

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF LITERACY EXPERIENCES,
THE ROLE OF PARENTS, AND CHILDREN'S
LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

by

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SUMMARY

"A longitudinal study of literacy experiences, the role of parents, and children's literacy development"

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This study investigated the literacy experiences and attainment of 42 children aged 3 to 7, who had attended preschool education in a city in the North of England. Data were collected through parent interviews before nursery entry; literacy assessment at school entry, and at age seven; and by parent, teacher and child interviews. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were employed.

Four measures of literacy development at age seven were used: children's reading book level, writing ability and standardised scores for reading and English at seven. Factors before school entry shown to be significant were: vocabulary scores, number of letters known, how well children wrote their name and a phrase, whether they listened to stories at nursery, and how often they were read to at home. This was influenced by earlier home factors; by having access to books, being read to from storybooks, and having books read in their entirety, the age parents started reading to them, how many nursery rhymes they knew, and parents pointing out environmental print. By seven, other significant factors were parents' knowledge about school literacy, and how often children read to parents at home. Several findings confirmed those of previous studies. Others were new: having a favourite book before nursery, choosing to read books in nursery, access to home computers at seven, children storing literacy resources indiscriminately, parents reading more than newspapers and magazines, and parents providing examples of day-to-day literacy. Process variables appeared to exert greater effects on children's performance than status variables, such as social class, mother's employment and qualifications, and relatives with literacy difficulties.

Home literacy experiences for the majority of children were barely acknowledged in school, and home learning for children with problems was often unsupported by school. For most children, homes provided rich, complex and powerful environments for literacy learning.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The study reported in this thesis originated from my work within a primary school as a nursery teacher, with a commitment to the value of research as a way of illuminating practice. I wanted to increase my understanding of children's learning, in particular the role parents play in children's early literacy development in the home, and how this related to children's subsequent literacy development.

Literacy underpins a major part of the school curriculum. My premise was that while children learn a great deal about literacy before they enter the education system, often teachers know very little about this prior knowledge and understanding when the children start in school, and many of the literacy experiences of children at home remain invisible. I was concerned to find out more about the literacy environment and experiences of the children starting in the nursery where I worked. While the school had a policy of welcoming and trying to involve parents, nothing concerning parents and literacy had previously been attempted at the preschool stage, and there had been no attempts to discover what the children had learnt about literacy at home before they came to nursery.

Because this study was based in my own work setting, it has connections with the tradition of 'teacher research', a style of research which came to prominence with the work of Lawrence Stenhouse and others in the 1970s. Stenhouse defined teacher research as,

"...an enquiry...founded in curiosity and a desire to understand: but it is a stable, not a fleeting, curiosity, systematic in the sense of being sustained by a strategy." (in Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985, p.8).

My strategy was to find out more about the literacy environment and experience of young children at home, through systematically talking with parents of children due to start at the nursery where I taught. I began to do this, in the Autumn Term 1987

and carried on until the Autumn Term 1988. During this time I interviewed parents¹ of sixty children, in the order in which the children were to join the nursery.

I discovered that most parents were keen to share their experiences of their children's literacy. It was not something they had been asked about by anyone in a professional role before, and they had plenty of information and observations to share. This encouraged me to investigate further. Avery (1990) suggests that in the teacher research model, an initial central question, often leads on to further questions. In my case, there were several questions. Would the children's early experiences have an effect on their performance at school entry? Would they affect children's performance and attitudes towards literacy at the end of the Infants school (at the end of Key Stage 1)? Did some of the children's literacy experiences at home remain invisible during the school years, and to what extent did parents and teachers talk with one another, and collaborate on children's literacy development?

This led me to ask questions again, when the children reached the age of seven, by interviewing the parents, the children themselves, and also their teachers. I also assessed the children's literacy at school entry, and again at the end of the Infant school. The majority of the children remained at the school where I worked as a teacher. Some moved to other schools. I traced all those children from the initial sample whose literacy I had assessed at school entry. In total, forty-two children were followed for the whole length of the study, from before the start of nursery to the end of Infants school.

One of the advantages of doing research in a workplace setting was that there were many aspects of the situation that were already familiar. In this case, I knew the school, the staff and the families, including extended families, very well. Particularly at nursery level, where the children had to be delivered and fetched, there were

¹ Parents interviewed were the children's principal carers during the daytime, which in each case was the child's mother.

many opportunities to meet parents, siblings, grandparents and neighbours on a regular basis, and so have an indication of the child's social network outside the school. These understandings helped to bring additional meaning to data collected in a more formal way, contextualising it, and allowing the creation of a more rounded picture.

This approach might be criticised for a 'lack of objectivity'. However, what is important here is not so much 'objectivity' as the need to maintain sufficient distance to examine the issues dispassionately. As Stenhouse (1975) reflected in a paper about the teacher as researcher, the concern should be with, "... the development of a sensitive and self-critical subjective perspective", rather than with "... an aspiration towards an unattainable objectivity." (p.157).

If the research is carried out in this way, then it can enable others to relate a discussion of the findings to their own work setting. Mohr and Maclean (1987) point out that one can neither replicate, nor control for all the variables in a real-life setting, but with the presentation of sufficient data and analysis, others can work out for themselves what is relevant to their own situations. In this way, this type of research can have a relevance to other teachers. Some of the findings of this study have practical implications for the way teachers and parents work together for the benefit of children's literacy development. As Webb (1990) emphasised, in her book on the practitioner research model, this research tradition has helped considerably in linking theory and practice (p165).

While sharing some attributes in common with teacher research, this study also includes features less commonly found in the traditional teacher research model. It is not only concerned with qualitative methods, but also employs quantitative analyses. Here these are used to examine the extent and variation of certain background variables, literacy practices and achievements, and to suggest relationships between them. This study also connects with, and where appropriate, builds upon, a number of studies undertaken by researchers (as opposed to practitioners) who have explored similar data. Several aspects of literacy were

examined and compared with findings from other studies. Ways of looking at the acquisition of literacy, and influences upon it were explored, whilst recognising the complexity of the task. In such an attempt, literacy and the way it is taught at home and at school, can be seen more clearly. As Taylor (1981) put it,

"...by making the customary visible, we may come a little closer to an appreciation of the assumptions (both good and bad) on which our present pedagogies of reading and writing are based."

In this way, the study hopes to link with, and extend, other research studies of the role of home background in children's early literacy development.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Early Literacy Development

Over the past decade significant changes have taken place in ideas on how children become literate. Previously a mechanistic, skills based model was widely accepted. Currently many theorists and researchers suggest that a naturalistic model may provide a better explanation of children's literacy development. This model suggests that literacy development starts soon after a child is born. Children learn to become literate by being surrounded by print, observing people interact with it in a social context, and interacting with print themselves. This model is also concerned with what children can do, and the understanding and knowledge they come, incrementally, to have about literacy, rather than having as a starting point the aspects of literacy which children have yet to assimilate (Strickland and Cullinan, 1990). Literacy can be learnt in this way because, as several ethnographic researchers have shown, some contact with literacy is an almost inevitable consequence of living in the developed world. In many ways, both overt and subtle, it impinges on our day-to-day lives, (Heath, 1980, Taylor, 1983, and Teale, 1986a).

Researchers have characterized this naturalistic view of children's early literacy in a variety of ways. The term 'emergent literacy' has been coined to include the child as agent in his or her own learning (i.e. it emerges from within), and the fact that literacy emerges over time, Clay (1966), Teale and Sulzby (1986), Hall (1987). Goodman's (1980) research into young children's behaviour with print has led her to conclude that literacy learning is a 'natural' response as children try to make sense of the world around them. She has developed the metaphor of different aspects of literacy as 'roots' which can develop simultaneously, and which will feed the 'tree' which is literacy. The 'nutrient' for the roots is the child's environment.

In order to learn to read and write effectively, children need to develop a metalanguage about print. They need to understand, if not articulate, various

aspects of written communication, such as that print has directionality and that, wherever encountered, print represents words and sounds. This is learned behaviour, which can (but not invariably) occur almost imperceptibly as children encounter print as part of their daily lives - for instance, recognising a familiar food package or clothes label while out shopping, having a book read to them at home, or writing their name on a birthday card. Obviously the more encounters with print the children have, with experienced readers on hand to answer questions or point things out, the more likely is this process to occur.

Literacy involves many aspects of responding to the written word, often occurring not in isolation, but in a sequence of activities. For example, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), in their ethnographic research into children's literacy, described an observation of a young child's activities at home. She played with pens, drew, handled books and also listened to a story in the same session. As in the example, many aspects of responding to literacy can occur more or less simultaneously. The sum of the parts is greater than the individual components. However, for the sake of clarity, different aspects of literacy will be discussed here in turn.

Environmental print

In many parts of the world, children are surrounded by print from the time they are born. They see it on billboards, street and road signs, on food packaging, labels, advertisements on television.... they see it in their homes, on the street, in shops and clinics.... the list is endless. Not only is it endless, it is also, as several studies have shown, often transient, and almost literally 'flows' through neighbourhoods and households, (Taylor, 1983, Heath, 1983, Leichter, 1984). Do young children pay attention to this print, and if so, what meaning does it have for them? From various research studies it does seem that children notice this print in their preschool years and that for them it is usually embedded in a context which they understand and with which they are familiar. Hiebert (1978), for instance, found that children recognised print from its environmental context rather than recognising the words

as such. Goodman and Altwerger (1981) also found appropriate responses to labels on household goods when the context was available, but this declined sharply when context was removed. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) found that when preschool children were asked what the printed words on a variety of packages said, they generalised and said what the item was used for rather than 'reading' the print. However, their responses were accurate in terms of meaning. As Teale and Sulzby (1986) point out, the function of the print takes precedence over the form. The children Harste et al. (1984) studied knew, for example, which packet contained toothpaste and which contained mints. Their 'readings' in terms of the meaning of environmental print were far more accurate than their reading of their own written stories or of published children's books. Harste et al. (1984) argue that the children could do this because the environmental print they encountered was so familiar (p.27).

In this way, a recognition of children's response to environmental print contributes to an understanding of their literacy development. The environmental print is there, the children do notice it and try to make sense of it, and for many children it may be their first meaningful encounter with print. Clark (1976), in her study of early readers, reported that while some children began reading through their interest in stories, many began through interacting with environmental print, such as signs and advertisements. Teale (1986a) found great similarity in the environmental print that was available in the group of families he studied, where other forms of print varied considerably (p.178). Goodman (1986) found in her survey of research that this print awareness occurs amongst all children, regardless of their socio-economic, racial or linguistic background (p.7). Often this learning occurs unnoticed by adults, as young children are often able to absorb for themselves messages from print around them. Payton (1984), for instance, gives the example of her daughter recognising 'Co-op' on a receipt whilst out shopping, without previously having asked or been told about the word (p.27-28). although adults can help children make these meanings by pointing out print and reinforcing the child's growing awareness.

Reading

Reading used to be seen as a passive activity in which the reader decodes written symbols, and finally arrives at meaning. A psycholinguistic model which fits with an emergent literacy and neo-Vygotskian perspective, suggests that the reader actively makes meaning and to do this has to interact with the written word, bringing to it prior knowledge of the way in which language works and some expectations of what a particular text is likely to contain (Goodman, 1973, Smith, 1978). This model presupposes that reading is a holistic process, which implies that learning to read is NOT a question of learning the prerequisite subskills, which once consolidated, can then be applied to actually reading and that the primary way to learn to read is by reading, (Smith, 1971, Meek, 1982).

This is not to imply that reading cannot or should not be taught. It is very important for young children to have an experienced reader to guide and help them in their reading, (Meek, 1982). They also need experienced readers to explain their misconceptions. Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982), using a Piagetian frame of reference, show that children will endeavour to make sense of written material presented to them, but they may misinterpret it. Researchers referring to Vygotsky's work (1962, 1978), have highlighted the important role of the social and cultural context in extending children's literacy competences (Harste, Woodward and Burke, 1984, Teale, 1986a). For preschool children, the role of parents will be central here.

Part of being able to learn to read effectively is having an understanding of the conventions of book language. Clay (1979 p.59) coined the phrase "talk like a book" to describe children's attempts to internalise this form of written language. These understandings can only be arrived at through experience with written language. This particular aspect of literacy learning is primarily cultural rather than developmental from within the child. The language in which books are written is not the same as the way we speak. There may be formulaic beginnings and endings, and phrases, passive grammatical structures, archaic forms of words, and

decontextualised material. Once children have had experience of a number of books, they may be able to infer "...what the text might say" (Dombey, 1992, p.10), which helps them to make sense of new texts.

Stories

The majority of children in the Western world will have encountered oral stories and often stories in books before they start in school. Stories can provide a powerful way of disseminating and assimilating culture. Bruner (1987) suggests we have a predisposition to relate to stories and this may explain their pervasiveness,

"Insofar as we account for our own actions and for the human events that occur around us principally in terms of narrative, story, drama, it is conceivable that our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us". (p.94).

Other writers and researchers also suggest we make sense of our experiences and tell others about ourselves through story, (for example, Britton, 1970, Galda, 1984). Applebee (1978) interprets stories as an important agent of a child's socialisation. Stories show children what they might expect to encounter in the world. At first children do not separate fact and fantasy, but the power of stories is that they deal in universal truths that transcend these divisions,

"...it is these underlying patterns, not the witches and giants which give them their concrete form, which makes stories an important agent of socialisation". (Applebee, p.52-3).

Stories are important for the discovery of "the symbolic potential of language", where children learn that different experiences to those they know can be described and interpreted, and which will take them beyond the "naming and rote recall" of other types of reading experiences (Wells, 1987, p.156).

Children's access to story and the conventions surrounding their telling or reading will be culturally determined. The reading of stories is featured more regularly within mainstream than non-mainstream culture (Heath, 1983). While stories are not a prerequisite of a child learning to be literate, they do convey the powerful messages about literacy and socialisation discussed above, and are important in children's acquisition of school-endorsed literacy.

Reading to young children

Research has shown that one of the ways in which very young children learn about literacy is by parents reading to them (for example, Teale, 1981, Baghban, 1984). Having had this experience, children can demonstrate a number of literacy skills, which are an important part of their learning to read and write. (Baghban, 1984, Holdaway, 1979, Snow and Goldfield, 1983, Taylor, 1983, Sulzby, 1985, Snow and Ninio, 1986). There are social class and cultural differences in how and whether storybooks are read to children (Scollon and Scollon, 1981, Heath, 1982, Heath and Thomas, 1984, Ninio, 1980).

In having the experience of being read to from the continuous text of a book, children learn to understand about the decontextualised nature of print, which they cannot acquire from their encounters with environmental print. They also learn about the

"...sustained meaning-building organisation of written language and its characteristic rhythms and structures". (Wells, 1987, p.151).

Book reading is an activity which is often routinized, (Ninio and Bruner, 1978), with the speech used being more complex than that used in many other activities engaged in by parents (here mothers) and children, (Snow, Nathan, and Perlmann, 1985).

Children can learn a great deal about literacy from having books read to them, with adults providing a 'scaffold' (Bruner,1975), where the adult supports the child's current abilities and provides help to move on to the next stage. They can learn that print conveys meaning, that books are read from front to back and print from left to right, that print is made up of letters, words, punctuation marks and spaces, and there is a special language for books and print, for example, page, word, letter (Hall, 1987, p.32-3). Research has shown that those children who had been read to more frequently at home showed higher interest in listening to stories within a nursery or preschool setting (Lomax, 1979, Morrow, 1983). Re-readings of a known text can be particularly fruitful as the child comes to memorize text and story, later being able to read the text for themselves, recreating the text while following the print and pictures on the correct pages, for instance, Juliebo's (1986) observation of one of the children about whom she wrote a case study of literacy development. Wendy moved from memorising favourite texts to combining,

"...a high quality of meaning reproduction and a high degree of verbal similarity". (p.15).

This repeating of favourite texts can give children,

"...a feeling of mastery as well as a solid familiarity with linguistic forms and a growing understanding that texts can endure and yield more on a second or even third reading". (Dombey, 1992, p.15).

Re-reading allows children to "know the essence of storyness" (Goodman, 1980).

Snow and Ninio (1986) write that when a child has a book read to them it,

"...provides a child with exposure to more complex, more elaborate and more decontextualised language than almost any other kind of interaction, and the ability to understand and to produce decontextualized language may be the most difficult and most crucial prerequisite to literacy." (Snow and Ninio, 1986, p.118-9)

Thus book reading is not an end in itself. What the child learns can be generalised to other encounters with decontextualised text. Being read to can lead children to use knowledge they have acquired in this way such as literacy skills, and particular language use (Baghban, 1984, Gundlach et al., 1985, Holdaway, 1979, Snow and Goldfield, 1983, Sulzby, 1985, Taylor, 1983, Snow and Ninio, 1986). Picture book reading has its own special lessons. In the inter-relationship of text and picture, children learn to understand the complexities of literary devices such as intertextuality and irony, (Meek, 1988, Graham, 1990, Jordan, 1992). It is this knowledge that children need to make sense of a good deal of their early 'formal' schooling, and for this reason, experience of listening to stories and knowledge about books and print shows a strong correlation with later reading achievement, Moon and Wells (1979), Wells (1985b).

Writing

The emergent writing approach has transformed the way in which children's writing is viewed. Writing is now seen as much more than transcription, handwriting and orthographic skills. Researchers have observed the way young children make deliberate marks, which change with experience over time, and have seen how they behave as authors, actively making meaning. At first their marks may not even approximate conventional writing, but over time and with encouragement, children move nearer to the written word as we recognise it. Even in the very early stages, children's writing often takes on visual similarities with the script the child is most familiar with. Harste, Burke and Woodward (1982), for instance, provide clear examples of differences in the overall form of young children's writing before conventional letters have been learnt, between English and Arabic speakers. This demonstrates the socio-cultural dimension of writing (as well as other aspects of literacy) is not only about developing abstract skills, but also learning to use these skills in appropriate practices determined by the culture in which one lives (Scribner and Cole, 1981).

In their writing development, children will initially produce scribble, or a sequence of lines or circles or dots, or a combination of these. This is often followed by using letter-like shapes and some conventional letters that are familiar - often the letter that begins the child's own name. These will be used in different combinations in order to mean different things, (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982). Some children become interested in copying script. Once children have understood the relationship between sounds and letters they can use this knowledge to 'invent' spelling for themselves. This process has been described by a number of authors, for example, Gentry (1981), Schickedanz (1990), with Read (1971, 1975) being the first to provide a thorough documentation of "invented spelling". He pointed out that children usually spell in a systematic way. Some errors occur because while the sounds are often represented accurately, the conventions of how we usually write the word have not yet been learned, (Ferreiro, 1984, Goodman, 1984). Their spelling at this stage is to a large part dependent on their phonological awareness, Goswami and Bryant (1990 p.53). To begin with, children often write in syllables rather than distinct phonemes, and also pay attention to consonants rather than vowels, (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982, Sulzby and Teale, 1985, Schickedanz, 1990). This pattern of development is not in any way arbitrary, but is based on the development of children's thinking about writing, making what they do "understandable from a psychogenetic point of view" (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982, p.89).

What children need to extend their writing is more experience. Experience gives children the opportunities to construct the rules of, and knowledge about literacy for themselves, Bissex (1980) Schickedanz (1990). Conflict in their conceptualisations leads children on to further development, Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982), Schickedanz (1990). Most preschool children are keen to 'write', and if given materials and a context will do so readily, (Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1982, Baghban, 1984).

Although children's writing develops at different rates, many children already know about the significant features of writing when they first enter school. They may

know that it is meaningful, and is to communicate messages, that written language is composed of elements, and that the writing has certain forms and structures (Hall, 1987, p.53).

This experience is gained through interacting with print that has already been produced, and learning from more experienced writers. Gundlach et al. (1985) point out that "writing does not just happen". If young children are writing at home then their parents must be involved, since it is they who provide the child's context for learning. As the children move towards conventional writing they are assimilating "socially transmitted knowledge" (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982, p.42).

Parents as literacy models

Nebor (1986), in a review of the literature on parental influence on reading attainment, found that parents who read at home and acted as a model of what it is to be a reader, encouraged an interest in reading in their children. This in turn influenced children's literacy acquisition, (Greaney, 1986). Some studies of early readers have shown that their parents were often avid readers (for example, Durkin, 1966, Clark, 1976). Those parents who enjoyed reading as a leisure activity were more likely to have children with a high interest in literature (Morrow, 1983).

In his study of language and literacy, Wells (1987) found that the children who were the most accomplished writers by the age of nine and ten, had parents who wrote frequently, often "...lists, memos and notes", forms of writing which were both visible and recognisably purposeful (p.149).

Rhyme

Many children are fascinated by rhymes, and enjoy using them, both in real and invented words (Chukovsky 1963, Dowker, 1989). Recently, rhyme has been shown to have a direct link with some aspects of learning to read.

To understand the different sounds made by symbols in our alphabetic system, children need to be able to distinguish separate sounds within the stream of language they hear when people talk and read aloud. There is evidence to suggest that this is helped by a familiarity with nursery rhymes, which play with sounds and reinforce rhythm patterns and rhyme, and that some children, for whatever reason, are more sensitive to rhyme than others. This facility links directly to the ease with which children learn to decipher print (Adams, 1990), and as such is a strong predictor of later reading ability (Goswami and Bryant, 1990).

Bradley and Bryant (1983, 1985), reporting a longitudinal study of 403 children, initially found that the children could detect rhyme and alliteration before they could 'read' texts. Their initial sensitivity to rhyme and alliteration at age four and five was strongly associated with their progress in reading in the subsequent three years. Building on this work, Maclean, Bryant and Bradley (1987), and Bryant, Bradley, Maclean and Crossland (1989) explored the connection between children's awareness of rhyme and the extent of their knowledge of nursery rhymes. They found a strong relationship between the two. It is therefore likely that the cultural influence of parents (and siblings) at home affects preschool children's familiarity with nursery rhymes (Goswami and Bryant, 1990,p.25), and consequently has an effect on the ease with which children acquire literacy.

Literacy related socio-dramatic play

Socio-dramatic play arises from children's observations of the world around them. Since many children are involved in socio-dramatic play with some literacy content before they go to school, it must derive from experiences observed primarily at home or mediated in some way by parents. Pretend play gives children the chance to explore the social roles that they observe the adults in their world carry out (Bretherton, 1984). Play can serve to extend the child's current level of understanding. As Vygotsky (1978) suggested,

"...play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour..." (p.102).

In this way, socio-dramatic play involving literacy will extend the child's literacy competence.

To summarise, what I have described is a general view of children's literacy development. Because it occurs within a cultural and social context, children from different backgrounds, with their different expectations, ways of doing things, and resources, will necessarily have different experiences. These experiences will inform the child's developing view of literacy, which usually starts shortly after birth, and certainly well before the child goes to school.

Smith (1978) contrasts a naturalistic, incremental view of reading (which could equally well be applied to other forms of literacy) with a mechanistic view which makes a clear division between readers and non-readers,

"The term 'learning to read' can be misleading, if there is an assumption that there is a magical day in every literate person's life, some kind of threshold, on which we become a reader but before which we are merely learning to read. We begin learning to read the first time we make sense of print, and we learn something about reading every time we read." p.128

Some aspects of literacy will vary more than others. Environmental print is available to virtually all children (Teale, 1986a). Other forms of written language that is not "situationally embedded" (Goodman, 1986, p.8) in this way, will vary. It is documenting this variety, and its implication for literacy development, which forms a central component of this study.

2.2 Home Background, the Role of Parents and Literacy Development

The view of early literacy development outlined in Chapter 2.1 makes clear that literacy learning occurs right from the beginning of a child's life, and takes place in the familiar settings of home and local community. Implicit in this view of literacy development, is that parents play a central role. This has been highlighted by a number of research studies, operating from different methodological bases. To get a true flavour of what happens in the children's homes and the role of their parents, naturalistic studies are reported, i.e. parents' roles are explored in situ, and not taken out of context.

Virtually all children in a literate society have a great deal of experience with print and the written word at home, often mediated by their parents, before they formally start school (Goodman, 1980; Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984; Teale, 1986a). Environments where parents provided resources that could be used for literacy activities, gave encouragement, responded to their children's requests for help and information, read to their children, and engaged them actively in that reading, were the most successful in helping children acquire the sorts of literacy that would be expected of children in school (Durkin, 1966, Clark, 1976). That some of these attributes were found more commonly (but of course not exclusively) in middle class homes may provide one of the explanations for the differentials in achievement between children from different backgrounds. What seems to be most pertinent is not social class per se, but "how parents rear their children" (Gordon, 1972, White, 1982).

Surveys

There have been a number of surveys which have demonstrated the influence parents and the home exert on children's literacy development. Some surveys have shown a relationship between social class and attainment, with socio-economic disadvantage being associated with low attainment.

Douglas (1964), in a longitudinal study of a cross section of children born in one week in 1946, (approximately 5,400 children), found that children from different social class groups showed different levels of attainment in school, and that during their years in primary education, this gap widened (p.45-50). The performance of children of parents in non-manual occupations was better than children of parents in manual occupations.

Davie, Butler and Goldstein (1972), using longitudinal data collected on nearly all children born in one week in 1958, in England, Scotland and Wales (approximately 17,000 children), demonstrated a strong association between social class and a child's reading performance at seven. They found that the chances of a child from Social Class V having a low reading test score at seven on the Southgate (1962) Group Reading Test (a test of word recognition) were six times greater than that of a child from Social Class 1 (Registrar General's classifications), although the nature of the testing, and what it is testing need to be taken into account. As Davie et al.(1972) acknowledge. "there is no such thing as a culture free test." (p.29). The chances of a child from Social Class V being classified as a 'non-reader' (judged on a reading test score, the stage reached in a reading scheme, and teacher's reading ability rating, on a five point scale), were fifteen times greater than for a child from Social Class 1. Davie et al.'s study also showed that the parents' level of education (here taken to mean the age at which they left school) had an effect on the children's reading attainment. The more education parents had received, the more likely it was that their child would have a higher 'reading age'. (p.36-39). They suggest that,

"A great deal - if not the major part - of learning takes place outside of school and much of this is accomplished even before the child enters school" (p.100).

Peaker, (1967), in the regression analyses of the National Survey into "Parental Attitudes and Circumstances related to School and Pupil Characteristics", of approximately 3,300 parents, commissioned by the Plowden Committee, found that there was more variation in school achievement accounted for by variation in

parental attitudes than variation in the material circumstances in the homes or variation between schools (p.184). Parents' aspirations for their child, the literacy level of the home, and parental interest in school progress accounted for 20% of between-school variation in reading achievement.

Morton-Williams (1964), also using the National Survey data, found that book ownership and library membership were both highly correlated with social class (p.106, 116). Sixty per cent of unskilled workers had five books or less in the home, apart from children's books and magazines (14% said they owned no books), compared with five per cent of professional workers (here 1% said they owned no books), and that the children of unskilled workers borrowed fewer library books.

There was close association between level of education and occupation. More than fifty per cent of the children's parents left school at the minimum school leaving age (then at 14 years old). 63% of fathers and 81% of mothers had had no subsequent education since then (p.106). The majority of parents said they liked to read for leisure. Mothers in manual working class homes tended to read less than fathers. They read mainly newspapers and magazines (p.107). Less than 50% were members of the library. Parental attitudes to school were strongly associated with educational achievement (an association also found by Douglas, 1964). However, as Bernstein and Davies (1969) point out, the measures used by Morton-Williams were of middle class linked behaviour, and it was this that they claimed was associated with school achievement, rather than what might be a wider interpretation of parental attitudes.

Newson and Newson (1968) conducted a longitudinal study of children's development at home to discover "the social and material context of their lives" (p.13), through interviewing parents of approximately 700 four-year-old children in Nottingham. Their aims were wide ranging and were concerned with many aspects of child rearing practice. They too found differences in attitude and behaviour between social class groups.

They found that story telling as a regular bedtime routine varied with social class. 48% of children from middle class homes had stories told to them or read to them at bedtime, whereas the figure was half that for children from working class homes (24%), (p.485). The Newsons comment that, from the parent responses, middle class parents tended to see telling stories as part of their role in educating their children, whereas the working class parents saw it more as a way of diverting children, which they would grow out of, "...he's been told now that he's getting a bit too old for stories." (p.274).

When the children reached the age of seven, parents were asked if their children read or looked at books 'much' at home. There was a highly significant difference between working class and middle class children, and between boys and girls. Middle class girls read the most and working class boys the least. (1976, p.120). The same differences were also found for writing (p.121-2).

Newson, Newson and Barnes (1977), in a follow-up survey of mothers of children then aged seven, in Nottingham, found that 81% were helping their child with reading, or had done so in the past (p.141). They suggest that,

"a child's proficiency in reading is one of the most tangible ways in which parents can assess progress in the primary school, and it is also an area in which many parent feel not quite incompetent to participate as instructors." (p.137).

They hardly mention writing at all, which is indicative of its relative lack of status before its significance for early literacy development had been shown by researchers adopting an emergent literacy perspective. They comment that most parental help with writing was concerned with spelling. They also mention that parents recognised the importance of making resources available, for example, by setting "the table out and a nice sheet of paper and sharp pencils - everything to invite him to write." (p.126).

Like Douglas (1964), and Davie et al. (1972), when Newson, Newson and Barnes (1977) asked parents about how well their children could read, they found a strong association between reading and social class. At seven, only 20% of middle class children were poor readers, compared with 39% of working class children; and at the ends of the spectrum, the chances of a child from an unskilled manual worker's home being a poor reader was four times greater than a child from a professional worker's home. (p.138). While they had not asked systematically about help with reading at the preschool stage, they were able to look back on material collected at the four-year-old stage (Newson and Newson, 1968). Nearly half (44%) of the children who parents described as being good readers at seven had been read aloud to when they were four. In comparison, half this number of children, just under a quarter (22%), of non-readers had been read to. Newson, Newson and Barnes (1977) suggest that,

"Being read to by an adult (or, for that matter, another child) familiarises the young child with the structure of written English, and it is plausible that this will be of value to him in his own early efforts to read." (p140).

There was a strong association between social class and whether parents read to children. Twice as many children from professional homes were read to compared with children from lower-working class homes, and of the children who were being read to, again twice as many children from professional homes were read to often. There was equally a relationship between the number of books owned by children, and social class, and library use and social class (p.154-5).

Newson, Newson and Barnes (1977) constructed an "index of home literacy" (p.161), which included mother's use of books to answer the child's questions, whether the child belonged to the library, how many books the child owned, whether the child had a regular comic or magazine, whether the mother read to the child and from what sorts of material. Not surprisingly, children from middle class homes scored highly on this scale whereas children from working class homes did not. What an

index such as this one demonstrates is the strong connections between the environment of middle class homes and the literacy expectations of primary schools.

Miller (1969) conducted interviews at home with 55 mothers of children attending kindergarten in midwestern towns in the U.S.. Families were divided into socio-economic groups. She found very few 'lower-lower' children had been on a family outing. Very few of any of the children used the library. Children from middle class homes could recognise most letters of the alphabet, but most children in the 'lower-lower' group could not recognise any. Middle class children tended to be better at hearing the rhymes in words, and had more experience of acting out stories. Significant correlations were found between these background variables and what Miller terms "reading readiness". There was a significant statistical difference in the early literacy experiences at home between children from different social classes.

Share, John, Maclean, Matthews, and Waterman (1983) looked at the relationship between early reading achievement, home background and oral language ability. They found that socio-economic status, on its own, was too crude a measure to explain variance in children's reading abilities, and suggested that its strength came from an association with educational processes in the home which made a more direct contribution to early achievement. 543 children attending nine schools in the Geelong region of Australia were tested at the start of compulsory schooling. Early reading achievement was assessed through children's response to letter names, name writing, name reading, letter copying and recognition and discrimination of letters and numbers. Since scores on these measures proved sufficiently homogeneous, a single early reading achievement variable was created by summing the standard scores of the five individual variables. Children were also assessed for oral language competence, and parents asked to complete questionnaires about the children's home background. There was a 90% response rate.

They found that children with higher reading achievement scores tended to have been library members, owned more books, been read to more frequently by their parents, preferred non-commercial television viewing, and their fathers had higher occupational status. Oral language was associated with the home educational environment, and more of the variance in children's oral language abilities was explained by this than by socio-economic status.

Socio-economic status and home process measures accounted to 26% of variance in reading achievement. When the home processes were partialled out using multiple regression, socio-economic status did not contribute substantially to variance in achievement, but home processes did make a substantial contribution to achievement when socio-economic status was partialled out. This suggests that socio-economic status is associated with reading achievement because it correlates with aspects of the home educational environment.

Davie, Hutt, Vincent, and Mason (1984), observed 165 children from Stoke-on-Trent, interviewed parents, and recorded maternal entries in diaries kept for the purpose, in an attempt to describe what life was like for three to four-and-a-half year olds at home. They found that middle class children had access to significantly more books than working class children. Not many children had access to letter equipment, but again it was the middle class children who had significantly more of this. They did not find class or sex differences in the proportion of time spent by parents and children playing together with letters, looking at books or telling stories, but they did find a difference in the way this was done, with middle class parents being more likely to provide instructions and help increase the child's vocabulary, their ability to classify and to form concepts. Working class children were likely to encounter more simple cognitive demands such as labelling common attributes.

Fietelson and Goldstein (1986) compared book ownership among 102 preschool children in neighbourhoods where children tended to perform poorly and well at school, in Haifa, Israel. They found that about 60% of the children in the former

neighbourhood did not own any books themselves, whereas in the latter, the children owned on average more than fifty books each. In terms of parents reading with their children, all except two children from the "school orientated" homes were read to daily, often for half an hour and more. In comparison, 61% of parents from neighbourhoods where children tended to perform poorly in school said they did not read to the children at all.

Hall, Herring, Henn, and Crawford (1989) report a questionnaire survey of 418 parents of children who attended nursery and reception classes in Manchester. They found that the majority of these parents helped their children learn to write before school, and in their responses, showed a great deal of interest in this. The parents felt they had a role to play in their children's writing development. The majority of these parents came from areas of Manchester which could be termed 'disadvantaged'.

Ethnographic studies

Ethnographic studies provide a useful way of looking at familiar issues with fresh eyes. They can challenge assumptions and orthodoxies, and they can provide much needed evidence to demonstrate the minutiae of literacy learning within different contexts.

Heath (1983) presents a detailed ethnographic study of "language, life and work" of three communities in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas, Southern United States. Roadville was a white working class community, and Trackton a black working class community. The group Heath refers to as 'townspeople' were teachers' families living in the town. Heath found different forms of child rearing practices and ways of engaging with literacy events in these three communities.

The children of the townspeople tended to be the most successful at school. The townspeople read with their children, talked to them and played with them before school. Once the children went to school, values were in many senses shared

between the two settings. The children had had extensive exposure to stories, they had had practice at labelling and naming things, and were able to create narratives about items that were not necessarily present (p.352).

In Roadville, the parents were keen to prepare their children educationally until the age of four. Once the children were in church nursery school, they felt their role was no longer an educational one, for example, before the age of four the parents often read to their children from their books, but this practice was likely to stop once the child started nursery. The content of their stories tended to be factual, with fantasy being discouraged, as making things up in that community could also be construed as lying. Most of the children's books were of nursery rhymes, alphabet or books with pictures of familiar objects, and short descriptions underneath (p.157). Mothers had access to the Bible, but apart from that their reading tended to be limited to occasional magazines or paperback novels. Mostly, when asked, the mothers felt they did not have time for reading (p.156).

Trackton presented a much more oral culture, with stories being elaborately told and status afforded those who could embellish their story most effectively and entertain the listener. The content was usually about people and events that others were familiar with, so the context would be known and shared. Formulaic beginnings and endings of stories were not used (p.171). Children were more likely to amuse themselves, or to fit in with the adult activities around them than in the other two settings. The adults did not tend to read to the children, and the children did not often have books among their possessions.

In both Roadville and Trackton there were discontinuities between home and school which often made literacy learning problematic for the children within a school setting.

Taylor (1983) presents an ethnographic study of six families which contained at least one preschool child who was considered by their parents to be successfully learning

to read and write. The families were white, middle class, and lived in suburban towns on the periphery of New York City.

She found that parents did not deliberately teach the children, in fact, when they did try to do so, they often met with resistance (p.55/75). Learning at home was seen to be a natural, highly contextualised, complex cultural activity. Children learnt for a purpose, for instance, learning to decipher the "label on the shampoo bottle, the recipe for carrot bread..." (p.20). These were not disembodied learning activities, but had significance within the child's daily life. Even when the parents deliberately introduced print to their children, the words were "locked into the context of the situation" (p.20), rather than being decontextualised. Many of the children were interested in writing and drawing, and considerable amounts of both were produced on a daily basis (awareness of this occurred because this was being collected for the study, p.11). The only activity that all parents mentioned in the context of their children acquiring literacy was that they consistently read stories to their children. The parents also remembered having stories and print around when they were children.

^{Taylor}
Family Literacy (1983), discussed above, described the early reading behaviours of children from highly literate middle class homes. It begs the question of whether these would occur within working class homes. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) set out to explore this question in the context of black children living in urban poverty. The children were selected by the same criteria as the previous study (Taylor, 1983), in that parents had identified at least one of their children as successfully learning to read and write at home.

A characteristic of these homes, which in economic terms were extremely impoverished, was that the adults were interested in studying, there were always newspapers and sometimes magazines in the apartments, and reading for pleasure was important to the family members (p.136-8). The children were frequently engaged in a variety of reading and writing activities, which were encouraged and valued by the parents.

Cochran-Smith (1984) conducted a study of adults and children at a U.S. private preschool in Philadelphia, over an eighteen month period. The adults in the community were seen not as consciously teaching reading or writing, but rather as helping the children to become literate through gradual socialisation. The children were frequently exposed to and involved in 'literacy events', and print was used naturally as part of the "social, transactional and informational needs" of day-to-day life.

Schickedanz (1984) examined the literacy events in the homes of six preschool girls who attended a university-based nursery school in Boston. Parents were interviewed on several occasions and also asked to keep a diary of their children's involvement in literacy events. Schickedanz found that the children initiated most of the literacy events, with parents playing a major supporting role by setting the stage and providing encouragement. When instruction was given, it was mostly when parents responded to their child's request for help. The parents expected their children to behave like apprentice readers and writers, saw themselves in a supervisory role, and gave material as well as psychological resources to help their children.

Teale (1986a, also reported in Anderson and Stokes, 1984) systematically observed 24 preschool children from Anglo, Black and Mexican American low-income families in San Diego, U.S. over a period of three to 18 months. At the outset of the study the children were aged between 2:6 and 3:6. He found examples of literacy occurring in all the homes. Apart from similar contact with environmental print, other encounters and activities varied between the families. In some homes a great deal of literacy activities occurred, in others very little. The literacy observed was largely socially defined and it, "occurred within particular socially assembled situations and the vast majority of the time was engaged in for reasons other than the reading or writing itself." (p.184). Literacy was most common in connection with what Teale describes as "daily living routines" for example, shopping, cooking, paying bills, travelling, etc. (p.185), a reflection of how highly literate a society we live in, and also described as a feature within other studies of literacy, for example Heath (1980), Taylor (1983). In terms of ethnic group, gender,

educational level of parents and family structure, there was as much variation within the groups as between them. All homes had paper and something to write with. But in most families, if the child being observed wanted to write, it was difficult to find these, and the child often then lost interest. Only in four homes were special places set aside for the writing materials. These four children tended to write more than the others. In most of these families, story reading was irregular, and not a feature of everyday life. Three children were read to more often than the rest, and they were among the group of children with the most highly developed emergent literacy abilities. Because Teale went into the homes to find out what was actually going on, he was able to discover some of the detail of literacy learning in non-mainstream families, which may not otherwise have come to light. Other ethnographic studies contribute in this way too, and can be particularly enlightening when they explore situations that do not mirror the mainstream culture of school and most middle class homes.

Minns (1990) studied the literacy experiences of five preschool children from Coventry, from three ethnic backgrounds, Afro-Caribbean, Asian, and Anglo. She found all had experienced literacy encounters at home, but that they varied in type and in quantity.

As Teale (1981) has suggested, more evidence is needed to build,

"an understanding of the nature of variations in the literacy orientations with which children arrive in our schools. In large measure reading and writing instruction in schools assumes that children share similar typifications of literacy". (p.910).

Studies such as those reported here show that these assumptions are not correct. They help to illuminate what is actually happening in children's homes.

Individual case studies

Some researchers have studied individual children to gain a greater understanding of the process of literacy learning.

Butler (1979) describes the influential role that books played in the early years of a handicapped child (the author's granddaughter). Details are given of her responses to books and the knowledge of the world that became accessible to her as a result of very early and continued exposure to books and stories. She continued to have an interest in books, an ability to read, a competence with language, and a level of confidence which might not otherwise have been expected.

Lass (1982) provides a description of her son's awareness of print, and early reading behaviours, from birth to age two. She concludes that specific teaching is unnecessary for a child's acquisition of letter names, some sight vocabulary, an interest in the messages of print, and gaining pleasure from literature, providing they have a facilitative home environment.

Crago and Crago (1983) wrote a detailed account of their daughter Anna's experience and response to picture books and stories, from one to five years of age. Each reading session was documented and, in many cases, tape recorded. Both parents themselves read a great deal and had many books in the home. Her parents abridged and simplified some texts when their daughter was young, but by the time she was three, most texts were read as they were written. She tended to select for herself the books that were read to her, and was a member of the library from the age of two. She was read to regularly at bedtime, and also during the day. On average, she was read to for approximately 30 minutes a day, and sometimes for considerably longer. During this time she encountered hundreds of books, and some she gained familiarity with through repeated re-readings. Anna was a fluent reader from when she was six. At this stage she preferred to read to herself, although later on she came back to being read to, in conjunction with her younger sister.

Baghban (1984) wrote a detailed case study of her daughter's acquisition of literacy from birth to five. She charted her development with the written word, showing how familiarity with texts, contact with parents (and grandparents) as models, and access to writing materials, facilitated her progress in literacy learning.

Payton (1984) provides another account of her daughter's literacy development, from age three to five, following her progress to a stage where she began to read and write with independence. Payton considers the parents' role to be vital, to share stories, to provide materials and to act as a model when reading and writing for themselves. Like many of the other studies mentioned, this learning tended to be 'natural', and unplanned, rather than the parents setting out to deliberately teach aspects of reading and writing. For instance, Payton's daughter learnt information about letters not by being specifically taught, but from the print around her and the alphabet books and other reading material with which her parents supplied her, and shared with her (p.71).

Gundlach, McLane, Stott, and McNamee (1985) provide case studies of a four-year-old and a five-year-old child writing at home, with the help and encouragement of their parents (and for the five-year-old, with interactions with a sibling and friends as well). The parents' role, (and that of other more competent literacy users), and the social context are seen as critical. As they summarised,

"People...provide the child with reasons to write, technical and emotional support (or challenge) during the process, and responses once the writing is done". (p.53)

Schmidt and Yates (1985) report a case study of Yates' son, from 22 months, learning to make sense of print during his preschool years. Literacy learning during interactions with his mother and from texts is identified and documented.

Within her extensive review of research on reading, Adams (1990) provides information on what could be considered a small-scale case study of her son. She describes some of his activities, which include thirty to forty minutes a day when his

parents regularly read to him. She suggests he was typical of other middle class, culturally mainstream children living in the United States. She calculates that by the time he was to start in first grade, her son would have experienced between 1,000 and 1,700 hours of storybook reading with a parent, watching the book while the story was being read. Contrasted with this, the impact that his first grade teacher would be able to make, (taking into account all the other children she or he would also be responsible for), could only be limited, (Adams,1990, p.85-6). The teacher must therefore rely on the children's preschool learning at home, on which to build her/his literacy programme at school. The implication is that all teachers have to do this, whether they are conscious of it or not. How much better to do it consciously, and build on a foundation that is known about, rather than having to guess, and possibly make false assumptions and underestimations.

Other studies

A number of other studies have contributed to our understanding of the role of parents and home background in children's literacy development.

Chazan, Laing and Jackson (1971) collected data on 122 children living in Swansea. The authors looked at differences between children who came from a 'deprived' area, and other children, seen as coming from a 'control' area. They found statistically significant differences in the number of books owned, the number of newspapers and magazines taken, library membership and the extent to which parents encouraged interest in reading in their child, between the two groups. The children from the 'deprived' area had ^{fewer} of these experiences than the children from the 'control' area.

Robeck and Wiseman (1982) assessed the print awareness of 20 middle class children, all but one white, aged from 4.1 to 5.11 years, attending a private daycare centre in Texas, U.S.. Wiseman and Robeck (1983) conducted a comparison study of 18 children from Headstart programmes in Texas, U.S.. The majority of children were black, and their average age was 5.6 years. Taken in conjunction, these two

studies showed that white middle class and lower class SES children had already learnt about print in the preschool period. There were differences in their written language knowledge both between groups and within groups. The implication is that much of the learning occurred at home. The middle class group showed greater print awareness, more of this group could write their own name, and were better able to listen to a story attentively.

Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984), conducted a telephone survey of thirty-two parents (from a larger study). They found that one of the most important factors in encouraging early literacy learning at home was not just that materials for literacy were available, but that they were "highly accessible". 'Formal teaching' seemed less successful than more naturalistic activities of parents and children together. Another important factor in early literacy learning they term "inclusion". By this they mean that the child was integrally involved in what the adults were doing. This was often by default rather than by design, for instance, for the parent to go shopping, to the doctor's, to cook, write letters or bills, read letters etc., this had to be done with the child, or not get done at all. Harste et al. found that all the children in their study knew many things about reading and writing regardless of gender, ethnicity, parental income, educational level or neighbourhood, (p.43-44).

Farquhar, Blatchford, Burke, Plewis, and Tizard (1985), in an interview study of 202 parents living in inner London, found that many parents were interacting with their children on "academic-related activities" including literacy, before the children started school, and saw helping their children in this was as part of their role.

Hannon and James (1990) reported a study in which a random sample of forty parents of children attending nursery schools in a northern city were interviewed about their role in their children's literacy development. The parents provided a wide range of literacy resources for their children, and the majority said they enjoyed using them together with their children. The parents claimed to spend a significant amount of time on reading and writing activities with their children. Many, however, were unsure if they were going about things in the 'right' way.

Hannon, Weinberger and Nutbrown (1991) surveyed the literacy environment of the homes of twenty preschool children. They found that all the parents, with the majority living in disadvantaged circumstances, valued literacy. All of the children had access to some children's books and shared them at least occasionally with their parents. Materials were available to all the children for drawing and writing, and the majority of parents interacted with their children in their use of these. All the children had opportunities to see their parents read on occasion, and most to see them write too. There was, however, considerable variation between the families.

Fitzgerald, Spiegel and Cunningham (1991) interviewed 108 parents of children beginning at kindergarten, and also assessed their literacy level. Analysis was made of responses from the two groups of parents at the ends of the spectrum, whom they term "high" and "low literacy parents", to find if there were differences in their ideas about how their children learnt about literacy, and the parents' role in the process. They did indeed find differences between the two groups. 'Low literacy' parents thought literacy artifacts and events were more important than did 'high literacy' parents. While both groups recognised the relevance of everyday materials, e.g. paper, pens, and magazines, 'low literacy' parents also found 'instructional' materials, e.g. alphabet blocks and flashcards, equally important. 'High literacy' parents were not in favour of 'skill orientated' materials and activities. Both groups thought it was interacting with literacy artifacts that was important, not just owning them. 'Low literacy' parents thought some 'instructionally orientated' situations, such as watching educational television programmes, or playing school were important, whereas 'high literacy' parents found these least important, that is the 'low literacy' parents were the more concerned about items that could be used to teach something or encourage skill development. 'High literacy' parents were more aware of their role as literacy models. Both groups of parents tended to think of literacy development far more in regard to reading than to writing. Using constructs from Resnick's work (1987), they characterise 'low literacy' parents' view of literacy as being concerned with 'a bundle of skills', 'school learning' and 'a school game'. In contrast, the 'high literacy' parents saw literacy more as 'cultural practice', 'out-of-school learning', 'shared cognition', and 'apprenticeship'. While there are

clearly differences between these two groups of parents, all the parents felt they had some role in their children's literacy learning.

Parents interacting with their children on literacy activities

Parents interactions with their children often occur naturally, without parents' being consciously aware of their teaching function. Theoretical models for their behaviour help to make their role more visible.

Vygotsky (1978) developed the concept of the "zone of proximal development", which represents the distance between what the child can achieve on their own, and what they can do with the help of someone who is more competent than they are. Successful learning can occur when parents support children to engage in activities just a little beyond their current level of development, but within the "zone of proximal development", so that with help, the child is able to achieve a level of understanding or competence.

Bruner (1975) suggested the concept of "scaffolding" to describe the help that a more competent person can give to the child. At first they provide a considerable amount of structure and support, but slowly take away the amount of support given as the child becomes competent on their own.

These concepts explain the behaviour of many parents when they interact with their child on a learning task, which will include the learning of literacy.

Literacy learning as part of day-to-day family activity

Research studies that have looked in depth at children's literacy development at home have shown that this often happens as an integral part of day-to-day life rather than as something separate, (for example, Taylor, 1983. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988, Schieffelin and Cochran Smith, 1984). Anderson and Stokes (1984) provide a useful summary of this,

"Literacy events function not as isolated bits of human activity, but as connected units embedded in a functional system of activity generally involving prior, simultaneously occurring, and subsequent units of action". (p.28).

To conclude, research suggests that there is a clear relationship between home background and literacy development. While taking into account the child's own predispositions, their literacy acquisition arises from the social environment in which they find themselves. As Schieffelin and Cochran Smith (1984) suggest,

"...the print interests of children in this community (or any community) do not emerge "naturally" at all. Rather in this community they emerge out of a particular cultural orientation in which literacy is assumed and which organises children's early print experiences in particular ways". (p.6).

Parents have a formative role, and most parents themselves also clearly see themselves as having a central role in their children's literacy development. The vast majority of parents involve themselves naturally with their child's acquisition of reading and writing skills. The interaction of this role with the agency which formally teaches children to read and write, the school, and the types of literacy which each location emphasises, recognises and rewards, is one that is less clear cut, and where anxieties and misunderstandings can occur through lack of shared understandings.

2.3 Home-School Relations and Children's Literacy Development

As we have seen in Section 2.2, the majority of parents are involved in their children's education anyway, and feel they have a role to play, whether this is acknowledged by school or not. Increasingly the parents' role is being recognised, but the extent of this, and in what ways, merits investigation.

It was the Plowden Report (1967) which gave the first official recognition, in this country, of the potential role that parents could play in their children's schooling.

Subsequently, other government reports, legislation, and official documents have recognised the potential benefits of collaboration between teachers and parents to enhance children's learning, (although until more recently, they have avoided suggestions of involvement in the curriculum), for example, Bullock (1975), Warnock (1978), H.M.I.(1991).

"No parents beyond this point"

In the past, many parents felt excluded by school, and received messages, actual or implied, that they should leave the teaching of reading to professionals. For example, Newson, Newson and Barnes (1977) report parents' comments which suggest that schools set out to deter parents. One parent, asked if she helped her child, said,

"Not since going to the school and talking to his teacher. I found out that we were doing the wrong thing, teaching him a different way, you see, so it's best to leave it alone." (p.145).

Another explained,

"When I went to the school and asked why he wasn't reading very well, and said should I help him, the teacher said 'Oh no, it won't be necessary'." (p.148).

In studies of children who learnt to read before school, parents reported being uneasy about telling the school about their child's achievements, and felt they may have put their child at a disadvantage. In the United States, Durkin (1966) reported parental feelings of uneasiness about their children's early reading, with suggestions from teachers and magazine articles that this might lead to later problems (p.56). Clark (1976), in her study, of Young Fluent Readers also showed that parents of children who could read early were made to feel rather embarrassed, and were reluctant to report the children's abilities to the teacher's (p.55).

Parental involvement in school initiated learning

The teaching of reading

The predominant view amongst teachers that parents should be dissuaded from working with their children on literacy (specifically at that time, reading), changed during the 1980s. The work of Tizard, Schofield and Hewison (1982) was very influential. In their study of top infant to first year junior children in Haringey, reading regularly to their parents from books sent home by their teacher, they showed positive outcomes for the children's reading when compared with a matched control group and a group that received additional teacher help in school. This was followed by similar work elsewhere, including the PACT project, reported by Griffiths and Hamilton (1984) in inner London, Widlake and Macleod (1984) in Coventry, and many others. Topping and Wolfendale (1985) provide an overview of a number of these projects. Hannon (1987), conducted similar work in Rochdale, but in this study of parental involvement in children's reading, he did not find marked improvements in children's reading test performance, although there were other areas of improvement, for instance, in children's motivation to read and enjoyment in reading. But in a study of the strategies which the parents and teachers used when hearing their children read (Hannon, Jackson, and Weinberger, 1986), there were found to be many similarities between what parents and teachers do, showing that parents can play a useful role. Furthermore, there were important differences between parent and teacher sessions which favoured reading at home, for example the possibility of a longer time spent together on reading, and fewer interruptions. HMI (1990) reported in a survey of 3,000 inspection visits to primary school, that parental support for reading had a positive effect on children's reading.

The evidence suggests that parents involved in school initiated schemes might improve children's reading development, and there are certainly no indications that they hinder progress. Several studies have also shown that parents like to be involved (for example, Jackson and Hannon, 1981, Weinberger, 1983, and Hannon, Weinberger and Nutbrown, 1991).

What has been illustrated is that most parents do already have involvement in their children's literacy development, and that school promoted parental involvement can at best be helpful, and at worst is not counterproductive.

For teachers to work effectively with parents, possibility for a dialogue between them needs to be established. In the survey that accompanied the Plowden report (Morton-Williams,1967), the contacts between parents and teachers were explored. Almost a third of the parents thought teachers should have asked them more about their children, the majority responding in this way being working class parents, (para.3.32, p.131), although this was less likely when open days, or the possibility of several talks with staff were available.

"The highest proportions of parents who had been to see the staff without an invitation were in the professional and in the unskilled occupational classes" (para 3.29, p.131).

Epstein's (1988) overview of research studies on parental involvement showed that parents welcomed clear communication with teachers about the curriculum and how to help their children at home. Effective parent-teacher collaboration depended less on the parents' background (for instance, level of education, marital status, or workplace), and more on the **teachers'** practices on work with parents.

Many studies have focused on families living in disadvantaged circumstances. The interest of these parents, together with the findings from ethnographic studies of families in similar circumstances (for example. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) challenge the myth of hapless, disinterested and unmotivated lower SES families. All parents tend to be very interested in their children's education, and when asked by the school, are keen to be involved. It seems that only in very extreme cases of multiple difficulties, do parents not become involved (for instance. Weinberger, Jackson, and Hannon, 1986).

There are, however, limits to this type of involvement. Aside from demonstration projects outlined above, how far have such programmes found their way into

schools? They may well have had an impact on most primary schools, but how this has manifested itself is not on the whole well documented. Is there anything more happening than a tokenistic involvement of a few parents? Hannon and Cuckle (1984) conducted some research, for instance, into the extent to which schools really did foster parents hearing their children read at home. Headteachers, teachers and children from Infant and First schools were asked about the school's involvement of parents in children's reading. Of the sixty children they interviewed, nearly half read to someone at home, but when it came to taking home school books and reading these at home, only three out of twenty of the classteachers gave support and advice on this to all the parents, and only two children had taken a book home and read it to their parents on the previous night. This suggests that claims about the extent of parental involvement may not be so widespread as is sometimes implied.

How schools involve parents varies from school to school, and also within schools. Not surprisingly Stierer (1988), in his postal survey of nearly four hundred schools, which aimed to examine parental help with reading in schools, found that the most successful schemes occurred where there was a whole school policy. Stierer reports staff from the schools surveyed raised the anxiety of creating a gap and therefore reinforcing disadvantage, between schools that made use of parents as reading helpers and those that did not. Volunteer help for instance, was found more in middle class catchment areas than in others. *This parallels differentials in schools' abilities to fundraise* documented by HMI (1983).

In his studies on working with parents in areas of disadvantage, Toomey (1989, 1992) found that schools tended to work only with the minority of parents who were already confident in their relationship with the school, and who shared a view of schooling that reflected that of the school and teachers. This marginalised even further the "hard-to-reach", or low contact parents, and reinforced divisions between parents that know about and support what is happening in schools and those that do not. Toomey raises the question of how the delivery of parental involvement in school initiated learning can be prioritized to ensure that it is not just reinforcing

what is happening already, but is made available to all families. HMI (1990) also comment on parental involvement and children most in need. They found that in some cases the arrangements for children to take books home from school for reading practice were least effective for those children most in need of such support.

At the preschool level Hannon and James (1990) found that teachers and headteachers tended to underestimate what the parents were doing regarding literacy with their children at home. Other studies have pointed to the limited nature of parent-teacher dialogue about children's learning, (for example, Pinkerton, 1978, Tizard et al., 1981, Blatchford et al., 1982, Tizard and Hughes, 1984).

Broadening the approach

There is another issue to be addressed here. The focus of involvement in the 1980s was reading and school. More recently a broadening to include other aspects of literacy has occurred, for example, Hannon et al.(1991). This recognises that learning about environmental print and learning to write have a dynamic and often mutually reinforcing connection with learning to read. More radically, the focus is beginning to shift within the teaching profession, from starting with the school to starting with the home, when looking at initial literacy.

Minns (1990), for example, studied the literacy experiences of five four-year-old children from Afro-Caribbean, Asian and white families in Coventry before they started at the school, and later in their first year at school, at which she was then headteacher. She found that each child's experience differed from the others, but all had had experiences of literacy, which might not have come to light in the classroom without this type of investigation. As a result of her work, Minns suggests that, "...children's learning can be fully understood only within a framework that acknowledges their lives at home and in their communities." (p.xvi).

In a project designed to promote parental involvement in early literacy development (Hannon et al., 1991), while wanting to share current educational thinking about

literacy with parents, felt it was important to find out about the literacy environments of the homes, and, as well as adding new materials and ideas, to base any work with parents on what was happening, and the resources already available, in the homes.

Assessment of children's literacy experiences and abilities can provide ways of starting a dialogue with parents about what children have learnt at home. The Primary Language Record (Barrs, Ellis, Hester, and Thomas, 1989) begins with a discussion between a child's parent(s) and the teacher. The commentary on some examples provided by parents suggests this allows a realisation of how much, "...children know and how much they are involved in a range of language and literacy-related activities at home and in the community."(p.13).

One factor missing to develop this work further, is staff training. To work confidently with parents, staff need adequate training. Despite a few courses being available, for example cited by Atkin and Bastiani (1984), this is clearly insufficient. This is an area of need mentioned frequently by the teachers surveyed by Stierer (1988), and also highlighted by Nutbrown, Hannon and Weinberger (1991). What is needed is communication between schools and all parents, with a flow of information in both directions, a valuation by schools of the parents' contribution, and training and support for teachers.

Another factor missing here, on which to base future developments, is an in-depth study of how a number of parents of young children, from a variety of backgrounds, interact with or are involved with their children's school, with the primary focus on the parents and the home. This is something that will be addressed in this study.

2.4 The Relationship Between Early Literacy Experiences and Later Literacy Achievement

This section will explore which factors can make a difference for children's literacy acquisition. Since young children spend the majority of their time with their families, experiences at home not surprisingly seem to have a major impact. These factors are of two kinds. The first are **status** variables, aspects of the given environment, which include such factors as the socio-economic status of the family, parental qualifications and numbers of years of parental schooling. Secondly, there are **process** variables, or what actually happens in the home, which include the literacy environment that the parents provide, and how they interact with the child on literacy activities. In this section findings from previous research studies will be reviewed to discover what relationship there is between various factors in children's early experiences and their later literacy achievement. Many of the research studies cited are about reading. This is because it has been only in recent years that reading, phonemic awareness, writing, recognising environmental print, and socio-dramatic play have been linked in their relevance to literacy development.

Literacy learned at home

The studies reported here show that social class exerts an influence, but it is particular **process variables** in the home that, in the majority of the findings, seem to be more accurate predictors of children's literacy than social class per se. While factors which tend to lead to successful literacy outcomes seem to be associated more with middle class homes than with working class homes, this is not exclusively the case.

Shea and Hanes (1977) were interested in the influence of the home on children's reading achievement. They followed 153 families from a Florida Parent Education Follow Through Model. Approximately two thirds of the families were black, from a rural north western city in the U.S., and one third were white, from a second similar city. All families were living in economically disadvantaged circumstances.

The children's reading achievement was analysed at the end of kindergarten, and first and second grade, to discover to what extent the variance in scores could be explained by home environment variables. All the parents were interviewed at home by a trained para-professional, who also noted down aspects of the home environment. Analyses were conducted using stepwise multiple regression. This showed that home environment variables accounted for a statistically significant proportion of variance in reading achievement at all grade levels.

The best predictors of reading achievement were, at kindergarten and first grade level: the availability of materials for learning in the home, learning opportunities outside the home, the reading 'press' (that is, the encouragement of, and interest in reading at home), and parents' expectations from the child's schooling. At second grade level, the best predictors were: language development, the provision of materials for learning, and parental awareness of the child's development.

Porter (1982) studied the effect of preschool children's family environment on their first grade reading achievement. A hundred and forty-four children were tested and observed both at the beginning and at the end of their kindergarten year. Parents were asked to complete a Parental Attitude Questionnaire. The Standard Reading Test (Daniels and Diack, 1970) was given to the children at the end of first grade.

A series of multiple regression analyses were performed, to explain the amount of variance for each set of predictors. The variables which most strongly predicted first grade reading were social class ($p < 0.01$), mother's secondary education ($p < 0.01$), Concepts about Print, (Clay, 1972) (assessed at the end of kindergarten) ($p < 0.01$), and sex ($p < 0.05$). The results showed that girls, and in particular middle class girls, tended to be better readers than boys.

Moon and Wells (1979) report a study of home influences on children's reading development, which formed a part of the Bristol Longitudinal Language Development Research Programme. They followed a sample of 20 children over two years to discover what parents and children did at home in terms of literacy.

Data were from two parent interviews, conducted when the children were aged five and seven, (both looking retrospectively at the previous two years), and analysis of the quality of verbal interaction between parent and child taken from transcripts of tape recordings.

Children's reading was assessed using Clay's Concepts About Print, and Letter Identification (Clay, 1972), Neale (1966) and Carver (1970) Reading Tests, and class teacher's assessments of children's reading ability, attitude to reading, and parents' attitude to education.

The teacher's assessments of children's reading ability correlated highly with children's scores on the reading tests and with parent's interest in and attitudes towards literacy learning and provision of resources for literacy ($p < .01$). Children's knowledge about books and literacy before school, acquired largely through what parents did with children at home, correlated highly with later reading ability ($r = .60$ and $.79$, $p < .01$).

During the first two years of school, children's reading abilities remained ranked in the same way as at the outset. The key variable to explain differences in progress in reading was the level of parental encouragement for literacy and their provision of literacy resources.

In The Meaning Makers (1986), Wells also drew on data from the Bristol Research Programme. Although the primary focus of the study was language development, some of the most interesting findings relate specifically to literacy focused activities. Thirty-two children were studied, from the age of 1;3 to 3;6. Conversations were tape-recorded (through time sampling every 20 minutes), from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m., and ten observations were made for each child (at three monthly intervals). Children were assessed in a playroom at the university as part of each observation. When the children were three and a half, parents were interviewed to find out more about the home environment and their views about bringing up children.

When the children were aged two and three and a half, assessments involved oral language alone. The English Picture Vocabulary Test, or E.P.V.T. (Brimer and Dunn, 1963), was given at three years three months, at five and at seven. At five, children were also tested on their knowledge of literacy using Clay's Concepts about Print and Letter Identification (1972), and their oral comprehension of a story. At seven, the children were assessed using the Neale (1966) Analysis of Reading, and some instruments devised by the research team. Teachers were asked to assess children when they started school, when they were seven, and when they were ten. (Tests were also administered at these times including looking at 'readiness for school' at age five, and reading at age seven). The results of all measures and tests were combined at each age, to give an overall score.

Looking for which factors were associated with predicting future achievement, Wells was surprised to find that difference in oral language ability declined in importance once the children reached school age, but items associated with written language (reading in particular, but also writing), were the most significant.

"Probably the most striking finding from the whole of the longitudinal study has been the very strong relationship between knowledge of literacy at age five and all later assessments of school achievement". (Wells, 1987, p.147).

Teacher's assessments concurred with the findings from the tests (p.136-7). The test of knowledge of literacy was the best predictor of overall achievement at seven ($r=.79, p<.001$) (Wells, 1985 p.234), and was also strongly associated with family background. Those children who scored highly on this test tended to have parents who both read more and owned more books, and read more often with their children. Wells suggested that children's understanding of what he terms the 'mechanics' of written language is a by-product of a deeper understanding about the fundamental attributes of written language which the children had acquired through interactions with the written code at home (Wells, 1985a). The extent of these understandings varied, often due to different experiences. By way of illustration, Wells makes a similar point to Adams (1990, mentioned in section 2.2), when he

contrasts the number of stories read to two children from the study. One was read at least four stories a day and the other none at all. The first child would probably have had about 6,000 story-reading experiences by the age of five, compared with none for the second child. While the numbers are surmised, and may not be totally accurate, it is the magnitude of the difference that makes the point (p.231). Children with limited preschool literacy experiences had less understanding about the purposes of literacy or how to derive meaning from print than their peers.

Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquhar, and Plewis (1988) conducted a longitudinal study of 343 children from inner London from the term before they started compulsory schooling, (when they were all attending nursery), until the end of Infants school. The children attended 33 different schools. The aim of the study was to examine the effect of race and gender on children's school achievements and progress. The sample was selected to include schools which had high proportions of black pupils, so that similar numbers of black and white pupils could be studied (and thus compared). The majority of the schools were in economically disadvantaged areas, with a mean of 40% of children receiving free school meals (compared with a mean of 34% of all infant schools in the inner London area in 1982).

Data were collected from the children, parents, teachers and headteachers. Children were tested in the term before they started school, at the end of their reception year, and at the end of each of the two following school years. These tests will be described in detail as they were also used in the present study.

The children's literacy (and numerical) competence was assessed just before compulsory school attendance, at age four and three-quarters. Children were tested on the Vocabulary subtest of the Weschsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (W.P.P.S.I.) (Weschler, 1967). A number of tests were used to assess reading. The children were given the task of word matching to see if they could select the correct match from four alternatives. They were given an adaptation of Clay's Concepts about Print (Clay, 1972). This was to find out if children knew it

was the print that is read, not the picture, if they knew the directionality and sequence of print across the page, and the difference between what a letter is and what a word is. Children were asked how many letters they knew, and finally, given a list of ten common words (taken from beginning 'reading books' often found in Infant classrooms in London), and asked if they could read any of them. To test writing, children were asked to write their first name independently, and to copy the phrase 'on the ground'. All the tests were given to children individually, (source: Blatchford, personal communication, 1988).

The findings from these tests showed that the children knew on average only five letters. Very few of the children could read any of the words in the test. Roughly a quarter could write their first name competently. The mean score on the W.P.P.S.I. vocabulary test was slightly below the national norm. Less than half the children knew that you read the print, not the pictures in a book. This means they had not picked up this information either at home or at nursery (p169). There was a wide range of scores on all the tests. There was a statistically significant difference between girls and boys in writing, with girls performing on average better than the boys (means 5.2 and 3.9, $p < .001$), (also reported in Plewis, 1991).

Further testing took place at the end of the following school year, and at the end of the final year in the Infant's school (since the introduction of the National Curriculum, known as the end of Key Stage One). At this stage, children were tested on Young's Group Reading Test (Young, 1989) (also used in an earlier edition by Hannon, 1987). There are two parts to this test. The first is a test of reading individual words where the child chooses the correct word from a choice of three to match a given picture. In the second part, the child chooses a word from six given, to complete a sentence, which therefore focuses on reading for meaning. The reliability given in the manual for this test is 0.95.

At the same time, children were given two writing tasks, administered in small groups. In the first, the children were given a picture which accompanied a story about two children meeting a bear on their way to school. They were told the story,

and then asked to complete it in writing. In the second task, the children had to write a sentence and describe three given pictures. A model of a picture and sentence appeared at the top of the sheet.

The mean standard score for the Young's Reading Test was 95. While this was lower than the national average, Tizard et al (1988) quote Levy and Goldstein's (1984) review which casts some doubt on the sampling method for selecting the national standardisation sample for this test (p101).

The writing task demonstrated a wide range of skill in writing among children.

At this stage (top infants) the correlation between reading and writing was high ($r=.77$), (p108). In addition, the children who performed well on the tests just before compulsory schooling at age four and three quarters, were most likely to be performing well at the end of the Infants school. (This is in line with findings from the Bristol Language Development Research Programme, Wells, 1987, reported above).

Since attainments of children in reading and writing on entry to Infant school are highly predictive of attainments at the end of Infants, what the children learn at home before school would appear to have a direct bearing on what they achieve in school.

Regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between the different variables. The strongest predictor for reading at the end of infants school was letter identification at four and three quarters ($r=.61$).

Tizard et al (1988) did not use a measure of social class because of the large number of single-parent families. Instead they used mother's education and family income. They found an association between these and children's reading and writing (they accounted for 8% of the variation in children's scores), but not between single parent families and reading and writing. Tizard et al (1988) also looked at

whether what parents did at home affected the children's scores for reading and writing. Children of parents who provided more exposure to books, through supplying them and reading them to the children, and who had the most positive attitude towards helping the children at home, scored more highly on the tests of reading and writing than other children.

Mother's education, the amount parents taught their children to read and write, and the experience of books children had at home accounted for 22% of the variation in scores of reading and writing. When the children's scores from the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (W.P.P.S.I.), were added, 37% of the variance in reading and writing scores was explained.

Children from the families with higher income were found to have significantly more experience of books than other children ($p < 0.001$) and their parents had greater contact with the school and more knowledge about school ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, mothers with higher educational qualifications tended to provide their children with more books ($p < 0.001$), although they did not have significantly greater contact with the school (p112-114).

This still leaves a good deal of the variance unexplained, and points to a need for more detailed research, such as the current study.

Anglum, Bell and Roubinek (1990) report a study of 492 children from a central states small town elementary school, U.S., and their families. Data on the home environment was collected through a parent questionnaire. Children's reading was assessed using standardised tests (Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests, no references given). The intercorrelations of variables were determined using the Pearson r . To determine predictors of reading achievement, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was undertaken. They found that the education level of the father and the mother was significantly correlated with reading achievement. Of the literacy variables, the frequency with which the parents read to the child before school entry, the frequency of library visits, book

ownership, and the variety of print materials in the home also correlated significantly with the children's reading achievement.

Badian (1990) aimed to find out whether knowledge of certain background factors would increase the predictive power of preschool screening using a screening battery described in the paper, and the Metropolitan Readiness Test (1976) of reading readiness. These tested for a number of reading related aptitudes including language development, name writing, copying, visual matching and phoneme awareness. Approximately 400 children from a small suburban community in the U.S. were tested at four, when data on background factors were also collected, from a questionnaire completed by parents. The children's reading was tested again at grade three and grade eight. Stepwise regression analysis showed that the background factors made a contribution to explanations of variance in reading. Family history of problems with reading contributed to the prediction of reading scores. There were gender differences for several of the measures. Socio-economic status had a significant effect for boys, and speech delay for girls. Overall, boys were more likely to become poor readers than girls.

Meyer, Hastings and Linn (1990) conducted a longitudinal study of children's reading comprehension and decoding skills. The study concerned approximately 650 children and their families, from three school districts in the midwest, U.S.. Questionnaires were administered each year to all parents of children in the study. Children's reading was assessed using a battery of different tests, (The Wide Range Achievement Test, Jastak, Jastak and Bijou, 1978; The Chicago Reading Test, Barr, 1985; The Early Reading Test, Mason, 1983; The Woodcock Reading Test, Woodcock, 1973; and The California Achievement Test, reading subtest, CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1978). The results showed low, but positive correlations between parents reading to their children, and children's reading achievement.

Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991) in their book, Unfulfilled Expectations, explored the effects of different experiences at home and at school on the literacy achievements of children from low-income families.

Thirty children in grades two, four and six were studied for two years. All were either above or below average in reading at the start of the study, and no child came from a dysfunctional family. The children were tested at the end of each school year using a diagnostic reading test, two writing tasks, and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Revised (WISC-R) vocabulary subtest. The children were observed, and asked to keep 'time allocation diaries', and interviews were conducted with children, parents and teachers. In addition, school records were consulted and teachers completed questionnaires about their teaching and relationships with parents. Data collection techniques combined those informed by ethnographic methods, and a more quantitative approach using test-based measures. Snow et al. point out that some of the children's literacy skills would not be reflected in standardised test procedures and scores, but that findings from these would have relevance to "real-world educational decisions". (p.45).

Findings from the study show that the most powerful predictors of word recognition and vocabulary (45% and 60% respectively of the variance explained) were the literacy environment of the home, and the mother's expectations for her child. Snow et al. termed the model constructed with this combination of variables, 'The family as educator'. Home variables explained much more of the variance (45%) than school variables (10-12%). (Reading comprehension was the most complexly determined of all the different aspects of literacy assessed. This was influenced by both home and school variables).

Five years after the study began, Snow et al. collected follow-up data on the children's literacy. They found that the children had not maintained the rate of progress they had previously made on literacy assessments. Aside from this general finding (which gave this book its title), they report that previous provision of literacy at home was still the most powerful predictor of literacy achievement. This provision of literacy was based on observer ratings of parents buying books, reading to their children, taking them to the library and discussing books, magazines and newspaper articles with them. It was related four years later to word recognition, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and to a lesser extent, writing (p206). The

second most powerful predictor was the mother's expectations for her child's education. The mother's own education also showed a relationship to word recognition (p.207).

Mason (1992) reports findings from a longitudinal study of children's reading development of approximately 100 children. Children from two schools were tested at the beginning and end of kindergarten and first grade. Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire about their support for literacy at home, and their child's involvement in literacy activities. Data from the parents that correlated significantly with reading test variables were the frequency of reading to children, the number of books in the home, the frequency with which the children read and wrote themselves, the frequency of parental help in reading and writing, and the frequency of story telling at home.

Using multiple regression analyses, Mason found that the children who could read and spell words at first grade had better reading and language understanding skills in kindergarten and were more involved in literacy activities at home.

Kindergarten children's language understanding was significantly correlated with their being read to and engaging in a range of literacy activities at home, and also having access to a number of children's books. These findings suggest that home literacy encourages language understanding, which then helps with decoding and reading comprehension.

These studies confirm a view that the literacy learned with parents at home has a direct bearing on later literacy achievement. Process variables identified as significant include: the availability of literacy materials at home, parents creating literacy learning opportunities outside the home, parental encouragement of literacy, parental expectations of their child and child's schooling, frequency with which parents read with their children and taught them about literacy, parental contact with school and knowledge about school, frequency of library visits, extent of book ownership and the variety of print materials in the home, the literacy environment

generally of the home and parents' reading themselves, the child's knowledge of letters preschool, and the frequency of storytelling at home. In addition, status variables shown to have a bearing on children's literacy development were: social class, parents' educational level, gender, family income and family history of reading problems.

Studies of children who read before school

There have been a number of studies of children who read early, some of them substantial, dating from the 1940's onwards. Taken together they have generated a body of empirical evidence which indicates characteristics the early reading children have in common with one another. Parental levels of education and social class do not necessarily make early reading more likely. Most parents of early readers were keen readers themselves. They (and older siblings), answered children's questions about print when the children asked - but in a casual, not didactic way. The children had plenty of access to reading materials especially story books, and often used the library, and also had access to paper and pencil which they often used frequently. Reading to the children, often with the child on the parent's lap, was a common experience of these children. (Teale, 1978, Baghban,1984). As well as motivation on the part of the children, the most striking feature was an interest and engagement in reading and reading related activities by the parents interacting with their children.

Almy (1949) interviewed parents of 106 children from New York to discover what opportunities children had for reading in the preschool period at home. She later tested the children's reading ability in school. She found that those children who were read to and had the opportunity to look at books and magazines at home were significantly more successful at beginning reading at school.

Sheldon and Carrillo (1952) explored the relationship between early readers' and poor readers' test scores. and their home background. Data were obtained from a parent questionnaire given to 521 families in New York. They found that children

from better educated and smaller families tended to be better readers. The greater the number of books in the home, the better at reading the children tended to be.

Durkin (1961) described characteristics of 49 children from a multi-racial group in California who learned to read early at home. All their families had a high regard for reading and the children had all been read to regularly.

Durkin (1966) then looked at the families in California (upper lower class families, from 1958 onwards) together with families in New York, (lower middle class families, from 1961 onwards), where the children also learnt to read early. She monitored the children's progress for three years and found their mean reading achievement was higher than comparatively bright children who did not begin to read until first grade. Parents of early readers were more prepared than others to give their children help and were less likely to think reading could only be taught by a trained professional. The parents spent time with the children, read to them and helped when asked, and used books themselves. Durkin did not find a connection between early reading and socio-economic status of the families, perhaps because of working in two different geographical areas, perhaps because in the years between the two studies ideas were changing concerning when it was appropriate for children to begin reading (p.136).

The mothers seem to have played a key role in helping their children become early readers, by the provision of materials, acting as a role model, giving their children time and feeling comfortable as an educator of their own children.

Plessas and Oakes (1964) gave a questionnaire (based on Almy's work, 1949), to parents of twenty early readers about their children's early literacy development. Most early readers had had some sort of beginning reading instruction from their parents (or a sibling). They tended to come from middle class homes, and reading and reading-related activities were encouraged at home.

Sutton (1964) studied 134 kindergarten children in Indiana, U.S., to see which factors predisposed children to early reading. She found that girls were more likely to read early than boys, that early readers tended to come from homes with a higher socio-economic level, often had an older sibling who read to them occasionally, and were read to by their parents from a younger age (one and a half years or younger), than the children who did not take to reading so quickly.

King and Friesen (1972) studied 62 children in kindergarten in Calgary, U.S.. Half the children were early readers. They found these children tended to come from smaller families of higher socio-economic levels, their mothers had had more education, and they received more informal help in learning to read from their families at home. The early readers knew more letter names, could recognise more words and could learn to read new words at a faster rate than the other children.

Clark (1976) studied precocious readers in a longitudinal study of 32 children in Scotland who could read before school. She conducted interviews with parents, who were from a variety of backgrounds. All the parents valued education and the children had had plenty of adult attention. Most of the mothers were free to be with their children for much of the day and themselves read widely. The children were encouraged to choose a range of books for themselves, and were taken to the library regularly. While the parents had provided an environment for their children conducive to reading, few of the parents had consciously taught their child to read. Parents' help was "casual rather than systematic", and "part of their daily life rather than something separate" (p.53).

Briggs and Elkind (1977) assessed the reading of 76 prekindergarten children. Half were early readers, and half were a control group. Data about factors at home which might influence children's reading was collected using parent interviews. Factor analysis of the parental interviews showed that more parents of early readers worked in professional jobs and had higher levels of education ($F(1,54)=6.30$, $p<0.02$). Early readers were also provided with more reading and writing materials and instructions for their use ($F(1,54)=5.62$, $p<0.025$). Their parents helped more

with writing, spelling and word meaning, and other aspects of family interest in language ($F(1,54)=10.73, p<0.005$). The parents of early readers took the children to the library more frequently ($F(1,42)=4.96, p<0.05$). The data suggest that parents' interest may be an important factor in children's early reading.

Anbar (1986) was also interested in those children who learnt to read early. She interviewed parents of six preschool children from middle class homes, who had learned to read at home. The data suggest that the parents' role was "crucial". Parents had interacted with their children on reading related activities from when their children were very young. They used a variety of methods, such as pointing out environmental print when out together, reading books to their children, making up rhymes and trying to make what they did appropriate, and of interest to their child. However, as Clark (1976) also reported, the parents did not intend deliberately to teach their children to read.

In summary, background characteristics, which could be described as **process** variables, that many early readers had in common in these studies, include: being read to from a young age, together with opportunities to look at a range of books and other printed material at home, parents acting as literacy models and being happy to instruct, parental help and encouragement of their children's literacy (although in some studies parents pointed out that they did not deliberately set out to teach literacy, and often their help with learning was informal), parents' valuing education, parents providing plenty of adult attention, children taken to the library and encouraged to choose books for themselves, and parents interacting with children on literacy-related activities from a very young age, not only by sharing books and stories, but by pointing out print and making up rhymes. **Status** variables identified by the studies include: higher socio-economic status, better educated parents, gender, smaller families, larger number of books in the home, and having an older sibling who read to the child occasionally. Taken together, a home environment that was supportive of literacy learning was an important dimension for early readers.

Knowledge of letters

Several studies have reported high correlations between knowledge of letters and successful early reading (for example, DeHirsch, Jansky, and Langford, 1966; Chall, 1967; Bond and Dykstra, 1967; Muehl and DiNello, 1976; Zifcak, 1981; Wells, 1987; Tizard et al., 1988). Ehri (1983) suggests that the connection is because letter-name knowledge provides the starting point for understanding an alphabetic system, where learners have to identify individual letters, and process them for sounds. Those children who know some letter-names have already begun to make these associations. Ehri describes a study in which it was no problem teaching letter-sound associations to kindergarten children who could name eight letters, but it was impossible to teach this to children who could not name these eight letters. She suggests that being able to link letter-sounds to letter-names is much easier for children than learning letter-sound correspondences from scratch (p144). Knowing the names of letters so well the child can respond to them automatically may also be important. For instance, Bond and Dykstra (1967) reported a correlation between letter-name knowledge and reading achievement of $r=.51$ to $.60$, while Speer and Lamb (1976) reported an even higher correlation between speed of letter naming and reading achievement, $r=.79$ to $.81$. As Fitts (1962) suggests, moving towards successful skill learning and automaticity can only take place once the learner has achieved at least partial understanding of the tasks involved in performing the skill. Where experimental studies (for example, Johnson, 1969, Ohnmacht, 1969, Samuels, 1972) failed to find that letter-name knowledge facilitated word recognition, Ehri (1983) suggests that this was due to flawed research designs. In her opinion, either letter-sound or letter-name correspondences could be taught, because the main learning task is to associate a name or sound with a letter shape, not to extract the sound from the name after the name has been acquired.

Many children who had acquired a knowledge of letters before they started school were not taught systematically, but gained this information through other interactions with literacy (for instance, Payton, 1984).

Phonological awareness and knowledge of nursery rhymes

A number of research studies have uncovered the importance of phonological awareness for reading development. Research evidence suggests that the better children are at reading, the more sensitive they are to the constituent sounds of a word (Goswami and Bryant, 1990). Conversely, children who have difficulties reading are often unable to differentiate between the different sounds that go to make up words.

There are three ways of separating the sounds within words, all of which constitute a type of phonological awareness. One is the **syllable**, such as 'hol-i-day' (three syllables), which most children are able to recognise (Lieberman, Schankweiler, Fischer, and Carter, 1974). Another is the **phoneme**, which is "the smallest unit of sound that can change the meaning of a word". (Goswami and Bryant, p.2), such as 'c' in 'cat', which could, with the change of a phoneme, become 'mat'. These are very difficult for children to detect in the early stages of learning to read (Goswami and Bryant, p.98). The third type of sound within words is the **intra-syllabic unit**. This is a unit of sound which lies between the syllable and the phoneme. The sound at the beginning is known as 'the onset', and the sound at the end is known as 'the rime'. (Goswami and Bryant, p.3).

Children acquire an awareness of onset and rime, and of phonemes, at different stages of development (p102). Many children can detect onset and rime well before they can read. This makes sense in terms of observations of young children's natural interest in rhyme and alliteration (Chukovsky, 1963). It is through an awareness of onset and rime that children learning to read can start to make analogies between words that share the same onset or rime, and in this way, learn a useful strategy for reading (and attempting to spell) new words (Goswami, 1990). This ability to split phonemes is highly predictive of later reading achievement (Lundberg, Olofsson, and Wall, 1980; Share, Jorm, Maclean, and Matthews, 1984). Children only start to recognise **phonemes** as a result of learning to read and write using an alphabetic script (p.148). Goswami and Bryant performed multiple

regression on their data, to eliminate the effects of extraneous variables. Their findings show that children's sensitivity to rhyme makes an independent contribution to reading but not to children's spelling (p112). It may also help with the growth of sensitivity to phonemes. (p115).

Bradley and Bryant (1978) found that failing readers made a large number of errors when asked whether a set of words had common onsets or rimes. Olson, Davidson, Kliegl and Foltz (1985) found that poor readers had great difficulty in reading nonsense words, because they could not distinguish between the phonological units.

Lundberg, Olofsson and Wall (1980) conducted a longitudinal experiment in Sweden, examining children's ability to detect syllables and phonemes. They found a correlation between children's ability to make rhymes (sensitivity to rime) and to recognise phonemes, which sometimes coincided with the onset, and the children's level of reading skills at the end of their first year in school (two years after the start of the study). They suggest this is because if children can recognise rhyme and alliteration before they can read, they can then categorise words by their onsets and rimes (p107).

Bryant, Maclean and Bradley (1990) conducted a longitudinal study of 64 children over three years, from the children being aged three and a quarter to being six and a half. The children were given tests of rhyme and alliteration, and most children could manage the rhyme oddity task, (for example, selecting the odd one out from the following: mop, hop, tap, lop), even at the outset. The rhyme scores proved good predictors of children's subsequent reading performance, even after controls for differences in children's intelligence, vocabulary and social background were taken into account. They did not predict arithmetic ability.

Bradley and Bryant (1983, 1985) devised a longitudinal study of the relationship between children's sensitivity to rhyme before they could read and their later success in reading (p108). They started with 403 children (later 368) aged between four and five, and followed the children for up to four years. They found there was a strong

relationship between children's sensitivity to rhyme and alliteration and their progress with reading and spelling. This finding remained after controls for the effects of differences in I.Q., vocabulary and their initial memory scores were taken into account. The rhyming scores did not predict arithmetic skills.

Sixty-five children from the study, who had performed poorly on the rhyme oddity task were assigned to one of four groups, at age six, for two years. The first experimental group was given training in rhyme and alliteration. The second experimental group was taught, in addition, to represent sounds with alphabetic letters (in the second year). The first control group (not really a control, but a different treatment group) had the same amount of time allocated to words, but they were classified according to conceptual characteristics (the examples given, animate vs inanimate, indoor objects vs outdoor objects) (p124). The second control group had no additional experience.

Children were assessed using standardised tests of reading, spelling and mathematics at the end of the two year period. They found the children taught about letters as well as rhymes did far better than any other group in reading (but not in mathematics).

Building on their previous research into children's phonological awareness, and its relationship with children's reading, Bryant, Bradley, Maclean and Crossland (1989) report findings from a longitudinal study of children's knowledge of nursery rhymes and their subsequent reading achievement. The study involved 64 children, from the age of three and a third, over a three year period. All but one of the children were from English speaking homes, (one spoke English at home, but the mother was Swedish).

They found a strong relationship between early knowledge of nursery rhymes and success in reading and spelling, after differences in social class, educational level of parents, I.Q., and children's phonological skills had been controlled. They used mother's educational level as the main measure of children's background.

Their hypothesis was that nursery rhymes make children more sensitive to phonological differences in sounds, and this helps with their reading.

Although the study took account of social class, the influence of parents and home has an impact here, because it is most often with parents that children learn and repeat their first nursery rhymes (Snow, De Blauw and Van Roosmalen, 1979). As Maclean, Bryant and Bradley (1987) point out, "Nursery rhymes are one example of the informal way in which parents, for the most part unwittingly, draw their children's attention to the fact that words have separable component sounds". While many parents say and sing nursery rhymes with their infants as a matter of course, others do not, or do so very infrequently.

The link between rhyme and speech segmentation is that once a child is sensitive to rhyme and alliteration through familiarity with nursery rhymes, they are in a position to hear when words share a common sound, for example, Jill and hill, in 'Jack and Jill went up the hill'. The children can then transfer this sensitivity to the business of reading.

At the start of the study, children were asked to recite five well-known nursery rhymes. They were then given a series of tasks to discover their "phonological sensitivity". They were assessed on a number of tests of reading, vocabulary and intelligence. The researchers found that knowledge of nursery rhymes correlated strongly with phonological measures and reading test scores administered three years later ($r=0.56$, $p<0.001$). To check that this was not because of the effect of some other variable, multiple regressions and logistic analyses were undertaken. This revealed that there was a real connection between knowledge of nursery rhymes and reading, and the results did remain highly significant. The logistic analyses were used for those measures that did not have a normal distribution, and were therefore dichotomized and analysed using the Generalised Linear Interactive Modelling System.

These studies, then, demonstrate that there is a relationship between phonological awareness, knowledge of nursery rhymes, and children's subsequent reading achievement.

Impact of stories, access to books, and familiarity with favourite books

Research studies that have looked at the influence of stories on children's literacy development will be described below.

Rossman (1975) reports a small scale exploratory study into the previous experience of failing readers. Two hundred and sixty-one high school students with reading difficulties were interviewed individually to find out if they recalled having been read to by their parents. Half the students said their parents never read to them at all. Only 44 could remember anything appropriate being read to them at the preschool stage. Conversely, those students who could name a book that they had enjoyed reading recently said they could all remember their parents reading to them as a child.

Walker and Kuerbitz (1979) investigated the relationship between parents reading stories to their preschool children and the children's reading achievement at grade one and grade three in school. The study was conducted in an elementary school in Michigan, U.S. A questionnaire was sent to 36 parents asking (retrospectively) about the frequency with which they shared stories with their child in the preschool period, and their child's response. At the end of their first and third grade years, children's reading was assessed using the Stanford Achievement Test (1964, 1972). Analysis of the results was undertaken using Chi square. While all children were said to have been read to at least once a week, some had been read to every day, and the data showed that the children's reading achievement increased with increased frequency of story-time experiences. As well as being read to these also included children's enjoyment of listening to the stories, requesting stories, and talking with the parent, with the story as a focus. This indicates that story-time with parents before school was a positive factor in successful first grade reading.

Wells (1985b) examining data from the Bristol Longitudinal Language Research Programme, found that sharing stories was the most powerful predictor of later reading achievement. More generally, growing up in a literate environment, where reading and writing activities occurred every day, gave children a distinct advantage for the start of their compulsory schooling. Using the Mann-Whitney U test, the relationship between looking at books, drawing and colouring, reading stories, and levels of education were explored. There was no significance found in looking at books or drawing and colouring, but **reading stories** was significantly correlated with mother's education, ($p < .01$). Data from a previous study were used to see if these findings could be replicated. Again, only **listening to stories** was significantly associated with knowledge of literacy, reading comprehension, and mothers' and parents' educational level, ($p < .025$ to $p < .001$) (p 248).

Several studies have shown a positive relationship between books in the home (either owned, or ready access through the library), and children's reading ability, (for example, Sheldon and Carillo, 1952, Durkin, 1966, Clark, 1976, Lamme and Olmsted, 1977).

Wade (n.d.) conducted an experimental study to see whether increasing parental involvement in reading stories and listening to their children's own stories, would improve children's abilities in 'storying', defined by Wade as, "the shaping and ordering into narrative from personal experience or from fiction". (p.11). Stories were analysed in terms of organisation, structure, content and conventions used. The importance of this for the learning process is that learners need to be able to put new learning into their own words, so that it can make sense to themselves.

Twenty-four children were in a control group, and 21 children in an experimental group, within ten schools in the West Midlands. The children came from a range of differing backgrounds. Parents of children in the experimental group were given a leaflet explaining the importance of story, and encouraging them to read and tell stories to their children, and to listen to the children tell their own stories. The children's storying abilities were then examined using an analysis of co-variance.

The experimental group was shown to produce significantly better results than the control group (mean differences ranging from 0.65 to 3.25, $p < 0.001$) (p.28). A follow-up enquiry 18 months after the end of the study showed that parents of children in the experimental group read and told their children more stories, during longer sessions, than parents in the control group.

Mason (1992) concludes, from analysing transcripts of story reading sessions, correlational analyses and models of reading development, that preschool children learn about how to read by listening to, and talking about, stories with adults. For some children this would be with their parents at home. Some children memorise familiar texts, and from understanding the meaning can move towards an analysis of print and word recognition skills.

In summary, these research studies have shown that familiarity with books and stories has a direct impact on children's later reading abilities.

Writing

There have been a few research studies that have explored the relationship between writing and children's later literacy development.

Kroll (1983) incorporating data from the Bristol Longitudinal Language Development Research Programme (Wells, 1987), explored the relationship of children's preschool experiences at home to their later writing development at nine. A subsample of children from the Bristol research, comprising 18 children attending 15 different schools, were assessed on four measures of writing ability; personal-experience writing, story writing, persuasive letter, and game explanation writing. Scores for these tasks were significantly interrelated, and therefore could be combined to give an aggregate score for writing. Kroll found that the oral language measures did not strongly correlate with later writing ability and nor did parental feedback concerned with oral language. However, parental interest in

literacy and the child's knowledge of literacy, at the preschool level, were both highly predictive of later writing attainment, ($r=0.73$ and 0.64 respectively).

Blatchford (1991), using data from the study of children learning in inner-city London, reported above (Tizard et al., 1988), investigated the association between preschool factors at home and children's writing at the end of Infants school at age seven.

Multiple regression analyses indicated that letter identification at school entry was the strongest predictor of reading at age seven. The analyses also showed that handwriting skills at school entry were independently related to later reading, and the oral vocabulary test was also an independently related measure. These three factors accounted for approximately 40% of the variance in seven year old reading scores.

Blatchford et al., (1985). and Tizard et al., (1988) showed that parental help with writing at the preschool stage was related to children's handwriting at school entry. Forty-nine per cent of parents had taught their children to write their name and other words, and 40% just taught the child's name. Only nine per cent only rarely taught the child to write. or said they did not do so at all.

Writing tests, and story and sentence writing, were given to 331 children in their final year at Infants school. Preschool transcription test scores correlated significantly with writing test scores at seven ($r=.50$, $p<0.0001$). Using regression analysis, Blatchford found that the parents teaching of writing at the preschool stage, children's knowledge of literacy (as measured by an adaptation of Clay's ,1972 Concepts of Print Test), and the child's oral vocabulary (measured using W.P.P.S.I., 1967), were all related to children's writing scores at seven ($p<0.05$). Knowledge of literacy, unlike the other two variables. was not however found to be independently related to writing scores.

The study showed wide differences between children in their knowledge about writing at school entry. Those children with the greater knowledge when they started school tended to have higher writing scores at seven. The reasons for this suggested here are that even if only handwriting skills were assessed at the preschool stage, these give an indication of some level of awareness of written language, and that this is related to achievement in writing later. Children's knowledge of writing at school entry was related to help from parents at home. Often schools have worried that what parents would do might be inappropriate (for example, Farquhar et al., 1985). These results suggest that parental help with writing should be encouraged by schools.

In Snow et al.'s study (1991), a combination of variables which looked at the way families organised themselves, interpersonal relationships and external pressures was termed the model of the 'Resilient Family'. These variables explained 43% of the variance in the children's writing performance. The explanation Snow gives to this is that writing, of all literacy skills, is most affected by a child's confidence, initiative and organisational capacity, which are directly influenced by the variables in the 'Resilient Family' model. Writing involves self-disclosure, and therefore makes the writer vulnerable to criticism (p.168). To add weight to these suggestions, Snow et al. cite Shaughnessy (1977), and Britton et al. (1975), who found that basic adult writers and working class children tend to produce short pieces of writing to avoid negative responses from teachers. Children can gain confidence in themselves as writers when they are encouraged to concentrate on ^{content} rather than presentation (for instance Graves, 1982).

While the number of studies looking specifically at the predictive relationship between home variables and children's writing are limited, those factors found to relate significantly with later writing achievement are of interest. They include: the parents' interest in literacy, the child's knowledge of literacy preschool, family reactions to one another and the outside world, and children's handwriting at school entry, related to parents' help with writing preschool, and in turn related to later

writing and reading achievement. These findings indicate that the home has a significant role to play in children's writing development.

Environmental print

A number of studies report that young readers are responsive to environmental print (for example, Torrey, 1969; King and Friesen, 1972; Price, 1976; Mason, 1980; Hiebert 1981; Goddall, 1984; Payton, 1984; Kontos, 1986). Recognising environmental print is context-dependent for many young children, for instance, Masonheimer, Drum, and Ehri (1984) made a study of 102 preschool children who could identify eight or more signs and labels from 10 photographs. When the same words were presented out of context, only a very small proportion (eight per cent) could identify more than a few words and many did not recognise any. To date, however, there have not been any studies to assess the statistical significance of reading environmental print for later literacy development.

Socio-dramatic play

There is to date only limited documentation on the relationship between socio-dramatic play and later literacy development. There is a study by Pellegrini, Galda, Dresden and Cox (1991) based on their previous work (Galda et al.,1989), in which they observed a sample of 12 preschool children over two years during free play activities in kindergarten, and assessed their literacy abilities. (They claim that no other longitudinal studies of play and its relationship with literacy had been reported). They found that the children's use of symbolic play predicted their emergent writing, and their use of linguistic verbs predicted their emergent reading.

They explain the link between symbolic play and emergent writing with reference to Vygotsky's (1967,1978) conceptualisation of writing as a developmental process from play, to drawing, to scribbling, and then to writing. Play and writing both use signifiers to convey meaning, rather than the literal object itself. Isenberg and Jacob (1983) make the same point in their review of literacy and symbolic play. They

suggest that it is the process of transforming oneself or objects into something else while engaged in make-believe play, that has a relationship with literacy development, (p.272). Cazden (1976) suggested that children's play with language was important for the development of their metalinguistic awareness (p.603). Pellegrini et al. (1991) found that children's linguistic process verbs significantly associated with symbolic transformations for three and a half year olds. They suggest this may be because these verbs are initially learned in the context of being read to by a parent, and are then practised by the children in their play. In this way, play provides an opportunity for children to practise what they have experienced. Hall (1987,1991), for instance, gives examples of how when children are provided with literacy-related resources, ^{these} allow them to demonstrate what they already know about literacy.

The parents' role in the teaching of literacy (reading) and its effect on children's literacy (reading) achievements.

Clark (1970) conducted a study of 1,544 children aged seven to nine, to discover the factors contributing to having reading difficulties in school. She found that lack of parental help adversely affected the children's reading abilities. Until 1980, however, there was no firm evidence that parents' specifically helping their child with reading was beneficial. Then Hewison and Tizard (1980) investigated what aspects of parents' day-to-day activities with their child had the greatest impact on reading attainment. A pilot study was conducted within a white working class population. The children were aged between seven and eight, and attended two Infant schools. Data for 65 children were collected using standardised tests for I.Q. and reading (Southgate Reading Test, 1958) given to the children, and parent interviews.

Results showed that whether or not the mother regularly heard the child read correlated strongly with children's reading attainment. A main study was undertaken to see if results from the pilot study would be replicated. This involved following 30 randomly selected children from each of four Junior schools. The

children were assessed using NFER Test A (1973). Again, parental help with reading had a significant impact on reading attainment. Analysis of variance showed a highly significant relationship between the amount of help given by parents and reading performance, (F.18.5, df=4.99, p<0.0001)

The study showed that very few parents had consulted the school about helping their child with reading, and none said the school encouraged them to do this. Nevertheless, half the parents did help their child with reading.

School encouragement of parental involvement in the teaching of literacy (reading)

There is limited, and inconclusive documentation to date on the effect of teachers' encouragement of parental involvement in the teaching of literacy, although what evidence there is, is encouraging about its value, in terms of enhancing children's attitudes towards literacy, and in some cases increasing their performance. Most studies show benefits in children's mean reading scores of parents hearing their children read.

Gordon (1979) surveyed intervention programmes which included those concerned with parental involvement in reading. The relevant studies are discussed below.

Crossett (1972) worked with low socio-economic black parents of first grade children from a school in Cincinnati, U.S.. The parents observed the children reading in school, and received materials to work with their children at home. This had a positive effect on the level of parent participation in school, but no significant results were found for reading scores, (cited Gordon, 1979).

Wise (1972) conducted an experiment with 19 experimental and 19 control children attending a childcare centre in Washington, D.C., U.S.. The parents were asked to act as 'home instructors' in reading. The experimental children performed significantly better than the control children on the California Test of Basic Skills, (cited Gordon, 1979).

Henry (1974) found a positive effect on children's performance on a reading readiness test when all the boys to attend a state kindergarten in Syracuse, N.Y., U.S., were read to by their fathers six months prior to entry at the kindergarten, (cited Gordon, 1979).

Woods (1974) conducted an experiment involving parents of 40 children from 14 kindergarten classrooms in five schools, and 40 control children, from Mesa, Arizona, U.S.. The parents received instructions in working with the children and making reading games twice a week, and spent one day a week in a kindergarten classroom. The experimental children performed significantly better than the control children on the Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis Test, (cited Gordon, 1979).

Tizard et al. (1988) in their study of children in inner-city London, found few home variables explained progress (as opposed to attainment) once the children were in school. However, factors that were significant were the amount of contact parents had with the school, and their knowledge about what happened in school, (range of effect = 1.7 S.D., $p < 0.001$ and range of effect = 0.7 S.D., $p < 0.008$ respectively). Few teachers showed parents how they might help with reading, or gave written information. Tizard suggests this may be why parental contact with and knowledge about school was more significant than the frequency of parents' hearing their child read, which was not found to be significant (discussed below). This is because parents with more knowledge about school methods could adapt their input to be in keeping with what the child was learning at school.

Tizard et al. (1988) conclude that school and teacher variables were more important than home variables in explaining differences in **progress** through Infant school. However, in terms of **attainment**, those children performing well before the start of school tended to continue to do so (findings in keeping with Wells, 1985b). The single best predictor of later achievement was how much children knew about literacy before they started school. Although Tizard et al. (1988) did not establish a **causal** relationship, since they did not conduct any controlled experiments, they

point to studies that did (Bryant and Bradley, 1985), and also suggest that if children had learnt to pay attention to individual letters this was likely to help them with literacy and that children who already had this facility were more likely to be given 'reading books' before other children (p168).

The proportion of poor readers in this sample was very high (25%), and the majority of these children were being helped by their parents three times a week or more.

Parents listening to their children read at home most frequently did not seem to affect reading and writing progress. (This may be because of the lack of variation in the sample, since 92% of the parents said they heard their child read at least three times a week at some stage in their Infant school careers).

Other studies report similar findings. Ashton and Jackson (1986), in a one year parental involvement project in a class of seven and eight year-olds found the intervention produced no significant effect on reading test scores. Hannon's study (Hannon, 1987; Hannon and Jackson, 1987) aimed to investigate the effects of parental involvement on children's reading test performance, the significance of which had been suggested by Hewison and Tizard, 1980, and Tizard, Schofield and Hewison, 1982, (reported below). The families in the study were working class, and all children attended the same school. The school already had a history of working closely with parents, but had not previously done so systematically with regard to children's reading. The Reading Project involved all children in three cohorts (three successive year groups) from the ages of five to eight, taking reading books home and reading to their parents every day. There was support for parents through meetings, handouts, parent-teacher contacts and home visits. Children's reading was tested using NFER Reading Test A and Young's Group Reading Test. Results were compared with scores from children who had attended the school prior to the Reading Project. There was no evidence to suppose there were significant differences between pre-project and project children. Differences in test scores between the two groups were small and statistically insignificant.

These findings run counter to those of Tizard, Schofield and Hewison (1982). They conducted an experimental study in Haringey, inner London, to test the hypothesis suggested by the findings of Hewison and Tizard's (1980) earlier survey, that increasing parental involvement in hearing children read at home would increase children's performance on standardised reading tests. Teachers of children at the start of their last year of Infant school, from two multiracial classrooms, sent school books home regularly, for children to read to their parents at home. Parallel classes in the same school acted as a control and were not part of the intervention. A further two classes, in different schools, were given extra help with reading within school, to provide a different treatment group for comparison. The intervention lasted for three years. Cross-sectional analyses showed highly significant improvements by children reading to parents at home, but no comparable improvement for the children given extra help with reading at school.

The contradictory nature of the findings from these different studies suggest a need for more research into schemes to involve parents in the teaching of reading. Hannon (1987) using evidence from the Belfield project and comparing it with results from the Haringey project, suggests that such schemes may be most successful with fairly intensive home visiting, with children for whom English is a second language, or where perhaps there is limited involvement of the school with parents to begin with. Tizard et al. (1988) also suggest that it may be that positive scores for parental help with reading may only be possible if there is funding for extra staff to support parents and teachers. Perhaps sending reading books home is insufficient to raise standards of children's reading where home school liaison is needed to make this effective. Nevertheless, in all the studies it was children^{who} read at home most frequently who tended to have the highest scores on standardised reading tests.

What all these studies of parental involvement in the teaching of reading do not give, is evidence that the parents' help with reading and writing at home hinders the children's progress in school. This is an important negative finding, since it is still within popular mythology amongst some parents and teachers, that parents can

make the child's learning to read and write more difficult by actively helping in the early stages.

The effect of parent-teacher contact on children's literacy (reading) development

Aside from specific schemes focused on encouraging parents to take part in school initiated home teaching practices, it is also relevant here to look at the extent to which parent-teacher contact might influence children's literacy development.

Iverson, Brownlee and Walberg (1981), explored the relationship between teacher-parent contacts, and children's gains on standardised reading tests. The sample comprised 398 underachieving children from grades one to eight. They were all part of a supplementary reading project which emphasised parent-teacher contact. The teacher who taught the child reading recorded the number of contacts with the parents. Regression analysis revealed that the increasing number of contacts were associated with significant gains in reading scores for the younger children.

Epstein (1991) describes a longitudinal study of older children, third- and fifth-grade students, relevant here because the variable she was interested in exploring was whether teacher encouragement of parental involvement had a direct effect on the children's reading and maths scores. Two hundred and ninety-three children in Baltimore City, U.S., were tested at the beginning and end of a school year. Data were also collected from parents, teachers and the children. The children attended 14 different classrooms, and their teachers varied in the extent to which they attempted to involve parents, from teachers who frequently asked parents to become involved, "confirmed leaders", to those who infrequently or never involved parents in this way.

Multiple regression analysis was used to discover whether teacher practices of parental involvement affected children's reading and maths achievement, after

controlling for other variables such as student and family background, teachers' characteristics and practices, parent reactions and student effort.

Epstein found that teachers' encouragement of parental involvement contributed indirectly to increases in the children's reading scores over a school year. It did not, however, have an impact on maths achievement.

Gordon (1979) conducted a survey of U.S. programmes which examined the effects of parental involvement on schooling. He reported that there was evidence from a number of programmes to show positive long-term effects of parental involvement for preschool children (Lazar et al., 1977, Guinach and Gordon, 1976). Less evidence had been collected for school age children, although Gordon cites Olmsted (1977), who found that parents who took part in an experiment to promote their knowledge about children's learning and greater use of desirable teaching behaviours. The experiment had a positive effect on children's achievement.

Niedermeyer (1969) conducted an experiment with parents of 56 kindergarten children, with 18 in a control group, in Los Angeles, U.S.. The parents received a 90 minute training session and were given information from school weekly. This was found to have a positive impact on the children's reading achievement, (cited Gordon, 1979).

Snow et al. (1991) in their book Unfulfilled Expectations, looked at 'parent-school partnership' to see what effect this might have on children's reading achievement. Variables included formal parent-school involvement, contact with teachers, parent-child interaction and school punctuality. This partnership model explained 21% of the variance on reading comprehension, 32% each on word recognition and writing, and 38% on vocabulary. Formal parent-school involvement was significantly correlated with all four literacy outcome measures. Parental involvement with school was therefore seen to have an effect on children's literacy performance. This may be due in part to the effect parent-teacher contact has on teacher perceptions and expectations of the family and the child (p.126).

Parents and teachers exchanging information was helpful to the children's literacy progress. Conversely, they found that lack of such exchanges could lead to miscommunication.(p.170).

Although there are only a few studies here, they do point to the significant connections between parent-teacher contact and children's literacy development.

The study that follows is built upon the findings of the previous studies mentioned so far. Some data confirm findings from these studies. Other factors have come to light that have not previously been fully explored, but which I believe have a significant part to play in explaining children's literacy development.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From surveying the work of others in the field it became clear that a number of key questions about children's literacy experiences at home, the role of parents, and children's subsequent literacy achievement, needed addressing. Some questions stood in their own right. Others required the collection of data over time, since to date there has been a lack of longitudinal data to supply satisfactory answers. As Kontos (1986) pointed out,

"Longitudinal research is needed to trace age changes in children's literacy acquisition, instead of inferring them from age differences".

Seven key questions can now be posed. They either relate to fundamental issues themselves, or have to be answered before those issues can be addressed.

1. **What are the literacy environments of children at home, pre-nursery?**

There is very little documentation about children's literacy experiences at home, at age three to four. There are a few case studies, very detailed, of one particular child from mainstream homes, for example Baghban (1984), Payton (1984), Schickedanz (1990), and a few studies of minority families, such as Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), Teale (1986a), but not many general descriptions, focused on literacy, across different socio-economic groups.

What is needed is more general information about children's homes as an environment for literacy. This would include an exploration of:

- access to books
- access to other printed material
- do children have favourite books?
- do they have drawing and writing resources?

- does anyone read and write with them, parents, siblings, grandparents, neighbours?
- do they have games or other resources to help with learning literacy?
- what contact do the children have with 'environmental print'?
- are stories and nursery rhymes commonplace?

2. What have children learnt about literacy at home at pre-nursery level, and by school entry? (after a period of nursery education).

More information is needed about what sorts of things the children have already learned, even before they come to nursery, for example, how to be a reader and writer. Is this universal, and if not, who learns what and why? Again there are some case studies, for example, Crago and Crago (1983), Baghban (1984), Payton (1984), Schickedanz (1990), or studies with a particular focus, but nothing that incorporates key elements of literacy development for children from a variety of backgrounds.

Not so long ago, children were only thought to make a start on literacy when they came to school. But even when they first come, most children have already learnt a considerable amount. More documentation is needed, including children's knowledge about letters, their understandings of print, and their literacy behaviour in nursery.

3. What are the literacy environments of children at home, at age seven (the end of Key Stage 1)?

Similar questions need to be addressed at seven to those asked at three. Case studies tend to be of younger readers (Bissex, 1980, provides an exception). There is a lack of detailed data focused on literacy for children from different social groups.

4. What have the children learnt about literacy at age seven (the end of Key Stage 1), at home and at school?

There is a need to look at standardised assessments for comparison with other studies as well as more naturalistic descriptions and assessment, for example, whether the child choose to read to themselves, and what, and whether they write on their own.

5. What is the nature of home-school relations, and children's literacy development, at age seven (by the end of Key Stage 1)?

There is limited research evidence here. How do teachers see a parents' role, and what is the level and type of exchange of information? Do teachers communicate equally with all parents, or more so with particular groups? If so, which are the parents that teachers communicate with most.

6. What role do parents play in their children's literacy development?

A theoretical framework is needed to clarify the role of parents in their children's literacy development. What are the relevant aspects of their role. and to what extent do parents behave in similar, or in different ways.

7. To what extent can children's literacy achievements and experiences in literacy be predicted from their performance and experiences at earlier stages?

What sorts of predictions can be made about children's literacy development in general, and what can be said about the previous experiences of children experiencing difficulties with literacy? Other studies have shown social class to be a powerful predictor. However, other factors operating **within** the family itself provide a more accurate picture since there is also considerable variation between children within social class groupings.

Factors meriting further examination are:

- having a favourite book to memorise and love - the type of book is not important, children chose books as favourite for very particular and individual reasons (Meek, Warlow, and Barton, 1977, Robinson and Sulzby, 1984).
- knowledge of letters at school entry (Wells, 1985, Tizard et al.,1988)
- access to books (Feitelson and Goldstein, 1986, Clark, 1976)
- distinction between books treated as such, and books as objects.
- parents' knowledge about school literacy practices.
- parents taking the initiative over parent-teacher collaboration.
- teacher-parent communication.
- phonological awareness and knowledge of nursery rhymes.

This study will address issues in each of the questions posed above. Findings will be documented, once the methods have been described in the next chapter (4). In the concluding chapter (12), a summary of findings in relation to each question, will be presented.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

Various methods, both qualitative and quantitative, were employed at different stages of this study, to answer the research questions identified in the previous chapter, (see Table 1).

The methods employed will now be described following the order in Table 1. The descriptions will include the numbers of children, parents and teachers involved at each stage of the study. This information is summarised in Table 2, which also shows the timescale of children's progress from home to nursery, and through school, during the course of the study.

Characteristics of the Sample

The sample in this study comprised all children due to start in the nursery where I worked during 1987 to 1988, and their parents. It was not therefore a stratified random sample found in studies examining similar issues, such as Wells, 1987, or Tizard et al. (1988), where they took into account social class, gender, and in the case of Tizard et al., race. Rather it was a naturally occurring sample arising from the school setting in which I worked. However, it did provide a reasonable cross section of the population. The school had been built in the 1970s, in the middle of a council housing estate, with older private housing, and new private housing estates nearby. The children came from all the different social class groupings, from Social Class 1 to Social Class V (according to the OPCS 1991 classifications). In keeping with many other areas of this particular city, few families were from ethnic minority groups. In this sample, all the families were white and spoke English as a first language, apart from one Chinese family where English was a second language.

The nursery had places for 39 children to attend either a morning or an afternoon session. This was staffed by a nursery teacher and two nursery nurses. Many local

Table 1 Summary Table: Different methods used to explore main topics of research

Methods used	Topics to be addressed										
	Home Environment and Literacy pre-nursery	Literacy at school entry	Literacy at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)	Relationship between Literacy pre-nursery and age seven (end of Key Stage 1)	Home-School Relations and Child's Literacy	Role of Parents in Children's Literacy Development	Views of Children	Views of Teachers and Headteachers			
Parent Interview Schedules	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					
Assessments of Literacy		✓	✓	✓							
Teacher/ Headteacher Interview Schedules			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Child Interview Schedule			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Analysis using SPSSX-PC	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Relevant Chapters	Chapters 5 and 6.1	Chapter 6.2	Chapters 7 and 8	Chapter 11	Chapter 9	Chapter 10	Chapters 7 and 8	Chapters 7 and 9			

Table 2 Timing of data collection, numbers of children involved at the different stages, and their progress through Nursery and Infant School (children from two 'school year' groups)

Start of Study Interview pre-nursery	→ Entry to Nursery	→ Assessment at school entry	→ Interviews and Assessment at age seven (end of Key Stage 1). Children reach end of Infants School
School Year 1987-1988			
	No of Children	No of Children	No of Children
Autumn 1987	14	17	2
Spring 1988	11	10	4
Summer 1988	23		10
			Summer 1988
			Autumn 1988
			Summer 1989
Start of Study: School Year 1988-1989			
Autumn 1988	12	24	15
		9	7
			4
			Autumn 1989
			Spring 1990
			Summer 1990
Total No of Children at each stage	60	60	42
			Summer 1991
			Summer 1992
			16

families already knew the school well when their children first came to nursery. The children were admitted in order of birth date, which, because of the length of the waiting list, meant that most children started nursery in the term in which they had their fourth birthday. However, if a child was considered to have a special need, for example, being brought up by a lone parent, living in a flat without playspace, or being recommended by the health visitor because of language delay, they were admitted when they were three years old. This policy of priority admission was one that operated throughout the city. In school there was a reception class and four (later reduced to three) parallel classes of children aged five to seven, a headteacher, childcare assistant and a secretary. Most of the children who attended the nursery continued through the Infants school.

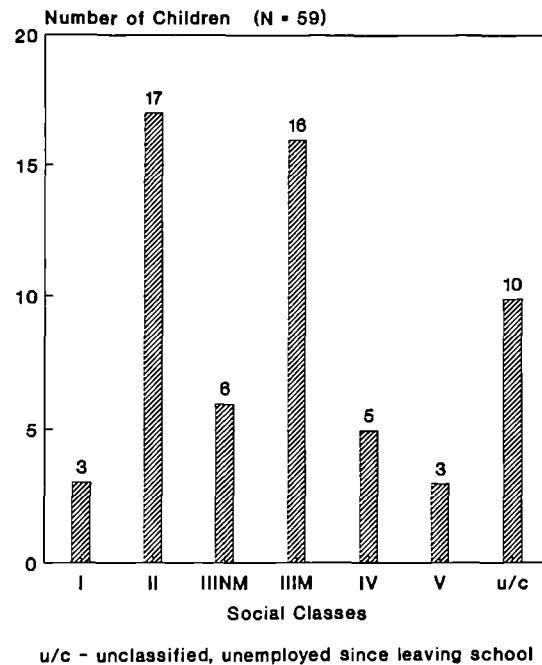
There were 26 girls and 34 boys in the study. Forty-eight children lived with two parents, and 11 children lived in single parent families. This proportion of single parent families is in keeping with the national average (General Household Survey, 1990). Although there were sixty children, they were from fifty nine families, because two of the children were twins. Where the focus is on the children's experiences, the total number discussed will be 60, but where it is on the families, the number will be 59.

The range of social classes (OPCS, 1991) was represented in the sample, see Table 3. It was not possible to classify families where the parent(s) were unemployed, and had not previously been in employment. This applied to ten families.

The distribution of social class was bi-modal, with families of skilled manual workers being under-represented. This is in line with changes to both the local and national economy.

The adults in just over a third of the families (21), were not in employment at the start of the study. Eleven fathers from the 48 two parent families were unemployed and amongst the 11 single parent families (all lone mothers), only two parents were

Table 3
Distribution of social classes
within the study



in paid employment, one on a part-time casual basis. Twenty-eight of the other mothers were also not in paid work, although 22 mothers were, which reflected the national trend for mothers of under fives to be in paid work (largely part-time and casual, with only five mothers in full-time employment).

Whether families were in receipt of Income Support or not (due to being out of work or on a low income), was taken to be an indicator of the level of poverty at home. Here the level was high, with just under a third of the families (19) receiving Income Support.

The housing area was varied, with a combination of council and private estates, and private and rented individual houses. The council estates were extensive, and included many families rehoused from the inner-city. A few parents on the council estates had bought their properties. Nearly half the families (28) lived in rented accommodation. This is higher than the national average, where the proportion was

a third (General Household Survey, 1990). The probable explanation is the relative size of the local council estates compared with other types of housing in the area.

All the children were white and had English as their first language, apart from one Chinese child, who at the start of the study, had yet to learn English.

Few of the families were large, although as these children were young, some families were likely to grow, (by the end of the study, for instance, there were known to be thirteen additional siblings). At the start of the study, there were fourteen only children. Thirty-two children had one sibling, including the set of twins. Aside from the twins, half had older siblings (15), and half younger (15). Ten children had two siblings. Of these five had both a younger and older sibling, three had two older siblings and two had two younger siblings. Three children had three older brothers and sisters, and in the largest family, the child had four siblings, three older and one younger.

Only a quarter of the fathers (15) had remained at school beyond the compulsory school leaving age, or had received further or higher education (although in single parent families these data were missing). Similarly, only thirteen of the mothers had stayed on at school or gone on to further or higher education.

There were more differences between the mothers and fathers in terms of educational qualifications, (again some data were missing for absent fathers). Twenty-five of the mothers had no qualification at all, compared with twelve of the fathers. At the other end of the scale, four of the fathers were known to be graduates, and six fathers and seven mothers had professional qualifications (for example as teacher, accountant, nurse). In addition, seven fathers and five mothers had vocational qualifications (for example as wiredrawer, hairdresser). Six fathers and twenty-two mothers were known to have CSE's or O Levels obtained at school, as their highest qualifications.

Parents were asked if anyone in the family suffered from chronic illness. Ten parents responded that someone did, although no clear patterns across the group

emerged. In some cases it was the child who suffered from illness, caused for example by cystic fibrosis or epilepsy. In other cases it was the parent who was ill, suffering for example from cancer or acute arthritis. In one case, a father was incapacitated by a work-induced back injury, and in two cases, parents were suffering ill health probably due to stress.

Children were admitted to the nursery in order of birth date, except where they were eligible for priority admission, for social, developmental or health reasons. This was negotiated with the nursery staff, headteacher, and local health visitors. Twenty-three children were admitted early in this way. Eleven of these children came from single parent families, four of whom the health visitors felt were in particular need of nursery provision. Three children were referred by health visitors because of concern over their cognitive development, in particular, their speech, and an additional four for medical reasons. Two children lived upstairs in flats without adequate access to playspace (one in a local high rise), one came from a family with three children under five, and one did not speak English, and nursery could provide an opportunity to learn this.

Families operate within complex social networks, and even very young children interact with many different people. To gain some insight into the key people in the children's lives, parents were asked about significant caregivers who did not live in the family home. Only one of the children lived in an extended family at the start of the study (with grandparents). One other child lived with her grandparents until the age of two, and many lived near their relatives. For nearly half the children (26), grandparents played a significant role in childcare, and for twelve children, aunts (10) and uncles (2) sometimes looked after them. Close neighbours and people from the local church were especially important as care givers to children in three families. In addition, eight children were looked after outside the 'extended' family circle, three by childminders and five by 'babysitters'.

The majority of children had had experience of preschool provision before starting nursery. Seventeen children had attended one of several local playgroups regularly. Eleven had been to a mother and toddler group, and eleven children had been to

seen as a useful tool because it can provide "...detailed data on both behaviour and the attitudes underlying behaviour" (Newson and Newson, 1968, p.17). Would findings from previous studies be replicated, or would a different picture emerge? New items were added as seemed appropriate. The following studies were referred to in devising the interview schedule: Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976; Whitehurst, 1983; Wells, 1985b,1987; Hannon, 1987; James, 1987. Subsequently Tizard et al.,1988; B.B.C.,1991; and Fitzgerald et al.,1991, were found to have included some similar items, which proved useful for reference.

The interview schedule was piloted on parents with children of comparable age whose children did not attend the nursery. The majority of questions proved meaningful and the schedule was seen to work in practice. Only minor alterations were considered necessary as a result of the pilot.

The interview was designed to give information about the following:

- general information about the children.
- details of home background and social class.
- additional information about the parents.
- child's access to reading and writing materials.
- child's book ownership.
- child's experience of being read to.
- parent's approach to reading and writing with their child.
- information and advice on literacy given to parents.
- child's interest in reading and writing.
- child acting like a reader and writer, with what frequency, and for how long.
- child's having a favourite book.

The schedule in its final form was then used with parents of children due to start nursery, from the Autumn term 1987 until the Autumn term 1988. (These children reached the end of the Infants School in 1991 and 1992, see Table 2). When a child was due to be admitted to nursery, they were visited at home by the teacher/researcher. Their parents were asked if they would be prepared to be

interviewed about their child's literacy. All the parents contacted (59) agreed to answer the questions, and most were keen to do so, never having been asked about their children's literacy development by anyone in a professional capacity before. Each interview took up to an hour.

Only one child was not included in the study. She had recently moved to a temporary foster family and they could not therefore answer questions about her previous literacy experience, they had yet to establish their own patterns, and the child was soon to be adopted by a third family. No other selection occurred.

A summary of the Initial Parent Interview schedule appears in Appendix 1.

Question 3.

What children had learnt about literacy at school entry : (Assessment of literacy).

A picture of children's literacy experiences at three could be provided by the Initial Parent Interviews, but how would these children fare in school? Previous studies have shown that children's home backgrounds and their knowledge about certain aspects of literacy at school entry can provide strong predictors of children's later achievements. This study aimed to replicate enquiries into these previously identified aspects of literacy, and discover if there were other significant factors. To do this, it was necessary to find out how much children had learnt about literacy by the time they started school.

A series of literacy assessments were devised for the children, to be carried out in school. Not all of the 60 children whose parents had been interviewed when they were aged three to four, continued at the school to which the nursery was attached. (This is because there was no catchment area to the nursery, which served several local schools). For practical reasons, it was only those children who stayed at the school with the nursery, who were assessed at this stage (N = 42). These assessments were carried out on a termly basis, from the Summer term 1988 to the Summer term 1990. Children were assessed in the term in which they had their fifth birthday.

To allow comparison between literacy achievements of children in this study with others, methods used in other studies were employed. These were from Tizard et al.'s (1988) study of children at school in inner London, and from Wells' (1987) Bristol Language Study. Four assessments of literacy were replicated: the extent of the children's vocabulary, the frequency with which they listened to stories at home, and their achievements in reading, and in writing. Three additional assessments were included, based on the child's observed behaviour at nursery. These were whether the child was able to sit and concentrate through a story, and whether they chose to look at books, or to draw and write on their own initiative, all within the nursery setting. (See Table 4, for a complete list of assessments). All the parents gave their written permission for these assessments to be carried out, and answered a question about reading to their children.

These assessments were carried out by the teacher/researcher, with whom all the children were already familiar, in a quiet area of the classroom. All children present on the days on which the assessments were carried out completed the range of assessments, with the exception of the WPPSI vocabulary subtest (Wechsler, 1967). Here, despite knowing the person assessing them and being in an environment they knew, a few very shy children were unable to provide a response, even though they had the ability to do so. This can be a problem when using any assessment methods with young children. The unfamiliarity of the task and its relatively formal nature will inevitably lead some children to underperform, or in this case, not to perform at all.

Letter identification has been shown to be a powerful predictor of later literacy achievement (Wells, 1987; Tizard et al., 1988). and Tizard et al.'s adaptation of Clay's (1972) Concepts about Print test was used to assess children's basic understanding about how books and the written language work. Two other assessments of reading were used. Word matching, which demonstrated if a child could discriminate between words with a similar visual pattern, and a selection of words chosen for word recognition, both again replicating Tizard et al.'s study.

Table 4 Methods used to assess literacy at school entry

	TYPE OF TEST	REPORTED ELSEWHERE
VOCABULARY	Wechsler (1967) Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) Vocabulary Sub-test English Picture Vocabulary Test (EPVT) (Brimer and Dunn, 1963)	Tizard et al. (1988) p97 Wells (1987) p136-137
LISTENING	Listening to Stories - Home Listening to Stories - Nursery	Wells (1987) p151-157 Lomax (1979)
READING	Word matching Adaptation of Clay's Concepts about Print test Letter identification Word recognition Choosing to look at books - Nursery	Tizard et al. (1988) p97 Tizard et al. (1988) p98 Wells (1987) p136 Tizard et al. (1988) p98 Wells (1987) p136 Tizard et al. (1988) p98 Teacher Assessment
WRITING	Writing first name without model Copying phrase 'on the ground' Choosing to draw and write - Nursery	Tizard et al. (1988) p98 Tizard et al. (1988) p98 Teacher Assessment

An omission at this stage was that of assessing children's phonological awareness. The importance of this for literacy development only came to the author's attention after the assessments at school entry had been carried out, and a key publication post-dated these assessments (Goswami and Bryant,1990). This was remedied by a question in the Second Parent Interview Schedule (described in detail below), about how many nursery rhymes the children knew when younger, and whether they had been generally able to detect rhyme. As this question had to be asked retrospectively, the replies may include inaccurate recollections, although I would suggest that the question was a meaningful one for the parents, since they were able to answer without hesitation, and many provided examples of rhymes their children knew, and the ways in which they played with rhyme.

Similar omissions occurred in the assessments of writing. Children were assessed on the extent to which they could write their name without a model, and whether the children could copy a short phrase, replicating Tizard et al. (1988). Copying a phrase assesses children's familiarity with forming letter shapes, spacing and sequencing abilities but not their understanding about how marks convey meaning, and the correspondence between letter and sound. Some studies have shown that it is possible for children to grasp these concepts about writing from an early age (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982; Harste, Woodward, and Burke,1984, Schickedanz, 1990), and asking the child to write words they knew independently could have provided useful data here. In addition, what could have been usefully added (with hindsight) was a more contextualised assessment to show whether the child could attempt to make sense of print, with a sense of the logic of print and an awareness of story structure (Harste, Woodward and Burke, 1984, Sulzby, 1985).

Other data to throw light on what the children knew about literacy at school entry come from responses to a Second Parent Interview Schedule (described below). These were whether the parent said their child could read or write before school; and from what age, if at all, they became aware of their child recognising environmental print, and whether the parents themselves deliberately pointed it out. The importance of the latter for literacy development was not sufficiently recognised at the time of the Initial Interview Schedule for separate questions to be asked

about it, although again it was a question which most parents felt they could answer with confidence, with many supplying actual examples of when their child had recognised environmental print.

Question 4.

What are the literacy environments like of seven-year-old children at home?

This study aimed to follow the progress of children from the age of three to the age of seven, when they reached the end of Infants school. To complement the assessments of literacy achievements, parents were interviewed for a second time, to find out what had happened to children since the last interview, what was happening for them currently in terms of literacy in the home, and the interactions between home and school. This Second Parent Interview Schedule was piloted on parents of children who were in their last year at Infants school. A few minor changes were necessary. All parents of children who were assessed at four were contacted to see if they would answer questions about their children's literacy development. Some of these children had left to attend different schools. All the parents agreed to participate. They were interviewed at home, for approximately three quarters of an hour, to an hour. *All interviews were tape recorded.*

The Second Parent Interview Schedule repeated questions from the initial interview, so that changes over time could be examined. In addition to this, information was collected about the following:

- whether child heard stories.
- whether child brought books home from school, and how often.
- whether child read out loud, including from school reading book, and how often.
- experience of child reading to him/herself.
- whether child used reading and writing in pretend games.
- whether child had difficulties with reading and writing, and how this was being dealt with.
- the age when child recognised environmental print.

- child's previous knowledge of nursery rhymes.
- child's use of home computer, and whether this helped literacy.
- any examples of outings, when child was involved in some literacy activities.
- newspapers and magazines, and other reading material taken regularly in the home.
- adult reading and writing at home.
- whether parent remembered literacy activities at home when they were a child.
- any chronic illness in the family.

A summary of the Second Parent Interview Schedule can be found in Appendix 2.

Question 5.

**What children had learnt about literacy at age seven (the end of Key Stage One):
Assessment of literacy.**

Once again, when the children in the study reached the end of Infants school (the end of Key Stage One), the methods employed by Tizard et al.(1988) were replicated. Children's reading was assessed by the Young's Group Reading Test (Young, 1980, 1989). This had also been used by Hannon (1987), in a research project measuring the effectiveness of parental involvement in the teaching of reading. The test was administered by the author, with whom all the children were familiar. Teachers were subsequently asked to what extent the children's performance on this test reflected their level of ability as shown in class.

Writing was assessed in two ways. Firstly, children were told a story, (whilst looking at a picture that contained some elements of the story, see Appendix 3.), and then asked to complete it in their own words. Secondly, they were given a sheet on which there were three simple pictures with blank spaces beside them, plus a model of a picture and matching sentence at the top of the page (see Appendix 4.). The children were asked to write a sentence to describe what was happening in each

picture. The writing tasks were undertaken in small groups, supervised by the author. Again teachers were asked whether children's performance here was characteristic. Parents gave written permission for their children to be involved in these assessments. Table 5 shows the assessments used at age seven (end of Key Stage 1).

The children were asked about the literacy activities they were involved in at home, using a semi-structured interview schedule. Children were interviewed in school (with their parents' written permission), by the teacher/researcher. The interviews lasted on average fifteen minutes, and were recorded.

Teachers, parents and children were all asked about the children's attitude to reading. For the children, this was done by showing them an 'Attitude Scale', (adapted from Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis and Ecob, 1989). They were presented with a series of five faces, ranging from very happy to very sad and were asked to choose the face first of all that showed how they felt when asked if they liked ice cream and secondly, how they felt if they were to fall down and hurt themselves. This was to indicate whether they understood how to point to the face which expressed their feelings. They were then asked to pick the face that represented how they felt about reading and writing on their own or with others, at home and at school. All the children were able to do this without difficulty, and were often able to articulate the reasons for their choice. The Attitude Scale and the Child Interview Schedule had been piloted on children aged between six and seven who were not in the study. They were able to answer the questions asked without difficulty, and this also proved to be the case for the children in the study. A summary of the Child Interview Schedules appears in Appendix 5.

Table 5 Methods used to assess literacy at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)

	TYPE OF TEST	REPORTED ELSEWHERE
READING	<p>Young's Group Reading Test (YGRT) (1980)</p> <p>Level of reading book</p> <p>Standard Assessment Task (SAT): Reading Teacher Assessment SAT: Reading</p>	<p>Tizard et al. (1988) Hannon (1987)</p> <p>Cliff Moon's categories, University of Reading, Moon (1980)</p> <p>Nationally administered criterion referenced tests. (School Examinations and Assessment Council, 1991, 1992)</p>
WRITING	<p>Story writing, Expository writing, Level of independence in writing.</p> <p>SAT: Writing, spelling, handwriting. Teacher Assessment SAT: Writing, spelling, handwriting.</p>	<p>Tizard et al. (1988)</p> <p>National Tests (School Examinations and Assessment Council, 1991, 1992)</p>
SPEAKING AND LISTENING	<p>Teacher Assessment SAT: Speaking and Listening</p>	<p>National Tests (School Examinations and Assessment Council, 1991, 1992)</p>
ENGLISH	<p>SAT: English Level (incorporating reading, writing, speaking and listening)</p>	<p>National Tests (School Examinations and Assessment Council 1991, 1992)</p>

Teachers and parents were asked about the child's performance and progress. (Parent and Teacher Interview Schedules are described below).

The time at which these assessments were collected coincided with the first administration of the Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs), which were criterion referenced tasks, given to all children in England and Wales in their second year of compulsory schooling, and introduced alongside the National Curriculum, (Education Reform Act, 1988). The children's SAT results, and teacher's assessments of reading, writing, speaking and listening, were all collected. The level of the child's current reading book (Moon, 1980) was noted. All these interviews and assessments were conducted during the Summer terms, 1991 and 1992.

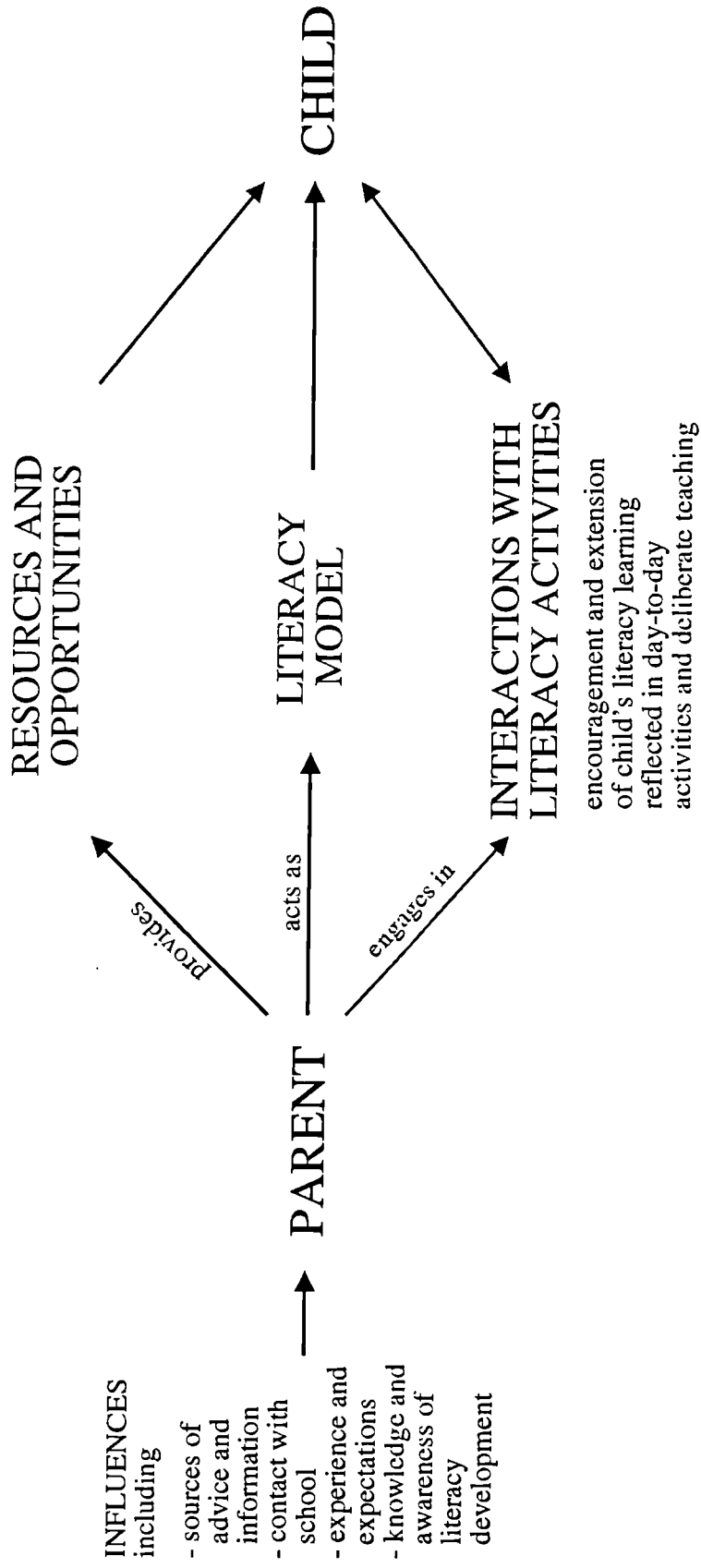
Question 6.

The role parents play in their children's early literacy development: (Second Parent Interview Schedule).

The initial parent interview, undertaken when children were aged three and four, has already been mentioned. Some of the data collected had relevance to the role of parents: the awareness of their role and of literacy development; how they resourced literacy in the home; and the way they behaved as 'teachers' and interacted with their children on literacy activities. The part that parents' play in their children's literacy development is central to this study. Building on the work of others, (developed from the model proposed by Hannon, 1990, of Model, Opportunities, Recognition, also incorporating ideas from Vygotsky, 1978, Bruner, 1976, Taylor, 1983) a theoretical framework was devised for looking at the role of parents in their children's literacy development. This provided a tool for examining the parent's contribution, to show some of the influences on the parents, and the ways in which the parents influenced the child. This framework appears in Figure 1.

The framework shows some of the influences that may affect parents' behaviour, including sources of advice and information, contact they may have with their child's school, their experience and expectations, and their knowledge and awareness of literacy development.

Figure 1 A framework for looking at the influence of parents on their children's literacy development



To varying extents, parents provide resources and opportunities for literacy for their children (for instance, supplying books, going on a shopping expedition involving some reading and writing). They may also act as a literacy model (for example, by reading a newspaper, or writing a shopping list). They may also interact with their child on literacy activities, on an informal basis, without necessarily consciously thinking about the literacy teaching involved, or through deliberate teaching. The two-way arrow in the Figure indicates that these activities are interactive with the child (resourcing and modelling may also be interactive, but not inherently so). Data will be analysed in terms of parents' provision of resources and opportunities, parents acting as a literacy model, and parents' encouragement and extension of their children's literacy learning through direct teaching and during day-to-day activities of family life. Factors which may influence the parents' role in their children's literacy development will also be addressed. While this provides the main framework for examining the data, additional features of the home and school environments affecting children's literacy learning will be discussed as appropriate.

Question 7.

Views that teachers have about the parents' role in their children's literacy development, and the extent of collaboration between teachers and parents on children's literacy development: (Second Parent Interview Schedule, Teacher Interview Schedule, and Headteacher Interview Schedule)

The first source of data was from the Second Parent Interview Schedule, (described above). Information collected of relevance here included:

- parents' knowledge of how reading and writing were taught in school.
- whether the parent worried about how to help with reading and writing.
- whether the parent pointed environmental print out to their child.
- where parent received the most information about literacy.
- parent contact with teacher, and literacy activities in school.
- any discrepancy between home and school.

The second source of data was from a Teacher Interview Schedule. Eleven teachers from eight schools, were interviewed during the summer term in which the children in their class who were part of the study came to the end of Key Stage 1. Some questions were general, about how they viewed the parents' role in early literacy development, how they interacted with parents, and the methods they used for teaching reading and writing. There were also specific questions, about each child in the study and their parents. These included questions about the following:

- any reading or writing activities taken from school to home, or from home to school.
- predicted level of support for literacy at home.
- anything parents shared about the child's literacy.
- any discrepancy between home and school.
- any activities in school the parent took part in.
- the child's interest and progress in reading and writing.
- any difficulties the child had with reading and writing.

Interviews lasted between three quarters of an hour and an hour and a half, depending on how many children from the study the teachers had in their class. A summary of the Teacher Interview Schedule can be found in Appendix 6. The more formal interview also often gave teachers in the school where the teacher/researcher worked, the opportunity to make informal comments at other times about particular children's literacy development.

Headteachers of the schools which the children attended were also interviewed (although almost all attended the school where they had been to nursery). Responses here provided the third source of data about the role of parents in literacy development, and the relationship between parents, teachers and schools. Headteachers were asked questions about their policies on literacy and on parents, what was happening in school now, its history, and what sorts of developments they might envisage. They were also asked about written information from schools, for parents about literacy, or policy documents relating to parents and literacy, and all but one school made documents available. At this last school, they were in the

process of revising their school policy on reading and writing, and did not have documentation on this for parents. A summary of the Headteacher Interview Schedule is in Appendix 7. These interviews were conducted in the Summer terms of 1991 and 1992. Interviews with the teachers and headteachers were all tape recorded.

Question 8.

Prediction of children's literacy achievements from their performance at earlier stages.

Predictor measures and outcome measures were analysed through correlations, comparison of group means (ANOVA), and chi-squared tests, using SPSSX (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Table 6 shows the main predictor measures and outcome measures to be analysed here.

Table 6 Predictor and outcome variables

PREDICTOR VARIABLES:	
Background variables:	N = 60
Sex	
Number of parents (1 or 2)	
Social class	
Employment status of mother / father	
School leaving age mother / father	
Qualifications mother / father	
Indicators of poverty - receiving Income Support	
Accommodation - private / council	
Literacy variables:	
Pre-nursery:	
How old when first read to	
Library membership	
Number of books owned	
Mother teaching reading / writing	
Child "reading"	
Child "writing"	
Mother reading for pleasure or not	
Interest in literacy as described by parent	
School entry:	N = 42
Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence score:	
vocabulary subtest	
English Picture Vocabulary Test score	
Listening to stories at home and at nursery	
Choosing to look at books in nursery	
Word matching	
Concepts about print	
Letter identification	
Reading / writing in nursery	
Writing name	
Copying phrase	
OUTCOME VARIABLES:	
	N = 42
Children's literacy performance at age seven (end of Key Stage 1):	
Reading book level	
Young's Group Reading Test score	
Writing task score	
Standard Assessment Task, English results	
Whether the child had literacy difficulties	
Teacher assessment	
Children's attitude towards literacy	
Information from parent / teacher / child interviews	

CHAPTER 5

HOME AS A CONTEXT FOR LITERACY, PRE-NURSERY

"To facilitate literacy learning, we need to know more of the ways that children from a variety of social settings initiate, absorb and synthesize the educational influences of their environment". Leichter (1978).

This study aims to find out just such information. In this chapter, the environment of the children's homes will be documented, and in the following chapter (6.1), the focus will be on ways the children interact with this environment. As this study is longitudinal, it also requires a detailed picture of what was happening at home for very young children to provide the baseline from which to examine later developments. Data will be presented within the framework suggested in Figure 1.

PARENTS' PROVISION OF RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LITERACY

The range of materials varied considerably between families, but reading and writing materials were available in all homes. The variation occurred within the social class groupings as well as between them.

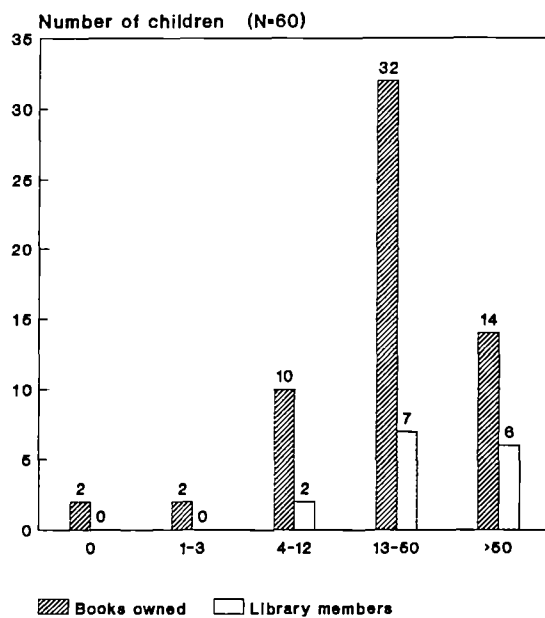
Books

All children had some access to children's books, and the use of children's books was taken as a matter of course in all but one family. Even in that family, children's books were used. The mother, who herself found reading difficult, had recently bought three books on advice from the local health visitor to share books with her child. (This child also looked through a Sunday Paper colour supplement, so other written material would have been available at home even though her mother had not at first thought of introducing books).

About a quarter of the children borrowed books from the library, often frequently, although the majority (almost three quarters) did not borrow library books at all.

The number of children's books available at home varied widely, from none, to the child who owned 200 books at least, and was also a member of the library, see Table 7.

Table 7
Book ownership and library membership
within the study, pre-nursery



Those that owned the ^{fewest} books were also the least likely to borrow them. About a quarter of the children owned ^{fewer} than a dozen books each, and of these only two used the library. However, it was very rare for the children to own no books, and then it was due to exceptional circumstances. In this sample, only two children owned no books at all at the time of interview, and both had recently, and hastily, moved away from difficult domestic situations and had not yet become fully established in their new homes. So, for only a small proportion of the children access to books was very limited.

Favourite books

When parents were asked about the books the children owned, very few mentioned the type of picture books found in nursery. Parents were asked, for instance, whether their child currently had a favourite book. Two-thirds (40) said yes. Looking at the titles of these books, only seven story books were ones that one would be likely to find in a nursery setting. Of the seven, one was a book the child had been introduced to at playgroup, Titch, by Pat Hutchins. The other fiction books were: The Snowman, by Raymond Briggs, The Tiger who came to Tea, by Judith Kerr (chosen twice), Where's Spot?, by Eric Hill (chosen twice), and Five Minutes Peace, by Jill Murphy. One other favourite book was one which one might find in nursery or school, a non-fiction book about sharks and whales. These children, then, were gaining experience of the "characteristic narrative structures" of the sorts of story books they would later encounter at nursery and school, (Wells, 1985b p.139). Other children may not have been presented with opportunities to gain this experience. The majority of the books were fiction (33). Three children had nursery rhyme books and two had 'labelling' books, (books with pictures and the words underneath) as favourites. Books of this kind can help with the acquisition of vocabulary and answering 'display' questions in school, but they are in the long term restricting, because children need to move beyond naming to follow more complex narrative and expository written language, to meet the requirements of later schooling (Heath, 1980; Wells, 1985a p.13; Wells, 1985b, p.251). Only two children had a non-fiction book as a favourite.

Book ownership

As for books owned in general, at least half the parents mentioned those published by Ladybird books, a publishing house that prints an extensive range of books for children at competitive prices that are widely distributed. Many of the books feature characters and stories from series on television, and are often written to a formula. The most often mentioned books by title were those about Thomas the Tank Engine. At the time of the interviews, there was a series of that name on television, and the stories and logo were being aggressively marketed. Books about other characters familiar on television were also mentioned, for example, Postman Pat, Mr. Men, Shoe People, He-Man and Thundercats. Many of these could be characterised as 'ephemeral' in that their themes or protagonists were popular for a time, but then their place was taken by other, similar books. A few years after these interviews, a number of the titles mentioned by parents were no longer available. A few non-fiction books were mentioned; ABC and counting books, books about animals, books about going to the dentist and to hospital, an encyclopedia, picture dictionary and book of Bible stories. As one might expect, other popular books contained traditional stories and nursery rhymes. The children also looked at and read reading scheme books, comics, bath books, cloth books, colour books, annuals, lift-the-flap books, books with cassettes, and books with videos.

The majority of books owned by the children were selected from those most readily available. This was usually from local shops, often the post office, newsagents, or nearest supermarket. Some books were also bought through bookclubs, although several parents commented that these books were rather expensive. A number of parents bought books in a 'bookshop' in town (there were none locally), although most frequently, this was at the Early Learning Centre, or at W.H. Smiths, which were chain stores that also sold other goods. Only three of the parents mentioned buying books in bookshops. Tizard and Hughes (1984), in a study of language development of middle class and working class children at home and at nursery, found that middle class parents tended to buy books from specialised bookshops,

whereas working class parents were more likely to buy from the local toyshop or supermarket (p.220). Fewer middle class parents bought from bookshops in this sample, perhaps because all the families lived at a considerable distance from one. Some parents may not have known about the many types of books that were available for preschool children, and therefore would not have sought out items they did not know existed. Weinberger (1988), and Hannon, Weinberger, and Nutbrown (1991) both referring to similar groups of parents, document parents' surprise at the range of books produced for young children.

For the majority of children, books at home were those most widely distributed and relatively cheap. Similar findings are reported by Robinson and Sulzby (1984) in their study of preschool children in Chicago. They found that the books the children liked best were mostly "inexpensive, softbound, easily accessible books of the sort found in drugstores or supermarkets". I suspect the books were often bought while shopping as an object, together with, or in place of, a small toy or sweets, with the child often initially attracted by a familiar character or logo on the cover. The types of picture book found in nursery and bookshops were not encountered so frequently by many of the parents and children when shopping, and also, these were seen in some cases to be too expensive. Toomey and Sloane (in press) report similar findings from their studies in Australia.

For most children there was a difference between what they read at home, and what they would later find in school. In particular, the children's expectations of narrative deriving from what they encountered at home was different from what they would soon experience in books in the nursery, which could be characterized as literature specifically written for children, and pitched at a developmentally appropriate level. As with most texts, these books could offer more to readers who had had experience of similar books. The reader's understanding and appreciation of the text can be enhanced by their "...life experiences and the resonance of the own previous reading". (Mawdsley, 1990). However, the books many of the children had at home often had either simple captions or were lengthy and hard for the children to follow, (see Figures 4 and 5 as examples), as also found by Hannon, Weinberger,

and Nutbrown, (1991), Toomey and Sloane (in press). This is not to denigrate the importance of children's encounters with their books at home. Children may encounter a wider variety of books at home, for instance, in Dickinson, deTemple, Hirschler and Smith's (1992) study of 25 preschool low-income children's book reading experiences, the mothers read more didactic narratives and non-narratives than were read in the preschool setting (p.338). The books children encountered at home gave them access to the world of print, to information, and to notions of being a reader. However, a gulf existed between what most children read at home, and what they would later be expected to understand at school. Some children, when hearing stories at school, would have brought with them a prior understanding of the "rules of the game the author is playing", while others would not. Some would be able to make multiple meanings from "polysemic texts", while others would have yet to learn this (Meek, 1988).

Stories

Parents were asked if their children were told stories at home. Nine of the 40 parental replies recorded said that this was not a part of family life, (some data are missing). It was usually parents who told the stories, but grandparents, siblings and other caregivers did so too. The child who had Chinese as a first language was told stories in Chinese, and a number of children also listened to stories on tapes. Stories were often told from when children were tiny. As one parent put it,

"...as soon as she's realised what you've been saying, there's been people telling her stories"

This meant that for many books were not the only source of stories for the children.

Other printed material

Children are often avid consumers of print, able to make sense of general printed matter, as well as material specifically designed for them, for example the majority

of the children in this sample looked through mail order catalogues, and many read the other 'adult' items, for example: magazines, newspapers, dictionaries, Bible and prayer books, and trade magazines. In all, the range of printed materials to which the children had access was considerable, and reflected the amount of print that now enters the majority of homes within an advanced Western society, bidden or unbidden. Several researchers have observed this within children's homes, for instance, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988). Wells (1987) found that while not all the children in his study owned books themselves, there was "no home without illustrated magazines and mail-order catalogues" (p.150) which the children spent time looking at.

Resources for drawing and writing

Resources for drawing and writing were available to all the children. Items mentioned by the parents for children to draw and write with, or to encourage writing were: pencils, crayons, pens, paints, felt tips, chalk, drawing with a magnet, copying shapes, writing patterns, stencils, blackboard, easel, desk, paper, colouring books, magic slates and writing pads. Although some parents thought their children were too young to 'write', the materials were there if the child had wanted to do so. Activities such as drawing, colouring in, and 'scribbling' were all regarded by the parents as normal everyday activities for the children.

Games and resources linked with literacy

Many parents mentioned games and other resources linked with literacy that they used with their children. These included games for matching, listening, and sorting, for example, letter lotto game, domino game, animal sound game, and shape sorters; flash cards, alphabet cards, pictures with words underneath, jigsaws with words, letters, or numbers; magnetic letters; a post office set; cutting out and sticking, including using old catalogues; an alphabet teacher, (a commercial toy with moving keys that revealed words underneath letters); computers and toy computer; an alphabet tray, alphabet pictures, and an A-Z dinner mat. This list demonstrates the

variety of games and toys with literacy connections commonly found in the homes. The list could probably be very much longer. I saw evidence of many games and resources linked with literacy in the homes, but by their very familiarity, they did not necessarily spring to mind when the parents were discussing what was available to the children, and indeed, many may well not have been specifically acquired to help with literacy development.

Television

Television was a feature in all the homes. Depending on how television is used it can encourage literacy learning, or, in some cases, it can be detrimental. There are a number of studies that show high rates of television viewing has a negative effect on children's reading development (for example, Robinson, 1971; Stein and Friedrich, 1975; Schramm, 1976; Parkinson, Wallis, Prince, and Harvey, 1982). Other studies are more positive, for instance, Mason (1965) reports a study in which 12 teachers studying at Florida State University, U.S. assessed 345 children of different ages and abilities on their response to written words that had been shown on television to the accompaniment of spoken words and phrases. Only eight kindergarteners were assessed, all above average ability, and they were able to identify correctly 61% of the words and phrases presented to them. This indicates that young children are able to learn to read some words from watching television. For the other children assessed, many had learnt to recognise a number of words from the television. Children rated by their teachers as having superior reading ability were able to read more words correctly than those children with average or inferior ability, suggesting that learning from the television was not more accessible than other methods for less able children.

In terms of television as a positive factor in literacy learning in this study, some parents mentioned that their child learnt to recognise words on television or Teletext, and also that they looked in the paper to find out the time of favourite programmes. A few television programmes were mentioned by parents as being helpful to literacy development, some about literacy and others more general, which

parents still saw as relevant. Those specifically mentioned were: Words and Pictures, and Adventures in Letterland, both specifically designed to teach about words and letters, Rainbow, an educational programme for the under fives, and Wildlife programmes.

In some cases, parents mentioned television as taking the child's time and attention away from literacy activities, for example, one child was said to be "infatuated with T.V.", and another watched a great deal of television, particularly 'soaps' at home, and limited most of the times when he looked at books to when he was at his grandparents' house. The first child was not included in the longitudinal study, but the second was one of the children struggling with literacy at age seven.

"Off the shelf" literacy packages

A few of the parents mentioned that they had bought ready made resources to help them teach their child learn to read and write. Those they referred to were books for children to learn the alphabet, learn to read, learn to write. (from Early Learning Centre, Ladybird books, and the local supermarket), writing patterns to copy (2), Speak and Spell computer (1), Questron books, Preschool activities (1), Story book (1), Humpty Dumpty pack (learning activities for under fives) (2), and Learn and Play magazine (1). These types of resource were becoming increasingly prominent, and the pressure on parents to buy them had increased with the advent of the National Curriculum (Education Reform Act, 1988) and scares about reading failure, (for example Turner, 1990). However, in this sample, they were not widely used, and often those parents who had tried them commented that their children were still too young for them, for example,

"I bought some flashcards. I've shown him the cards, but I put them away - they're too hard".

Another parent said,

"She's got some books to 'Learn to write' and 'Learn to spell'. You trace over them. I started one of them, but they're too difficult. I'll save it 'til she's older."

This same parent was aware that her child was already 'writing', and felt that what her daughter was doing herself was more appropriate at this stage of development,

"She has plenty of notebooks and old diaries. Her father works from home, with an office next to the playroom, and when he's working she'll get out her notebook and do her 'work' - 'writing' with lots of squiggles."

There were several other examples of parents trying things, finding the children were not ready, and deciding to wait until later to do them, demonstrating an intuitive sensitivity to their child's stage of development,

"I'll be ready to teach him when he wants to, but you can't force it".

The general impression created by the parents' comments was that more naturalistic activities, that fitted in naturally with other family activities, were preferred by the children. This will be discussed further in the section on parents 'teaching' (below).

Some of the preschool children were extremely well resourced, and some children had very little, but all of them had access to reading and writing materials, and had made a start on using these resources well before their entry to nursery.

PARENTS AS LITERACY MODELS

When children see others at home reading and writing, they learn 'unconscious' lessons that they can then internalise about what it is to be a reader or writer. For most children, parents are their most significant role models. In this sample parents reported that all children saw them either reading or writing. However, some read and wrote considerably more than others, and some were more conscious of their role as a model for their children.

The only parent who said her son did not see her reading to herself was one of a small number of parents who had difficulties with reading.

"I don't read for myself. I only read because of the children. I hate reading. There's lots of words I don't know so I skip them. I never read for pleasure".

Despite this, she appreciated the importance of helping her children with literacy and how they might copy her behaviour. She did look at books with the children, and commented elsewhere during the interview.

"He's got the idea of picking up a book and looking at it. He might have copied off me - seeing me pick up books".

Four parents thought their children saw them read regularly, but did not see them write. Three other parents said they read only from newspapers or magazines. Apart from these exceptions, other parents were able to provide numerous examples of the reading and writing they were doing at home, which their children might observe.

Reading was a well-established part of most families' daily routine, and children had regular opportunities to see their parents read if not for pleasure then for directly practical purposes and to find out information. Some of the parents felt the pressure of time in looking after young children, and said they did not read for pleasure, often adding that they used to. Still, over half the parents (36) agreed they did read for pleasure at the time of the interview. They were equally likely to read for pleasure or not, regardless of whether they had been read to as a child themselves. But, of the parents who did not read for pleasure, more had not been read to as a child (12) than those who had (5). (some data on parents' memories of being read to is missing). There was a considerable throughput of printed material in the homes. Thirty-six parents took a newspaper daily. Apart from one 'quality' paper, the others taken were tabloid (25) or local (19) papers. Eight families took both. In addition thirty parents took a magazine regularly. In only

six families were neither daily newspapers or magazines bought regularly, but even in these instances, two families bought a paper once a week for the television listings, and two of the other families sometimes bought television guides or magazines. Also, as some of the families commented, even without these resources, free papers and advertising brochures arrived unbidden into all the homes. Other examples of items parents read, observed by their children, included a whole variety of magazines read by both women and men, books, catalogues, knitting and crocheting patterns, T.V. guides, puzzle books, professional journals and papers, teletext, and their mail.

The parents also generated a long list of writing they did at home. This included: writing shopping lists, bank statements, directions, crosswords, keeping a diary, appointments, notes, cheques, bills, letters, writing for work, word processing, running clubs, filling in forms and coupons, party invitations, writing for study, sending for mail order items, keeping books, word searches, invoices, letters, Spot the ball and Pools coupons, DSS forms, cards, accounts, bank paying in slips, desktop publishing, and writing to do with being a school governor.

Some parents did only one or two of the activities listed above. Others did many, and read and wrote extensively at home.

For several children, the experience of seeing a parent read or write appeared to have prompted the child to imitate their behaviour.

"I think his interest in reading come from me, probably because he sees me read a lot".

"He gets out the Autotrader. What sets him off is my husband looking through the Autotrader".

"She likes to watch me write a shopping list and then she 'writes' hers".

Some parents were aware of the impact of these experiences, and deliberately encouraged their children to participate too.

"If I'm reading a book, I'll ask him to sit and 'read' with me, and he does".

"I sell Avon now. We have a game at doing Avon. I get all the little forms out and she thinks she's helping. She loves that".

"I type my husband's work invoices. It's ended up with buying him a typewriter because he wanted to join in".

There was variation in the extent to which parents provided a model, along a continuum from minimal to extensive uses of literacy, but among this sample all the parents at some time provided a role model in the uses of literacy for their children.

The Role of Siblings

There were already patterns of engagement with literacy resources and activities for parents and children in the homes where children had older siblings. This applied to nearly half the children in the study (27).

Some of the parents explained that they spent time with the older child, and the child in the study joined in with them as a matter of course, for example,

"We read to her from being tiny. We always read with Robin², and she would be there too".

"When we help Joanne to write, Sandra pretends to write too. We're telling Joanne the letters and Sandra is writing them down too".

² all names are pseudonyms

"He'd be in his pushchair. I'd point out signs to Rachael, and he'd look too".

Some of the parents commented that the older siblings also provided role models which the children imitated, for instance,

"If her brother's doing homework, she'll do it too".

"He does what she does. They sit at the table, mostly when she comes home from school".

Because there were already children in the family, there were often books and resources for literacy available across a wider age span than in the other families. Many of the older children passed on books, or books were shared. Three children had access to their siblings' computers. More school-type resources were available to the children such as reading scheme books and flashcards.

Parents reported that 12 older siblings stimulated interest in literacy in the children in the study, and eight of these also read out loud to them. Four other older siblings read to the children, but were not seen to be the main source of their interest in literacy. As young as the children were at the start of the study, four of them had started to 'read' to their younger siblings.

Seven parents said that older siblings were involved in directly 'teaching' children aspects of literacy; how to read books and isolated words, how to form letters and shapes, and the sounds letters make, for example,

"If Roy's learnt a book off by heart, he learns him how to read it".

"Kira gets hold of the flashcards and asks Nigel".

"Lynne gives him things to do like copying letters and he does them".

"Rachel's done a bit of sound work with him". (teacher's child).

In these ways, siblings provided children with opportunities and encouragement to become involved in literacy activities. However, because the parents had additional children in the family, some of the children (11) with older brothers and sisters tended to be given less time on literacy together with their parent, compared with the time that they spent with their first child.

PARENT'S INTERACTIONS WITH LITERACY ACTIVITIES WITH THEIR CHILDREN

Parents reading to their children

Reading to children is not one of the everyday living experiences that help form children's understandings of what literacy can be used for, such as shopping, cooking, filling in forms or reading notices. Rather it is an end in itself, as Dombey (1985) suggests, "language here is action, not an accompaniment to it", (p.29). It is a very important component in children's acquisition of literacy, showing them the pleasure, information and types of language which can be derived from books.

All but four children were read to by a parent at the time of interview. For one of these children, an aunt and grandparent took on this role, and for two others, the parents had read to them in the past (when they were about two years old). This means that out of a sample of sixty children only one was not read to at home. It is always hard to establish why something does not occur, but there were certain key factors which seemed to prevent these four parents from reading to their children. These were a move in haste from a difficult situation for two of the parents and children (and in both of these instances, although the parent had not read to the child for a while they had done so in the past). The third child had a medical condition which entailed frequent hospital treatment that had disrupted his preschool years. This seems to have made day-to-day routines hard to establish, including the reading of stories, to which the child was resistant. However, his

mother said an aunt and his grandmother did read to him on occasions. This was an exceptional circumstance, with a child with very pronounced interests and tolerances. The fourth child was the youngest of four children, whose mother had over-generalised advice given by the teacher of her first child, that the school had one method of teaching reading and if something different happened at home the child might become confused. As a result, the mother "left (the children) to pick reading up on their own".

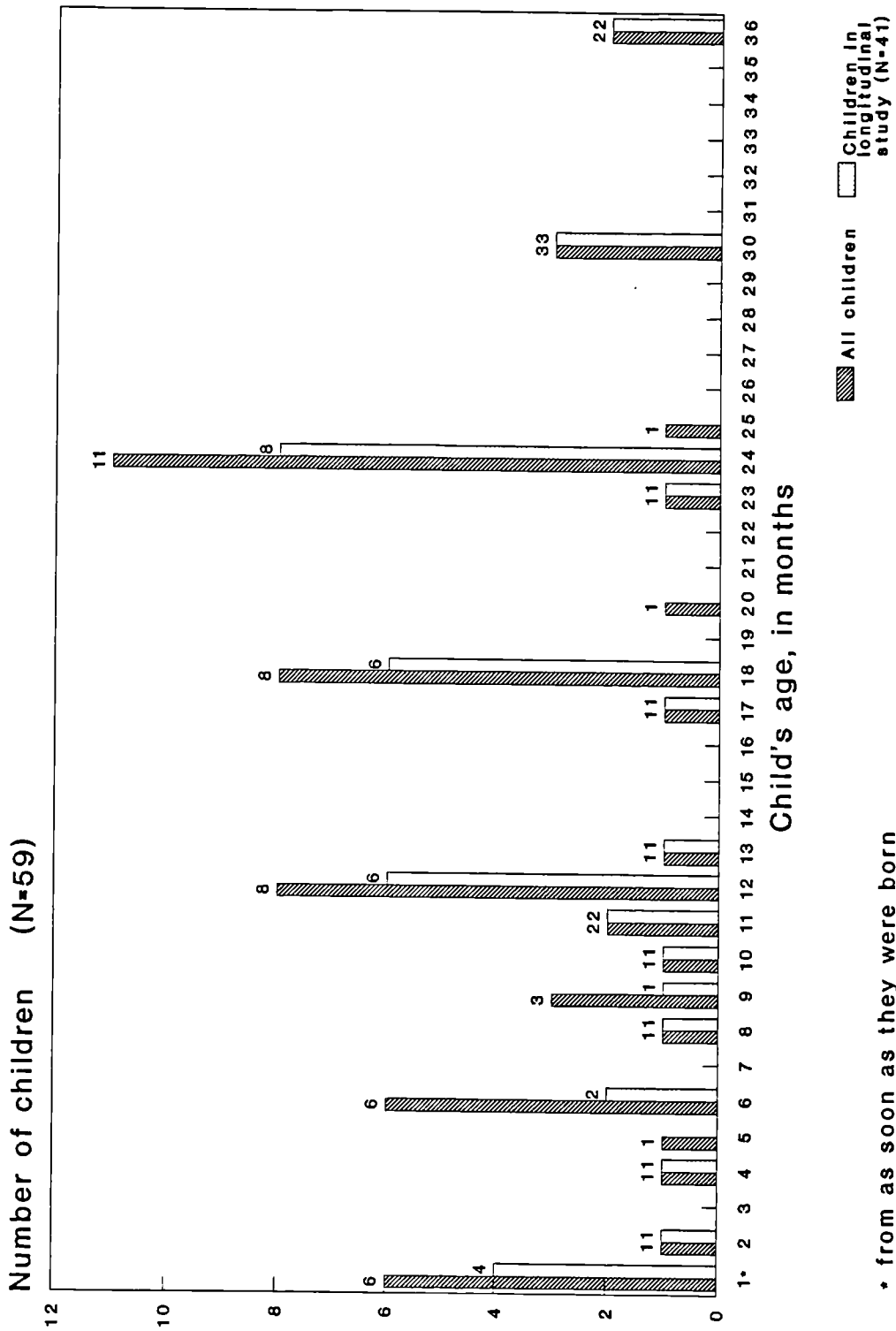
To summarise, disharmony in the routine of family life was a contributory factor to explain why parents of three children did not read to their children. For the remaining child, a half understood piece of advice was misinterpreted, which demonstrates the potential influence of information from school.

When someone did read to the children, it was mothers who did so most consistently. As has been mentioned, all but four read to the children at the start of the study. The majority of fathers (36) also read to their children, and one mother reported that her husband read most with their child because, "he can read better than me". There were also other people who read children regularly. Parents mentioned that all but half the children were read to by a grandparent (29). Twelve of the twenty-seven children with older siblings were read to by them (gender of the sibling appeared to have no significance here). In addition, four children were regularly read to by an aunt, two by an uncle, two by their babysitters and two by friends, neighbours and older children visiting the family.

Parents were asked how old their child was when they were first read to at home, see Table 8.

For the majority of children, experience of books was a part of their baby and toddler years. Approximately a third of the children (21), were under a year old when they first had the experience of being read to. About half the sample (31), were read to from the ages of one and two. Sutton's (1964) data suggest earlier

Table 8 Age at which the child was first read to by their parents at home



readers were read to from one year or 18 months, and Feitelson and Goldstein's (1986) study shows that children in "school-orientated families" started being read to significantly earlier than children from "non school-orientated families". For a minority (6), being read to at home started between two and three years of age. This gives an indication of how early the majority of parents in this study began reading to their children. For all of them (apart from the one exception of the child who was not read to), being read to at home easily predated their start at nursery.

The frequency of being read to varied. The majority of the children were read to very frequently, either daily (34), or most days (4). Almost a quarter (13) were read to two or three times a week. Again it was a minority who were read to less often, two children read to once a week, a further three less than that, and the four children not read to at all at the time of the interview. Most children had books read to them all the way through. However, nine children did not have this experience, or their parents specifically selected very short ones, so that reading through them was not an issue. One parent, for instance, said,

"She's got books with a picture and words underneath, and nursery rhyme books. I've got some 'older' books and I'm saving them, like Peter Rabbit with lots of words".

For some children, then, their access to sustained narrative, which they were to encounter at school and be expected to attend to, was severely constrained.

Reading to the children occurred at some time during the day, often several times a day, for nearly half the children, (27). Some research studies have looked at parents reading to children as part of a bedtime routine. Here a third of the children (20) were regularly read to in this way. Some of the children did not have a bedtime and other parents commented that they did not read to their children at bedtime because it made putting them to bed problematic, for instance,

"They don't seem to go to sleep with a story. They get too interested".

"Once they have one story, they're asking for another".

Parents were asked what they read to their children, or looked at with them. The majority of children had story books (52) and picture books (51) read to them. Many liked to have familiar books reread to them, and over a third of the parents (22) mentioned, unprompted, that their child memorised books that were read to them, (more could have done this, but the parents did not think to mention it). The fact that so many spontaneously did so indicates what a significant part it played in children's literacy activities in many of the homes. Parents made comments like,

"He knows every one of his books off by heart. He picks you up if you read it wrong".

"When she gets used to a book, I read so much, and she'll tell you what's coming next".

"With Thomas books, if you start a sentence, he can finish it off".

In addition to books, a large number of children (47) looked through mail order catalogues with their parents, and nearly half (28) looked at magazines together. Just over a third of the children (22) looked at comics with their parents. Seven children, all with older siblings, looked at or read reading scheme books with their parents. Six parents mentioned *looking through photograph albums together with their children*. Other items mentioned were Bible stories (1), a children's dictionary (1), and adult focused material, newspapers (2), and car and motorbike brochures (2).

Thus children's experience of reading matter shared with them at home was varied, and, as well as child centred material, included items that were available for the whole family.

How far did parents see themselves as 'teaching' their children about reading, writing, and environmental print, before their child went to nursery?

Much of the parents' 'teaching' of literacy skills occurred in a natural way, usually in response to particular events or situations, and building on their child's interests. McLane (1985) for instance, described parental support and encouragement for their child's learning as seeming "natural and unremarkable to them" (in Gundlach et al., 1985). As one parent in this study expressed it, "I didn't set out to teach this or that". There is a difference between this and teaching in a school setting where, even in nursery, objectives are set in advance and learning possibilities within a particular activity are specified, (Resnick, 1987).

Most parents showed a sensitivity to, and awareness of, incidental activities which involved literacy learning. Questions including the formal word 'teach' produced at times limited responses in which parents tried to fit what they did into a school learning pattern. Other more open ended questions enabled them to give a much fuller and more realistic account of family life. These will be discussed below in the section on 'Literacy learning involved in the day-to-day activities of parents and children at home'.

The 'teaching' of writing was easier for parents to identify as a deliberate act than the 'teaching' of reading. As has already been mentioned, virtually all parents read to their children. But for most, the word 'teach', implied something more structured than this. Over two thirds of the parents (44), said they were teaching their children to write, nearly half the parents (28), said they were teaching their children to read, and the same number (28), said they deliberately pointed out environmental print to their children. In only seven cases were none of these literacy skills specifically taught.

Sometimes children resisted being taught (Taylor, 1983 also found this). In three cases the parents persevered trying to teach reading, and in four cases they

continued with teaching writing, even though they felt they were battling against their child's lack of maturity and interest,

"I learn him to write his name. I hold his hand. He fights me and the pen and wants to scribble, but I do try and make him try."

But most parents were sensitive to the developmental stage their child had reached and adjusted their input accordingly. Tizard and Hughes (1984) observed in their study that when parents tried to teach something the children found too difficult, the children were resistant, and that particular session came to an end (p.55), but in most cases the children were interested in what their parents taught them and enjoyed the activity (p.67).

Nearly half the parents (28) said that they taught their child to read, and provided examples of the ways in which they did so. The explanations given for not teaching their child to read were divided between reasons to do with the children and reasons to do with the parents, see Figure 2. Sixteen parents thought their child was not yet ready to be taught to read. Eight of these mentioned their child's lack of interest and eight mentioned their child's lack of maturity as why they did not teach reading; the children not seen as old enough, not having enough concentration, and not having the language skills. They gave explanations like,

"He's not interested, and I'm not going to push it. If you do, they might not want to know".

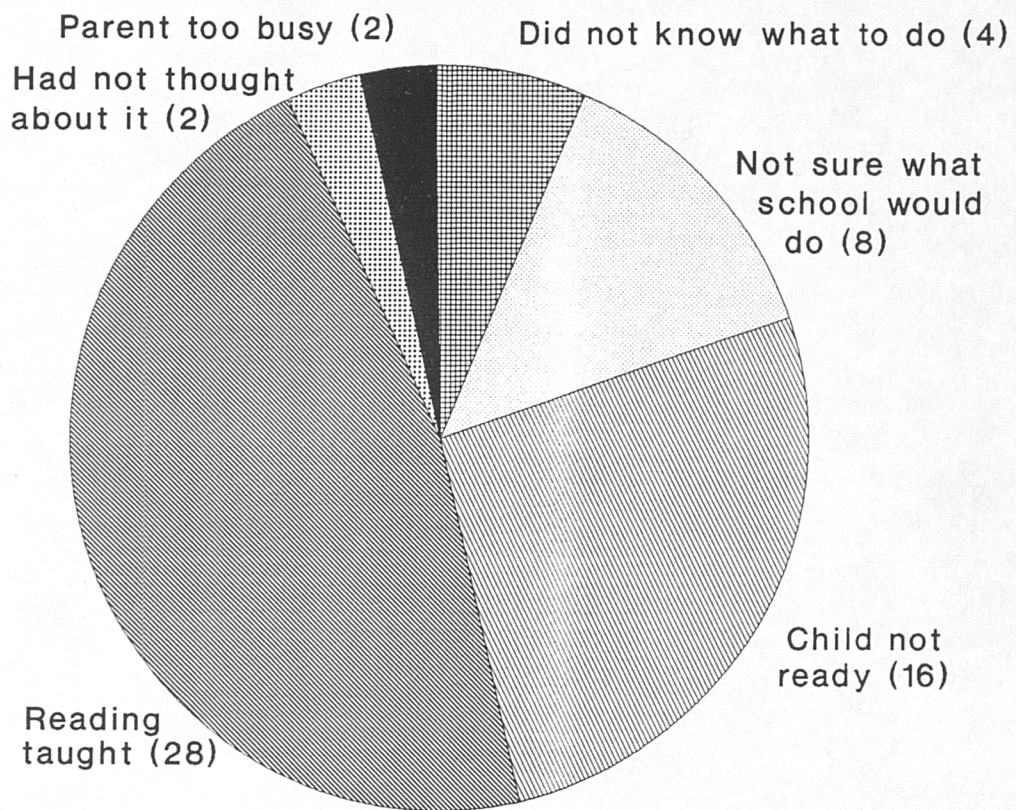
"I'll be ready to teach him when he wants to, but you can't force it".

"I'm not teaching her at the moment - she's a bit young".

"He likes to flit to different things".

"He's finding it hard talking. 'Til you can talk, you can't read".

Figure 2
Numbers of parents who taught reading,
or did not do so, with reasons,
pre-nursery N=60



Eight other parents felt prevented from teaching their child because of anxieties that they might not do it in a way in which the school, at a later stage, might approve, for example,

"One reason I don't teach her is I don't really understand the school's approach to learning to read. I feel I could do more harm than good".

"I never taught the other two. I didn't know what school would do...It's no good him turning round to the teacher and saying, 'No, you don't do it like that, my mummy says'."

One parent added the rider that teachers, not parents, get paid for teaching reading,

"I think there's plenty of time once they get to school for that. My method of teaching him to read is probably different to what you would do at school. Besides, you get paid to do that, not me."

Four parents were uncertain about what they could do, saying for example,

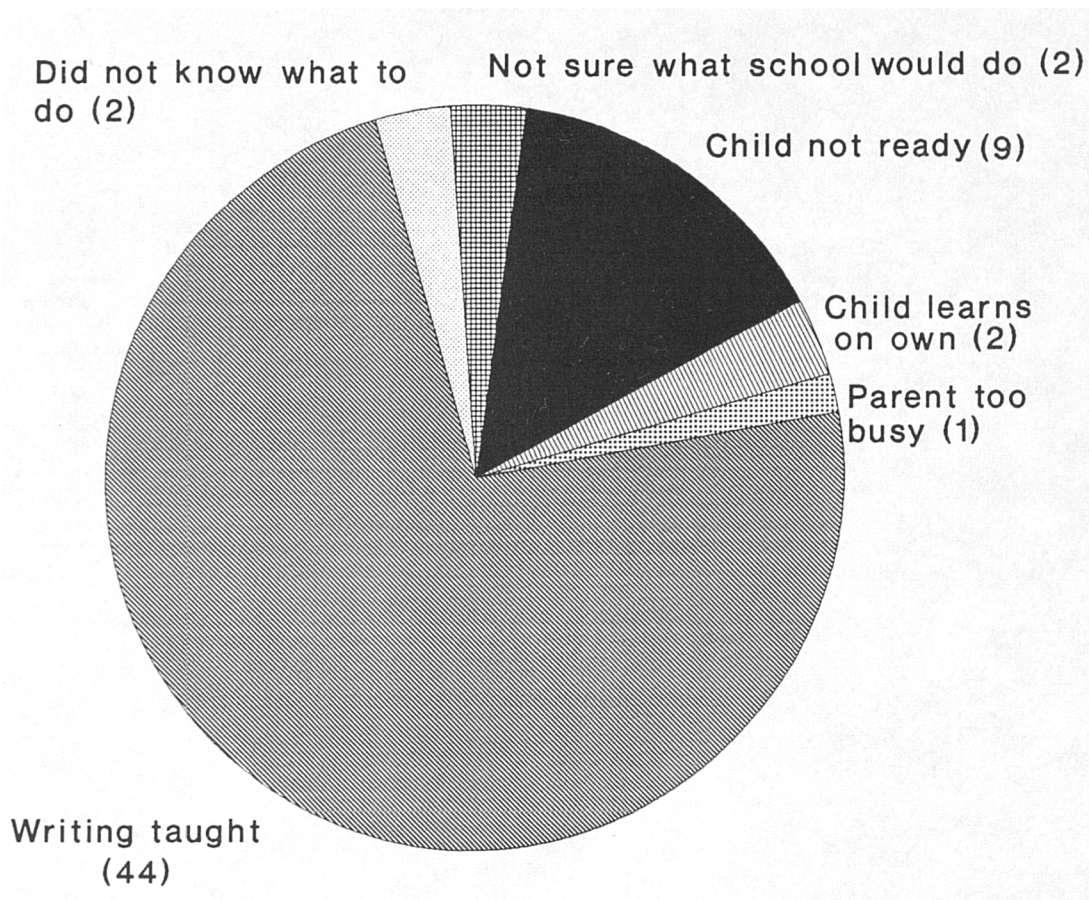
"I don't know enough about it myself."

Two parents had not thought about teaching their child, and a further two did not do so because a heavy work schedule and domestic upheaval made it impossible at the time.

Parents appeared to be more confident about their role in teaching writing. Three quarters of the sample said they were teaching their child to write, mostly getting their child to copy their own name. The same reasons as for not teaching reading were given for not teaching writing, although with fewer instances, see Figure 3. Nine parents mentioned their child's lack of interest or maturity, for example,

"She wasn't interested".

Figure 3
Numbers of parents who taught writing,
or did not do so, with reasons,
pre-nursery N=60



"Not at the moment, she's a bit young. She's more interested in what's going on around her".

"She's tried, she's not really into it yet. I'll get her something at Christmas".

Two parents were not sure what school would do, for instance, one said,

"I don't know what to do because you don't know what they do in school. Some say 'aye', 'bee', 'cee', some say 'ah', 'buh', 'cuh', so I've not taught her to write her name or anything".

Two parents were not sure what to do themselves, for example,

"I don't know what to start with".

One parent felt too busy to teach writing. In addition two parents said they did not see the teaching of writing as necessary, but let the children get on with writing in their own way, and not intervening (although one said she did give encouragement).

How the children were being taught to read

The main strategy parents used was to pick out words or letters from what they were reading to the child, for example,

"I've only just started, picking little words out from what I'm reading to her."

Ten parents did this. Seven parents pointed to the words as they read,

"I show him words as I read to him, I point to each word that I'm reading."

Three parents worked with their children on the sounds that letters make, and two parents tried to see if their child could remember a story or predict what was going to happen next. Other strategies used were: playing games which involved reading, listening to story tapes together, reading things when out shopping, asking the child "to get such and such off the shelf", using reading scheme books (Peter and Jane, Puddle Lane, Letterland), and asking the child to copy what the parent had read.

Only one parent responded to the question of whether she taught reading by saying yes, she read to her child since he was tiny, "because that's how they learn reading (to them) isn't it".

The majority of parents read to their children, but none of the others explicitly made this connection.

What the children were being taught to write

Thirty-three children were taught to write their name. There was often a specific purpose in this, such as children being able to label their own drawings and writing, or contribute to greetings cards,

"She likes to write her name on birthday cards."

"He writes his name on cards, for example, to mummy from Dan".

Tizard and Hughes (1984) also observed this activity amongst their sample of preschool children. Other parents taught name writing for its own sake, and Tizard and Hughes (1984) found too that several mothers in their sample taught name writing as an activity in its own right, not linked with anything else. They found it was working class mothers who did this most (p.65).

Four of the children taught to write their name were also taught letters or the alphabet, three were taught other family names, and two were also shown how to draw particular shapes. Seven other children were taught letters or the alphabet, two children were taught short sentences about the child and family, and two children were taught particular shapes - circles, lines, and kisses.

How the children were being taught to write

Half the children, (30), were taught to copy. Six were taught by having their hand held and guided (two of these then moved on to copying), five were taught to write over the top of the parent's writing (one then moved on to copying), or over the top of lines in a book, and three were taught to follow dots to complete letters.

Parents teaching children about environmental print

All the families were surrounded by environmental print, on packages, clothing, on television, in the street, in shops, on buses - none of them could avoid extensive contact. Parents were asked whether they deliberately pointed out this print to their children. This information was collected retrospectively. Because the way children relate to such print often goes unnoticed by others or is part of taken-for-granted daily life, it was sometimes hard for parents to identify exactly what was occurring and when. Some parents felt that the way they pointed out environmental print was embedded in the way they related to their child, doing it "unconsciously, just like mentioning colours or counting". Nevertheless, parents of nearly half of the children (28), said that they deliberately pointed out environmental print to their child before they started at nursery. In their responses, parents identified a number of situations in which they were most likely to point out environmental print to their child. These were while shopping, while travelling, seeing advertisements and logos (printed and on television), and facing something potentially dangerous. Some examples are given below.

"In the supermarket I'd say, 'Can you go and get me a packet of Cornflakes from the shelf?'"

"We're going to the butcher, you can take me. Are you sure this is the right shop?"

"If we were on the bus and I pressed the bell, I'd tell him 'that says bus stopping'."

"When we were on the bus we used to look out for posters".

"I showed her the names of shops - I was scared of her getting lost."

"I'd point out danger signs, 'what does that say?'"

"If we're ever near water, I point out instructions about the dangers".

The teaching of nursery rhymes

Parents were asked about nursery rhymes and rhyming, during the Second Parent Interview. All the parents said they recited at least one nursery rhyme with the children when they were very little. Some children (16) knew a considerable number of rhymes, some up to a dozen, while two children knew only one or two. A few parents mentioned playing with rhyme with their child, for example,

"When I read a nursery rhyme, I follow along with my finger and miss the last word off, to see if she can finish it."

and,

"We'd play silly nursery rhymes. I'd deliberately miss things out and he'd chuckle about that."

Some parents were able to give specific examples of the way their child responded to rhyme, for example,

"He memorises a story and can turn the pages and 'read' it, especially if it rhymes."

Parents of only seven children said their children were not sensitive to rhyme, and not able to discriminate between words that rhymed and those that did not. Of these, one only knew "the first two lines of baa baa blacksheep", five knew up to a dozen, and one knew a large number of rhymes. Thus experience of nursery rhymes was one that all the children shared, but to varying degrees, from extremely limited, to extensive and familiar contact.

Literacy Learning Involved in the Day-to-Day Activities of Parents and Children at Home

Parents were asked to name resources and activities helpful for children's literacy development that their children made use of, or took part in. By their replies, parents demonstrated a broad interpretation of what was useful for literacy.

One of the strengths of the home is that it offers children the chance of uncontrived learning situations. Much occurs naturally, without parents consciously noticing that it is helpful for literacy, as Leichter (1974) comments, the transmission of literacy often "occurs at the margins of awareness". Nevertheless, unprompted, the list of what the parents themselves picked out as being helpful to their children's literacy development was substantial, wide ranging, and often embedded in day-to-day family activities. The illustrations given in Table 9 combine to give a flavour of the sorts of things that were happening at home. Achieving literacy is not only about interacting with books and writing materials, but also about skills acquired in the ordinary activities of everyday life. These activities are not separate and special, but indistinguishable from the rest of their lives. They have meaning and purpose because they are an integrated part of daily life. Wells (1987) made similar comments about children's conversations with parents which were observed less commonly during play situations, when they tended to be "brief and undeveloped", but appeared more fruitful alongside the "routine business of running a household",

where "the purposefulness of the task gives purpose to the conversation". Tizard and Hughes (1984) report similar findings, "...the most frequent learning context was that of everyday living".

Table 9 Range of everyday activities reported by parents as encouraging children's literacy development.

- Writing and drawing in steam on the windows.
- Selecting shopping by the label.
- Writing a shopping list.
- Writing names in cards.
- Child writing their name on drawings.
- Reading and writing alongside their parent.
- Reading letters to the child.
- Cutting and sticking using old catalogues.
- Watching television together.
- Reading things off the television.
- Following up ideas from children's television programmes.
- Recognising product labels.
- Baking.
- Modelling with plasticine and playdough.
- Taking the child out.
- Saying and singing nursery rhymes.
- Listening to cassettes with songs.
- Operating washing machine.
- Using a home computer.
- Filling in bank paying in slips.
- Putting laundry away.
- Looking at pictures.
- Looking at photo albums.

The difference between families was again evident, with some parents involving their children in many activities, and others doing only a little. Wells (1985b) suggests that variation in such activities was one of the key attributes in determining children's later success or lack of success with literacy. He and colleagues felt that,

"...it was through the place and value given to literacy in everyday activities of the family that we considered social and educational inequality to be transmitted from one generation to the next". (p.234).

But it is worth pointing out that something was going on in all the homes. As Gundlach et al. (1985) point out, "...literacy events are embedded in the continuities of interaction that constitute longer-term relationships". (p.53).

As schools become more standardised and orientated towards specific goals, the distinction between the informal literacy learning at home and the more formal literacy learning and teaching at school might widen. The pressure to standardise what is available at home has begun to filter through from the National Curriculum, the media, and the proliferation of products designed to help parents 'teach' their children. It would be a loss if what is already happening was not acknowledged and built upon.

There was a wide variety of literacy on offer to children in the study, in terms of quantity and appropriateness, including the style of presentation, from the naturalistic to the more formal.

Some children had many resources for literacy, and others had very few. The type and extent varied considerably. But all children had some access to books and other printed matter, and to paper and writing implements. There was variation within social class groupings as well as between them.

All parents read or wrote in front of their children. Some parents were aware of their role as models, and some also built on this as a way of encouraging their child to read and write.

The majority of parents deliberately taught their child about literacy. However, much meaningful literacy learning was embedded within the ordinary everyday activities of parents and their preschool children.

In all the families in this sample, children had learnt some understandings about literacy and had developed some literacy skills, before they started at nursery.

CHAPTER 6

CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AT PRE-NURSERY LEVEL AND SCHOOL ENTRY

6.1 Children's Literacy at Home, Pre-Nursery

The previous chapter looked at what sort of context the home provided for literacy. In this section, the children's responses within this context will be explored.

Level of children's interest in literacy

Parents were asked about what level of interest their children had in reading and writing. About two thirds of the children (37) showed some interest, in that reading and writing was enjoyed, but among other activities too. Nearly a quarter of the children (14) were very interested in literacy, and reading and writing were favourite activities (both for eight children, reading for five, and writing for one). In this sample, boys and girls were equally likely to be very interested in literacy (seven and seven). Whether they were from middle class or working class homes made little difference. Eight children from working class families were very interested compared with six from middle class homes (there were proportionately more children from working class families in the sample). In contrast, nine parents said their children showed little or no interest in reading or writing. All but one of these were boys, and class also had a bearing, with two of the children not interested being from middle class homes, but seven being from working class homes.

Children's interaction with print: favourite books, memorising text, and acting like a reader

Whether children had a favourite books at this age has been discussed in Chapter 5. The majority of children, (40) did have a favourite. Amongst the children without a particular favourite book, there were two distinct groups. The first group (of 11

children), did not have a favourite book because they liked plenty of them, but no one book was special. Parents made comments such as,

"He likes a lot of them."

"She likes to look through anything, even if it's only writing, she'll look through it."

One child was placed in this group because, while she did not own many books herself, she did have books with which she behaved like a reader, memorising text, for example, her mother said,

"There's a Ladybird book she knows well with a picture of a family sitting at the table, with writing at the bottom. She knows it says, '...and then mummy got them their breakfast', and she'll sit and 'read' it. She knows it off by heart".

In contrast, the second group (of nine children), seemed not to have a favourite because, according to their parents' replies, books did not seem to be particularly special for them, maybe because they did not have access to many books. Eight of these children owned under a dozen books and two owned none. Only one of them was a member of the library. Parents of three of them said their child showed no, or little interest in reading. Three of the mothers said they did not read to their child. It therefore appeared that having a favourite book was a consequence of familiarity with books and having the opportunity to share them within a family context.

Some research studies have shown that children can begin to see themselves as readers through memorising books, often a favourite text (for example, Robinson and Sulzby, 1984; Sulzby 1985). This was the case in this study too, for instance, one of the parents said,

"I think a lot of it is memory with him. We used to read nursery rhyme books to him, and when he saw the Humpty Dumpty picture, he knew what it was. Later on he knew what the simple words were".

Without this exposure to familiar and favourite books, children did not have this opportunity.

This did not, however, prevent all but one of these children from behaving 'like a reader' on occasions. When parents were asked whether their child acted in this way, all but four parents from the whole sample said their child did, and many gave examples. Apart from the child without favourite or familiar books, two of these four children showed little or no interest in reading and the third liked being read to, and liked to draw, but when it came to looking at books, his mother said, "he likes physical things. He's not got the patience to sit down and learn".

The ways in which children behaved like a reader varied. Most of the examples given were of children interacting with books. Over a third of the parents, (22), described the way in which children memorised books, (also mentioned above), as a stage in the reading process, for example,

"He knows some books so well he will 'read' you the story."

"She knows her favourite book off by heart."

"He always likes the same book. You'd think he could read - he knows every word."

This exposure to books in a meaningful way, shared with family members at home, allowed for memorisation and familiarity with books and gave many of the children opportunities to experiment for themselves with what it felt like to be a reader.

Some of the children read to their dolls, or teddies or younger siblings, for example,

"She reads to her dolls, especially books which are really familiar to her."

"He gets his book, and tells his teddy things."

"Sometimes she picks up a book and pretends to read to her younger sister."

There were examples of children showing they had internalised some of the language of books, using formulaic phrases they had heard from stories, for instance,

"She makes her own words up. She always starts, 'Once upon a time...'"

"He opens a book, and he starts 'One day...'"

Some children imitated what they had observed others do when reading, or generalised from when stories had been read to them,

"She runs her finger along the lines and pretends to read, because that's how I read it to her."

"Especially when he's gone to bed, you find him sat with a book, talking to himself as he's looking at it."

"She reads a lot - Little Storytellers and Thomas the Tank books. She makes up the story as she goes along."

These children were making their own meanings as they chose, of their own accord, to interact with text.

Some parents provided examples of their children reading from printed material other than books, including newspapers, magazines, comics, trade magazines and brochures. Here the children had observed adult behaviour in the way they used these items, for example,

"She'll get the newspaper, look down the page and point with a finger, and say things like, 'such and such is on telly at ten past ten'."

and

"Sometimes when he's got a comic, he's making it up. He's copying his daddy reading the paper."

The meaning of the print was uppermost for these children. For instance, although some parents gave examples of their children holding books or newspapers upside-down, the purpose of the activity, to tell a story or find out information, was always evident.

For all but four children in the sample then, behaving like a reader was a natural activity undertaken by the children at home. Some studies have shown that children who are read to often act like a reader themselves, (for instance, Robinson and Sulzby, 1983; Sulzby and Teale, 1987). This provides an indication of how embedded literacy behaviours were in day-to-day life for these children, even at the ages of three and four.

Children acting like a writer

At this stage, however, ^{fewer} of the children were acting like 'writers', (although in a less formal sense, all were drawing, scribbling and making marks at least on some occasions). Just over two thirds of the children (42) acted as a 'writer' according to their parents. Three of the four children who did not behave like readers did not behave as a writer either. However, there was no obvious pattern to characterise those children not acting as a 'writer'.

Where parents provided descriptions of their child 'writing', there were two types of examples. One was concerned with the reason for the activity, such as writing letters, shopping lists, names as labels and on cards, filling in forms, notes, or in socio-dramatic play, for example,

"She pretends to write a letter, put it in an envelope, and take it to Postman Pat".

"She likes to 'write' the shopping list out for Asda (local supermarket)".

"When she's done a drawing, she'll try to write her name at the top of the page".

"I got a slip from the bank, a paying in slip, and she wrote lots of 000's, filling the slip in".

"Last time he 'wrote' he said, 'that's for daddy', (sometimes I leave notes for my husband when he comes back from night shift)".

The other type of example was purely descriptive of what the writing looked like, with comments such as,

"She makes tiny little round shapes in long lines - she's seen me write. It's very neat, all in a straight line."

"His writing is like little ticks and he's drawing is bigger circles, and things like that."

Parents observed that children's writing was different from their drawing (as in the example about writing and drawing above), or scribble, for instance,

"If she attempts to write, it's all dots and circles, no scribble."

and that certain writing materials were suggestive of writing for the children, for example,

"When he's got his pencils rather than his wax crayons, he pretends to write his name."

Unlike reading, which once done leaves no trace, writing is permanent, and parents could observe the product without being aware of the purpose. Some of the children's attempts at writing would probably have been done simply for the pleasure of creating something that looked like writing they had observed others produce, or 'double writing', as one child described it. But much of the writing was probably produced for a purpose, (as the majority of the examples given suggests), even if the parents were unaware of what it was.

Children's initiative in literacy activities

Many replies during the course of the interviews gave instances of children taking the initiative in literacy activities. They were not passive recipients of literacy experiences at home, but were active learners (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969, Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982). Most children were engaged and interested, at least in some aspects of literacy, and this tended to be what the majority of parents expected, rather than what they were surprised by. As one parent put it, when asked about her child's interest in literacy, "I thought it was natural". Parents also pointed out that children of this age would not do anything that they did not want to do. Some of the children took the initiative and asked their parents to be involved on an aspect of literacy with them, for example,

"He insists on his bedtime story."

"She comes to us and asks us what the words are."

"We do writing together when she asks."

"She often says, 'what does that say?' like a sign on a bus or in a shop, and I tell her."

Two thirds of the children (20), were involved in literacy activities, whether 'reading' or 'writing', on their own, and at their own initiative, either daily or most days. Nearly half (27) were doing so two or three times a week. A small group of eight children 'read' or 'wrote' on their own either only once a week or less. This was therefore not a regular activity for them.

In terms of the length of time children spent reading and writing on their own, this varied, with eight spending half an hour or more at a time, but for the majority it was usually less than this, and half (30) would spend no more than a few minutes at a time reading and writing. This is a reflection of the concentration span of children of this age, when activities are most likely to be sampled for only a short period of time.

Children's response to environmental print and rhyme

Twenty five of the 60 children were showing their parents that they responded to or could recognise environmental print at this stage,

"If she sees Asda, it's as though she can read it."

"If he sees signs, he'll say something related to the picture, for example, if it's of a ball, he'll say something related to a ball."

"She often says, 'that's KitKat, Oxo'."

The majority of children were able to distinguish words that rhymed, and were able to recognise, say or invent rhyming words, for example,

"I used to sing nursery rhymes all the way through, and if I said something wrong she'd pick me up and say, 'no, it's not like that'."(57)

"He was brilliant with his nursery rhymes, he knew them off by heart".(11)

"He could make up silly words of his own and they would always rhyme".(8)

Parents of only seven children said they thought their child was not able to do this.

Children's use of literacy in socio-dramatic play

A number of the children in the sample took part in socio-dramatic play, with siblings, friends, parents, or on their own, in which literacy activities played a meaningful part. For instance, children played at schools, shops, a library, a cafe, a garage, and acted out well-known stories, for example,

"She loves 'writing'. Nine times out of ten she's being a waitress, and each letter is a different mark in her notebook, 'Keil will have sprouts, Terri will have ham'."

"He gets some Autotraders out, gets his pretend phone, and phones up, 'Mark, have you seen this Range Rover? I've looked underneath, it's in sound condition'."

"His sister does dressing up play, and he does them with her, for example, Jack and the Beanstalk and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs - dressing up and play acting."

In addition, several children played at being grown up by imitating adult behaviours, for instance, 'reading' the newspaper, or trying out a signature,

"He'll get the newspaper, he pretends to read what's on telly, such as Emmerdale Farm."

"You can see she's watched me write letters. She copies and writes loops and things across the paper and pretends to sign her name."

This type of behaviour made literacy seem real to the children, and gave them another way of practising what it is to be a reader and writer.

Stimulation of children's interest in literacy

Parents were asked for the source of their child's interest in reading and writing. Five parents said their child showed little interest, and one did not know. In the majority of cases (35), the interest generated mostly from the child (sometimes in combination with the parent, sibling, or in one case, other relatives). Ten parents felt they provided the primary source of interest, in seven instances, they thought this was provided by siblings, and for two children this was grandparents.

Apart from interacting with people at home, the main prompts to the children for involvement in literacy activities came from three sources. The first was literacy resources being available: books, other printed material, and resources for writing. The second involved joining in with the literacy environment at home, following the examples of parents, siblings and others. Finally, there was engagement in activities which gave rise to some form of literacy behaviour, such as shopping, bus rides, outings, games and socio-dramatic play.

These opportunities varied, as did the children's own inclinations. Many children were involved in a number of different literacy activities at home, and minimal involvement was unusual within this sample. While the group represented a span of interest and opportunity, on the whole, the children had learnt a considerable amount about literacy at home by the ages of three and four.

6.2 What Children had Learnt about Literacy at Home and at Nursery by School Entry

What do children know about literacy before they start school? This section looks at the children's knowledge^{of} and response to literacy in the term before compulsory schooling, after a period of nursery education. To assess the children's literacy, the measures used by Tizard et al. (1988) were employed, together with information from parents and observations from nursery. These assessments were carried out with the 42 children who continued at the school to which the nursery they attended was attached.

Assessments were carried out on a termly basis, so that variation in age was kept to a minimum (four months at the most). The majority of the children were four years, 10 months old.

Two standardised vocabulary tests were used. The first, the vocabulary subtest of the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (**W.P.P.S.I.**) (Wechsler, 1967) tests children's ability to define words, such as 'castle' or 'swing'. It was a method used by Tizard et al. (1988). As described in Chapter 4, some children were too shy to undertake this assessment, despite it being conducted on a one-to-one basis, in a familiar setting with someone the children knew well. For the 35 children who were able to supply answers, the distribution of scores was normal, see Table 10. The mean score was slightly below the national norm, but matched that of Tizard et al.'s sample, see Table 17.

The second test of vocabulary, The English Picture Vocabulary Test (**E.P.V.T.**) (Brimer and Dunn, 1963) tests children's comprehension of isolated words. Children are shown four pictures at a time and asked to say which one matches a given word, such as 'boat', or 'hand'. This was a test also used by Wells (1987). Only the preschool section of the test was administered, which means the scores for the top scoring nine children may be skewed due to a ceiling effect. Nonetheless, there is a range of scores represented, in a reasonably normal distribution, see

Table 10
Children's scores on vocabulary subtest
of WPPSI, at school entry

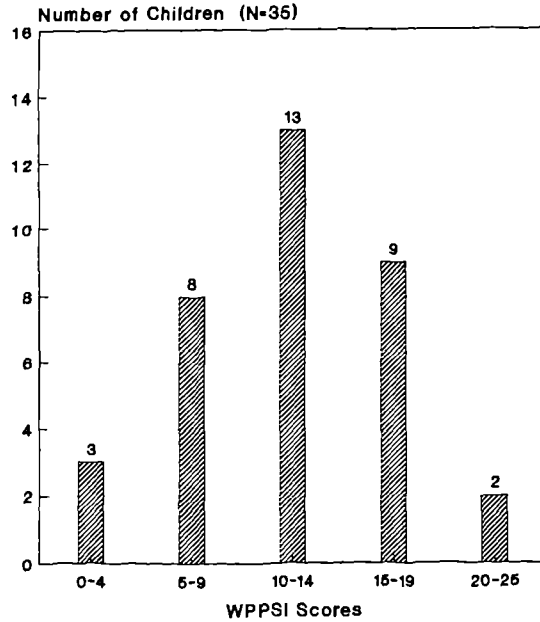
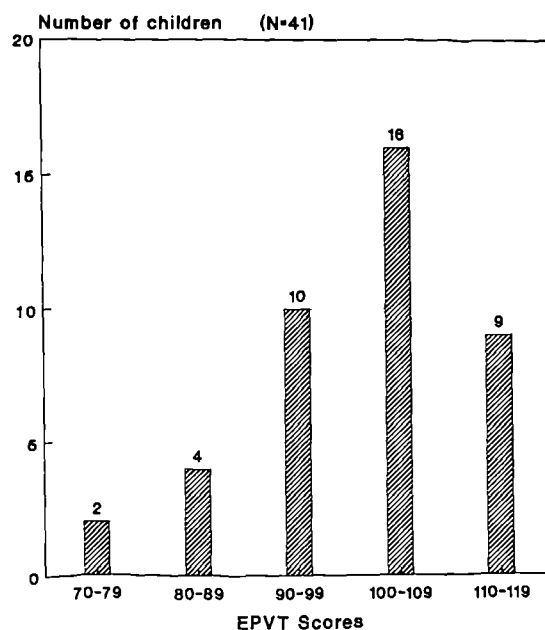


Table 11, and the more critical information, in terms of this study, that of scores for the poorest readers, are unaffected by this.

Other tests used had also been conducted by Tizard et al. (1988), and their scheme for scoring the children's responses was employed (Blatchford, 1988, see Appendix 8). The children's scores appear in Tables 12 to 16, and are described below. As Tizard et al. (1988) found, there was a wide range of scores on all the tests.

Table 11
Children's scores on the English Picture
Vocabulary Test, at school entry



To assess the children's **print knowledge**, they were given a set of tasks adapted by Tizard et al. (1988) from Clay's (1972) Concepts about Print test. The children were asked to show which way round you hold a book, what you read (print or pictures), and where you continue reading, and to distinguish letters and words from a selection of numbers, letters, words and sentences. Many children found these tasks difficult, and the distribution of children's scores is skewed towards the lower scores, with over 50% of the children achieving scores of 0 or 2. Tizard et al. (1988) also found that less than half their sample knew that you read the print, not the pictures, in a book. A fifth of the children, however, were able to demonstrate print knowledge with a high degree of accuracy, see Table 12.

The children were asked to **write their first name** unaided. The differences in scores represent their increasing ability, from the one child who was unable to do so at all, the majority of children who attempted their name but made some errors, to the 17 who could write their name in a conventionally recognisable way, see Table 13.

Table 12
Children's Scores for concepts about
print, at school entry

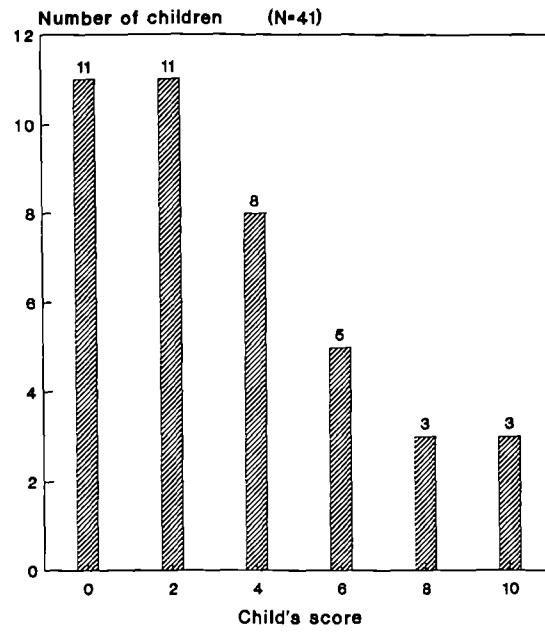
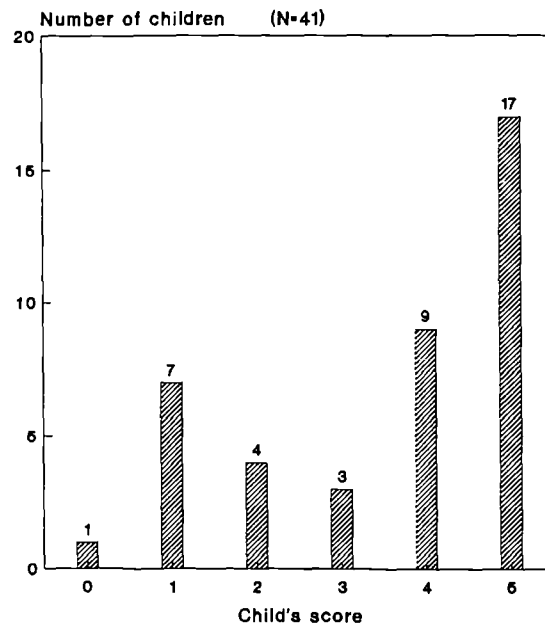


Table 13
Children's Scores for ability to
write first name, at school entry



The children were asked to **copy a phrase** 'on the ground', which was written out for them in large print. Their scores are shown in Table 14, the higher the score, the more accurate the copying. The results are bi-modal. For a third of the children, their copying was barely recognisable, while for just over half (22) their writing showed a high level of accuracy.

The children were presented with the **letters** of the alphabet in turn, but not in sequence, to see how many they could recognise. The results are summarised in Table 15. Nearly half the children (19) could recognise no letters at all, 16 could recognise up to a dozen, while six children recognised over half the alphabet.

Children were asked to **match** a series of ten given **words**. They were to select from four alternatives supplied, (such as 'feet' from the list 'foot' 'feel' 'feet' 'feed'). They therefore had to attend to small graphical differences. Many of the children found this task difficult, with over half of them (22) getting less than half correct and only one child completing the task without mistakes. The distributions of scores is reasonably normal, and appears in Table 16.

Another assessment used by Tizard et al. (1988) was replicated, that of **word recognition**. Children were given 10 words, chosen because they commonly appeared in early reading scheme books, to see how many they could identify. So few children were able to recognise any words that, like Tizard et al.(1988), this assessment was not used for analysis.

Table 14
Children's Scores for ability to write
a phrase 'on the ground' at school entry

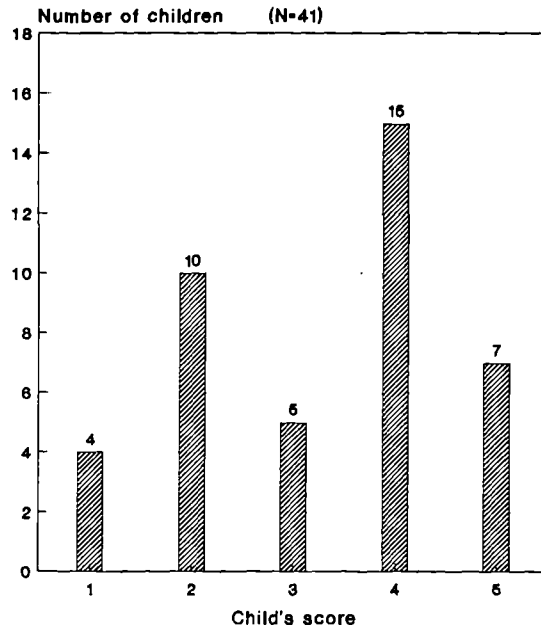


Table 15
Children's Scores for number of letters
the children could identify at school entry

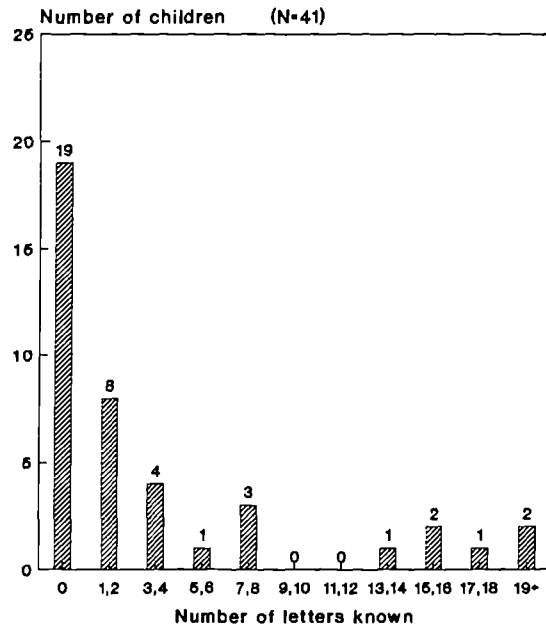
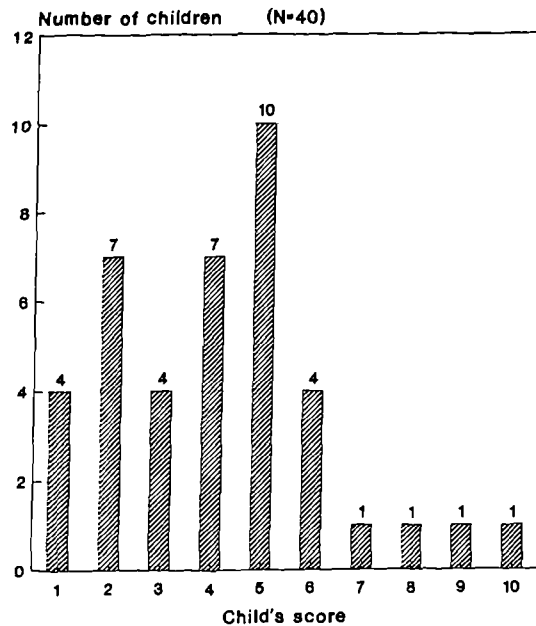


Table 16
Children's Scores for word matching,
at school entry



One of the reasons for using the same assessments as those used in another study was for comparability of findings. Table 17 shows a comparison of the results here with those of Tizard et al. (1988). The results are similar. The WPPSI scores are matched. The children from inner-London (Tizard et al.'s study), identified more letters, but had slightly lower scores for concepts about print, name writing, copying a phrase and word matching. Nonetheless, the standard deviations are similar, and there are no wide discrepancies in scores between the two samples.

There was other information about the children's literacy that was also collected at this stage. Parents were asked if the children listened to stories at home at this stage, and if so, how often. The results appear in Table 18.

Table 17 Comparison of results from assessments at school entry with results reported by Tizard et al., 1988

	Mean		Standard Deviation		Possible Range	Number at Minimum Current Study	Number at Maximum Current Study	% at Minimum		% at Maximum	
	Current Study	Tizard et al.	Current Study	Tizard et al.				Current Study	Tizard et al.	Current Study	Tizard et al.
V o c a b u l a r y	12	12	5	5	0 - 44	1	0	3	0	0	0
	27.2	-	8.8	-	0 - 46	0	0	0	-	0	-
	100.1	-	10.2	-	70 - 140	0	0	0	-	0	-
R e a d i n g	4.1	3.8	2.1	2.4	0 - 10	0	1	0	6	2	1
	3.4	2.5	3.0	2.7	0 - 10	11	3	27	41	7	2
	2.0	2.4	3.0	3.5	0 - 10	19	2	46	50	5	12
	4.5	-	6.7	-	0 - 26	13	0	31	-	0	-
	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0 - 10	41	0	99	97	0	0
W r i t i n g	3.5	2.5	1.6	1.8	0 - 5	1	0	2	18	0	24
	3.3	2.0	1.3	1.4	0 - 5	0	0	0	23	0	1

No. of children: Tizard et al. = 343 Current study = 42

Table 18
Whether, and how frequently, the child
listened to stories at home at school entry

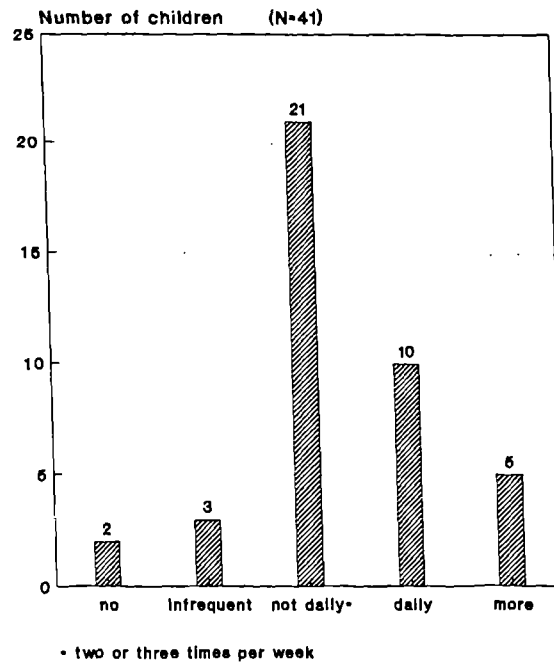


Table 18 shows that by the time children were to start school, there was marked variation in the children's experiences the listening to stories at home. Half the children (21) listened to stories at home two or three times a week. Several children (15) had the experience of stories at home once a day or more, but a handful of children (5), had this experience infrequently or not at all.

Teacher observations were made about whether the children were able to attend to stories at nursery at the time of the other assessments, and whether they chose for themselves to look at and read books, or to draw and write, in the nursery setting. Five children found it hard to attend to stories in nursery, compared with 35 who were able to listen attentively, 29 children chose to look at books on their own initiative in nursery, but 13 did not, and 30 chose to draw and write in nursery, while 12 did not.

These assessments were used for later data analysis, see Chapter 11.

CHAPTER 7

HOME AS A CONTEXT FOR LITERACY, AT AGE SEVEN, (END OF KEY STAGE 1)

In Chapter 5, a detailed description was given of the children's homes as contexts for literacy learning for three and four year olds. This chapter will look at broadly the same issues, highlighting what was relevant for the home as a literacy learning context once the children had reached the age of seven.

Data at this stage are about the 42 children who were part of the study for four years. There were now 24 boys and 18 girls, 27 of whom were working class and 15 middle class. The girls were equally divided between social classes, but there was a disproportionate number of working class boys, 18 in all, compared with six middle class boys. Thirty-five children attended the school where they had been to nursery. Seven children had moved to other schools (each to a different school).

PROVISION OF RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LITERACY

Books

All but one of the parents bought books for their child at age seven. This child already had a large number of books, but at the time of the interview, was not showing much interest in them. He had had "hundreds" of books bought when he was little, but "was not terribly grateful". She said that he "wouldn't appreciate a book for a present". Another child had books bought for him, but was not keen on them. As his mother said, "he'd rather get a car". (32).

Ten parents bought their children books only from local shops, for example, at the newsagents, post office and supermarket, where the choice was limited. Six of their children were from the group of 14 poorest readers.

Schools had an impact on book buying for children through school bookclubs. These were selections of books similar to those found in bookshops, and in nursery and Infant schools available for sale, together with savings stamps for the books. In addition at least five of the schools were known to hold annual bookfairs at which books could be purchased. Three parents said they bought most of their children's books through the school bookclub, and a further 16 said they sometimes bought books from their school's club (from four schools). Several parents and children mentioned buying books at school book fairs. School bookclubs and annual bookfairs greatly increased the range of children's books available locally, although a couple of parents commented on the cost of these books, "I think they're a bit steep", and "I thought they were quite expensive".

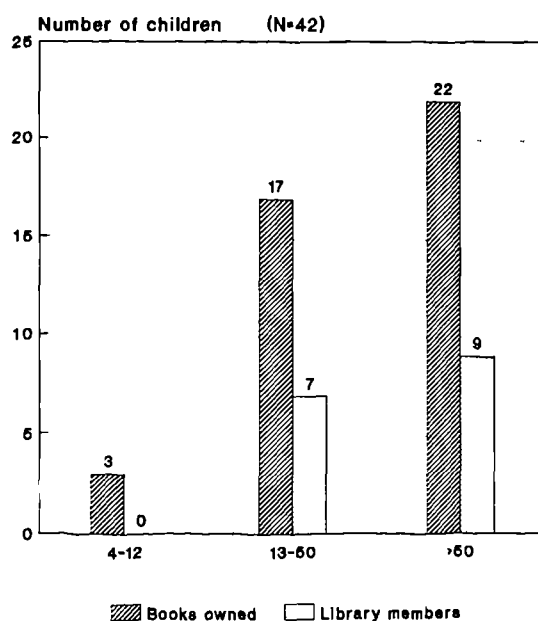
Three parents bought children's books from bookclubs other than those run by school at the time of the interview. Other parents (10) bought books in town, usually at shops that also sold other items, such as W.H.Smith or the Early Learning Centre. In addition to the ten parents who only bought books locally, an additional five also mentioned buying children's books in local shops. Other places to buy books mentioned by parents were the main market, car boot sales, jumble sales, and bring and buy stalls (one mention each). Seven parents said they bought most children's books in bookshops. This was an experience more common for children from middle class families (five of the seven). A few of the children were very familiar with bookshops. As one parent said,

"We could leave them (the child and her sister) all day, and they wouldn't know we'd gone",

but for the majority of the children in the study (35), going to a bookshop was something that was infrequently, or never done.

By the age of seven, all the children owned some books of their own. Only three children had no more than a dozen (all poor readers), and over half (22) had more than fifty books each. This information appears in Table 19.

Table 19
Book ownership and library membership
at seven (end of Key Stage 1)



The same number of children were library members at seven as were members at three to four (16), but this was an increase in library membership, as the sample size was smaller. Eight children had joined the library who had not been members before, although three children were no longer members. One parent gave no explanation, one thought that the school provided as good an access to books as a library could, and a third had not transferred to another library since the nearest one closed due to cuts in local services. Two children (both middle class) borrowed library books more than once a week. Four children went to the library every two or three weeks. The remaining children went to the library less frequently. Two children went less frequently than they had done before since the closure of the nearest library. As one parent explained,

"Now you have to go out of your way to go".

As at the pre-nursery stage, children who owned the most books were also more likely to be library members, while a small minority of children had extremely restricted access to books at home, (see Table 19).

Favourite books

Most of the children (31) were said to have a favourite book, and those without a particular favourite did have books to choose from. Similar findings were reported by Meyer, Hastings, and Linn (1990). Given sufficient choice, children may choose as favourite a book to which they can respond personally. Moss (1977) for instance, writes about her own daughter's selection of favourite book, which she termed an "artistically worthless book - hack written and poorly illustrated". However, what it had to offer was that the content matched her daughter's needs, and for her conveyed "a message of supreme significance" (p.142). The types of books mentioned gives an indication of the sorts of reading material characteristically available to the children. The range was wide, from nursery rhymes and books with simplified texts through to children's novels. In some cases the child read the book themselves, and in some cases it was read to them.

Four children had children's novels as favourites. Roald Dahl was mentioned twice, The Twits and his novels generally, one child had several favourites, including Dick King Smith Sophie's Tom and Sophie's Snail, and Gobblino the Witches Cat, and one child had Jill Murphy The Worst Witch as a favourite. All these children were middle class girls. These books were available in the main school in the study, but children could only choose to have them as a 'reading book' once they had completed their progress through the twelve stages of the reading schemes (to be discussed below).

The range of **types** of books children had as favourites had been extended since the children started at school. Fifteen children had the sorts of picture books commonly found in nursery and Infant schools as favourite, and for one child her two favourites were picture books from school. Four of the other picture book titles mentioned had been bought at the school's bookclub.

One child had included among her favourites the book she had liked best at three, The Tiger Who came to Tea. Other parents also mentioned that the children liked to return to books they knew well, saying for example,

"He still goes back to the old ones".

"She still goes back to the Happy Family books".

Picture books of the sort one would not be likely to find in school were chosen as favourites by a further 15 children, often with characters from television programmes or films, for example Turtles (twice), Thomas the Tank and Postman Pat (this time only one mention each as favourites), Flintstones (once) and Dumbo (once). Some children had fairy tales as favourites, and one a nursery rhyme book.

Non-fiction books were mentioned as favourites for four children. These were a Beano annual, a ghost joke book, a child's dictionary, and a book about wrestling. All these children were boys. Other studies have shown boys' preference for non-fiction reading material (Gorman et al., 1982, Gilmore, 1986).

One child (a poor reader) had a reading scheme book, Roger Red Hat, as her current favourite, (see Figure 11). This was indicative of the lack of choice she had for reading material. Since she was not familiar with many different kinds of books, her range of choice was extremely restricted. If her favourite book was a stylized reading scheme book, probably chosen because it was the only book she felt she could 'read' herself, what impression was this child likely to have had of what reading is for, and what it has to offer her?

There was a two month gap between the parent and child interviews. When asked, 29 of the children said they had a favourite book at the time of the interview. Ten children chose school books as favourites (maybe in part because they were interviewed at school). For all but one of the children the books from school were from reading schemes. Five of these children also had favourites at home. Several

of the books mentioned were the same as those indicated by their parents two months previously.

Two middle class girls, with a wide experience of different sorts of books, voiced criticisms of the reading scheme books they encountered at school, when compared with favourite books at home. One did not like reading from scheme books because she did not like the characters, and often felt the stories were inconsistent,

"some have got stories at the end that aren't like what they say on the front".

Her own choice of favourite, King-Smith's Sophie's Snail, did not, she felt, have these shortcomings. The other child thought the books in school were boring, and she said she got "fed up" with reading them. Asked what she preferred, she said she liked to read,

"normal books, like Red Riding Hood, and The Three Bears. I get them at home. There are no books I like to read here (i.e. at school)".

These two children, like many middle class girls, were among the better readers. Their comments indicate that they were not being satisfied or stretched at school in terms of reading. The parent of a further child, again a middle class girl, said she also preferred the books she read to home to the ones from school,

"She likes to pick out her own. I have to buy certain ones to appeal to her...like Enid Blyton novels or books by Roald Dahl...She wouldn't choose the ones from school, probably the way they're presented".

This begs the question of whether other children were more satisfied with reading scheme books because these books offer support to the less confident reader, or that the children's lack of experience with many other sorts of books led them to accept what they knew best. Reading schemes are a useful resource to supplement other reading materials, but as virtually the sole type of book given to children on

which to learn how to read, they have many inadequacies when compared with reading material children want to, and need to, read for 'real' reasons other than practising the skill of reading. As Dombey (1992) suggests,

"No scheme book can teach a child that the words on the page can be savoured, or can yield richer meanings on a second reading". (p.22).

Instead of this, scheme books tend to provide,

"...knowledge to be learned by the reader, and in which attention is deflected from the textualising process". (Baker and Freebody, 1989, p.95).

Other studies have also revealed a lack of sufficient stimulating material for children to read through school, with the need to supplement it from outside sources (Clark, 1976, p.50)

Other printed material

Once the children could read silently, much of the activity could occur unnoticed. Parents were asked for examples of what the children read for themselves, and because of the sometimes invisible nature of this activity, there was likely to be under-reporting here. All of the children had access to a range of printed material at home. Examples of print that parents gave provide a flavour of the sorts of material children were reading. They mentioned comics (11), newspapers (10), (as one parent said, "he'll read newspapers 'til there's no print left"), puzzle books and crosswords, trade magazines, mail order catalogues, T.V listings, Ceefax and Oracle, football magazines, football cards, maps and cereal packets. One child, whose grandfather involved him in gardening, could "read the back of a packet of seeds and know what to do".

Resources for drawing and writing

As when the children were aged three and four, resources for drawing and writing, or to encourage this, were available to them all. They helped themselves from a range of resources which included pens, pencils, coloured pencils, crayons, felt tips, biros, marker pens, highlighter pens, ink, chalks, paints, oil paints, rulers, set of compasses, set squares, rubbers, stencils, sellotape, string, staples, paperclips, plain paper, lined paper, squared paper, notepads, books, files, little books, exercise books, scrap paper, and a ledger from their parents' work, folders, colouring books, dot-to-dot books, puzzles, quizzes, word searches, a spirograph, typewriters, desks and a briefcase.

Some children had a wide range of resources to choose from, while others had more limited choice, but the opportunity to draw and write whenever the child wanted to was available to all. Some parents commented on how easy access to drawing and writing resources was for the children, saying for example, "they're always at hand", and "he doesn't have to look far".

Some children at the age of three were making distinctions between different writing resources, but this discrimination was more marked at seven. Ten parents specifically said their child now preferred to write in pen rather than pencil or crayon, which they had used more at an earlier stage. This showed increasing awareness on the children's part of the craft of writing as undertaken by more experienced writers. For example, parents commented,

"She thinks she's more grown up if she's using ink".

"She's got a thing for 'real writing' and joining letters up. It used to be crayons and felts. Now it's very much pens".

"Probably because his dad would use a pen, he'd use one".

This increased discernment, needing 'the right tool for the job', was also reflected in other selections of writing resources that children made, for instance, one parent described her son's socio-dramatic play,

"If he's doing things for his club, he needs the paper to be the right size".

One child preferred to write with pencil rather than pen, but again, the tool was chosen for a specific reason,

"He usually likes to write with a pencil - he can rub it out if he gets it wrong".

Games and other resources linked with literacy

As well as supplying the children with books and writing materials, most parents (37) deliberately provided other resources to help their children with reading and writing. Those they mentioned were: commercially produced books with so much written down for the child to finish or copy words (eight mentions), toy computers with reading games (seven), flashcards (six, three homemade), story and rhyme tapes (five), typewriters (four), magnetic letters (three), and a large number of games connected with reading including Scrabble, the Game of Knowledge and similar games where the child had to read the questions), Spellmaster, picture word cards, picture snap, pairs, dominoes with words, and Questron books with games and spellings. Five parents mentioned playing non-commercial games with a literacy content: sending messages to one another, playing I-Spy and hangman.

In connection with the commercially produced materials, four of the parents voiced dissatisfaction, because they failed to hold the children's interest, commenting, for example,

"We got about half a dozen books from the Ladybird reading system. I didn't carry on for very long. I felt she was developing without it and it was counterproductive to what she was doing at school. The flashcards were useful to build up her vocabulary, especially common words, but the stories weren't interesting enough".

"I bought three packs of writing books from the Early Learning Centre. We got to the first page and didn't go beyond that. It was a waste of money".

Although these products had seemed attractive, they did not hold the children's attention in the way that materials with a wider focus were able to do.

Many parents felt their children were able to learn about some aspects of literacy from their use of computers. This has also been reported in findings from Tizard et al.'s study (1988). Thirty of the 42 children here had access to a computer at home. Of these only six used the computer solely for games without a keyboard, and their parents did not think they learnt anything about reading and writing from them. For the rest, items parents mentioned that the children were learning were keyboard skills, recognising words on the screen, spelling, learning simple words, typing instructions for loading software, and using a variety of programmes, for instance, making a newspaper, designing cards, playing a shopping game, finding letters to a time limit, and playing educational games such as Granny's Garden and Pod. Some of the children used the computer for writing names and other words they knew, and for writing their own stories. A couple of parents mentioned that the computer helped to give their child confidence in writing, saying for example,

"She sits and writes a story on the computer. It's helped her a lot. She gets upset because she can't write neatly and her letters are back to front".

LITERACY MODELS

Family members as models for literacy

Children were asked whether they were aware of others reading and writing at home. Only seven children could not provide examples, (four of whom were amongst the children with literacy problems). Most of the children commented on reading and writing for a specific purpose, including for work (and homework), for instance,

"My mum reads cookery books. She writes out of the book what she's going to do and then she puts the book away, (when she's finished, she puts it in the bin)".

"Mum and Dad read letters and Mum writes to her friends".

"My Dad normally reads the newspaper".

"Sometimes my Dad reads special books, like from the bank".

"Mum writes lists for Asda".

"Mum and Dad write notes for each other if they're going out".

"Mum writes things when something's gone wrong, like we got *butter* with sellotape in, and she wrote to complain".

Other members of the family who lived in the family home were also mentioned as models, for example,

"My sister has to write a lot of words for homework. She's in the 'comp'".

"My sister's on her exams now and she reads loads of books".

"Grandad writes down telephone numbers".

Other examples that the children gave were about reading and writing for recreation, such as,

"My dad reads big books. Some are horror ones and some are comedy ones. One has something like a hobgoblin on the cover. He's got a lot more ones than horror ones."

"My Mum does her crossword sometimes".

"I see them reading in bed. Mum reads books with roses on (Mills and Boon, popular romantic fiction), and my Dad reads monster books and computer books. Mum writes when she's doing her knitting. The only time I see Dad writing is when he is writing his videos down".

"My brother reads adventure books from the library at school".

These examples demonstrate how observant the children were. In these many ways, other members of the family acted as literacy models for the children, and many of their activities were reflected in the children's behaviour in terms of literacy.

The role of siblings

The younger siblings were now at the stage of literacy learning that the children in the study had been at, at the start. Of the 16 children (ten girls and six boys) with younger brothers and sisters, six (all girls) now read to their siblings or helped them to read,

"Something she has started to do is to listen to Ryan reading. It makes her feel responsible".

"She'll sit and read to Luke".

Other involvement mentioned by parents was socio-dramatic play such as school, police and shops, for example,

"She likes to play at teachers. She holds the book facing out like the teachers do. Jennie's picked it up from that".

"He likes to play police. His uncle's a policeman. He says, 'Right, Greg's going to prison', and he writes it all down".

Three children liked listening when their parent read to the younger child. Two children were spurred on by the thought of their younger sibling competing with them, for example,

"As soon as he hears her say 'can I read?', he wants to too"

"There's only 19 months between them. If he feels she's nearly caught up with him, he tries to keep ahead".

Only one parent did not provide specific examples of the child interacting with a younger sibling on literacy related activities, although this child did interact with her older sibling.

Children's relationship with their older siblings in terms of literacy remained similar. As at three and four, older siblings often influenced the children's literate behaviour in several ways. They provided a model, for instance,

"His sister had her homework every night. He tends to sit at the side of her and say, 'I'll do my homework'".

"He makes little books. He draws a picture and writes underneath. He copies it off his brother".

"She reads to herself most nights...she sees her sister doing that".

They also gave access to resources that might not otherwise have been available, like computers and reference books. Some (11) were involved in shared literacy activities such as reading books, writing together, and socio-dramatic play involving literacy, like playing at school, for instance,

"He likes to sit and play school with Leanne. She's always the teacher".

"I play school with my sister. She teaches me all about me. She wrote down my friends, what I do at home, what I like best, telephone number and address, age. I fill it in and she marks it".

Some of the older siblings adopted a teacher role when not involved in role play, for instance,

"Her older sister writes words down for her from the dictionary and she finds them".

"He sits for hours with her. He sits and listens to her. If she doesn't know a word he spells it out".

"Ray learns me how to read his books and he reads some of mine and helps me".

and some listened to the child read.

In some cases, having brothers and sisters increased distractions away from literacy. As one child with three older siblings described,

"When my brother and sister put the telly on it puts me off. My mum can't hear what I'm saying and I have to start all over again. She makes sure the door's closed. We go in the room when my brother and sister are playing out and then it's nice and quiet".

On the other hand, this child also saw her siblings reading and writing while doing their homework, and on occasions they helped her with reading.

Several parents commented that the older siblings had increased the child's rate of progress, or stimulated an interest in literacy, for instance,

"Her sister's brought her on a lot".

"It helps (his interest) when he sees Kerry read as well".

For only three of the 17 children with older siblings did parents or children not give examples of ways in which the older child encouraged literacy. Even in these instances, two of the children observed their older siblings reading and writing as part of their homework, and the two children with younger siblings were involved in literacy activities with them.

Thus in most families, being a sibling and having a sibling made a distinctive contribution to the literacy environment of the home.

Family members with literacy difficulties

Parents were not asked whether they had literacy difficulties themselves, but three parents volunteered that they had problems with reading and writing. Ten of the children's siblings were also experiencing problems with literacy, one in a family where the parent had literacy difficulties. Of the children experiencing literacy difficulties at this stage, seven were from these families.

PARENT'S INTERACTIONS WITH LITERACY ACTIVITIES

Parents reading to their children

Parents reading to children continued to be widespread in the families in the study, with all but three of the children being read to at home by their parents. Two of these children had reached a level of independence where they no longer wanted someone to do their reading for them. The initiative had come from the child as the parents were still willing to read to them,

"He may listen when I'm reading to his younger sister, but he wants to take over himself. He'll even read to his sister now".

"I try to sit down and read to them both, but she gets up now, she's independent".

Clark (1976) also found that some children who were competent readers *no longer* wanted their parents to read to them (p.51). The mother of the third child was also willing to read to her child, but he was resistant. She gave up trying to read to him because,

"You couldn't sit him down properly. Perhaps there was too much pressure. He wouldn't sit, he'd kick the book".

Of the four children not read to at the ages of three to four, three had left the study. The remaining child was now read to, although her parent added that she did this "perhaps not as often as I should". This was the child with siblings who caused a distraction from literacy, mentioned above.

One parent only read to her child for 15 minutes at a time, once a week at school, at a session designed for parents to work with their children on reading. She did not read to him at home, because he had lost interest, although his brother sometimes read to him.

All but six of the children were read to mainly by their mother (36). Nearly half the fathers (20) read to the children. Other people who read to the children were siblings (13), grandparents (12, nine grandmothers and four grandfathers, with one child being read to by both), an aunt, a baby-sitter and a neighbour.

What was read to the children

Parents were asked about the sorts of reading matter that was read to the children. Half the children (21) were usually read to from storybooks alone. A further 14 children were also read to from storybooks amongst other reading material.

Some of the children were read fiction in forms other than books. Five were read to from comics and one from annuals.

All but one of the 11 children who were read to from non-fiction material were from middle class families, or were boys from working class homes. This was in keeping with other studies, in which boys were more likely to look at non-fiction material, and middle class children had access to a wider range of reading material than working class children (Newson and Newson, 1976).

While most of the non-fiction reading material shared with the children was in book form, four children were read to from non-fiction material. Two of these children, both boys, were read to from newspapers,

"I'll read him bits out of the Daily Mirror if I think they are of interest".

"I read him anything to do with the local football team in the paper".

and this parent also read the descriptions on football cards. The two other children were girls who were read to from mail order catalogues. One was from a working class home (the one exception to non-fiction material being read to middle class children or boys), and one from a middle class home. Three of these four children

also had stories read to them, but the fourth (the working class boy), was read to not from story books but from reading scheme books. This means that his access to narrative forms was restricted.

Other non-fiction mentioned were reference books, including books about animals, football, trains, buses, and motorbikes, a child's dictionary, a book of children's prayers and an atlas.

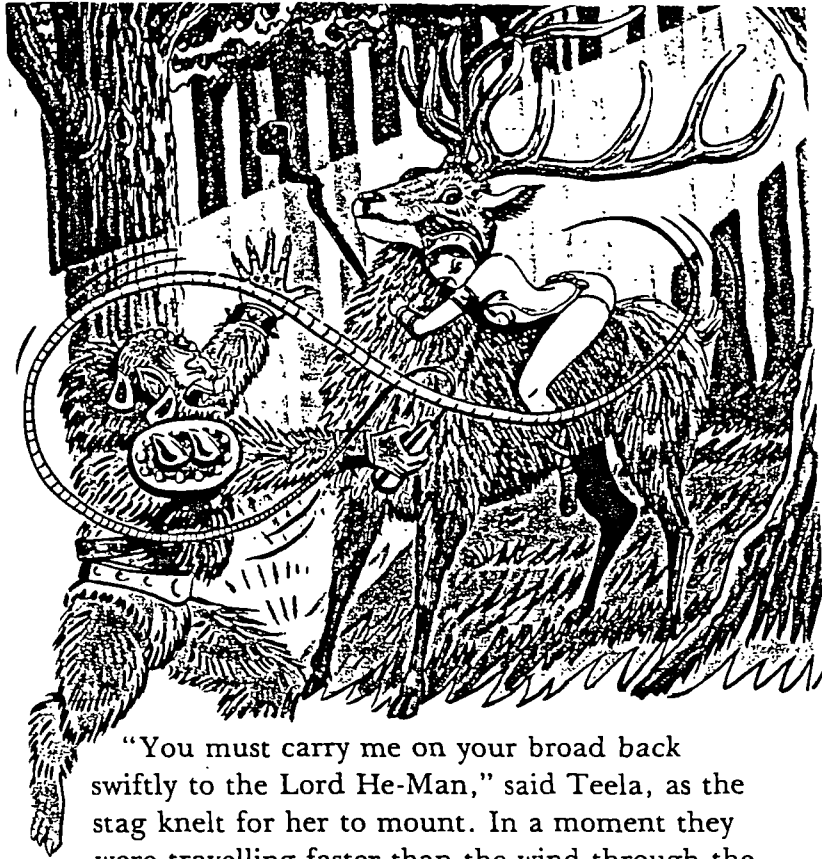
Eight children were read to from reading scheme books. Two of the children were read to **only** from scheme books. Four were read to from story books and comics as well, one from annuals and one from motorbike books and the paper. All the children read to from scheme books were from working class families. Scheme books are often designed to help children learn to read by simplifying narrative structures and repeating commonly found words. They are not usually designed as books to read to children. In comparison to children being read to from other texts, children read to from reading schemes received a restricted form of text, and meanings that could be derived from text.

How frequently the children were read to varied. The four children read to everyday were among the better readers, as did three of the four other children read to most days, (one child was a struggling reader). This mother read to her child every other night at bedtime **because** of the "worry over him not reading". She said,

"...we'll try, whether he'll listen or not".

She was reading his own books to him and gave He-man as an example. She read, "...bits of it at a time - they're big books", rather than reading the story all the way through, and intended to carry on "...til he can learn". The text of *this* book was quite complex, and would probably have been difficult for a struggling reader to follow the story, especially if presented in little sections at a time. A sample page appears in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Sample page from A trap for He-man



“You must carry me on your broad back swiftly to the Lord He-Man,” said Teela, as the stag knelt for her to mount. In a moment they were travelling faster than the wind through the forest.

With a piercing shriek a shaggy half-animal figure sprang in *front*, and the stag skidded to a halt.

“Beast-Man!” cried Teela, holding up Kobra.

Beast-Man flinched and turned his eyes away from the pulsing sceptre, at the same time sending his stun whip lashing out at Teela.

By this stage, only two children were having a regular bedtime story every night. Both were competent readers, both boys, one working class and one middle class. Sixteen other children had a bedtime story sometimes. Over half the children (20) were read to two or three times a week. Eleven children were read to once a week or less, so for these children, being read to was an intermittent rather than regular activity. Three children, as has been mentioned above, were not read to, but they were able to read to themselves.

Seven children were only read to for a few minutes at a time, with nine who were read to for half an hour or more, so even when the children were being read to the experience varied.

Parents were asked whose idea it usually was to read to the child. More often than not it was the child who took the initiative. For 28 children it was they that suggested reading (For 16 of these their parent also sometimes suggested it). In eight instances, it was the parent who took the initiative. Two parents found it impossible to answer the question, because they explained, "It's what we've always done", and, "We just do it". One of these was the parent who consciously 'taught' reading by reading to her child since he was tiny (chapter 5).

Parents teaching their children about reading and writing

Most parents said they were still teaching their seven-year-old child about reading and writing. On the whole this was supporting the child's own efforts. When teaching reading, 13 parents helped children to sound out the letters in a word, sometimes emphasising the initial letter. They said, for example,

"If he's reading me a story and he's not sure of this word, such as bug, I say 'buh-uh-guh' fast, so it sounds like bug".

"Some words, you can sound them, like 'duh' - 'o' - 'guh'. What does that spell? What does it sound like? What does it begin with? What does it say? He knows that now".

Children also gave examples of parents teaching them in this way, such as,

"My Mum helps by spelling the words out when I read them, like 'tuh' - 'oo', to".

Ten parents simply told the child the word if they were stuck when reading, and some parents commented that if the child could not figure out the word using different methods, they would not leave them long before telling them the word,

"When we sit and she's reading and she gets stuck, I help her. I say, 'Try and sound it out'. Sometimes she can and sometimes she can't. I don't leave her struggling a long time, I tell her".

A child explained,

"If I get stuck, they spell it out, and if I can't know what it is they tell me".

Nine parents tried to help their children by splitting up the unknown word, saying, for instance,

"If she gets stuck, I tell her to break it down, and see what words she could recognise within a word".

"If he's stuck on a word, like 'anything', I split it up for him. I cover up half the word, then the other half, then he can read it. We keep on and then go back to it".

"He's got a lot of big words in his dinosaur books, like Diplodocus. I split it up into parts - he likes you to split them up".

Children's comments included,

"If I don't know a word, mum and dad say 'work it out' and if I can't read it they say half of it and then I get it".

"When I get stuck on a word, mum says split it in two, and I do, and I get it wrong and then she tells me".

Parents also adopted other teaching strategies such as reading the passage first and the child then reading it back, and helping the child not to run two sentences together, one doing so at the request of school. This was not the main school in the study, and the request was a general one to all parents of children attending this particular class. Two other parents had been asked to help with extra reading by the school, (in these cases, because their child was having problems), practising reading cards with words on, and cards with words to learn and then put into sentences. In addition, parents taught their child to recognise whole words, how to pronounce unknown words, checking that the reading made sense, and that the child had got the gist of the story (one mention each).

As well as supporting the children's own reading and reading for school in these ways, six parents also used words written on individual cards, home made and commercial, to help children learn new words, and one parent wrote sentences in which her child had to fill in the missing words.

When teaching writing, over half the parents (25) supplied words the children did not know how to spell. Examples given by parents included,

"He writes short stories - a few lines. He starts writing and asks if he wants any help spelling words. I sound them out as he writes them".

"Now if she gets stuck with spelling a word she comes and asks me. I spell it out and write it down".

Children made comments like,

"The words I don't know, my mum writes on a piece of paper. I copy off them."

"If I don't know how to spell summat Dad tells me how to spell it".

Seven parents gave help with the formation of letters, and the lay-out of words on the page, for instance,

"...more the neatness of it...like getting the letters the right way round, b's and d's. She gets those mixed up quite a lot".

"I keep telling him to leave spaces between words. You can read what he does at school, but there's no spaces in between".

One of the parents had been asked to help by the school (not the main one in the study). The child was to write rows of d's, b's and g's, and they did this writing together at the school's suggestion. The parent helped the child make sure that the "sticks" were "going above and below the line". This task clearly derived from the expectations generated by the National Curriculum, for children to produce clear ascenders and descenders in their handwriting at Level 2 in the English SAT, (SEAC,1991, 1992).

Four parents provided words for their child to copy. In one case, the child dictated the story and then copied it, and in another, a parent made up and wrote out a story which the child then copied. Three of these children also copied isolated words their parents had written for them. Only four parents talked of helping with the **content** of the writing. They described suggesting topics for stories (two mentions), helping their child "compile letters" to a friend, and helping their child write up regular projects undertaken at home. at the time of interview, one about gymnastics.

A few parents were wary of possibly undermining their child's efforts, saying, for example,

"It's a difficult thing to help with other than spelling. I don't want to appear too critical. I tell her letters - she'll ask me how to spell something. Her grandparents tend to be a bit critical...'you have to write on the line'".

"I don't criticise too much, she tends to take it personally".

"If she hasn't done something right and I try and show her I put her off sometimes. I think I'm a bit hard - I haven't got a lot of patience".

Most parents felt actively involved in literacy teaching at this stage. Only three parents said they did not teach reading, and six said they did not teach writing. The reasons given by the parents not teaching reading varied. One child did not want his parent to help, "He won't let me help at the moment", and earlier when his parent had tried to teach him to read some words "he didn't want to know". The mother of a second child said he did not read out loud "because he can't". She was unsure how she could help,

"I don't know where to start with him. He doesn't have a lot of interest, and now I lose my temper quick".

The third child was the only one in the study for whom English was a second language. His mother spoke mainly in Chinese, and did not read English. She said,

"Other parents can read to their children, but I can't. I can't teach him".

In terms of teaching writing, the latter two children not taught reading at home (both amongst the poorest in literacy in the sample) were not taught writing either. The parents' reasons, not knowing how to help, and not feeling able to help, were the same as for not teaching reading.

The other three children not taught writing by their parents had had their help in the past. Now their parents felt their child did not really need or want help at this time. As one parent explained,

"You can read what he's writing now".

Another felt more structure would give her a clearer idea of how to help,

"He's hoping for homework from the juniors. That way you can help him more".

Literacy learning involved in the day-to-day activities of children and parents

As indicated above, when asked about whether they **taught** their child to read and write, most parents who said yes emphasised the **form** of the activity rather than the **content**. However, when talking more generally with parents a different picture emerged. As when the children were aged three and four, parents were involved in activities which taught the children about the content and purpose of literacy, but these often occurred as a natural part of a more general activity. Much of this teaching and learning was effectively 'invisible' in that it occurred so naturally and was so much a part of day-to-day living, that it could go unnoticed. As Teale (1982) commented, "literacy is part of the fabric of everyday life". (p.157). Similar findings are reported in Atkin and Bastiani (1986), in their study of parental perspectives on teaching. Even so, in talking with the parents here, all but four were able to describe a variety of situations connected with family life in which literacy learning took place. As they talked, some parents had a sense of just how much they were actually doing. As one said,

"I suppose until you think about it you don't know how much you do".

Teaching and learning occur in a very different context at home compared with school. Unease with the term "teach" to describe what they were doing with their children was articulated by some of the parents as they tried to describe what they did with their children, commenting for instance,

"Not so much teach him. We'd look at books. He'd say, 'What does that say?'. I think that's part of learning".

"Teaching, maybe I was, unconsciously, by looking at books".

"I didn't sit down and teach 'ah' - 'buh' - 'cuh'. I did it gradually, at his own pace".

"I wouldn't really call it 'teaching her to read'".

"I wouldn't say I'd sit her down and say, we'll read now".

"We encourage him all we could - pointing words out. Teach is not the right word. If we're doing everyday things, we'd point words out, such as on a game".

The children whose parents could not supply examples of naturally occurring literacy activities in day-to-day life were amongst the children with the poorest scores for literacy at age seven (end of Key Stage 1). Parents of the majority of the children (38) were able to provide examples. As Clark (1976) commented of parents in her study, these literacy encounters were "casual" rather than "systematic", and part of daily life as opposed to being separate from it (p.53).

Some of the parents mentioned going on journeys and travelling generally as opportunities for literacy learning, for instance,

"She asks what the signs say on the road".

"We work out train and bus timetables. Where do we want to get to next? Where are we? How do we get there?".

"We read things on buses. When we go out for the day, they pick out road signs - they have to look out for road signs".

"When we're on our way to the seaside, we see who can spot the name first, and how far it is".

A number of parents described other occasions when they were involved in everyday activities outside the home as times when they incorporated literacy learning into what they did with their child, for example,

"If we're shopping we look at the guide telling you where all the shops are".

"When we're in the supermarket he knows which is soap powder and Comfort and margarine and that".

"We write a list for Asda. I push the trolley and they get things for me".

"I point things out like car park, the signpost for the toilets..."

"On Monday we went for a walk and there was a notice saying private. I asked her, 'What do you think it says?' She started to say p-r-...I told her it was private, and what it meant".

"We look at the hymn book and sing hymns at church".

Several parents gave examples of special outings and going on holiday as times that gave rise to literacy related to the activity, such as going to local places of interest, going to a zoo or farm, and going on holiday, for instance,

"Yesterday we went on a farm trail. There were blackboards above each different animal, 'My name is Matilda. My babies were born on such and such'. There were labels like a farm trail - to follow the arrows".

"We went to visit (a local historic house). If you take them to places like this they understand better - there's things to read in all the rooms".

"When we went to France, she wanted me to write things down in English and French".

"We went to London for her birthday. We went to the tube and she was wanting to know all the different stops".

One family went on holiday to Butlins. The child wrote a postcard to the teacher and children at school, and it was later pinned on the class noticeboard.

At home, parents mentioned writing letters, cards and invitations together (11), writing shopping lists (6), doing crosswords and wordsearches together (3), including one family where the child and parent actually sent off the results of a wordsearch to a newspaper, and won tickets to Blackpool, reading items together from the television (2), reading the back of cereal packets and sending off for things (2), reading recipes together for baking (1), and selecting a holiday destination from brochures (1). Two parents, both middle class, explicitly aimed to show their children how you could use reading to gain information. They commented,

"I teach her she can get more information by using reading, like looking in a catalogue for something she wants like a sleeping bag, or looking for a television programme - that it's an information giving thing".

and,

"If I came across anything like tadpoles at nursery, or Martin's been on a walk collecting conkers, we'll look it up in the encyclopedia".

In some cases, the parents' work generated literacy activities for the child, for example one parent mentioned doing the books for a family business, and her child wanted to be involved,

"She'd want to do the same. She says, 'Oh, I'll do a letter mummy'."

Another two parents studied and wrote at home,

"Sometimes if I'm doing my work she'll sit alongside me, but she's writing independently".

"If Mick's sat at the table drawing or writing, he'll want to join in with him".

Because these types of activity are sometimes hard for parents to disentangle from the day-to-day business of everyday life, there is likely to be under-reporting of what was happening with the parents and children. However, these examples give a flavour of the types of naturalistic activities involving literacy that parents and children engaged in together.

CHAPTER 8

CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AT AGE SEVEN (END OF KEY STAGE 1)

8.1 Children's Literacy at Home, at age seven (End of Key Stage 1)

This section will describe the types of literacy activities the children engaged in at home by the age of seven. It complements Chapter 6.1, which looked at the literacy activities of the children when they were three and four.

Children reading to themselves at home

Parents reported that all but four of the children read to themselves, most commonly from their own books (33 children), which were usually story books (29). They varied in type from very short simple texts, such as Murray (1964) Peter and Jane We have fun, or The Three Little Pigs (both Ladybird), to complex and extended texts for example, Roald Dahl (1980) The Twits, or Janet and Allan Ahlberg (1986) The Jolly Postman. This latter was a book the child had had read to him in school, which was subsequently bought as a present at home. A sample page of each of these books appears in Figures 5 to 8. It is possible to see at a glance that the language complexity, story structures and style of presentation varies considerably. Meek and Mills (1988), writing about The Jolly Postman, point to its intertextuality which is dependent upon, "...the readers acquaintance with nursery rhymes and fairy stories". (p.149). The Ladybird version of The Three Little Pigs is dependent upon the child's familiarity with the story to flesh out its meanings. However, a text like We have fun provides no intertextuality. Instead, it offers, "...arbitrariness instead of pattern, disconnection rather than coherence and emptiness rather than fulfilment". (Wade, 1982, p.33-34, comparing a child's story book with a reading scheme text).

Some parents thought their child was behaving like a reader, without actually reading, for example,

Figure 5 Sample page from We Have Fun, a favourite book of one of the children in the study, aged seven

16

Look, look, says Jane.
Look, Peter, look.
Have a look.
Come and look.
Peter has a look.

new word

Look look



Figure 6 Sample page from The Three Little Pigs, a favourite book of one of the children in the study, aged seven

Here are the little pigs.
They are at home
with Mummy pig.
You are getting big,
says Mummy pig.
You have to go
to look for a new home.



Figure 7 Sample page from The Twits, a favourite book of one of the children in the study, aged seven

The Wormy Spaghetti

The next day, to pay Mr Twit back for the frog trick, Mrs Twit sneaked out into the garden and dug up some worms. She chose big long ones and put them in a tin and carried the tin back to the house under her apron.



At one o'clock, she cooked spaghetti for lunch and she mixed the worms in with the spaghetti, but only on her husband's plate. The worms didn't show because everything was covered with tomato sauce and sprinkled with cheese.

'Hey, my spaghetti's moving!' cried Mr

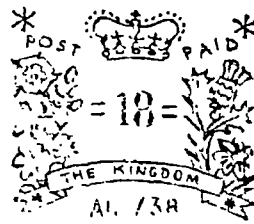
Figure 8 Sample page from The Jolly Postman, a favourite book of one of the children in the study, aged seven



Later on, the Postman,
Feeling hot,
Came upon a 'grandma' in a shady spot;
But 'Grandma'
What big *teeth* you've got!

Besides, this is a letter for . . . Oooh!

URGENT



B. B. Wolf Esq.
C/o Grandma's Cottage
Horner's Corner

"I don't think he's reading, he's just looking at the pictures".

while other children demonstrated that they knew how to read for themselves, for example, one parent said her daughter explained, "I'm reading in my mind".

Nine of the books mentioned were books published by Ladybird (either described generically, or the titles were known to be Ladybird books). Other books, such as books of well known fairytales, were probably also Ladybird books (mentioned by four parents). Several children had books accompanied by tapes on which to listen to the story.

Non-fiction books were specifically mentioned by eight parents. These were: dictionaries (two), joke books (two), books of films, "If he's seen the film he'll look at the book", books about cars, computer books, a book about wrestling, one about gymnastics, and one about football.

At this stage, all but one parent thought their child could read print in the environment. This was a poor reader, and his mother said, "I'm not sure that he can recognise it". Although the other parents thought they knew their child could read environmental print, they mostly did this in their heads by this age, so it was hard for parents to give examples of them doing it. One of the children, however, explicitly said,

"When we go shopping, I read all the things I see", (38)

and another said he read, "things that say on my shirts", i.e. the writing on his sweatshirts.

All but one of the children helped themselves freely to books when they chose to. In the exceptional case, the child had two younger siblings and the parent was concerned that they might rip the books. The books were therefore stored on a

shelf out of reach and the child asked when he wanted a book for it to be handed to him. In this way he was dependent on an adult for access to books.

Where the books were kept varied, and included the main living area, the child's bedroom or playroom, and "all over the house". Books were most commonly kept on bookshelves. In a few cases, however, books were stored indiscriminately with toys or other objects such as in a toy box, or together with toys behind the settee and under the stairs, in drawers or in a wardrobe. (They stored their resources for drawing and writing in a similar way). Five of these children were among the children with literacy difficulties. For these few children, their books were not treated as different from other objects in their possession, and had the same status as other playthings. This may well have affected their view of the function of books, in that they may have been more likely to treat them primarily as objects rather than as sources of entertainment or information.

Children writing on their own at home

All but two of the children wrote on their own at home by the age of seven. One of these children, however, did write his name on cards for special occasions such as birthdays and wedding anniversaries. These two children were among the weakest in both reading and writing at age seven (end of Key Stage 1). A further child, also poor at reading and writing, liked to copy write and 'pretend' to write (his parents' description), but could not yet write in a conventional way independently. He would copy from his sister, or the newspaper, and show his mother,

"Look what I've done mum", and then ask, "What does it say?".

Copying is a very different aspect of writing from composing one's own text. When copying the child is practising motor skills and hand-eye coordination. In composing, the child is engaged in a level of abstraction where he or she "must disengage himself from the sensory aspect of speech and replace words by images of words". (Vygotsky, 1962, p98). This child found the abstract nature of composing

too difficult, although he did understand that written language had meaning. Whatever form the children's writing took, it always had the potential to,

"...communicate across distance and through time, or record information". (Gundlach et al., 1985).

Over half the children (25) wrote stories at home expressing their own ideas independently. The influence here could have been writing done at school, or could have been a desire to express ideas as a result of contact with the storying process at home and at school. Many parents made comments like,

"She likes to write stories that she makes up herself".

"He makes little stories up".

One of the children could even recall in full a story she had made up at home, "I wrote about a butterfly. It was about a caterpillar, and it went for a walk and,

he met a butterfly and he said, 'I wish I was nice and purple like you', and then he met a blue bird and he said, 'I wish I was blue and I could fly like you', but one day he built a cocoon round him and he turned into a caterpillar, and he were a butterfly...

And I drew a picture at the bottom, and my mummy saved it and put it in the journal". (The mother's record of the children's achievements). This story clearly shows the influence of other stories the child had heard and read, for instance, Maris (1988) I wish I could fly, and Carle (1974) The Hungry Caterpillar. Here she had internalised story patterns and was able to reproduce them in her own work. She also knew that her mother valued her accomplishment.

Figure 9 shows an example of another child's story.

Figure 9 Example of a child's story written at home, at age seven

One Day a rabbit was
Lost And he began to
cry. Because he wanted
to go home. He began to walk
on a hill. He saw a bad man.

Some of the children described what they wrote about, for example,

"Sometimes I write about adventures and I write about where I'm going on holiday and I can think about lots of ideas that I can write about".

"I did a book at home...stories. It was a little bit about aliens and a bit of comedy".

"I've started a story at home. It's about Magic the cat".

Twenty-three children liked **copying someone else's writing**, copying the craft of writing and practising being a writer rather than using writing for a purpose. Most frequently this was copying out of their own books, including in one case from a dictionary. Sometimes the children asked their parents to write something which

they then copied. A couple of children copied writing from the newspaper, and one child like to copy the writing out of old birthday cards. One child however, did use her copy writing for a specific purpose. She was awaiting the birth of a sibling, and was preparing a welcoming gift,

"I'm making a book for it, Winnie the Pooh's Blowy Day. I'm copying words and pictures".

For this child, a homemade book of one's own was clearly a valuable special entity.

Over half the children who wrote at home (22) wrote to communicate with someone else, in all cases but one, to family or friends, in the form of **letters, notes and cards**, for instance, parents recalled,

"She writes little letters to her uncle. She wrote a letter to grandma about mum and dad. We were arguing. She wrote it all down".

"She writes little love notes - I love you - and posts them under the door in a morning".

"He made his own mother's day card".

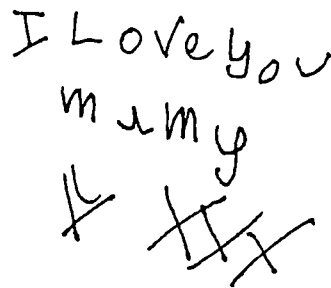
One parent showed an example of an 'I love you' note (see Figure 10).

Several children mentioned writing letters at home, for instance,

"I write letters to my friends in the holiday".

The child who wrote to someone outside their immediate circle had recently been on a family holiday to Disneyland. Of his own initiative, he explained that he wrote,

Figure 10 Example of a child's note written at home, at age seven



I Love you
mummy
H H H

"...about Mickey Mouse and (I) took it to his dressing room. He said, 'that's very good, Steven. I wrote, 'To Mickey Mouse, I liked your clothes, Steven'."

Ten children wrote **factual accounts**, often accompanied by a drawing, probably modelled on writing done at school. They wrote about things they had done, or descriptions of themselves in their world, for example, parents said,

"If she's been with her nanan for the weekend, she'll write what she's done and do a picture".

"If they go on a school trip, he writes about his school trip".

"At the weekend she wrote on the computer, 'My name is Laura. I have a rabbit. Luke had a rabbit. I am 7. My rabbit eats kabj and carits'."

One child also added such things as postcards and feathers to writing she did on holiday. Other children recalled what they wrote about, for instance,

"I write about my rabbits and my holidays and my bike".

Seven of the children wrote **lists** to create a concrete record of what they wanted, or had on their mind, for example, parents said,

"He wrote his own Christmas list. It took about half an hour. He really wanted to do that - the longest time I'd seen him writing".

"If she had something in mind, she'll write a list of what she wants, like her list for Easter was Matchmakers, Yorkie, mini eggs, All Gold and a Bart Simpson Egg".

"He writes his own shopping lists".

This purposeful writing was also highlighted by one parent who described how her child would not write for the sake of it, but would write if it was integrated into what he was otherwise doing,

"He wouldn't sit and write a story or write on his drawings if he drew a house, but if he's playing a game where you have to leave messages, or playing at clubs with kids in the road and they write down who's in it, he'll do that writing - writing for a purpose".

This purposeful nature of young children's writing was highlighted by Juliebo (1986), where she suggested that this type of writing was part of a child's "cultural experience".

Six children added **written labels or talk bubbles** to their drawings. Three children liked to write their name, names of people in their family, or their name and address. A third drew small pictures of herself and her family, with the initial letter of each person above or underneath. This child-generated activity at home was also observed by Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), in their study of inner-city children's literacy. They suggest that at home the child was able to explore the nature "of kinship or self" in this way, whereas in school, "names were drawn carefully during 'penmanship', but were written primarily to identify their work", (p.91).

Other examples of writing were also given. Two children made their own games, one included writing on big pieces of paper, the other, devising a game using letters, two children liked to fill in forms, one child wrote her own contributions to a

'journal' in which her mother recorded other family events, and one child wrote a diary. Two children showed the level of independence in writing that they had reached. While most children asked adults or siblings for help if they did not know how to spell a word, or had a go on their own, these two would look in their picture dictionary, or other books of their own, to see if they could find the correct spelling.

Four parents, three of weak readers commented that their child "pretended" to write rather than writing as such. For two of these children the comment was made in the context of socio-dramatic play, pretending to write letters and prescriptions at an office or at the doctors'. The other two children had writing problems. While other parents accepted their children's contributions as writing, even if they could not decipher them, these children were not seen as writers by their parents, and their efforts were not afforded the status of 'real' writing.

Time children spent on reading and writing activities on their own

Most children read to themselves daily or most days (23). Ten children read two or three times a week and the other nine read less than that or not at all. These children included seven of the weakest readers and writers.

In terms of the length of time children usually read to themselves, four children were able to read for over half an hour at a time. *One was an excellent reader, and the other two very poor readers.* The majority read for up to half an hour, while nine children read for just a few minutes at a time, and five did not usually read to themselves at all.

Nearly half the children wrote on their own most, if not every, day (18). Fourteen children wrote by themselves two or three times a week, and seven wrote less than this or not at all. This included both competent and struggling writers. Time on task varied, a good number of children (17) spending over half an hour writing (considerably more than the average time spent reading), and a similar number (18) wrote for up to half an hour. Seven children only wrote for a few minutes or not

at all. Three of these children were in the group who spent little time reading to themselves. On the whole, length of time on task seemed to matter less than the quality of the experience, for both reading and writing.

Children's use of literacy in socio-dramatic play

The majority of children (28) incorporated some aspects of literacy into their socio-dramatic play. The most popular game was playing schools (18 children). This could involve other members of the family, or dolls and teddies,

"She likes to be the teacher. She sets us all work to do, like she does at school - what she's been doing, and she does some too".

"He plays at school with his teddy bears and makes them little books".

As well as school work, reading and writing, two children liked to write registers of children's names as part of their school play.

Other socio-dramatic activities were playing at shops and post offices (seven children), families, which incorporated reading and writing (four children), offices (two children), and one mention each of being a doctor, policeman, waitress, librarian, delivery man and club secretary. The examples that follow give an indication of the sort of play the children were engaged in,

"He plays at shops, usually a food shop, and uses tins and packets. He writes the amount down and things they are - writing different words down".

"She plays families, grandma, mum and baby - and writes things down what she wants from the shop".

"She has a toy stethoscope. She pretends to write prescriptions for her dolls".

"With her toy cooker, she'll write things down, menus and things, and pretend to be a waitress".

"He is a delivery man. He has a little thing with a clip on the top, and gives everybody a receipt".

These examples give an indication of just how much the children had learnt about literacy and its social applications, and how they were able to use play to practice and extend their own literacy competencies.

8.2 What Children had Learnt about Literacy at School, at age seven, (End of Key Stage 1)

A number of assessments were made of the children's literacy at this stage.

The level of the child's reading book at seven

The level of reading book provided a useful measure of children's reading ability at age seven (the end of Key Stage 1) because it was a reflection of what they were actually reading, or attempting to read, on a day-to-day basis. The books had been chosen by the teacher, or by the child themselves, with guidance, from what was available in school. This measure, which does not rely on how a child performs 'on the day' was a naturalistic indication of the stage of school-based reading that the child had reached.

A study by Hannon (1987) found that the level of a child's reading book at a younger age (in combination with age and sex) accounted for a considerable proportion of the variance in reading test scores at age seven.

The books children read in school

When the children were in nursery, a wide range of books had been available for them to look at and read, including both fiction and non-fiction. Fiction books

were well written and illustrated, covering a wide range of stories of interest to young children. As soon as the children formally started in school, they began to 'learn to read' from a particular book, designated their 'reading book', practically all of them from commercially produced reading schemes. Only four children were reading a non-scheme book at the time data was collected, and one other child had a non-scheme book in addition to his current reading scheme book in his folder. Yet the English SAT (SEAC, 1991, 1992) expected children to be able to read from books which did not have the restricted and sometimes stilted language, lack of narrative tension and dynamic interchange between pictures and text, and the stereotyped conformity of many reading scheme books (Luke, 1988, Baker and Freebody, 1989). As Dombey (1987) points out, through access to what she, and others term 'real books', children can learn, "how to love books, how to choose books...what it is to have a favourite author", and that the consequences of not having these experiences can be serious for literacy development,

"To postpone these lessons until the reading scheme has been traversed to the end... is to run the very grave risk of communicating the idea that reading is something you do for someone else, or even of putting children off reading forever".(Dombey, 1987, p.18).

Some children gain these experiences out of school, but, in this study, the majority of children were not exposed at home to the sorts of books used to assess children's reading at age seven (the end of Key Stage 1) in the SATs. Three of the four children reading from non-scheme books at school were children who had access to similar books at home. It could well have been their familiarity with such books outside school which gave these children the confidence to choose to read them in school. It appeared, in this snapshot at a particular point in time, that the schools did not encourage the other children to have this experience in their sessions of reading aloud as part of the process of learning to read in school. This was also observed by Tizard et al. (1988) in their study of children in inner London (p.175).

In the main school in the study, and in all but one of the others, the children's 'reading books' were graded in order of difficulty. In the school that was the

exception, children read from a wide range of ungraded children's picture books. Limited numbers of books similar to those found in nursery, principally children's picture books and also short children's novels were available in all but one school (in which all children read from one of two reading schemes). But in all the other schools, most books for children to practise their reading were from commercial reading schemes, and, as has been discussed above, nearly all the children were actually reading from scheme books even when other choices of book were available.

For this study, the books were assigned a level of difficulty based on a system of **Individualised Reading** devised by Moon (1980). This system was in operation in many schools at the time of the study, including the main one, and five of the remaining seven schools in the study used it or a similar system. The system divides all readily available, commercially produced reading schemes, and many other non-scheme children's books, into graded levels, according to the difficulty of the text. Once children were able to read any of the books in the schemes, they were allowed free choice of any book, and this became the final level. It was possible to determine a reading level for the two children who attended schools that did not use this system by looking up the book they were reading in the **Individualised Reading** publication.

At the time of the final assessments, the children's current reading book could thus be assigned to a level, from one to 13.

This system of assigning a level to children's reading books is predicated on the idea that the books become more difficult and complex as the child moves through the different levels. Moon and Raban (1975) provide the rationale for the progression on which the system of **Individualised Reading** devised by Moon (1980), is based.

Theoretically, the levels in the scheme range from 0 to 13. The span of stages represented by the extremes of reading book levels assigned to children in this study was from level 3 (termed 'beginning reading' p.59), to beyond levels 11, 12 and 13

(combined)(termed 'reading for pleasure and information' p.59). Definitions of the levels provide an indication of the differences in the types of text which children encountered in their reading books at school. For example, the definition of level 3 is,

"'Caption books' which have more varied text (than preceding stages). The child will now have to pay more attention to the text although the illustrations are essential". (p.78)

Figure 11 shows an example of a text at this level read by a child in the study. Two children were reading at this level.

At the other end of the scale, the definition of levels 11 to 13 is,

"'Bridging books'. Developmental bridging from short, amply illustrated books to longer books (fiction in chapters) which do not rely on illustration cues. When children can read fluently books from Stage (level) 13, they should be able to succeed with the **wealth of fiction** available to them (e.g. the Puffin range)." (p.79) (my emphasis).

For children reading at this level, a whole variety of texts become available to them, as the phrase "wealth of fiction" suggests. Figure 12 shows an example of a text at this level read by a *child in the study*.

Figure 11 Sample page from a text at level 3: Roger Red-Hat read by a child at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)



The Red-hats' house

The Red-hats' house is white.

Figure 12 Sample page from a text at levels 11-13: The Secret Cave read by a child at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)



‘There’s nobody about,’ whispered William.

‘They’ve all gone ashore to get the gold.’

‘Good,’ said Hamid. ‘I can see a little boat tied up down there. Let’s climb down the rope ladder and row to the shore.’

It wasn’t easy to row the little boat. Hamid steered for the lights he could see in the cottages above the beach.

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There were two children reading at this level. Two more children had reached the end of the graded books and were choosing reading material freely from what was available in school, and a further child attended a school where books were not assigned a level of difficulty, but chosen with the assistance of the teacher, to meet the child's interests and ability. Figure 13 shows an example of text chosen by one of these children.

Clearly, by this measure, there was an enormous span of reading ability within the sample, and the understandings about text which the children would be able to glean from their varied 'reading books' differed considerably. By the end of the Infants school a minority of the children were sophisticated readers within school, able to choose their own books to suit their own purposes. For others, their interactions with text were constrained and some of the purposes for reading, beyond learning to do so for its own sake, were not apparent in the reading material they were using. The distribution of levels of children's reading books in the study when the children were seven, (end of Key Stage 1) appears in Table 20.

Figure 13 Sample page from a text beyond the reading levels: Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf

Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf 15

'Well, I haven't exactly read it,' said Polly, 'but I know the story very well indeed.'

'This time,' said the wolf, 'I've planted a bean. Now we know from the story of Jack that beans grow up to the



sky in no time at all, and perhaps I shall be in your bedroom before it's light tomorrow morning, crunching up the last of your little bones.'

'A bean!' said Polly, very much interested. 'Where did it come from?'

'I shelled it out of its pod,' said the wolf proudly.

'And the pod?' Polly asked. 'Where did that come from?'

'I bought it in the vegetable shop,' said the wolf, 'with my own money,' he added. 'I bought half a pound, and it cost me a whole sixpence, but I shan't have wasted it because it will bring me a nice, juicy little girl to eat.'

Table 20
Level of child's reading book
at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)

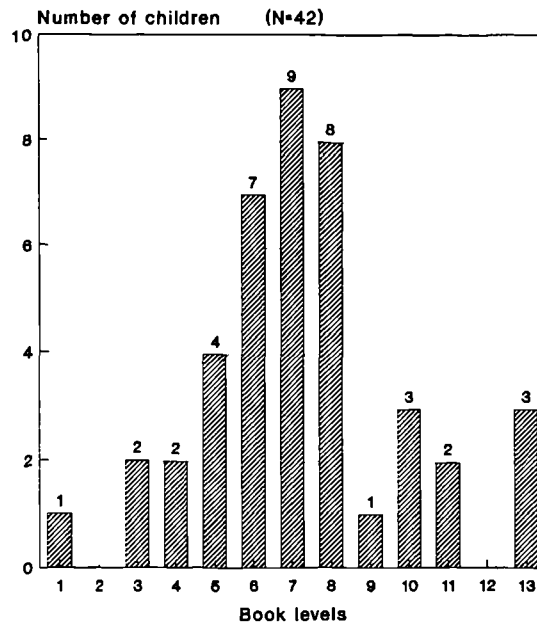


Table 20 shows that the distribution of reading book levels is reasonably normal. Although no child had a book at level 2 or level 12, and only one child had a reading book at level 9, most children were reading books in the middle of the range, and the numbers of children reading books above and below the mean score of 7.2, is reasonably balanced. Since this distribution could be considered normal, this measure was used as an outcome measure in regression and correlational analyses, looking at which predictor variables best explained variance in children's later reading.

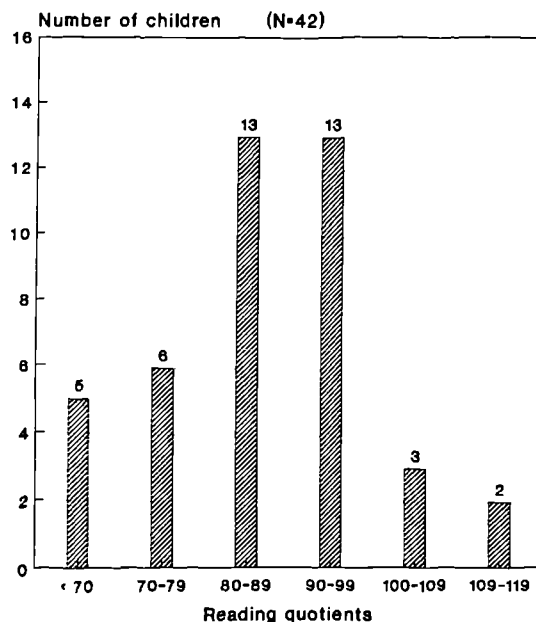
Young's Group Reading Test (YGRT) Score

It seemed appropriate to obtain some standardised reading test score, to allow comparison of this group of children with others. For instance, Young's Group Reading Test (1980) was one of the measures used by Hannon (1987) in his assessments of the Belfield Reading Project. Criticisms could be levelled against tests such as this one, that they do not test reading in a naturalistic way, they only assess a small part of what constitutes reading, there may be class, race and gender

biases, and that children may not perform at their best in a 'test' situation. Nonetheless, these tests are the nearest one can get to external validity, giving outcome measures that can be compared with other groups of children, and also provide internal validity, comparing one child's score with another. In addition, a test which incorporates understanding words in context, as the second part of this test does, is an improvement on those tests that simply test word recognition in isolation. This type of test will continue to be used until such a time as a better method, which offers a similar level of reliability and validity, is devised.

The reading quotient was chosen, as this allowed for differences in children's ages to be taken into account. The distribution of scores, which are reasonably normal, appears in Table 21. The mean score, of 87.3, was very low, below the national average, and below the mean scores of children in Hannon's (1987) study of 93.1 and 93.5, and also of Tizard et al.'s (1988) study of 95.0.

Table 21
Young's Group Reading Test scores at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)



Combined writing score

It was necessary to find a measure to assess children's writing when the children were seven (at the end of Key Stage 1). Tizard et al. (1988) had conducted a similar study to the current one, and the measures used to assess writing in that study were adopted here.

Children's writing tasks

In this study, three measures of writing were considered: the children's performance on a story writing task, their performance on an expository writing task, and the level of independence in their writing. The distribution of writing scores follow in Tables 22, 23, and 24. The higher the score, the more competent the child's writing was deemed to be.

Table 22
Child's score for story writing task
at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)

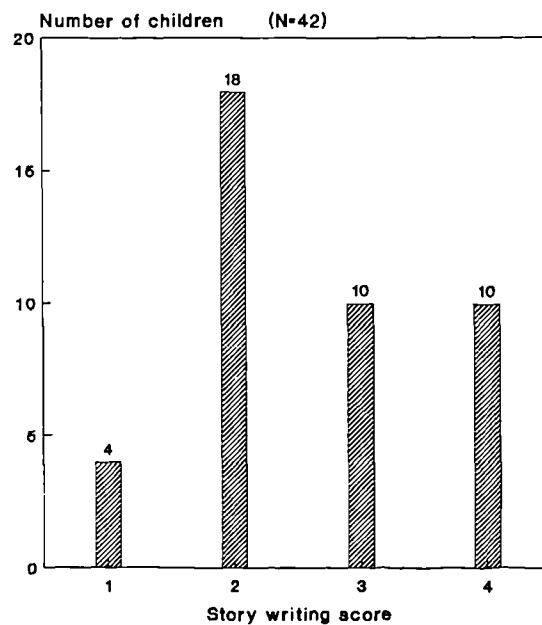


Table 23
Child's score for expository writing
task at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)

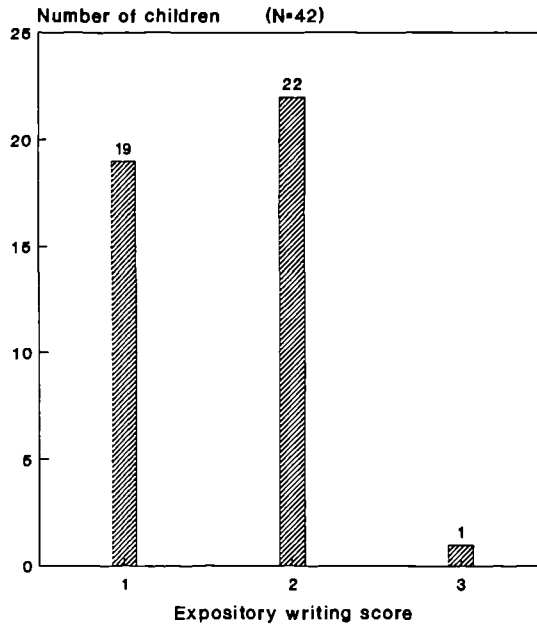
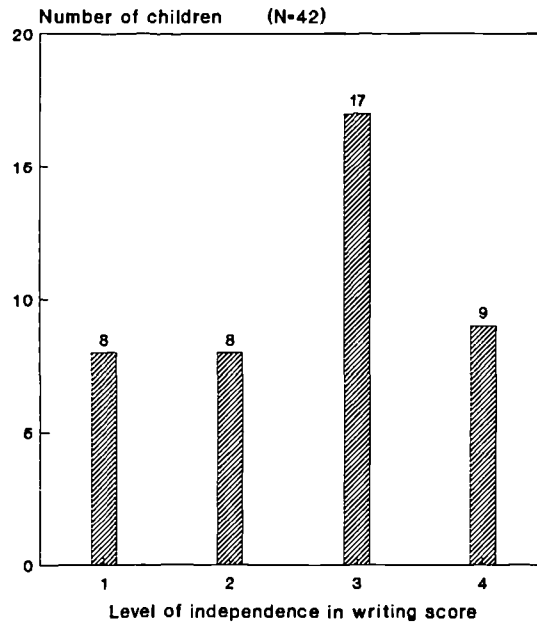


Table 24
Writing - child's level of independence
at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)



Marking the expository writing and independence in writing was a straightforward task, but the story writing component allowed room for subjective interpretation. A second judge was therefore asked to mark each child's story, and the inter-judge reliability was calculated. Table 25 shows the number of cases each judge assigned to each of four categories. The measure of agreement between them was 71%.

Table 25 Assessment of children's stories at age seven (end of Key Stage 1):
interjudge reliability: 71%
N = 42

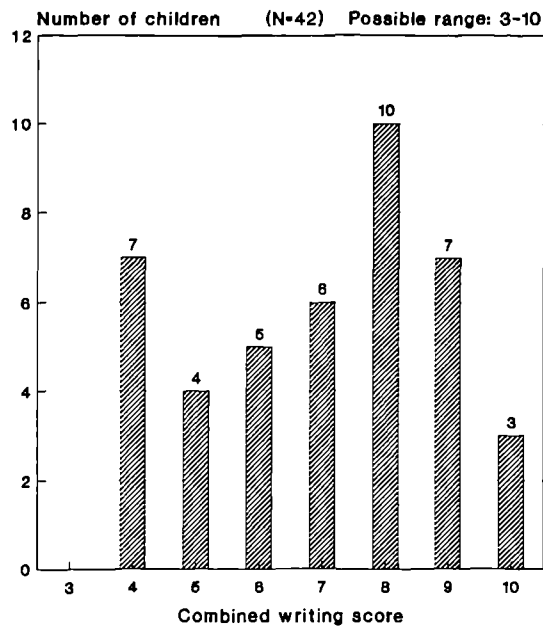
	4		1	3	6
1st judge	3		5	9	
	2		14	2	
	1	1	1		
		1	2	3	4
					2nd judge

With one exception, the disagreements were only one level apart. The first judge tended to give somewhat higher ratings. Of the disagreements, most were due to the first judge assigning higher ratings (9 cases). In three cases, the second judge gave higher ratings.

The level of agreement was considered sufficient for these scores to be used in analysis.

The three different writing scores were combined to form one outcome measure for writing. The distribution of the combined writing score is given in Table 26.

Table 26
Child's combined writing score at age
seven (end of Key Stage 1)



The distribution is rather bimodal, caused by seven of the children only achieving a rating of four.

The story task involved the children completing a story that was read to them about two children going to school, and encountering a bear outside the playground. The paper on which they wrote included a picture of the two characters, the bear and the school.

The expository writing task involved writing a sentence to describe what was happening in a series of three pictures. A model sentence was provided beside a picture at the top of the page.

Both of these tasks were adapted from assessments carried out by Tizard et al. (1988) in their study of children of the same age in London schools (Blatchford,

1988, personal communication). The tasks and the system for scoring the children's writing can be found in Appendices 3, 4 and 9.

Why look at story?

Story is an important form in the transmission of cultural values to children, and is widely used in early years education, as well as in the *naturalistic setting* of children's own homes. Stories allow for the exploration of abstract ideas, emotions, life situations and other people's perspectives. Reading and writing stories are connected. As the Kingman Report (1988) suggested,

"As children read more...they amass a store of images from half-remembered poems, of lines from plays, of phrases, rhythms and ideas. Such a reception of language allows the individual greater possibilities of production of language". (2.23)

Research has shown that young children's familiarity with story can enhance literacy development at later stages (Wells, 1987 Wade, n.d.).

Assessment of Stories

While there is a limited amount of overlap between the coding here and the Statements of Attainment, (D.E.S., 1990) the Statements of Attainment did not **specifically** look at the direct influence of the story genre on story writing, except to a very limited extent in Reading Level 3, that is, above the expected competence of the average seven-year-old, (D.E.S., 1990). Thus children performing at Level 2 were not having their storying skills assessed.

In this study evidence of an appropriate use of story writing genre was looked for in stories the children produced. Broad categorisations, taken from the data themselves, showed variation in the quality of language, ideas generated in the story, and sense of cohesion. The scoring here varied from that used by Tizard et al. (1988) since some of the variables they looked at had since become incorporated

into the National Curriculum, and were part of the child's Standard Assessment Task (SAT) English score, (discussed below). Two examples of stories incorporating appropriate use of story writing genre appear in Figure 14. For comparison with stories of children 'Having Literacy Difficulties', see Figure 17.

Standard Assessment Task (SAT) English level

The children in the study were the first year groups to be tested on National Curriculum Standard Assessment Tasks (SEAC, 1991, 1992). They had to perform a number of tasks, relating to reading, writing, speaking and listening, which were reduced to four (in the second year group, potentially five) outcomes. This measure was thus rather crude, collapsing a large amount of information into very few categories. The D.E.S. expected that the 'average' child should be at Level 2 at the age of seven (D.E.S. 1990). In this study, 17 children were performing below Level 2, and 25 were at Level 2 or above, (mean score, 1.7). The distribution of Levels that the children achieved appears in Table 27.

Since this SAT English Level was the one by which the children were judged externally, it seemed worth exploring its use as an outcome measure, although because of the way it has so much information collapsed within it, it is the most crude of the outcome measures adopted.

Teacher assessment

The children's teachers were asked whether the children's performance on the literacy tasks matched their usual literacy competence. Thirty-four (81%) said they performed as might have been expected on the reading test (one was better and seven were worse), and twenty-nine (69%) said they performed as they usually did in class on the writing tasks (five were better and eight worse). Even where the teachers felt that the children might have performed a little better, or felt they had performed worse than usual, they agreed with the children's rank order. Since in

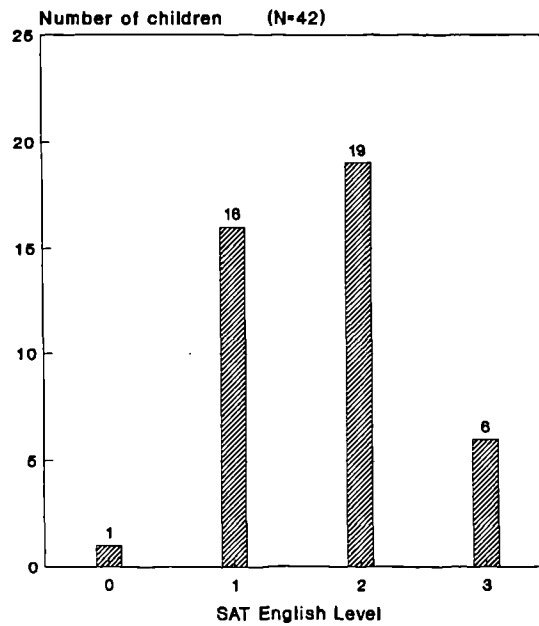
Figure 14 Two examples of stories incorporating appropriate use of story writing genre, children age seven (end of Key Stage 1)

They bring the bear into the play ground
and they said to their friends we've found a
bear look. But the children just laughed bec
use they couldn't see the bear. So they went
to the zoo and they said to the zoo keeper
here's your bear we found her on the path.
But the zoo keeper didn't see the bear eath
he said you're just day dreaming and they were
day dreaming.

Figure 14 (continued)

the bear walk in to the school
playground and a little boy was
playing with his football and
the bear started to play football
with the little boy and kick the
football over the wall and he
thought it was so funny he
laughed and laughed and laughed
and laughed but the little boy
don't think it was very funny he
was cross with the bear
very very cross and he ment
very very cross

Table 27
Children's SAT English level at age
seven (end of Key Stage 1)



general the teacher assessments agreed with the children's scores, this added validity to the measures used.

Children's understanding of why they did reading and writing at school

The majority of children (22) had no problem in identifying that they were being taught to read and write because it would help them learn now, while six thought it was because they would need it later in life, in the junior school, the 'comp', or for work. A minority of children said they did not know why they were being taught to read and write. One of these children could only think he had to do it, "because it's one of us work jobs". An additional six children could think of no other reason than that they liked doing it. One child said they thought it was important, but could not say why. This shows the wide range of awareness of the purposes and applicability of literacy amongst this group of children.

CHAPTER 9

HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS AND CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT, AT AGE SEVEN (END OF KEY STAGE 1)

Parental Involvement in the Teaching of Reading: Children Reading to their Parents

Since the dissemination of projects showing the feasibility and benefits of children reading to their parents from books used in school (for example, Tizard, Schofield and Hewison, 1982, Griffiths and Hamilton, 1984, Hannon, 1987), it has become common practice in many primary schools for children to take books home from school, (HMI,1991). Parents in this study, when their children were seven, were asked if the children brought reading books home, and the majority did so. Only two of the 42 children did not take a reading book to read to someone at home. Both of these children attended the main school in the study, which means that for the seven other schools, it was also customary for children to take books home.

Parents were asked how often children brought books home at the time of the interview, when the children were aged seven. Ten children took them home very frequently, most days, or every day, 14 took them home two or three times a week, and 18 took them home once a week or less. In all the schools that the children attended, reading books were sent home, but, for all but one school, this was not done systematically, and little information was given by the schools to all the parents.

All the children who took a reading book home from school read it aloud to someone at home at least sometimes, except for one child who used to, but since the age of about six could read on her own. Her mother said, "she reads to herself now".

The majority of the children (32) read out loud from a wider range of reading material at home than at school. Many of these children (11) were reading out loud from their own books. Other books children read aloud from were library

books (2), or a siblings' books (1). Children also read out loud from newspapers (2), to find out football results (2), what was on television (1), and the headlines, "large print"(1). Four parents commented on their children reading from the television, including from Oracle (1), and another four commented on their child's reading from print in the environment, for example,

"He reads signs when we're going round, like, 'dogs must be on a lead'."

or another parent gave an example from the kitchen,

"He'll tell you what you're supposed to be doing, like instructions for a cake mixture".

Three children read out loud from comics and an annual, one child read from magazines, including a television listing magazine, and one read from football programmes.

Most of the children's reading books from school were from structured reading schemes. As the majority of the children were also reading out loud from other materials written in different genres, with explicit purposes to inform or entertain, this gave them a more varied diet of reading materials than that supplied by the school. It gave them reasons to engage with the materials other than simply for reading practice.

The parents said that all children reading aloud (37) read most frequently to their mothers. About a third of the children (15) also read to their fathers. Of the 19 children with older siblings, eight read aloud to them. Ten children read regularly to grandparents (eight to grandmothers, one to a grandfather, and one to both). This included one child who said,

"When I go out with my grandma she can't see very well, so I have to read the letters for her and postcodes".

Two children read as well to family visitors, one to an aunt, and one to friends.

The parents were asked how frequently the children read out loud at home. Their responses are summarised in Table 28.

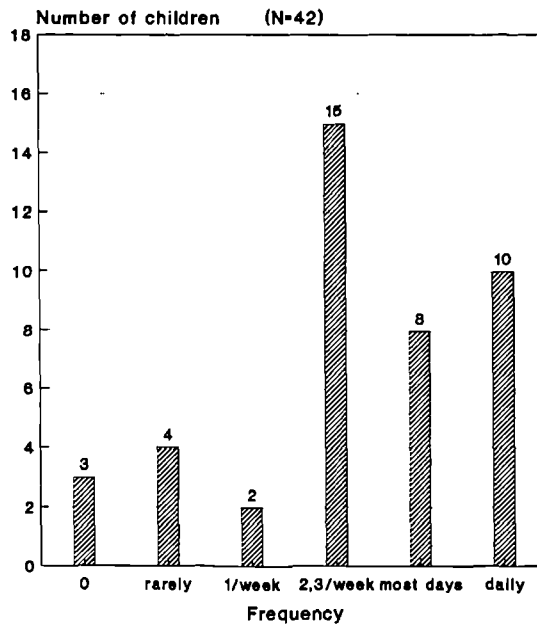
Parents said only two children (both weak readers) never read out loud at home at all. One other child had only just stopped doing so. Nearly half the children (18) were said to read out loud either daily or most days. A further third (15) read out loud two or three times a week. Only six children only read out loud once a week or less, but these were not the weakest readers, (apart from the two mentioned above). By the age of seven, reading out loud may not be the most helpful method for those children already reading well.

For almost half of the 39 children who read out loud at home (19), the initiative for the reading come from both parent and child. Twelve children asked the parent to hear them read, and eight parents asked the child to read to them. One child, who asked her parent to hear her read, was also asked by her sibling to read to him.

Parents of 40 children said their child brought a reading book home to read to them on some occasions. The children were asked when they were interviewed by the author whether they had done so on the previous night. This was to gauge the extent to which this was regular common practice. Seventeen children had done so, less than half the group, although this was in keeping with the frequency with which parents reported that books came home. This finding gives the impression that taking reading books home was more firmly embedded in school practice than was implied by a similar survey conducted by Hannon and Cuckle (1984).

The parents were asked if they knew what was expected of them when a school reading book came home, or their child read aloud to them. The majority (27) did feel confident they had an idea, and made comments like,

Table 28
The frequency with which children read
out loud at home, at age seven (end of
Key Stage 1)



"I sit and listen to her read and try to help her with words she doesn't know".

However, many parents said that they had to make assumptions, as this was never discussed with the staff, making comments such as,

"I think we're expected to read to her and her to read back to us, and put her right on her mistakes. I just assume that - we've never been asked to do that".

"Nothing's said, but I'm happy about what I'm doing. He brings his book home - but no folder and no information".

"We sit and let her read. If she gets stuck on any words we help her with them, but we try to get her to work it out. She would usually. I can't remember having been told. In earlier stages, if she had difficulties, she had a card in her book, 'let Suzanne do such and such'. It helped".

Over a third of the parents (15) did not feel they knew what was expected of them, because of lack of information and feedback. Thus while the majority of parents were able to use their initiative and felt reasonably confident in the way they supported their child's school-initiated reading, a sizeable proportion of parents felt unclear and unsupported. Similar findings were reported by McNaughton, Parr, Timperley and Robinson (1993) in their interview study of parents and teachers in New Zealand. In the current study there seemed to be an information gap between parents and schools for some of the parents who could most have benefitted from such information.

Half the parents were happy about the frequency with which their child brought their book home from school. The flexibility of the system, whereby children and parents could choose when to take books home, was generally welcomed, for instance,

"It's just right - it's left to you".

"I think they ought to leave it to the individual. If the reading books come home too much, you could pressurize them (the children)".

"You can set the pace. The reading books are always available to come home. The relaxed atmosphere makes it much easier".

While these parents seemed happy to 'set the pace', other parents were less happy about the arrangements. They implied they would have liked a more proactive approach by the school. More than a third of parents (15) thought that reading books did not come home often enough, making comments like,

"I don't think they're encouraged enough. I'm waiting in the car, I don't always go in".

"It's not pushed enough at school".

"His teacher doesn't encourage it. I get his folder out of his drawer".

One parent felt that while she felt she could supply books at home, for families without that back-up, the system was inadequate,

"It's not enough if you're relying on school...but we supply things at home, like Blyton novels".

A flexible approach was creating gaps in the system. But a more rigid policy had its problems too. The one parent who thought her child brought books home too frequently, had a child who attended the only school where books were systematically sent home every night. (As a working class boy, he performed better than might have been expected on the Young's Group Reading Test). His mother commented,

"I think every night is a bit much. It feels as if they've got to do it. Sometimes you feel you don't want to do it. If you push Adam to do something, he'll not do it".

Parental involvement in school

Parents were asked if they had some involvement within school, working with their own child during school time, working with groups of children, or helping in some other way. Half the parents (21) said yes. Most (parents of 17 children), were involved in attending a weekly Reading Workshop, designed for parents to work alongside their own child in school on reading and reading-based games, at the main school in the study. Another school which one of the children attended had previously run a similar workshop, which the parent used to go to with her child. In theory, the Reading Workshop was intended for all parents and their children. While many parents did attend, at least sometimes, a number of parents did not do so. Six parents gave no reason. Four were at work or did not have time to attend (one of these claimed not to have been invited). One parent used to go, but was no longer able to because she had a young toddler to look after. One parent had been in the past, but did not know she was still eligible to attend. Three parents

did not want to attend because, for various reasons, they were unhappy with what the Reading Workshop provided for them and their child,

"I did try it. She got distracted with it. We do it at home anyway. But it's a valuable thing school provides".

"I used to stay on Monday mornings to do things with him and follow them through at home. I used to have to sit and force him to sit and do it, and I'd lose my temper...I was really disappointed. Reading Workshop was a good idea, but I didn't think much to it. There was nobody there to give you advice. You either knew it or you didn't, but you might as well not have been there".

"I don't see why I should do all the donkey work...I didn't go to Reading Workshop because to me what they do there isn't reading".

The first parent quoted above felt it appropriate not to attend the Workshop, and was not doing so for negative reasons. For the other two parents, one only saw the teacher for formal consultations, and once in addition when she was asked to attend because the school wanted the child to see an educational psychologist. The other parent had asked the teacher about her child not reading, and had been told not to worry. Her response was that she felt parents were not told about what their children were doing in school. Increased dialogue with the teachers in school may have been helpful to address any misunderstanding about whom the Reading Workshop was intended for, and the problems expressed.

There were two other forms of parental involvement in school mentioned by parents; helping out in class, and attending school lessons. Three parents whose children attended the main school in the study helped out in class, including help with children's reading and writing, on a regular basis. Two of these parents had previously been in professional employment but were currently based at home looking after their children. The third helped to run a local Mother and Toddler group. All said they enjoyed work in the classroom and felt confident in the school setting. As one of them described it, "it's like a second home up there". It may be

that their confidence was enhanced by their experiences of work in the professions and in the community.

A parent of a child attending another school said she had taken the opportunity offered to sit in on a lesson in school, and had found it helpful.

Three parents of children attending other schools could not become involved at school because of work commitments and having two children under five. In two of the schools, there were not the opportunities. One parent contrasted the current school with the main school in the study, where parents could bring their child into the classrooms and collect them from there,

"You don't go into the school. You don't see your teachers every day, and if you'd got any comments, you could just tell them. There you're not allowed to go in".

This reduced the possibilities of parental contact on a day-to-day level.

The second parent described how parental involvement at her child's school was on a "social basis", although "one or two key figures ... were able to go in and help". The impression given by the school was that,

"...parents were alright for doing the fundraising, but (the teachers) don't like you going in and working alongside them".

The divergent experiences of the parents in this sample reflect the range of ways in which schools currently respond to the involvement of parents in literacy within school, and are in keeping with findings from earlier studies (Stierer, 1985).

Parent's knowledge about literacy teaching in school

Only a minority of parents felt they knew how reading and writing were taught in school. Uncertainty was the norm. Thirty-one parents said they did not know how

writing was taught, and 29 said they did not know how reading was taught. Twenty-five parents were unsure about the teaching of both reading and writing. More information would have been welcomed, for instance parents made comments like,

"They don't tell us about what our kids are doing. If they'd tell us more, we'd be able to help them better".

"He did a lot of letters the wrong way round. I asked his teacher about it... You don't really find out from school about how they teach reading and writing... You don't always like to bother them, you think they've enough on with all the children."

"I think parents ought to be a lot more involved. I think parents should be told a lot more exactly how they teach them, then they could help them a lot better at home".

The high proportion of parents who felt they did not know how their child was being taught to read or write in school reveals a gap in basic communication from schools to parents, (this has been reported at nursery level by several studies, for instance, Smith, 1980, Tizard et al., 1981, Blatchford et al., 1982, Weinberger, 1986, Hannon and James, 1990). Those parents who themselves initiated contact with teachers, or elected to be on the premises at some time during the week, were the group of parents with the most knowledge about what their children were being taught in school. This group of parents included disproportionate numbers of middle class mothers who did not go out to work, and other mothers for whom the school as an institution fulfilled a social function. This meant that a sizeable majority of parents were excluded.

Teacher's knowledge of children's literacy learning at home

This study, and others (for example, James, 1987, Tizard et al., 1988), demonstrates that virtually all parents help their children with literacy. Some parents do it more consciously than others. Some have more confidence about what they are doing

than others. However, most teachers seem to have a very limited knowledge about what parents do with their children at home on literacy.

Teachers said that they did not know the sorts of reading or writing the majority of children did at home. They did not know about reading at home for 28 children, or writing at home for 27 children. For 22 children, the teachers said they knew neither about their reading or their writing at home.

Contact between parents and teachers

Parents were asked whether they talked with their child's teacher specifically about reading and writing. This was in addition to biennial, formal, parent-teacher consultations. The majority of parents (29) did talk with the teacher about literacy at other times. Of those that did not, most (nine of the 12) said they were not involved in some way at school. It appeared that lack of regular contact within school lessened the likelihood of dialogue between parents and teachers concerning children's literacy. Such dialogue between parents and teachers is important for children's literacy development, since increased contacts have been shown to have positive consequences for children's literacy performance, (Iverson et al., 1981, Snow et al., 1991).

Teachers tended to wait for parents to take the initiative in talking about literacy, (apart from formal consultations, made a legal requirement of schools, Department for Education, 1992). As a result, some parents received a great deal more information than others. Many of the parents who could most benefit from information were least likely to receive it (Toomey, 1989). This reliance on parental initiative was also reported in a number of studies of preschool education, (for example, Pinkerton, 1978; Tizard et al. 1981; Blatchford et al., 1982; Weinberger, 1986). Sixteen parents said it was they who initiated conversations about their child's literacy. This compared with six parents who said that teachers took the initiative, and in five instances, it was a combination of parents and teachers.

Typical comments from those parents who did talk with the teachers concerned their need to ask in order to find out any information,

"If it weren't for parent's day I don't think we'd really get to know much - unless you ask, which I do".

"If I've got any questions, I ask".

This form of contact relies on a level of confidence and some understanding of literacy learning, on the part of the parents. It appears that those parents who could have benefitted most from a dialogue with teachers on literacy were the least likely to receive it.

Teachers too reported that talk was usually initiated by parents, and often in response to problems perceived by the parent, for instance,

"If mum has the least little thing, she wants to be there to help and support. She's asked for advice, and done it".

"She asked me why he wasn't reading..."

"When we have a chat, she asks about her handwriting".

Those parents who did not have contact with the teachers concerning literacy expected that they would be told if there were any problems,

"They invite you to go in if you've a problem. I don't seem to, so I don't seem to bother them".

"I haven't spoken to the teacher (about reading or writing) an awful lot. Probably if they had been worried they'd have told me".

Similarly teachers felt there was less to say if there were no immediate problems. One parent commented,

"I couldn't go to the open day. His teacher wasn't worried about his work, so rightly or wrongly she thought it didn't matter that I missed it".

However, even for some children experiencing problems, dialogue between parents and teachers was limited, and often instigated by the parent. The underlying assumption for both teachers and parents was that if there were problems they would be addressed. Silence implied that everything was satisfactory. However, in reality, parents and teachers did not necessarily communicate much even if there were problems.

Parents of some children whose teachers thought they were having problems with reading and writing, seemed unaware that this was the case. Teachers thought 12 of the children were experiencing difficulties with reading. Parents also agreed that seven of these children were having problems. The Chinese parents did not know if their child was having problems or not. Four parents thought their child was not having problems with reading when their teachers thought they were.

Thirteen children were thought by their teachers to be having difficulty with writing, but only five parents of these children thought their child was having problems. This means that eight parents thought their child was not experiencing problems with writing when their teachers thought that they were.

Five children were considered by parents and teachers to be having difficulties with reading and writing. Three other children were considered by teachers, but not by their parents, to be having problems with both reading and writing. It may well be that some children could have been offered more support at home had their parents been made aware of the problems the children were facing in school.

Communication between parents and teachers tended to occur with regular contact. In this way, a select group of parents, often those who had the most confidence and

knowledge about literacy in the first place, had the most frequent discussions about literacy with the teachers in school.

A more consistent flow of communication with all parents could have helped with parents' confidence and also alerted teachers to some of the literacy learning occurring at home which may otherwise have been overlooked.

Encouragement to parents

Parents were asked whether they felt they had had any encouragement from school for reading and writing with their child.

Five parents made comments that showed they felt positive about how much they were encouraged by school, saying, for instance.

"Yes, I should say so. If you've got time, they have. There's all sorts. You can go in anytime and read with your child".

"Yes. There's the folders. We didn't used to take reading books home when we were at school. There's Reading Workshop".

These five parents all had regular contact with the school. Three helped out in class, one was a school parent governor, and one attended the schools' Reading Workshop regularly. Four were middle class parents, and the fifth was involved in organising activities in the local community. A further 19 parents felt encouraged in some way by school, through school books coming home, being invited to literacy activities in school, or talking with their child's teacher. One parent said she felt encouraged once she had taken the initiative to go and ask how her child was getting on with his reading. The teacher started sending additional reading material home in response to this. (This provides another example of dialogue between parent and teacher occurring as a result of the parent taking the initiative, as described above). One working parent commented that the school did arrange

events and encourage parents to help with their children's literacy in school, but that she personally had not been able to attend, and no alternatives had been offered,

"They've arranged different things to come and see, but usually at a time when I can't go".

While many parents did feel they had some encouragement from school for reading and writing with their children, over a third (17) did not feel encouraged. Comments made showed a certain reluctance on the part of teachers and parents to take up one another's time, for instance,

"You don't always like to bother them (the teachers). You think they've enough on with all the children".

"No...I don't know if it's because they've not been worried about her".

"I think they let me get on with it".

This limited opportunities for teachers to convey encouragement to parents, and for recognition on the part of both teachers and parents of what one another was doing.

Perceived discrepancies between home and school

Parents were asked if they felt there were discrepancies between the literacy learning of their child at home and at school. Some parents did not feel there were, and five were unable to comment because of lack of knowledge about what their child did at school. Of the comments made, the majority (13) were about **positive** attributes **home** had to offer. Four parents spoke of their child's free choice of activities, and that they were self-motivated at home. Three parents mentioned children being able to do things that fitted in naturally with daily life and arose from, "...things that happen in and around the family", such as using a dictionary, writing about visiting a relative, or reading selections from the paper. Three other parents felt the children encountered less distractions at home than in a busy

classroom. Two parents commented that children had access to books they could select for themselves. One said,

"I think she's limited at school, with her school books. Here, she can start with a book with only a few words in and then get a book with lots of words. In the books she brings home, there's only just one word added. She could do with something a bit more grown up".

In addition, one parent mentioned the sustained support parents could offer for reading experiences at home,

"At home, she's always got somebody to read to her. It can be one-to-one. The teacher has to spread herself a long way with 26 children in the class".

Five parents gave examples where they felt school could offer more than home. Three thought their child had a wider range of literacy experiences at school, one said her child would attempt spelling at school but not at home, and one would write stories rather than copy write at school but not at home.

In summary, many parents felt positive about the contribution home made relative to school towards children's literacy learning.

In theory, teachers had many positive things to say about the importance of parents' input into the children's literacy learning, mentioning, for example, their help with language development, their role as literacy role models, their ability to share an enjoyment of books, to point out print to the children, and to supply them with material resources and experiences. At the level of the individual parents, however, the teachers' information was limited, and led to a less optimistic view. When teachers were asked the question about the possible discrepancy between home and school, in only 15 families teachers felt that parents were working with their child along similar lines to school. Like some of the parents, teachers of ten children felt unable to comment because they did not know what happened at home. Teachers of four children said they thought there was 'nothing' happening at home in terms

of literacy. Twelve children were thought to be doing more at school, with comments for instance that the child probably did little at home other than possibly colour in, or copy write, or write stories. In only one instance did a teacher feel that home was offering something positive which school did not provide. This was a child with an older sibling, where family provision catered for a "...more mature interest level than school".

On the whole, teachers seemed fairly sceptical about what the children's homes could offer as literacy learning environments.

The teachers were asked specifically about the level of support they felt parents gave to the children's reading and writing. In two cases, teachers thought the home provided no support at all. For three other families, teachers thought there was no support for writing. In five families the teachers felt they did not know enough to comment. They estimated only a little support was offered by about a quarter of the parents (eight for reading and ten for writing), and some support from about a third of the parents (16 for reading and 12 for writing). It was only about a third of families which, in teachers' estimation, offered children a great deal of support for literacy (16 for reading and 10 for writing). Similar findings were reported by Farquhar et al., (1985), in a survey of the views of parents and teachers. Twenty-nine per cent of the reception teachers interviewed considered that few or none of the children's parents would provide adequate back-up at home to academic work in school, and 16% felt they did not have enough information about what happened in the children's homes to make a judgement. In contrast, the majority of parents of the same children said they did help their child with reading, writing and number at home, with many seeing this as part of their role as a parent.

The teachers tended to know little about what happened concerning literacy in the children's homes, and were not positive about the inputs they estimated were provided. Increased communication might have provided a clearer picture on which to base judgements.

CHAPTER 10

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PARENTS' ROLE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

A theoretical framework for looking at the role of parents in their children's literacy development was outlined in Chapter 4. It indicates factors which may influence how and why parents **provide resources, act as literacy models, and interact with their children on literacy activities**. The parental role in literacy involves attitudes and ideas that have been built up over time, as a result of a whole range of predispositions and external circumstances. Some of these may therefore be hard to access. The more obvious factors which influence the role of parents in their children's literacy development will be discussed here. Data here are more speculative and exploratory than elsewhere in this study.

Advice to parents

Parents were asked at the initial interview, when the children in the study were aged between three and four, whether they had received any advice or information about children learning to read and write, and ways of teaching this. On the whole they had not. Most of the ideas parents had about reading and writing development seemed to arise from their own observations, probably informed by their memories of literacy at school and at home, making comments such as, "I do what my mum and dad did with us", or, "I can only teach him what I know myself". Nearly a quarter of the parents (13), were unsure about what they should be doing about teaching reading and writing to their child. One of these parents articulated a need for advice at this stage,

"It's knowing what to do and how to approach it and how much to do at a time. I'm sure a lot of parents don't have confidence, and would like someone to say whether they're doing it right".

Ten parents said that they had had advice and information. Four had received advice for their older children, and had generalised from this. In two cases, they found that what they had been told was counterproductive. One parent had been advised not to help with reading and writing at home as this could lead to confusion, and the other was told that their child, who was not yet reading, would do so "when she's ready". This left the parent more unclear than before. She explained, "if they don't send anything home, you don't know what stage they're at". Advice perceived as more helpful came from two relatives who were primary school teachers, one who was encouraged to start her daughter reading early by her own mother, and one who, as a foster mother, had seen a programme about reading on television, and then shared the information. One parent had been advised by the local health visitor, because her child had delayed speech development, to get some books and sit and read with her. Finally, one parent had been a reception teacher herself, and used this experience to inform what she did with her child. There was an additional parent, who, while saying she had not received advice, had taken the prompt to read to her child when a relative gave him a book just before his first birthday,

"Before he was one I never dreamt of reading to him, but when my auntie gave him a book, it set us off".

This demonstrates the impact such a 'suggestion' can have.

Although all parents were asked, only three specifically mentioned obtaining information about literacy from books. The publications were Carol Baker (1980), Reading through Play, purchased from the Early Learning Centre, a book about helping your child learn to write, from Books for Children bookclub, and Glenn Doman (1964), Teach your baby to read, in this case borrowed from a relative. This relatively low number of parents reading about children's literacy was also reflected in Clark's (1976) study of early readers, where only nine of the 32 mothers had read books on reading, and many of these were teachers themselves.

Parents were asked if they were confused about whether to use 'ah', 'buh', 'cuh', or 'aye', 'bee', 'cee' with their children. Of the fifty responses, nearly half (23) registered confusion, for example, as one parent said,

"I don't know whether to teach him 'es, aye, em' or 'suh, ah, muh'. I don't know how they go on at school. I didn't want to learn him wrong."

These uncertainties (also reported by James, 1987) undermined the parents' confidence.

By the time the children were aged seven (end of Key Stage 1), only seven of the 41 parents questioned mentioned having specifically received advice about children's reading and writing. Most parents used their own experience and ideas to inform how they interacted with their child on literacy. As one parent expressed it,

"What I know is because I've used my own initiative. I've always thought it was important that they should read and write".

Five of the seven parents who said they received advice said this was from teachers. Four were parents of middle class girls - the group of children least likely to be having problems with literacy. The fifth was the parent of a child who attended a school that was proactive in enlisting the help of all parents in school-initiated literacy, sending reading books home each night, and arranging meetings with individual parents to explain aspects of literacy to them. The remaining two parents, as when the children were aged three and four, mentioned advice from other family members (who were themselves teachers). These were also parents of middle class girls.

It is quite likely that there was some under-reporting of advice received, as it could well have been given informally, and may not have been consciously acknowledged. Nonetheless, these replies illustrate parents' perceptions of the level of advice given

about literacy, and they are in keeping with other data in the study on parents' knowledge about children's developing literacy.

From parents' responses to the question about advice, it seems that on the whole they were using their own initiative in the way they worked with their children on literacy, with little help, guidance or information either from printed materials or from other people. School was generally not seen as offering advice or information about literacy. Similar findings are reported by other studies (James, 1987, Hall et al., 1989).

Information about children's literacy

Over half the parents (21) felt that most of the information they had received about how children learn to read and write came from sources other than school, through family and friends, printed matter and the media. Of the parents who received information from school, 15 also mentioned other sources of information as well. Most frequently mentioned was what parents learned from children showing them and telling them about literacy (15 parents). For 10 parents, their primary source of information was from members of their family, and from other parents, saying for instance, "I ask my mum", or "...probably within the family, with my other sisters having older children". Ten parents gleaned information on literacy from books, and five from magazines. Eight parents mentioned information from television, both from documentary programmes such as 'Help your child to read' and '40 minutes', and from children's television programmes with a literacy content, such as 'Sesame Street'. Two parents could not suggest sources of information on literacy because they felt they did not know about it.

These findings are in keeping with other data from the study showing that only some parents receive information from school, and that, for most parents, information comes from informal channels of communication.

Ideas on reading to children

All but three of the parents were still reading to their children at seven (38). They were asked how long they anticipated doing this for. **Every** parent responded that they should carry on as long as their child wanted it or needed it. They said their prompt to stop reading would be the child being able to read proficiently on their own, or saying they did not want to be read to any more. Typical comments included,

"I think we'll go on reading 'til she gets to the age where she can do it herself with no problems. Once she can read herself, she'll want to do it herself".

"Probably when she gets fed up she'll tell us".

"I will read as long as he wants me to".

"(I'll read to him) until he can read a book himself".

"That's up to her. I'll always encourage it".

This shows how committed the parents were to supporting their children's reading, by providing props and encouragement until such a time as their children would no longer need it.

Reasons for sharing books

Of those parents who looked at books with their seven-year-old children, the majority (30 of the 41) offered positive explanations of why they shared books. They mentioned helping their children learn, giving them experience and information, encouraging them with reading, doing it for enjoyment and relaxation, and as a way of spending time together. Two parents said they shared books because their child asked them to. Of those parents offering less positive

explanations, two shared books but could not explain why, and one did so because she was worried about her child not reading. Two parents of failing readers had a very narrow view of the purpose of sharing books with their child. Both interacted with their child on labelling and naming pictures (Snow and Ninio, 1986), rather than exploring narrative, and were prescriptive in the way this was done. They explained,

"He spots pictures in it (i.e. the book). 'Here is a tree. Here is Jane in a tree. Here is a toyshop. Peter is in a toyshop'. He can see it in the picture. I have to give him something simple".

"To tell her what's happening in the picture. She likes to tell me what's happening".

Both these parents were limiting their children's interactions with books. In their efforts to help they had over-simplified the task of 'reading', and in so doing, made it potentially harder for their children to learn effectively the lessons that books can teach (Meek, 1988).

The benefits of literacy

Parents were asked a general question about the benefits they thought that children could get from learning to read and write. Most parents could articulate a number of reasons, including to gain knowledge, to communicate, to find one's way about and interact with print in the world, and for pleasure. A few parents mentioned how problematic life could be without literacy skills, saying, for instance,

"When they go out they can do their shopping. I don't know how they go on when they can't read and write".

"Round here I've seen a lot of children who are illiterate. They just hang around, and it's an awful waste".

"...It's not until you go to a foreign country or pick up a book in a language you can't read, and you realise this is how it feels to people who can't read".

A minority of parents did not express such views. Five said they did not know what benefits there were for their children (four were parents of failing readers), and two replied that the benefit in reading and writing was for its own sake. One gave the benefit as "practice" (06), and the other, "I think they learn to enjoy school more when they can see what everyone else is doing". (27)

So while the benefits of literacy were apparent to the majority of parents, this was not the case for a small minority.

Parents' experiences of family literacy

While all the children in the sample were helped with literacy in some way by their parents, and the majority were read to, only half the parents (21) recollected having had these experiences themselves as children. When they did, it may well often have been to a lesser extent. Parents commented, for instance,

"My mother (read to me). Not like we do it with them, not to the same extent. When I was at school, parents weren't consulted. If anybody's mother came up to school it was an event".

"Not as much as we do. I don't think they did at that time".

Parents provided a range of examples of the literacy activities undertaken with parents and other family members, such as,

"I was read to a lot, including at bedtime".

"I suppose my mum read to me, but not writing. I can remember writing stories with my grandparents every weekend. My grandfather gave encouragement with story writing. He pointed things out - this could be better, and he would buy a new exercise book and pencil".

"Yes, with my mother, She used to sit hours. She had ten kids and she'd leave her work and sit with us. My mother used to like to read and write. I think that's where I get it from".

"I used to read a lot with my father. We read newspapers back and front. Mum was the one who played games to do with reading".

"Grandad looked at Rupert books with me. I can remember when I was three, the books had things to do in them. My grandfather made a cage out of straws for me out of my Rupert book".

"Yes, with my dad more than my mum, and three older sisters. They used to read a lot".

Many children in the sample had similar experiences at home.

In contrast, there were many parents could not remember any involvement in literacy activities. Where explanations were suggested, these were that large families implied lack of time, and made interaction with individual children difficult (two families had seven children, one nine, and one eleven, none of the children in the sample were from such large families), and parents being busy at work (three instances). In addition, the Chinese mother could not remember literacy activities at home, and explained,

"My parents couldn't read or write in English".

Parents were not asked whether they had literacy difficulties themselves, but four of the parents volunteered that they had problems with reading and writing. All their children were amongst the group experiencing difficulties with literacy.

Highlighting these generational patterns of family literacy help to show the extent of change and replication in patterns of behaviour, and also give an indication of where support might usefully be given.

Parents reading for pleasure, and expectations for their children

The majority of parents (29) said that they read for pleasure themselves. Of the twelve that did not, three had children who were amongst the poorest readers in the sample, and all but three of the children of these parents had some problems with reading or did not enjoy it much. When parents were asked about their literacy expectations for their children, the only five parents who did not think their child would make much use of reading and writing in the future did not read for pleasure themselves. Two parents said their child had not shown much interest in literacy. One child was described as being, "not academic, more technical". For him, reading and writing were described as being a

"...necessary evil. I don't think he'll ever gain pleasure from it. He finds it boring".

The second parent also thought it was not likely that her child would be much involved in literacy later because,

"...at the moment he doesn't seem all that interested".

Two parents thought their child would not use much literacy later, and one expressed a very narrow view of the purpose of literacy,

"Only at school. I'll keep on with his reading. I'd like him to go through the books I've bought him, otherwise it would be a waste of money".

These views provide an example of the inter-relationship of parent and child perspectives. Expectations and attitudes towards literacy occur at a family level, rather than residing solely within individual family members. Understanding the parents' stance towards literacy can help with an understanding of the child's literacy perspective.

In summary, data from this study suggest that most of the ways in which parents interact with their children on literacy are intuitive and come from well-embedded child-rearing practices within homes and social networks. Schools had made an impact, and some information about new methods of literacy teaching had penetrated into children's homes, but this was by no means uniform, nor was information always fully understood.

Parents tended to be keen to help their children with literacy, in many ways they were able to, and in most cases were reasonably clear why they wished to do so. They were, however, fairly unsupported in this from professional agencies, often with children with the most difficulties receiving the least support at family level.

CHAPTER 11

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EARLY HOME EXPERIENCES AND LATER LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Since this study was longitudinal, it was possible to explore whether any of the children's early literacy experiences at home pre-nursery, and at school entry, were predictive of their later literacy development.

Outcome measures

Outcome measures, when compared with predictor variables, could be used for two different analyses in this study. One would provide an overview of the entire population of the study, so that generalisations could be made about relationships between certain predictor measures and outcomes. This was the case for the outcome measures already discussed in Chapter 8.2, namely, the level of the child's reading book, their Young's Group Reading Test score (Young, 1980), their combined writing score, and their English SAT level (SEAC, 1991, 1992). The second involved identifying those children having problems with literacy, to see whether factors from an earlier stage could be identified as providing predictors of later literacy difficulties. In terms of future practice, it was important to identify those children having problems. If some of the reasons for their problems could be understood, this could suggest ways to prevent or alleviate such problems in the future. It was for this purpose that the composite measure 'having literacy difficulties' was devised.

A composite measure - 'Having Literacy Difficulties'

The children whose scores fell within the bottom third for each measure were identified. A few children were in this category for one measure only. However, it was those children whose scores fell within the bottom third on **two or more** of the four outcome measures described in Chapter 8.2 (level of reading book, YGRT

quotient, combined writing score, and SAT English level), who were deemed to be having particular difficulties with literacy. There were 14 children in this group. They were also those immediately recognisable by their teachers at seven (and by myself) as those having problems.

A description follows of how the children fared on the four other outcome measures, to give an indication of the literacy performance of this group of children.

The level of reading book for these children at the end of Key Stage 1 is shown in Table 29. For comparison with the levels for all the children, see Table 20.

To help to show what this reading level actually meant in the classroom, a couple of examples of the type of books these children were reading at school are shown in Figures 15 and 16. These were both books being read by children 'having literacy difficulties' at the time of the data collection. These contrast with books read by some of the other children in the same year group, see for example, Figures 12, 13 and 20.

Table 29
Level of reading book for children
'Having Literacy Difficulties' at age
seven (end of Key Stage 1)

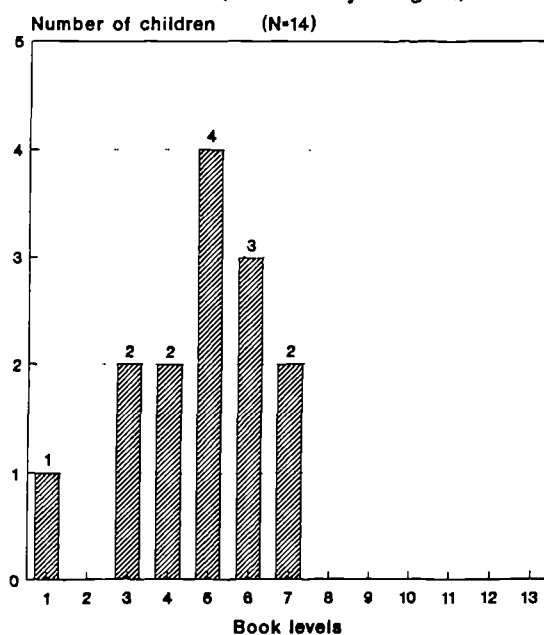
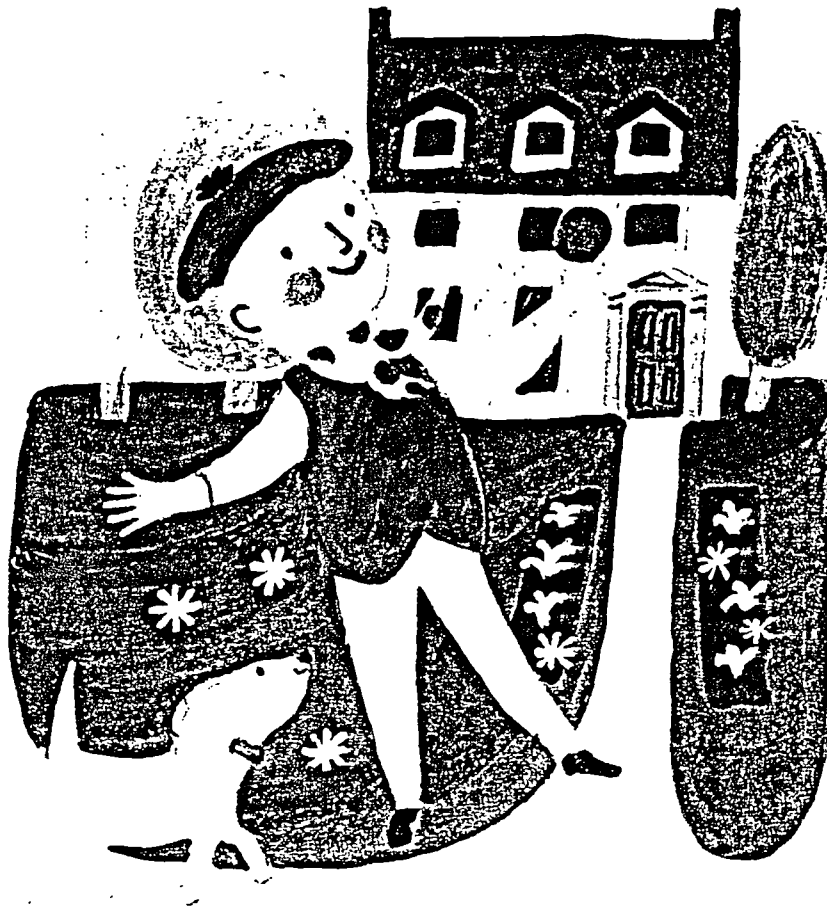


Figure 15 Sample page from a text read at school by a child 'Having Literacy Difficulties', age seven (end of Key Stage 1): The dog and the ball



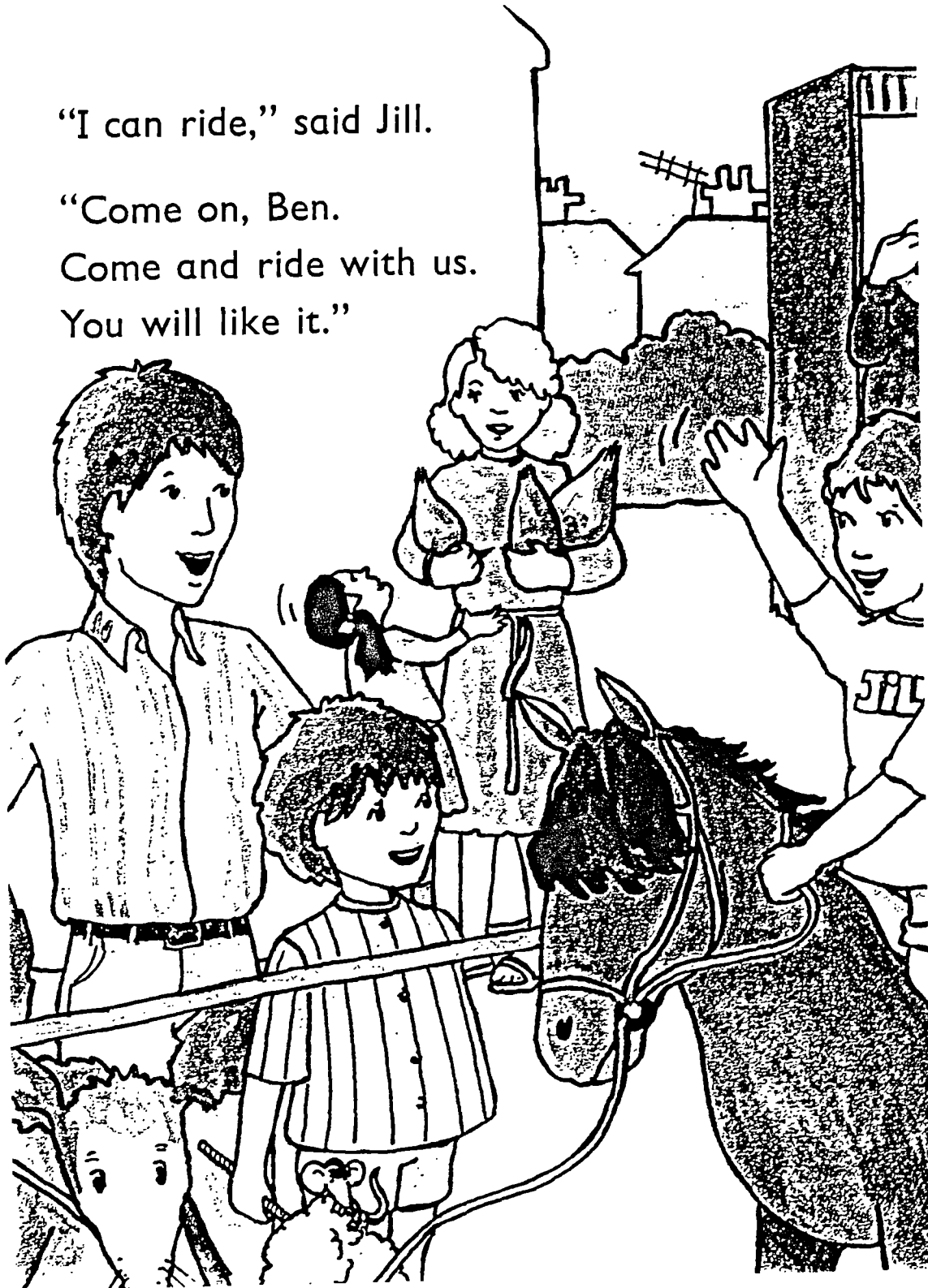
Roger Red-hat
had a red ball.
A little white dog went by.

|

Figure 16 Sample page from a text read at school by a child 'Having Literacy Difficulties', age seven (end of Key Stage 1): Ben and Sparky

"I can ride," said Jill.

"Come on, Ben.
Come and ride with us.
You will like it."



The YGRT scores for this group of children appears in Table 30. This compares with scores for all the children shown in Table 21.

The combined writing score for children having literacy difficulties is shown in Table 31. For comparison, the writing scores for all the children appears in Table 26.

Table 30
Young's Group Reading Test Scores for
Children 'Having Literacy Difficulties'
at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)

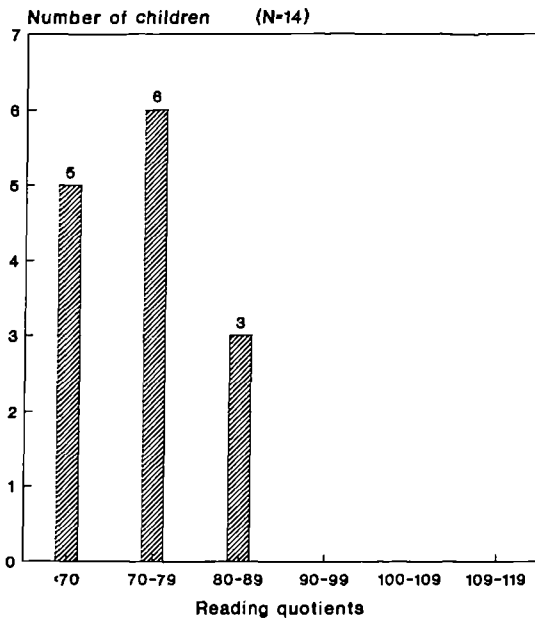
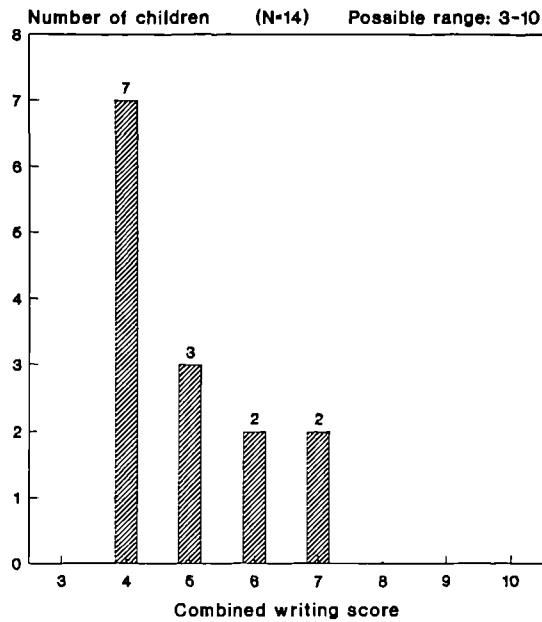


Table 31
Combined Writing Score for Children
'Having Literacy Difficulties' at age
seven (end of Key Stage 1)



To show the sort of writing produced by the children experiencing literacy difficulties, a few examples of story writing and expository writing are given in Figures 17 and 18.

In terms of the children's SAT English Level, all were at Level 1, apart from one child, who was at the stage of "working towards Level 1".

Having identified this group, it was possible to compare their measures on a number of predictor variables with those of the remaining children, using comparison of group means (ANOVA) and Chi-squared analyses, to find which predictor variables were most strongly differentiated children 'having literacy difficulties' from others.

Figure 17 Examples of story writing for children 'Having Literacy Difficulties', age seven (end of Key Stage 1). (Words supplied on request).

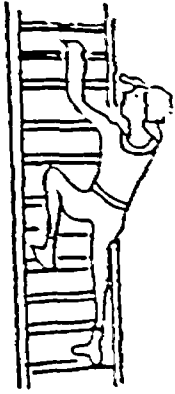
And they went in school
I like am school
It is very clean school
A bear went in the school

And they went in school
I like am school
It is very clean school
A bear went in the school

The children saw
the bear
it was white
it looked good
They liked the bear

The children saw
the bear
It was white
It looked good
They liked the bear

Figure 18 Examples of expository writing for children 'Having Literacy Difficulties', age seven (end of Key Stage 1). (Words supplied on request).



Model sentence

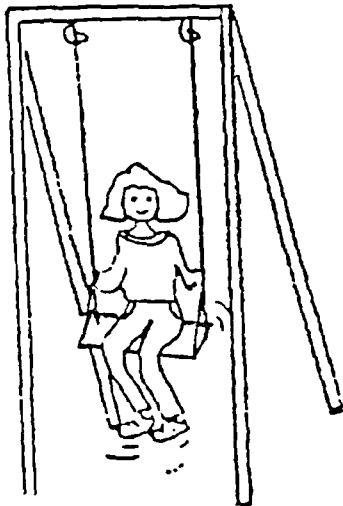
The man is climbing the ladder.

Children's sentences



The boy is written on
pip

The boy is written (writing) on
paper.



swing



I Or M a b @ by

Relationships between outcome measures

The five outcome measures all correlated very highly with one another, see the Summary Table in Table 32.

Table 32 Summary table of correlations between the 5 outcome measures of literacy performance, children age seven (end of Key Stage 1).

No. of cases: 42

Reading Book Level				
.74 (a)	Combined Writing Score			
.71 (a)	.79 (a)	YGRT Score		
.65 (b)	.74 (b)	.67 (b)	SAT English Level	
.66 (b)	.77 (b)	.77 (b)	.65 (c)	Having Literacy Difficulties

(a) Pearson r

(b) Point Biserial Correlation

(c) Contingency Coefficient

All measures of association significant at $p < .001$.

This Table shows that children performing well on one measure were thus likely to perform well on another, and conversely, if they performed poorly on one measure, they were likely to perform poorly on another. These findings are in keeping with those of Wells (1987) and Tizard et al. (1988).

Predicting outcome measures

Having identified satisfactory outcome measures, they were examined in conjunction with predictor variables, to find if there were any significant relationships between them. A number of likely predictor variables were explored for each outcome measure.

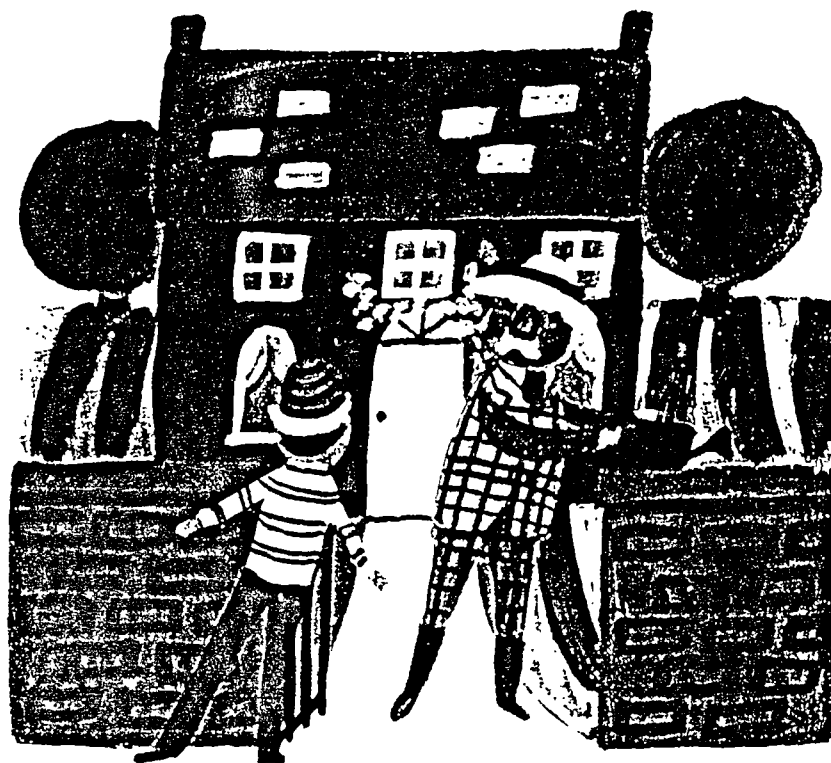
Level of child's reading book

Several home and child factors proved statistically significant here. It will be seen in the analyses to be reported that differences between the more able and less able readers showed variation that in most cases amounted to a **difference of at least two reading levels** (as defined by Moon and Raban, 1978). For each predictor variable, the poorer readers had a mean reading level typically of 4,5 or 6, compared with the more able readers who had a mean reading level of 7,8 or 9. These differences were of educational significance. This is because they made a distinct difference to the reading material the children encountered at school. Definitions from Moon and Raban (1975) help to show what this difference actually means in practice at classroom level. The definition of Levels 4,5 and 6 is,

"Less and less dependence on illustration and consequently text is fairly limited, **vocabulary range is narrow** within a particular book. New words should be obvious from the illustration. Ideally a **text form more akin to transcribed oral language form is used rather than the standard written form**". (p.78) (my emphasis).

In other words, children at this stage learned to read from texts which **differed** from the language used in most other books. This may well have caused confusion for the child who was struggling to make sense of what the activity 'learning to read' in school was about, as they encountered a discrepancy between what was read to them and texts they were presented with to read for themselves. An example of a text at this level read by a child in the study appears in Figure 19.

Figure 19 Sample page from a text at levels 4 to 6, read by a child age seven
(end of Key Stage 1): The big dog and the little white cat



Billy Blue-hat went by the house.
He looked in.
He saw the little old man.
“Go away!”
said the little old man.

In contrast, here is the definition of Levels 7, 8 and 9,

"Developmental reading'. Stories becoming longer, print smaller, style **conforming to standard written form, wider vocabulary content**. Most books are still short enough to be read at a sitting. Ideally these books are phrased in print format according to 'units of meaning'." (p.79) (my emphasis).

These children were more likely to be reading complete stories, and picking up a richer vocabulary than children reading at earlier stages. An example of a text at this level that a child was actually reading in the study, appears in Figure 20. The children's vocabulary before school entry, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, was significantly associated with their reading achievements at the age of seven (end of Key Stage 1). Thus those children who were more likely to have a wider vocabulary already were more likely to have it enhanced in school than children reading at a lower stage. This means that variation in children's school reading was likely to occur not just at a **skill** level, but also in terms of **content**. In this way, those children achieving at a lower level were doubly disadvantaged.

Pre-nursery predictors of reading book level

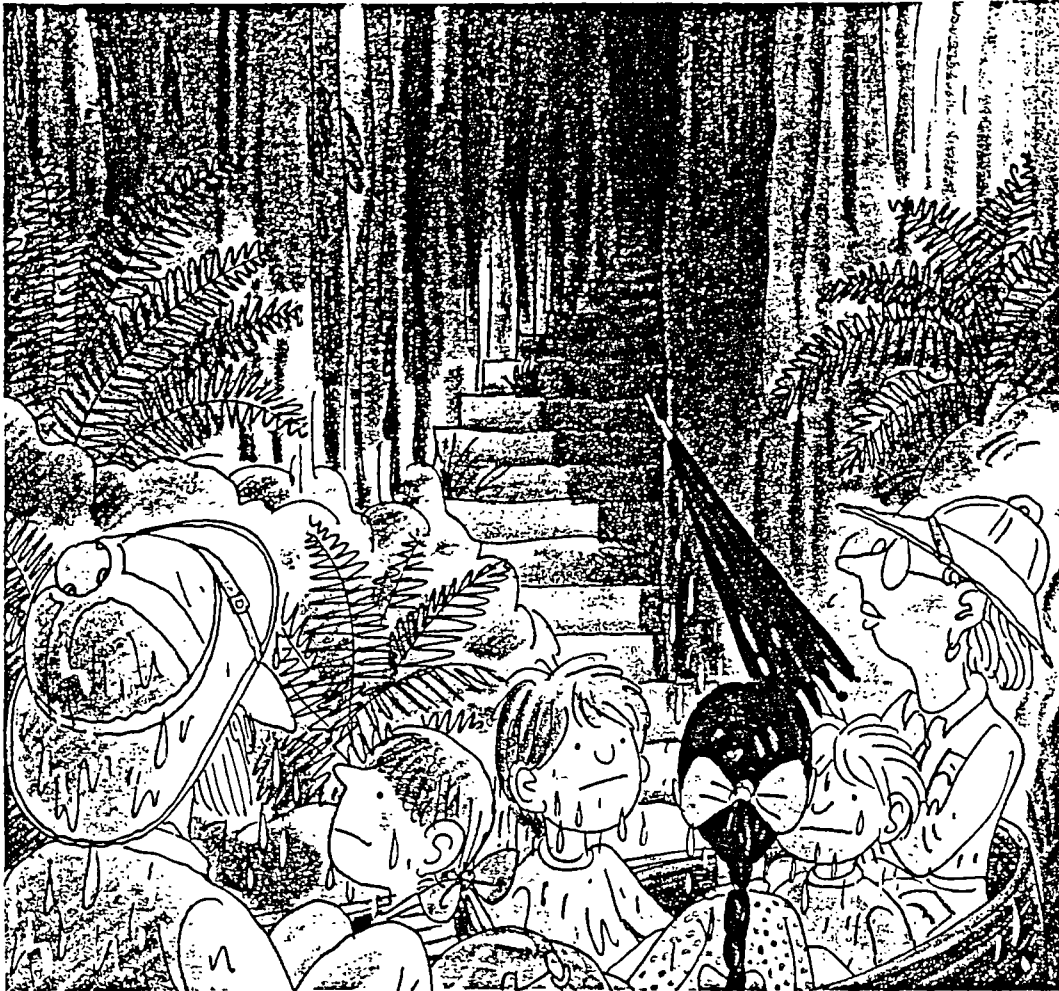
(summarised in Table A - Appendix 10)

From the interview data with parents when the children were aged 3 to 4, a number of variables proved significant in relation to children's later reading book level. They were analysed using comparison of group means (ANOVA).

All but eight of the 42 children³ had had a **favourite book** at the pre-nursery stage, and this was significantly related to the level of their reading book at age seven, (end of Key Stage 1), ($p < .01$). Children without a favourite book had a mean

³ predictor variables in this section will have data only for the 42 children who were part of the study until the age of seven (not the 60 children from the outset of the study).

Figure 20 Sample page from a text at levels 7 to 9, read by a child in the sample, age seven (end of Key Stage 1): Lost in the Jungle



Behind the waterfall there were some steps.
The steps went up and up for a long way.
Nobody could see how far they went.
'This may be the way to the Lost City,' said
the lady. 'Come on.'

reading book level of 4.9, whereas those with a favourite had a mean reading book level of 7.8, a difference of nearly 3 reading levels between them. This is of more than statistical significance. As has been indicated, this represented a very significant difference in **type** of scheme book the children were reading. It appears that having a favourite book indicated a greater familiarity with texts which gave children an advantage in reading at school. This 'process' variable was more significant than 'status' variables such as mother's employment or social class. At such a young age, having a favourite book would have been influenced by parents providing the opportunity to look at and read books at home, and encouraging the children to do so, (a point discussed further at the end of this Chapter).

Parents were asked about their own reading habits, and all but three **read items in addition to newspapers and magazines**. This was significantly associated with the level of the child's reading book, ($p < .01$). This implies that the parents' role as a literacy model had an impact on their child's literacy achievement, as did the literacy climate of the home, with a range of texts being available and used. There was a difference in mean reading levels between the two groups of children of almost four levels, with those children whose parents said they only read newspapers and magazines reading at a mean level of 3.7, and those whose parents read more having a mean reading book level of 7.5.

Whether the child's **mother was employed** outside the home had significant associations with later reading book level, ($p < .01$). Thirteen of the mothers were employed when the children were aged three to four (three in full-time employment, ten working part-time), and their children had a mean reading book level of 8.7, compared with the other children's mean reading book level of 6.6, a difference of over two levels. Mothers in employment were more likely to come from middle class as opposed to working class homes ($p < .05$), and in turn, social class was significantly related to mother's qualifications, ($p < .01$). This shows, that social class and educational attainment had a bearing on the mother's employment status.

However, **social class** as a variable in its own right, was less closely associated with the level of reading book at seven than the other factors mentioned so far, ($p < .05$). Twenty-seven children came from working class homes, and 15 from middle class homes. The working class children had a mean reading level of 6.5, and the middle class children a mean reading level of 8.5, still a significant achievement gap, if not quite as large as some of the other differences reported, such as having a favourite book, or parents reading from material other than newspapers and magazines. This finding is in keeping with other studies that have suggested it is '**process variables**' within families that have a stronger relationship with children's literacy performance than social class on its own (Share et al., 1983, Wells, 1985b, Toomey, 1989). Process variables include what happens between family members, and the children's active exploration of what it is to be literate.

Sensitivity to rhyme has been shown in other studies to be connected with later literacy performance (Maclean, Bradley, and Bryant, 1987, Goswami and Bryant, 1990). In the present study, the children's **knowledge of nursery rhymes** was used as one of the measures of rhyme sensitivity. About a third of the children (27) were said to know more than a dozen nursery rhymes at three, while the remaining children knew less. This was significantly associated with children's reading book at seven, ($p < .05$). Mean scores for children's reading book level varied from 6.7 for the children who knew the least rhymes, to 8.5 for children who knew the most, nearly two levels between them. For very young children, much of their knowledge of nursery rhymes was likely to come from family members repeating rhymes with them, and encouraging their attempts to repeat them on their own. Parents were also asked in retrospect, (because the importance of this was only recognised after the study had begun), to assess whether they thought their child was **sensitive to rhyme**. Only seven of the children were not thought to be sensitive to rhyme. This was also associated with level of reading book. ($p < .05$). This time there was a mean difference of more than two levels of reading book, with children not sensitive to rhyme reading books at a level of 5.4, while those who were sensitive had a mean level of reading book of 7.6.

It has already been shown that having a favourite book at three had a connection with the child's later reading performance. For this to happen, the child needed to have access to books, and one measure showing a relationship with the level of reading book here was whether the child was a **library member** at age three, ($p < .05$). It was the child's parents who would have chosen whether to enrol their child in the library. Only about a quarter of the children (11) were library members at this stage. Other studies have reported the significance of access to books via the library (Clark, 1976). In terms of difference in children's mean reading book level, for library members it was 8.7, and for the others it was 6.7, a difference of two levels. In this study, there was an association between library membership and social class (X^2 6.8 (1), $p < .01$), an association also reported by Morton-Williams (1964).

Parents were asked what sorts of material they read with their children. It was only if parents read from **story books** that a relationship was seen with the level of child's reading book at seven, ($p < .05$). Most children had this experience, only six did not. These six children had a mean level reading book score of 5.3, whereas the mean level reading book score for the rest of the children was 7.6, a difference of over two levels. This clearly shows that the parents' interactions with their child together with books had a positive influence on the child's later literacy development (also reported by Moon and Wells, 1979, Wells, 1985b). Those children with the least experience of books at home at age three to four (without a favourite book, and without being read to from story books), were the children faring less well with their reading at school at six and seven, compared with their peers.

School entry predictors of reading book level (summarised in Table B - Appendix 10)

When the children were about to start compulsory schooling, assessments were made of their literacy achievements (see chapter 6.2). Several of these related significantly to the child's reading book level at age seven, (the end of Key Stage 1). Looking at correlation coefficients (Pearson) among the predictor variables and the

level of reading book, the highest level of correlation was for the child's scores on **vocabulary tests**, taken just before the start of compulsory schooling. For the WPPSI vocabulary subtest (Weschler, 1967), $r=.55$, $p<.001$, and for the English Picture Vocabulary Test (Brimer and Dunn, 1963), $r =.53$, $p<.001$. These scores were associated with previous literary experiences at home, to be discussed later (see Figure 23), significance between vocabulary scores at school entry and later literacy achievement has been reported in other studies, (Tizard et al., 1988, Blatchford, 1991). Also highly significant was the child's ability to write their first name just before the start of compulsory schooling, and their level of reading book $r=.53$, $p<.001$ (point biserial correlation)⁴. Their ability to do so varied considerably, from the one child who could not do so at all, to the 17 who were judged able to write their names satisfactorily. The children's ability to write their own name at this stage was affected by their own inclinations and abilities, but also by the help and guidance of supportive adults. The adults with whom the children had most contact were their parents, and in their replies during the parent interviews, 33 said that they were helping their child to write their name. This was often for a specific purpose, such as contributing to greeting cards, or so the children could label their drawing and writing. Also highly significant was the relationship between whether the child knew some **letters** or not, and the level of reading book at seven, $r = .51$, $p<.001$. This has also been reported by other studies (Wells, 1987, Tizard et al., 1988, Blatchford, 1991). Since the children were rarely taught at home about print and letters outside of a specific meaningful context (see Chapter 5, 'Parents' interactions with their children'), or at nursery, knowledge of letters indicates something more complex involving the children's general familiarity and experience with print and letters.

These findings taken together imply that the achievements of the children at the start of compulsory schooling, relative to one another, remained reasonably constant

⁴ measures where the distribution of scores was not normal (see Chapter 6.2), were dichotomised for statistical analysis.

through to the end of Infants school. This has also been reported in other studies (Wells, 1987, Tizard et al., 1988).

Using comparison of group means (ANOVA), the differences in mean reading book levels between those children who did not know any **letters**, and those that knew at least some was 2.8, from the 13 children reading at level 5.2 to the 28 children reading at level 8.0, ($p < .001$). For those children able to **write their name correctly**, and those not being able to do so, the difference was 3.0. The 12 children who could not write their name correctly were reading at a mean level of 5.0, compared with the 29 children who could write their name, and had a mean level reading book score of 8.0, ($p < .001$).

Other variables were explored using comparison of group means. The children's ability to **copy a phrase** was found to be significantly related to later reading book level ($p < .05$). This assessment gave an indication of the child's familiarity with reproducing standard letter shapes. Blatchford (1991) reports similar findings. Mean reading levels varied from the 21 children who found it difficult to copy a phrase, and who had a mean reading level of 6.3, to the 20 children who could do so, with a mean reading level of 8.0. This indicates the interrelatedness of reading and writing.

Parents were asked how frequently children listened to stories at home. Those who did so frequently had a mean reading book level of 8.1 compared with a mean reading book level of 6.5 for children for whom this was an infrequent occurrence, $p < .05$. Other studies also found a significance between listening to stories and later reading achievement (Moon and Wells, 1979, Wells, 1958b).

The children's familiarity and enjoyment of books at home probably made the children more likely to choose to **look at books on their own** when they came to nursery. (The relationship between these factors is explored later, in Figure 21). Twenty-nine of the 42 children chose books on their own initiative, and this was significantly associated with the level of reading book at seven $p < .01$. Their mean

level reading book was 8.0, compared with the children who did not read of their own initiative who had a mean level reading book of 5.5, a difference of 2½ levels. There was a relationship between choosing to look at books in nursery, and being read to frequently at home (X^2 , 5.1(1), $p < .05$). Other studies have pointed to the connection between children being read to at home, and showing high interest in listening to stories in a preschool setting (Lomax, 1979, and Morrow, 1983). A few of the children (five) found it difficult to sit and **attend to a story in nursery**. There was an association between this and children's reading book level at seven, ($p < .01$). There was an even greater difference in mean reading book level here, of nearly 3½, those children who attended well to stories having a level of 7.6, compared with those who could not, of 4.2. It was about a third of the children (15) who **listened to stories at home** at least once a day. This experience was significantly related to their later reading book level. They had a mean level of 8.1, compared with a level of 6.5 for children who had stories read to them at home less frequently ($p < .05$). Wells (1985b) also found a relationship between young children being read stories at home, and their later reading achievement.

Children age seven (end of Key Stage 1) predictors of reading book level (summarised in Table C - Appendix 10)

Data here come from parent, teacher, and child interviews. A number of variables proved to be significantly related to the child's level of reading book.

Two-thirds of the children had access to a **computer** at home at this stage. Many of the parents gave examples of how this had helped with the children's literacy. This opportunity, provided by parents, made a significant impact on children's reading book level ($p < .001$). Those children without access to a computer had a mean reading level of 5.5, while those children using home computers had a level of 8.1, a difference of over 2½ levels.

The parent's perceptions and role were significant in relation to children's level of reading book. Only 12 of the 41 **parents** felt they knew **how reading was taught in**

school, and this was significantly related to the level of child's reading book, ($p < .01$). Similarly, Tizard et al. (1988) found that the amount of contact parents had, and their knowledge about what happened in school, was significantly related to children's school progress. There was a difference for children's mean level reading book of over two levels. Children whose parents knew about school reading practices had a mean reading level of 8.9, compared with the other children's of 6.6.

Parents were asked if they were **worried about how to help with reading**. Again it was parents of the weaker readers who expressed uncertainty. Nine parents were worried, and their children were reading at a mean level of 5.7, while the other children had a mean reading book level of 8.0, a difference of over two levels. This was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Not many parents felt they had been given **advice** about literacy by the time their child was seven. In a similar way to parent's knowledge about the school's reading practices, this was associated with the child's level of reading book, ($p < .05$). Only seven of the parents felt they had received such advice, and their children had a mean reading book level of 8.1, compared with the mean for the other children of 6.8.

Parent's knowledge of how reading was taught in school has already been reported. There was also a connection between their knowledge of **how writing was taught** in school and the level of reading book. Only 10 parents said they knew about writing in school, the association with level of reading book was significant, ($p < .05$). It is not surprising that the connection was stronger with reading, since the level of book measures reading competence, but that there was a connection with writing at all points to both the interconnectedness of reading and writing, and to school communication with parents having a relationship with children's progress. The mean level reading book for children whose parents knew about writing in school was 8.7, and for the remaining children it was 6.8, a difference of almost two levels.

Teachers were asked for a general assessment of the **level of support for reading** they felt parents gave their children at home. This varied from the 26 children thought to be receiving no help or not much help, who had a mean reading book level of 6.5, to 16 children thought to be receiving a great deal of help, who had a mean level reading book of 8.5, a difference of two levels. The relationship was statistically significant ($p < .01$). This finding shows that the less support teachers felt was available at home, the less well the children were performing with reading at school. As has already been discussed, many parents of poorer readers were unsure what happened in school and were not confident about how they could help.

At seven, most of the children at least occasionally **took books home from school** and read at home. Teachers were asked about which children did so, and they only mentioned four children that never did so. These children had been allocated lower levels of reading book, ($p < .05$). Their mean level reading book was 4.7, compared with a mean level for the children who did take books home of 7.5, a difference of $2\frac{3}{4}$ levels of reading book. Thus those children who could have most benefited from assistance with school initiated reading at home, were those whom the teachers thought were not being given this help.

In summary, parents of the poorer readers were more likely to report that they did not know how reading and writing were taught in school, that they were worried about how to help with reading, that they had not received advice about literacy, and their children were less likely to take books from school to practice at home. The more the children needed help and support from the combined efforts of home and school, the less likely they were to receive it. Other research (Toomey, 1989, Epstein, 1991) reports similar findings.

The children were asked if they were aware of **seeing someone reading** at home. Two-thirds (28) of the children said that they were. This sensitivity had implications for the children's own reading, as it was associated with the level of their reading book, ($p < .01$). There was a difference of over two levels in reading book between those children who were aware of someone reading at home (mean 5.9), and those

who did not see someone reading at home (mean 8.0). In this way parents and others at home acting as literacy models probably had an impact on the children's reading at school.

Only four children did not read to themselves at age seven. There was a relationship between those **children who read to themselves** at home at seven, and the level of their reading book, ($p < .01$). The four children who did not read to themselves were on the lowest levels of reading book, mean 4.0. The mean reading book level for the remaining children was 7.6, a difference of over 3½ levels.

In terms of the children's own reading, **how frequently they read** was significantly associated with reading book level. Nine children read less than once a week or not at all (mean level reading book scores of 4.2 and 6.0), while others read from a few times a week (10 children, mean level reading book of 7.7) to most days or daily (23 children, mean level reading book score of 7.9). This was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Only two children did not **write on their own** at home at seven. There was an association with this and the level of their reading book, ($p < .05$). The children who did not write had a very low reading book mean of 3.5, while the others had a mean of 7.4. This finding again shows the connections between reading and writing. The literacy climate of the home would tend to encourage or discourage children in these reading and writing activities.

Some variables that it was thought might be relevant failed to achieve statistical significance. These included whether the parent **deliberately** taught reading and writing to their child in the preschool years - it was the more contextually embedded literacy lessons that showed a relationship. Gender did not have a statistically significant bearing on level of reading book, nor did the number of terms in school, which means that the level of the child's reading book was not affected by the age at the time data were collected. Children's attitudes when asked about specifically, did not show a statistically significant effect on reading book levels, although their

attitudes as reflected in their behaviour did make a difference, for example, whether they chose to read or write themselves, and how often they did this. Neither whether children used literacy in their socio-dramatic play, nor whether the children were read to at bedtime were statistically significant. Some of the assessments at four and five did not achieve statistical significance. A test of children's concepts about print was not associated with later level of reading book, although measures such as letters known, and assessments of children's own writing gave an indication of their knowledge of print. The ability to match individual isolated words against a number of different possibilities was not statistically significant either. The frequency with which children read aloud to parents at home was not significantly related to reading book level (a similar finding to Tizard et al., 1988), although it did show a relationship with other outcome measures (in keeping with the findings of Hewison and Tizard, 1980, and Hannon, 1987).

Taken as a whole, these findings point to the considerable impact that parents make on their children's literacy development, and the children's efforts to be active literacy learners, in their early years before school.

Young's Group Reading Test (YGRT), quotients

Children were assessed at age seven (end of Key Stage 1), using Young's Group Reading Test (Young, 1989), and the results analysed. Reading quotients were used which took account of the children's age.

From the table of reading quotients (Young, 1989, p.7), it is apparent that a difference of one point represents a difference of approximately one month. A difference in reading quotient of ten points is roughly equivalent to one year's difference in reading attainment. Using this as an indication of differences in children's reading performance, a number of predictor variables were explored using Pearson correlation coefficients point biserial correlation and comparison of group means (ANOVA). A similar, but not the same, pattern to that reported for level of children's reading book was found. The two measures correlated significantly

with one another ($r = .71$). What is of most interest here is the **extent of the difference** in children's reading quotients which often meant a difference of a year or more in reading attainment. Since these children had only been in school for three years at the most, this is educationally very significant.

Pre-nursery predictors of YGRT scores

(summarised in Table D - Appendix 10)

At this stage, the findings were fairly similar to those reported for level of reading book. Again of greatest significance was whether the child had a **favourite book** ($p < .01$). The mean YGRT score for children with a favourite book was 89.9, compared with 76.6 for children without a favourite, a difference of means of 13.3, representing a difference in reading attainment of **well over a year**. **Social class** exerted a stronger influence on YGRT scores than it did on level of reading book ($p < .01$). The difference in means was 10.4, with middle class children having a mean score of 94.0 compared with a mean score of 83.6 for working class children. Again this status variable was less significant than the process variable of whether the child had a favourite book or not. Whether the child was read to from **story books** or not gave a difference in means of 12.6, indication once more over a year's difference. Those children who were read to from storybooks had a mean score of 89.1, compared with a mean score of 76.5 for those six children not read to from story books ($p < .05$). Whether the child was a **library member** or not was significant ($p < .05$), with a difference in mean scores of 10.5. Although the number of rhymes the child knew was not significant, the other measure of whether the child was **sensitive to rhyme** did prove significant ($p < .05$), with a difference in mean scores of 9.8. **Mother's employment** was significant ($p < .05$), but did not account for as much variation as social class, the other significant status variable, the difference in mean scores between children whose mothers were in employment and those who were not was 7.9. Parents' reading material was not significantly associated with YGRT.

School entry predictors of YGRT scores

(summarised in Table E - Appendix 10)

A number of assessments at school entry correlated highly significantly with YGRT scores. Looking at correlation coefficients, as with the level of reading book, the EPVT correlated with a similarly high significance level with YGRT scores ($r=.56$, $p<.001$), although this time the other test of vocabulary, the WPPSI, did not achieve such a high level of significance ($r=.37$, $p<.01$). Nevertheless, the correlation with EPVT again confirms children's **vocabulary** at school entry as being significantly associated with reading achievement at age seven. As with the level of reading book, the **number of letters** the children knew, and their ability to **write their first name**, had similar high correlations, ($r=.53$ and $.50$). In addition, whether the children chose to **read books on their own** at nursery and how well they could copy a phrase also correlated highly with YGRT scores ($r= .53$ and $.48$).

A number of variables proved highly significant ($p<.001$) when investigated using comparison of group means (ANOVA). These were whether the child could **attend to a story in nursery**, with mean scores varying by 18.5 points, from 71.0 to 89.5, signifying the equivalent of almost two years' variation in scores. The differences for choosing to **look at books on their own** in nursery or not was 13.8 (a mean score of 91.6 for children who did, and 77.8 for children who did not), **knowing some letters** or none was 13.4 (mean scores of 91.2 and 77.8), and **writing their first name** correctly or not was 12.9 (mean scores of 90.7 and 77.8). The other variable that was significant when analysed using comparisons of group means was whether the child could **copy a phrase** without mistakes (mean score 92.7) or not (mean score 81.5), with a difference in mean scores of 11.2, ($p<.001$). The relationship between writing and later literacy achievement was also found by Blatchford (1991).

These findings illustrate just how closely children's literacy abilities and behaviour before compulsory schooling are indicative of their later performance at age seven (end of Key Stage 1).

Children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1) predictors of YGRT scores
(summarised in Table F - Appendix 10)

Parents were asked to give examples of children's **literacy learning during everyday activities**. Almost all parents (38) were able to do so. However, four parents did not, and these all had children who had obtained the lowest score on the YGRT, of 69.0. (This score had been obtained by five children in total). The mean score for the remaining children was 89.3 ($p < .001$), a difference in mean scores of 20.3. The parents' lack of examples was indicative either of their not incorporating literacy into everyday activities, or their lack of awareness of doing so. In either case their response seems to be illustrative of the environment for literacy in these children's homes which had an adverse effect on the children's YGRT scores. This was also reflected in the teachers' assessment of the **level of support for reading** at home, which showed differences in mean scores of 82.5 for children not thought to be receiving help at home, compared with 95.1 for those children thought to be receiving a great deal of help, a difference of 12.6 ($p < .001$). **How frequently the child** read to themselves at home varied from never, with a mean YGRT score of 73.4, to most days and daily, with means scores of 91.8, a difference of 18.4 ($p < .01$). Parents saying they knew **how reading was taught in school** was significant in relation to level of reading book, ($p < .01$), with a difference in mean scores between children whose parents said they knew about the school's reading and those that did not, of 11.7. Parents receiving **advice** about literacy was related to YGRT scores ($p < .05$). The difference in mean scores of those parents receiving advice and those that did not was 10.1. Parents' knowledge of how **writing was taught in school** was significant ($p < .05$). The difference in mean scores for children whose parents knew about writing and those who did not was 8.5. Those children from families where a **parent or an older sibling had literacy difficulties**, had lower mean YGRT scores (80.1), compared with a mean level of 90.0 for children from families without literacy difficulties ($p < .01$). Whether the child **wrote on their own** at home was also significantly associated with YGRT ($p < .05$). The difference in means was again high, at 19.2. Use of home **computers** had a significant relationship with YGRT scores ($p < .05$), with a difference in mean scores of 8.0.

For comparison with other studies which investigated children practising reading at home and its effect on their reading development (Hewison and Tizard, 1980, Hannon, 1987), an analysis of the frequency with which children read aloud at home and its relationship with outcome measures was conducted. Whether children read aloud at home either everyday, or nearly every day, or did not do so, was not significantly associated with level of reading book, but it was significantly associated with YGRT score ($r=.26$, $p<.05$). This was less significant than findings in relation to standardised reading test scores from the studies cited above but more significant than the findings of Tizard et al. (1988), who did not find a relationship between the frequency of children reading aloud at home and later literacy performance. They speculate that this may be because other studies were conducted in settings where there was more support for the parents and teachers. In this study while there was a connection between frequency of reading aloud and literacy achievement later, it was not as clear a relationship as that exhibited by some of the other predictor variables. Further investigation is needed here.

Many of the results reported here were similar to those reported for the level of child's reading book. What was not significant was whether the child reported seeing someone read at home, whether the parent worried about how to help with reading, and whether the teacher reported that the child took books home from school. Nonetheless, it was clear that many home based variables were exerting an influence on children's scores on a standardised reading test.

Children's combined writing score

This is the one measure to specifically measure children's writing. Children's combined writing score measured the complexity of their story writing and the influence of stories upon it, the accuracy of their expository writing, and their level of independence as writers. The higher their scores, the greater their writing accomplishments. Differences of comparative means scores were not able to indicate differences of educational significance, as they had been for level of reading book and Young's Group Reading Test scores. Therefore correlational analyses

rather than comparison of group means (ANOVA) were used for analysis. A number of statistically significant differences were found when examining this outcome measure against likely predictor variables, indicating the possibility of predicting children's writing achievements from their previous experiences.

Pre-nursery predictors, combined writing score

(see Table M - Appendix 10)

It was with writing that **status** variables showed their greatest effect, with **social class** ($r=.47$) and **mother's employment** ($r=.46$) both being significantly associated with higher writing scores ($p<.001$). Also significant were whether the child had a **favourite book** ($r=.44$), and their **sensitivity to rhyme** ($r=.44$), and **how many rhymes** they knew ($r=.42$) (all significant at $p<.01$). Unlike with the level of child's reading book, and Young's Group Reading Test score, library membership was not significantly associated with later writing achievement.

School entry predictors, combined writing score

(see Table N - Appendix 10)

Predictors which proved significant at this stage were the child's **vocabulary** scores, (EPVT, $r=.69$, $p<.001$, WPPSI, $r=.48$, $p<.01$), whether the child could identify some **letters** or not ($r=.50$, $p<.001$), how well the child could **write their first name**, ($r=.49$, $p<.001$), whether the child **listened to stories at home frequently** ($r=.46$, $p<.001$), how well the child could **copy a phrase** ($r=.40$, $p<.01$), and whether they **chose to read books** in nursery ($r=.46$, $p<.001$). The relationship between the children's knowledge of literacy at this stage and their later writing attainment, shown here, was also found by Kroll (1983).

Children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1) predictors, combined writing score

(see Table 0 - Appendix 10)

At this stage there was a similar pattern of relationships to that reported earlier for Level of reading book and Young's Group Reading Test scores. Whether the child **stored reading and writing materials** as special entities, or kept them indiscriminately with other playthings proved significant. Those children who made a distinction between literacy resources and other playthings had higher writing scores ($r=.47$, $p<.001$). The parents and the family made a significant impact here. Whether the **parent knew how reading and writing were taught** in school ($r=.43$, and $.36$), whether they could **provide examples of literacy learning** occurring during day-to-day family activities ($r=.38$), whether the **parents said they read from more than newspapers and magazines** ($r=.39$), whether another **family member had literacy difficulties** ($r=-.36$), whether the child said they **saw someone else read** at home ($r=.37$), and whether the **parent read whole books through** to their child ($r=.33$) were all significantly associated with the child's combined writing score ($p<.01$). The children's own literacy habits may well have been influenced by the literacy environment of the home, and they had a bearing here. Whether the child **read out loud at home frequently** or not was significantly associated with their combined writing score ($r=.34$, $p<.01$), as was whether the child **wrote or read on their own at home** ($r=.42$, and $.30$, $p<.01$ and $<.05$ respectively). **How often the children read** ($r=.42$), and whether the **child took reading books home** ($r=.34$), were both significant ($p<.01$).

English Standard Assessment Task (SAT) Level

All children in the study were assessed on the Standard Assessment Tasks (SEAC, 1991, 1992) conducted at age seven (end of Key Stage 1). Since their scores for English were reduced to only four levels (working towards level 1, and levels 1, 2 and 3), there was not enough variation to conduct correlational or comparison of group means (ANOVA) significance tests. Their scores were therefore collapsed to form a dichotomous variable, performing below level 2, ($N=17$) (taken to be the

average score to be expected of a child at this stage, D.E.S., 1990), and those children performing at level 2 or above, (N=25). Chi-square tests and correlational analyses, where continuous variables allowed for this, were then conducted to see if their scores were significantly associated with any of the likely predictor variables already discussed when looking at the children's level of reading book, Young's Group Reading Test score, and combined writing score.

Pre-nursery predictors of SAT level

(summarised in Table G - Appendix 10)

There were only three measures to achieve statistical significance in relation to outcome measures at this stage. They were the process variables concerning the child's **sensitivity to rhyme** (X^2 , 5.5, (1), $p < .01$), and the **number of rhymes** the children knew (X^2 , 6.1, (2), $p < .05$). The status variable, **social class**, was also significant, (X^2 , 5.5, (1), $p < .01$).

School entry predictors of SAT level

(summarised in Table H - Appendix 10)

At school entry, the children's **vocabulary** scores correlated highly significantly with their SAT score at the end of Key Stage 1. For the EPVT, $r = .51$, $p < .001$, and for the WPPSI, $r = .39$, $p < .01$. The **number of letters** the child knew and whether the child could **write their first name** correctly were again highly associated with their English SAT score, (X^2 , 12.1 (1), $p < .001$ and X^2 , 9.9 (1), $p < .001$). Also significant was whether the child could **copy a phrase** correctly (X^2 , 9.2 (1), $p < .01$). The children's relationship with books and stories was significant. Whether they **listened to stories frequently at home** was significantly associated with their SAT level (X^2 , 6.0 (1), $p < .01$), as was whether they were able to **attend to stories in nursery**, and if they **chose to look at books** themselves in nursery, (X^2 , 5.8 (1), $p < .01$, and 4.8 (1), $p < .05$).

Children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1) predictors of SAT level

(summarised in Table I - Appendix 10)

A number of variables were significantly associated with the children's SAT English score at this stage. The parents' role in supporting the children's reading was important since their **knowledge of how reading was taught in school** (X^2 9.2,(1)), **how frequently the children read out loud to someone at home** (X^2 , 9.2 (3)), and teachers' assessment of the **level of support for reading at home** (X^2 6.6 (1)) were all significant at $p < .01$. Other significant variables related to the literacy environment of the home, including resourcing and types of interactions the parents were able to make. These were whether the child **saw someone reading at home** (X^2 , 3.6 (1), $p < .05$), **had access to a computer at home**, (X^2 , 3.6 (1), $p < .05$), whether the parent said they had received any **advice on literacy** (X^2 , 6.7 (2), $p < .05$), and whether they could give **examples of day-to-day literacy learning** occurring at home (X^2 , 4.1 (1), $p < .05$). The children's initiative in taking part in literacy activities was also important. It was statistically significant whether the **child read on their own at home** (X^2 , 4.1 (1), $p < .05$), and how often (X^2 , 9.5 (3), $p < .05$), whether they **stored literacy resources appropriately**, (X^2 , 5.1 (1), $p < .05$), and whether the teacher reported the **child took books home** from school to read at home (X^2 , 4.1 (1), $p < .05$).

Children 'Having Literacy Difficulties'

What is perhaps of most interest at classroom level is whether there are significant factors which are likely to predict literacy problems by age seven (end of Key Stage 1). It has already been explained how the 14 children experiencing literacy problems had been identified. As with the other outcome measures, there were a number of predictor variables which were significantly associated with whether or not the children were experiencing literacy problems by the time they were aged six.

Pre-nursery predictors of 'Having Literacy Difficulties'

(summarised in Table J - Appendix 10)

There were six predictors of later literacy problems that were significant at this stage. These were whether the child had a **favourite book** (X^2 5.6 (1), $P < .01$), whether they were read to **from storybooks** (X^2 5.5 (1), $P < .01$), the **number of nursery rhymes** the child knew (X^2 10.1 (2), $P < .01$), whether the parent thought their child was **sensitive to rhyme** (X^2 4.1 (1), $P < .05$), whether the **parent read other reading material** regularly besides newspapers and magazines (X^2 3.6 (1), $P < .05$), and the only status variable, whether the **mother was employed** (X^2 4.0 (1), $P < .05$). Thus process variables concerned with the reading environment of the home, and the child's response to rhyme, were the most accurate pre-nursery predictors for children's later literacy difficulties.

School entry predictors 'Having Literacy Difficulties'

(summarised in Table K - Appendix 10)

The most successful predictors were the children's **vocabulary score (EPVT)**, ($r = .58$, $p < .001$), how well they could **write their name** (X^2 , 15.3 (1), $p < .001$), **copy a phrase** (X^2 , 12.3 (1), $p < .001$), and whether they knew some **letters** or not (X^2 , 12.1, (1), $p < .001$). As is discussed at the end of this chapter, other factors contribute to the strength of the association here. Also significant were the children's **WPPSI vocabulary score** ($r = .41$, $p < .01$), whether they chose to **look at books at nursery** (X^2 , 8.7 (1), $p < .01$), and whether they were able to **attend to stories at nursery** (X^2 , 8.2 (1), $p < .01$). This pattern of relationships between predictor and outcome variables is very similar to that of the group as a whole.

Children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1) predictors 'Having Literacy Difficulties'

(summarised in Table L - Appendix 10)

A number of factors were significant here. **How often the child read at home on their own** proved statistically significant (X^2 , 15.0 (3), $P < .001$), as was whether or

not the children **read out loud** frequently to others at home (X^2 8.9 (1) $p < .01$). Those children having problems tended not to **read to themselves** as much as the other children, (X^2 , 5.8 (1), $P < .01$). Children who according to the teacher did not **take school reading books home**, were the ones most likely to be having literacy difficulties (X^2 , 5.8 (1), $P < .01$). The more problems they had, the less likely they were to read voluntarily, so making it hard to get the practice they needed to improve. It was parents of the children who were having difficulties who were less likely to know **how reading was taught in school** (X^2 , 6.4 (1), $P < .01$), and were therefore less in a position to know how to offer help with literacy problems at school. Their parents were also amongst those who were not able to provide **examples of day-to-day literacy learning activities at home** (X^2 , 5.8 (1), $P < .01$).

Resourcing of literacy was significant here. Children with literacy problems **owned** on average fewer books than the other children at this stage (X^2 , 7.1 (2), $P < .05$), were less likely to have access to a **computer** at home (X^2 , 3.9,(1), $p < .05$), and the children were more likely to **store books and writing materials** indiscriminately with other playthings (X^2 , 3.6 (1), $P < .05$). These factors were also reflected in the teachers' judgement that these children were **receiving less support for literacy** from home than the other children (X^2 , 3.6 (1), $P < .05$). In terms of the framework of resources and opportunities, literacy models, and interaction between parent and child on literacy activities, the children with literacy difficulties tended to have had ^{fewer} inputs than the rest of the children in the study.

In summary, Tables M, N, and O (in Appendix 10) show the relationships of predictor variables, at the three separate stages in the study, (pre nursery, at school entry and at the end of Key Stage 1), across the five outcome measures at the end of Key Stage 1.

Interrelationships between predictor variables and their relationship to outcome variables

While conducting these analyses, I became very familiar with the data. There appeared to be patterns of association between variables, which could possibly explain connections between the variables at home, and later literacy achievements. The relationship between measures at school entry and outcome measures when children were aged seven, (at the end of Key Stage 1), has already been described above, and summarised in Tables M, N and O (Appendix 10). For the most part, these correlated significantly with one another. I became curious to know what contributed to the children's literacy achievements at school entry, for instance, what it was that contributed to the number of letters the children knew, and how well they could write their first name, at school entry. What follows is a speculative attempt to convey an overall picture of the data. It was not possible to use more sophisticated and elegant statistical techniques, such as stepwise regression, or LISREL because the data set was relatively small, some of the data were not normally distributed, and some variables could be analysed using parametric tests while others could only be analysed with non-parametric tests. Instead, to examine the data as systematically as possible, I took the measures from school entry, described in Chapter 6.2 (treated here as outcome measures), and I looked in turn at which predictor variables correlated significantly with them, (using Pearson's r , point biserial correlation, and contingency coefficients). If any reasonable level of significance was found, this predictor variable was then examined in relation to other predictor variables to see if any relationship between them was apparent. In this way, inter-connections with children's prior experiences at home were found, to explain children's reading experiences, writing performance and vocabulary scores at school entry. There were links, for instance, between the child having a favourite book, the age they were first read to at home, how often they were read to, library membership, and book ownership. Relationships found in this way are shown in Figure 21 for reading, Figure 22 for writing and Figure 23 for vocabulary.

Figure 21 Children's experiences of reading at school entry and their connection with predictor variables from the children's background, pre-nursery: a tentative model.

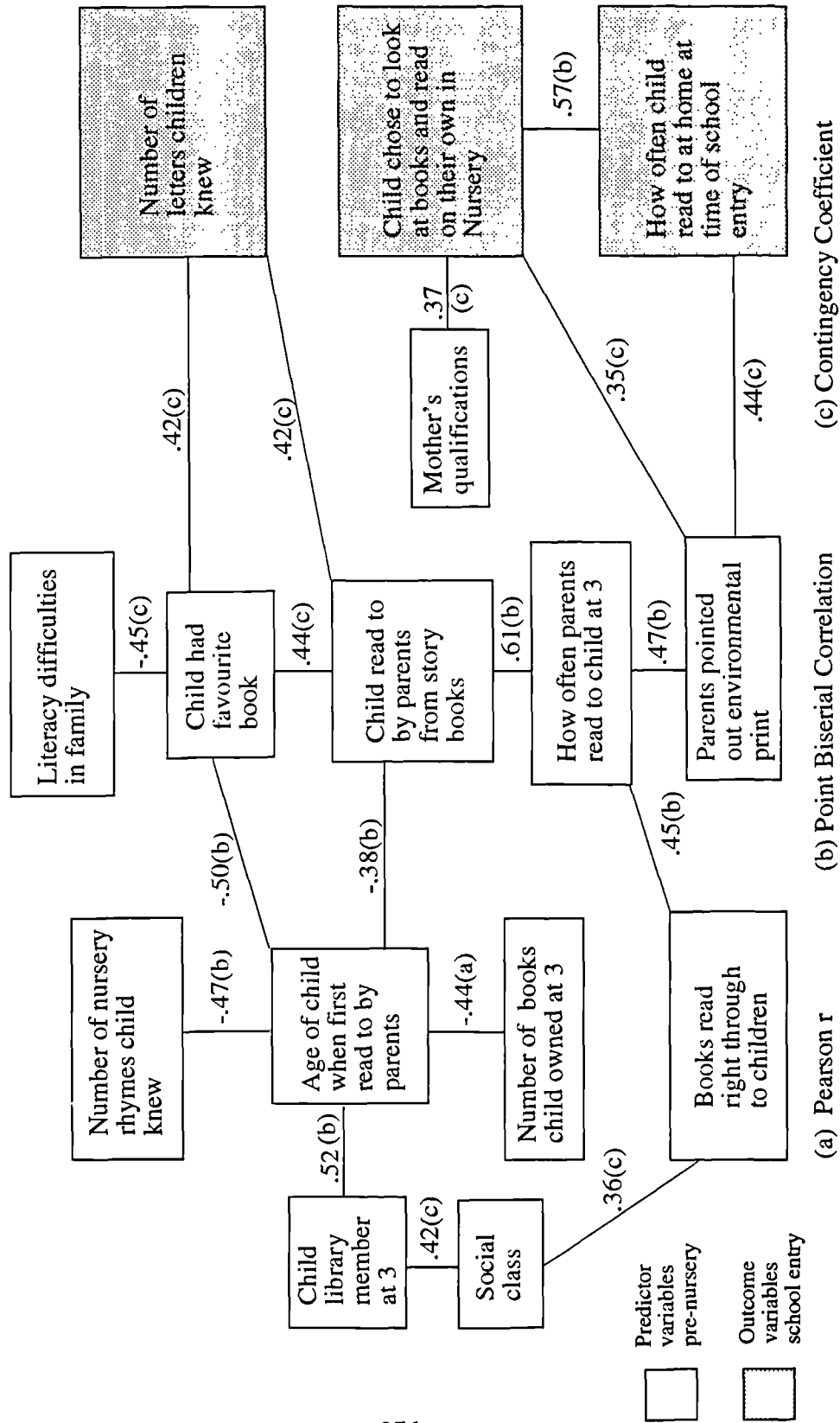


Figure 22 Children's writing performance at school entry and their connection with predictor variables from the children's background, pre-nursery : a tentative model

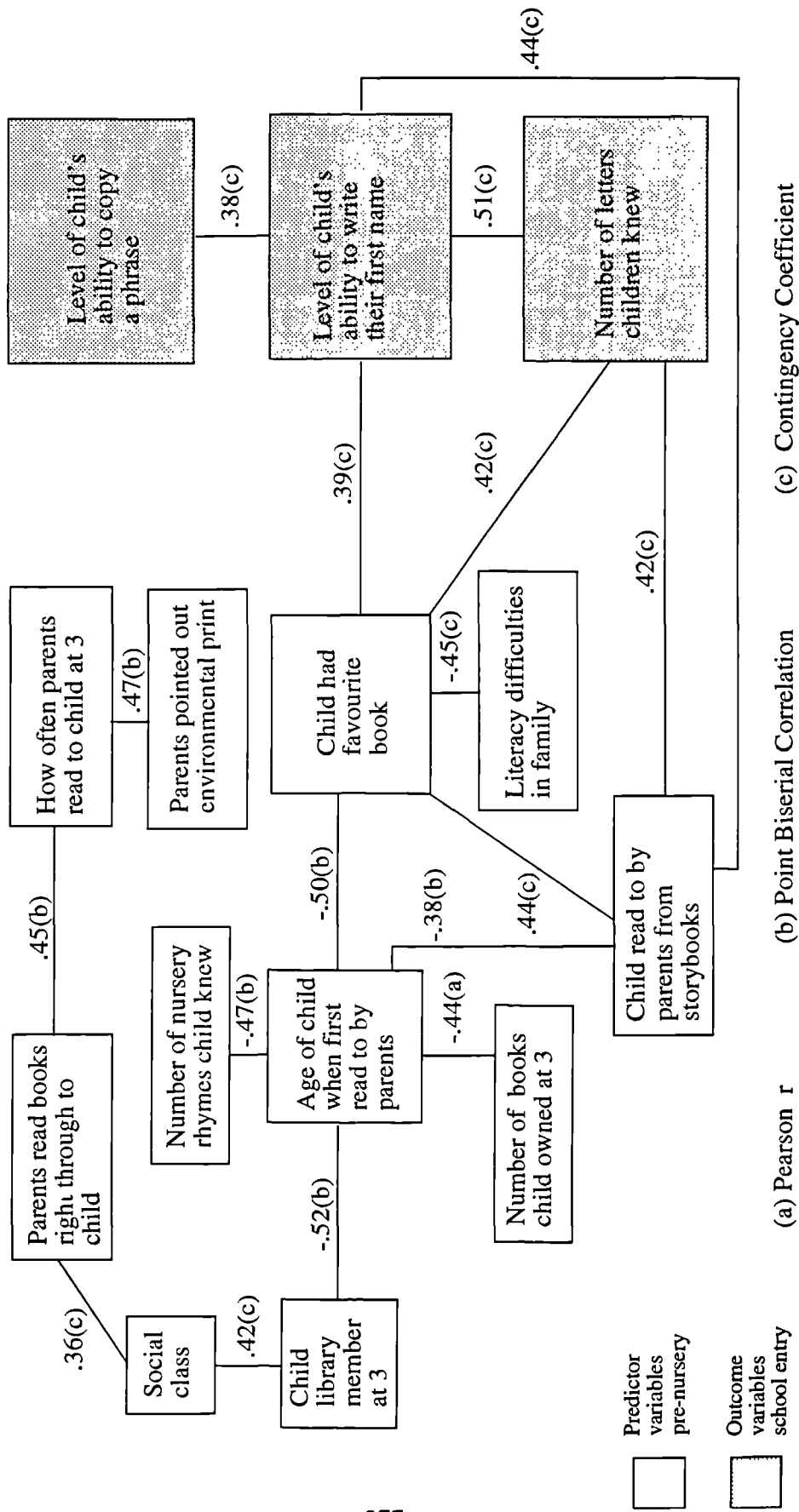
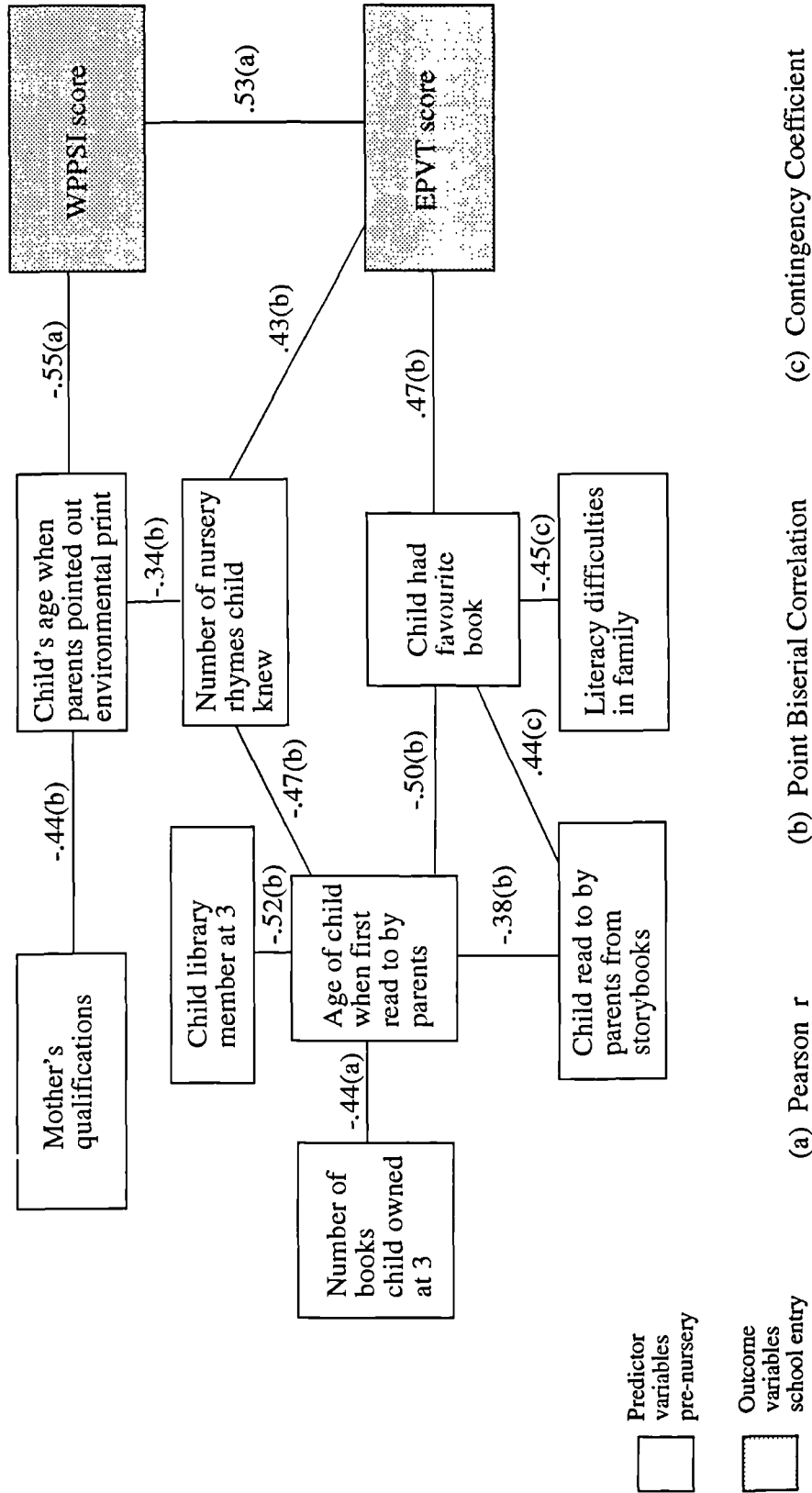


Figure 23 Children's vocabulary scores on standardised tests at school entry and their connection with predictor variables from the children's background, pre-nursery : a tentative model



Repetitions of predictor variables in the three Figures point to the way different aspects of literacy are inter-linked.

What becomes apparent from these analyses is that the parents' interactions with the children, and the resources and opportunities they provided, were crucial. The statistically highly significant predictor variables at school entry were, in turn, influenced by such process variables as whether the child had a **favourite book** at the pre-nursery stage, whether they were read to by their parents from **storybooks**, whether the parents pointed out **environmental print** to their child, and if so, **from what age**, **how often the parents read to their children**, **the age when they first started** reading to their child, **how many books** the children owned, or if they were **library members**, **how many nursery rhymes** the child knew and whether **books were read right through** to them.

These findings provide quantitative evidence to substantiate the qualitative findings of this study, discussed in the other chapters, namely that the parents and the home have a significant part to play in young children's early literacy development. Some of this relates to **status** variables, given aspects about the families, such as their social class and mother's qualifications. However it was **process** variables - how the parents actually interacted with their child, and the literacy climate of the homes, that exerted the greater effects on the children's literacy performance.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSIONS

Before reviewing the main conclusions of this study, it is necessary to look briefly at the sample from which they arose. It has its shortcomings, as do samples from other research studies. It was drawn from a very particular section of the population, a group of children about to enter the nursery in which I worked as a teacher. It was a small sample, there were unfortunately slightly more boys than girls, and slightly more working class than middle class children. On the other hand no selection of children took place, all different social classes were represented, and attrition reduced by following seven children who had left the original school, to their new schools. The sample did have advantages. As a nursery teacher I had the unique opportunity of knowing the children and families well over a number of years, while the study was in progress, so being able to contextualise the data more meaningfully than could be done by an outsider. Extensive data were collected through the interview schedules, which focused on the strands of parental involvement in children's literacy identified in previous studies. The level of detail about the homes of children from a variety of different backgrounds, analysed in the light of considerable knowledge of individual circumstances, distinguishes this study from apparently similar ones (for instance, Tizard et al., 1988).

With the limitations of the sample in mind, it is now possible to address the questions raised in Chapter 3, in the order in which they were originally posed.

1. **What were the literacy environments of children at home, pre-nursery?** (summarised using the framework of: resources and opportunities, literacy model, and interactions).

Resources and opportunities for literacy

While there was wide variety of experience between families, with many providing rich and complex environments for literacy, and a few offering less, all the children had literacy experiences at home.

Reading and writing materials were available in all children's homes, although the range varied considerably between families. All children had access to some children's books. Nearly a third owned more than 50 books, but a couple owned none at all. Only about a quarter of the children were library members, and these included the children who already owned the most books. Two-thirds of the children were said to have a favourite book. Only eight of these favourites were books of the type found in nursery, so there was a difference between what the children read at home and what they would later encounter at nursery and school. Children had access to a wide range of other printed material. Resources for drawing and writing were available for all children, and parents regarded drawing, colouring in and 'scribbling' as standard activities.

Literacy models

All parents reported that their child saw them reading or writing at some time, although some did a great deal more than others, and some were more conscious of their role as a literacy model. Only four parents said they did not read anything other than newspapers and magazines at home. Older siblings often acted as literacy models.

Parent's interactions with literacy activities with their children

Only one child (out of 60) was not read to at home at the time of the first data collection. Parents read at home with most of the children, and other children were read to by family or friends.

Parents of just over a third of the children read to them from before their first birthday. Parents of a small minority of children only started reading to them between the ages of two and three. Most children had books read to them all the way through, but a minority only had sections of books read to them, or were read to from specially chosen short texts.

Much parental teaching of literacy skills occurred in response to particular events or situations, was directly relevant to the child, and was embedded within ordinary day-to-day activities.

Nearly half the parents said they deliberately pointed out environmental print to their child before nursery. All parents said they recited at least one nursery rhyme with their child when they were very little.

2. What had children learnt about literacy at home at pre-nursery level, and by school entry? (after a period of nursery education)

All children in the sample had learnt something about literacy and had developed literacy skills before joining nursery, and well before their start of compulsory schooling.

Pre-nursery level:

There was wide variety of experience between families, but all children had learnt something about literacy and had developed literacy skills at home before joining nursery, and well before their start of compulsory schooling.

The majority of the children had a favourite book, or access to a number of books they liked. The small proportion of children without a favourite were those who tended to own ^{fewer} books, were unlikely to be library members, and had ^{fewer} opportunities to share books within a family context.

Virtually all children behaved 'like a reader' on some occasions, and just over two-thirds behaved like 'writers'. They 'wrote' for a purpose, attempting such things as letters or shopping lists.

Parents of nearly half the children gave examples of them responding to environmental print. Just over a quarter of the children knew a large number of rhymes, while two children knew only one or two. The majority of children were able to distinguish words that rhymed, through recognition, repeating or inventing rhyming words, while a small number of parents thought their child was unable to do this.

School entry:

There was variation in the literacy achievements and experiences of the children at school entry, reflected in their performance on a number of assessments.

Scores on the WPPSI test of vocabulary were slightly below the national norm, but similar to those for Tizard et al.'s (1988) sample.

Just under half the children were able to write their first name unaided in a conventionally recognisable way.

There was variety in the number of letters children could recognise. Nearly half the children were unable to identify any letters of the alphabet, while a handful of children recognised half the alphabet.

Just over half the children were able to copy a phrase with a high degree of accuracy, but the attempts of a third of the children were barely recognisable.

Over half the children knew very little about how to handle a book, where to read from, and how to distinguish between letters, words, numbers and sentences.

Whether the children were read stories at home varied considerably, from a small number who did not listen, or did so infrequently, to just over a third who were read to once a day or more.

Teacher observations about the children's literacy behaviours in nursery showed that the majority were able to sit and listen to stories, and actively chose to read and look at books. A small minority of children found it hard to attend to stories in nursery.

3. What were the literacy environments of children at home, at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)?

All children continued to have experiences of literacy at home up to age seven. In many cases these were extensive, but in a minority they were infrequent. Literacy at home was often different from school literacy and literacy for children with difficulties was often different from literacy experiences of other children.

Resources and opportunities for literacy

All but one child had books bought for them at this stage. School had had an impact on book buying through bookclubs and annual book fairs. A number of parents bought books from local shops, or from shops in town, while a minority bought most books from bookshops. All children owned some books of their own. Very few had no more than a dozen, and the majority had more than 50 books each. More children were library members than at the pre-nursery stage. Again children who owned most books were most likely to be library members, widening their access to books at home.

The majority of children had a favourite book. The types of book they chose varied, and included children's novels, picture story books, popular children's fiction many with characters from television programmes or films, fairytales and rhymes, non-fiction books (chosen by boys), and a reading scheme book (a favourite of a

child with reading difficulties). A few children (middle class girls) were critical of the reading material from school and preferred what they read at home.

All children had a range of resources for drawing and writing, in some cases wider than others, but the opportunity was available to all.

Most parents provided other resources for literacy, including commercially produced books, toy computers, flashcards, story tapes, typewriters and games. A few parents voiced criticism of commercially produced materials aimed to teach reading and writing, because they did not hold their child's interest. Nearly three-quarters of the children had access to a computer at home, and most parents thought their child had learnt useful literacy skills in their interactions with the keyboard and the software.

Literacy models

Only a few children were unable to provide examples of seeing someone reading or writing at home.

Parents gave examples of the way older siblings provided literacy models for the children.

Parents' interactions with literacy activities with their children

Almost all children still had books read to them by their parents at this stage. Boys were the most likely to share non-fiction, and middle class children were read to from a wider range of reading material than working class children, including both fiction and non-fiction.

The few parents who did not teach their child reading or writing at home said this was because they felt the child did not want them to help, they felt they did not know how to help or able to help. A small number of parents had been asked to

help their child by the school. A couple of children, taught neither reading nor writing at home, were amongst the poorest in literacy in the sample.

In describing their 'teaching' of reading and writing parents commented mainly about the form of the activity. They were, however, also concerned with the content and purpose of literacy, which became apparent as they described literacy which occurred as part of ordinary everyday activities. Almost all parents were able to provide examples. Those that could not had children who had the poorest literacy scores.

4. What had the children learnt about literacy at age seven (end of Key Stage 1), at home and at school?

Many of the children had a wide range of experiences of literacy at home, but for some they were restricted, and these affected their literacy performance in school.

Parents reported that almost all children read to themselves, usually from storybooks, which varied from very short simple texts to complex and extended stories.

Books were mainly kept on bookshelves, but in a few families, books were stored indiscriminately with other playthings.

The majority of children did not have access to the sorts of children's picture story books used to assess reading at the end of Key Stage 1 in the SATs (SEAC, 1991, 1992). Of the few children who were reading from non-scheme books at school, most were children who already had access to similar books at home.

The level of reading book at the time of the final data collection showed that children within the study were reading at very different levels at school. Some read very simplified and restricted texts, while others chose from a wide range of more complex texts. For readers having difficulty, the purposes of reading, other than

learning to read for its own sake, were not apparent from the texts they used in school.

Children were assessed on Young's Group Reading Test, a standardised reading test which showed these children to be performing below the national average. Over a third of children were below Level 2 on their SAT English Level, the Level children were expected to reach by the end of Key Stage 1. Teachers' assessments were broadly in line with the performance of children on literacy tasks.

5. What was the nature of home-school relations, and children's literacy development, at age seven (end of Key Stage 1)?

The level of communication parents had with school varied. Some parents had considerable contact with their child's teacher, and other parents with children in the same class, had little contact. Many parents were confused about how to support their child's literacy learning.

Children from all eight schools in the study were able to take school books home. Only a couple of children did not do so. Only one of the schools had a system for encouraging all children to take a book home. The majority of children read out loud from a wider range of materials than that supplied by the school, including from newspapers, comics and annuals, the television and print in the environment. These gave children reasons to engage with reading other than simply for practice.

Only two children never read out loud at home at all. They were both weak readers. The other children varied in the frequency with which they read out loud, but those reading out loud least often were not necessarily the weakest readers.

The children were asked whether they had taken a reading book home from school on the previous night. Over a third of the children had done so (more than was found in a similar survey, Hannon and Cuckle, 1984).

Over a third of parents were not sure of what was expected of them when their child brought home a reading book, and had to make assumptions, as this had not been explained by teachers.

Half the parents were happy with how often the children brought home a reading book, but more than a third thought the books did not come home often enough. However, the parent of the child in the only school where books were sent home every night, thought that this was too frequent.

Half the parents were involved in some way within the school. Some parents were unable to become involved because of work and other commitments. A couple of parents felt excluded from contact with the school.

The majority of parents did not know how reading or writing was taught in school, and most would have liked more information. The parents with the most knowledge included those who initiated contact with the teachers, or who elected to spend some time in school. This included middle class mothers not in paid employment, and others for whom the school fulfilled a social function. Regular contact increased the likelihood of parent and teacher discussions. Teachers tended to wait for parents to take the initiative in talking about their child's literacy. This contact was reliant on the parents' level of confidence, and some understanding of school literacy learning. Even for children with problems, dialogue between parents and teachers was limited, and often initiated by the parents. In this way, parents who could most have benefited from a dialogue with teachers about literacy were least likely to receive it.

Where parents made comments about differences between literacy learning at home and school most expressed positive opinions about the contribution of the home relative to the school. Teachers on the other hand felt that school had more to offer, and gave only one instance of where the home had something to offer in addition to school. The teachers did not know about the reading and writing activities at home for the majority of children in their class. While the majority of

parents said they helped with literacy at home, teachers' estimations were that only about a third of parents were offering their children a great deal of support for literacy.

6. What role did parents play in their children's literacy development?

Most parents were actively involved in teaching their children about reading, writing, environmental print, and rhymes. However, many lacked confidence in this role.

At the pre-nursery stage, nearly a quarter of the parents were unsure about their role in helping with their children's literacy. By the time the children were aged seven (end of Key Stage 1), very few parents said they had received advice about literacy. Most who had were parents of middle class girls, the group of children least likely to be experiencing literacy difficulties. For most parents, information about literacy came not from school but from informal channels of communication, through family and friends, printed matter and the media.

Half the parents remembered their own parents helping them with literacy, but many could not remember such involvement, and suggested that very large families, work, and not having the skills in English, had made this difficult. A small number of parents had problems with reading and writing themselves, and their children were amongst the group having difficulties with literacy.

7. To what extent can children's literacy achievements and experiences in literacy be predicted from their performance and experiences at earlier stages?

Many of the children's previous experiences showed a significant relationship with their literacy achievements by the age of seven.

The strongest predictors of children's literacy development when the children were aged seven (end of Key Stage 1) in this study were measures of children's literacy

level at school entry. These included their vocabulary scores on standardised texts, the number of letters they knew, how well they could write their name and copy a phrase, whether they chose to look at books at nursery, how often they were read to at home, and whether they could attend to stories at nursery. This applied to all the children, and to those having particular literacy difficulties.

Since very few children were taught about print and letters outside a specific meaningful context at home or nursery, these school entry measures probably indicate learning gained from more general literacy encounters in their early years. Those preschool factors that were significantly related to later attainment were what access the children had to books, whether they were read to from storybooks, and if books were read right through to them, the age from which they were read to, whether their parents deliberately pointed out environmental print, and the number of nursery rhymes they knew. Having a favourite book was also identified as a significant predictor of later literacy development, a link which had not been made by previous studies. Parents had a role here, through providing access to books, acting as a literacy model, and, most importantly, reading to their child.

Once the children were in school other factors of significance were whether their parents knew how reading and writing were taught in school, if the child had access to a computer at home, whether or not resources for literacy were stored indiscriminately with other playthings, whether the parents read from more than newspapers or magazines, whether the child read or wrote on their own at home, if the parent provided examples of day-to-day literacy learning, and the frequency with which children read to their parents at home. These findings applied to the whole group of children and to those having literacy difficulties.

The status variables of social class, mother's employment and qualifications, and whether other family members had literacy difficulties, showed relationships with literacy outcomes, but in general process variables exerted greater effects on children's literacy performance. The quantitative and qualitative data in this study tell the same story.

How this study adds to what is known about early literacy experiences, the role of parents, and children's literacy development

This study most closely compares with other longitudinal studies which explored reading and literacy in young children (Wells, 1985, 1987, Tizard et al., 1988). Many findings were replicated, in particular, how preschool knowledge about literacy, and parents sharing books with their children predicts later literacy achievements. However, both Wells and Tizard had a narrower view of literacy than in the current study. The focus of Wells' research (1985, 1987), was oral language. His examination of written literacy was confined to the children's interest in, and time engaged in, literacy activities, the number of books children owned, parents' interest in literacy, listening to stories at home, and children's knowledge of literacy at school entry. Tizard et al.'s study (1988) was more directly concerned with literacy (and numeracy). It investigated children's experience with books, aspects of writing taught at home, parental contact with, and knowledge about, school, attitude to helping children at home, satisfaction with children's progress and with school, and children's performance at school entry but reported in much less detail than in the current study. There was no examination of rhyme, environmental print, family members acting as literacy models, the general level of literacy resourcing at home, or literacy experiences earlier than just before school entry.

In contrast, this study was able to assess the contribution of over 200 different variables to children's literacy development, and revealed some new factors of importance for children's literacy. This included whether the child had a favourite book at age three to four, which was related to whether they were read to from story books, the age when parents started reading to them and their access to books through ownership and library membership. Having a favourite book provided a composite measure of early literacy experience, incorporating children's access to literacy materials, interactions with parents, and the children's own inclinations through making book choices. Other new factors identified in this study were whether children chose to read books to themselves in a nursery setting, access to computers at home at age seven, if children stored literacy resources

indiscriminately, whether parents read more than newspapers and magazines, and parents being able to provide examples of literacy learning occurring as part of day-to-day family activity.

While not an ethnographic or case study of literacy, this research was concerned to supply a great deal of detail about the home. What is different about the current study is that ethnographic and case studies concerning children's literacy have either concentrated on the preschool period, (for example, Crago and Crago, 1983, Baghban, 1984, Payton, 1984, Schickedanz, 1984, Teale, 1986a), or they have started just around school entry (for example, Taylor, 1983, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988, Minns, 1990). This study spans both the early years at home and the school period. While the locality of the current study meant that all but one child was white, there were children from different social class backgrounds. Within the literature there were either studies of middle class practices (Taylor, 1983, Crago and Crago, 1983, Baghban, 1984, Payton, 1984, Schickedanz, 1984) or working class studies (Teale, 1986a, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Findings from this study also add to the debate about whether parental involvement in school-initiated literacy learning (children reading to their parents at home), materially affects their literacy development at school. Hewison and Tizard (1980), and Hannon (1987), found a highly significant relationship between how often children read aloud at home and their literacy achievements. On the other hand Tizard et al., (1988) did not find a relationship. This study showed that reading aloud at home had some effect on children's reading at seven, but not such a marked difference as found by Hewison and Tizard (1980), and Hannon (1987). Many parents in the current study were unsure about what was expected of them when children brought a book home from school. The study shows that, while not necessarily explained to parents, the practice of parental involvement in children's reading had become more a part of school practice than had previously been reported (Hannon and Cuckle, 1984).

This study confirmed findings from other research that contact between teachers and parents on literacy significantly affected children's reading (Iverson et al., 1981,

Epstein, 1991), and added to their work by showing that this was true for writing as well. This study also replicated findings (Toomey 1989, 1992) which showed that teachers tended to work more with the parents who already knew most about school literacy practices.

The study has made a contribution to understanding the types of variables examined in surveys to explain later literacy achievement. It has tended to confirm the view of some surveys, that process variables are more significant for children's literacy development than status variables (for example, Peaker, 1967, Share et al., 1983). Other surveys (for example Douglas, 1964, Davie et al, 1972) did not look at process variables in relation to later reading achievement (data which would be more difficult to collect for large numbers of respondents). This study shows that status variables like social class did have significance for literacy development, but this may well have had more to do with the links between social class and process variables, than social class per se, and serves to illustrate the complexity of the relationship between home factors and literacy learning.

While some teachers may be sceptical about whether parents are involved and interested in their children's literacy, this study replicates the findings of others by highlighting the interest most parents show in helping their child with literacy (for example, Newson, Newson and Barnes, 1977; Hall et al, 1989; Hannon and James, 1990). This study has filled out details of this parental contribution by giving an account of parent response to a wider number of aspects of literacy than in previous studies, and has been able to do so over a number of years.

Other studies have used direct measures of children's phonological skills to assess phonological awareness (for instance, Maclean et al., 1987, Goswami and Bryant, 1990). This study has shown the significance of phonological awareness for children's later literacy development using a very much weaker measure (parents' self-report, made retrospectively). Since this indirect measure still showed a significance, it confirms the importance of sensitivity to rhyme for literacy development.

The particular importance of early experiences in literacy, including familiarity with story, books and writing, for later literacy development (reported for example, by Durkin, 1966, Clark, 1976, Wade, n.d., Kroll, 1983, Wells, 1987, Tizard et al., 1988, Blatchford, 1991, Snow et al., 1991, Mason, 1992) has been confirmed in this study.

Informed by the work of others (including Wells, 1987, Wade, n.d., Meek, 1988, Graham, 1990), this study is unique in looking at texts children read within the naturalistic contexts of home and school. The variety of texts children encountered, (illustrated for instance in Figures 5, 7, 13 and 15), indicates how very different were the literacy experiences amongst children in the study, particularly between those with literacy problems and the other children. The study examined what significance these texts had for literacy, from children having a favourite book at age three to four, to the book they were actually reading at school at age seven, and showed that both were significant for children's literacy development.

Implications for research

The methodology and data here have implications for further research and practice.

The framework for conceptualising the role of parents, first developed by Hannon (1990), of resources, opportunity and recognition, was found to be applicable to the data here. It was extended further, to include factors influencing the parents, and the interaction between parents and children through explicit teaching, and day-to-day activities which included literacy. This could be used elsewhere as a way of examining the parents' role in children's education.

Many of the outcome measures used were based on those in other studies. One adopted here which had not previously been widely used was the child's level of reading book in school. It had the advantage of revealing the types of texts which children of different abilities actually used. This proved to be a measure with high face validity, which was also reasonable on a psychometric level. Since assigning

levels of difficulty to reading books is a system used in many school, this could be adopted in future studies.

Another measure, that of writing ability, attempted to incorporate an assessment of children's story writing, and this was something which could be used and extended in future research.

Identifying whether or not a child had a favourite book pre-nursery was identified in this study as predictive of children's later literacy development. This measure could be employed in future studies.

The measure used to identify children with literacy difficulties proved helpful. This was obtaining low scores on two or more of four different literacy measures: the level of the child's reading book, their score on Young's Group Reading Test (Young, 1980), their combined writing score (story and expository writing, and level of independence), and their English SAT level (SEAC, 1991, 1992). This way of identifying children with literacy difficulties could be used in future research.

Implications for practice

To allow schools to build effectively on the extensive literacy learning that children do at home, and to support those children experiencing difficulties, literacy learning that takes place in homes needs to be made more visible. In addition, more information about the process of literacy transmission at home, would be illuminating. It would be beneficial for children's literacy for teachers to talk with parents about literacy occurring as a part of day-to-day family activities at home, and the parent's role in providing resources and opportunities, acting as a literacy model, and interacting with their child on activities that include literacy.

In encouraging reading books to go home, it would be helpful if teachers could check that parents knew what their role was, and ensured all children were

reminded that they could take their book. Many parents in this study would have liked their child to bring a book home more frequently.

To help with literacy development, teachers of young children could ask parents about children's favourite books. For children without a favourite, teachers could suggest the family borrow books, show parents the range of books available for young children, and explain the importance of children having the opportunity and encouragement to choose a favourite book, and use it as a book rather than a plaything, for later literacy development.

For early years teachers, it would be helpful to find out more about the home experiences of children who did not choose books for themselves in a nursery setting. It would also be useful to discover how many rhymes the children knew already, and to encourage saying rhymes at home, particularly for those children whose experience here was limited. With the focus on parents, if it were available locally, it would be useful to display information in school about help for parents with literacy difficulties themselves.

This study shows that it would be beneficial for children's literacy development if schools found ways of increasing dialogue between teachers and all parents. Teachers need to **initiate** communication about literacy with parents in a number of different ways, through printed information, and most importantly, discussion, so that all parents have the opportunity to find out how literacy is taught in school, and are able to tell teachers about the literacy learning at home.

Overall conclusion

The extent of home literacy experiences for the majority of children is barely recognised or acknowledged by school. What emerges clearly from the study is just how rich, complex and powerful were most children's homes as environments for literacy learning.

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APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF INITIAL PARENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- Number in family
- Child's position in family
- Mother's employment
- Father's employment
- Mother's qualifications
- Father's qualifications

- Would you say _____ shows any interest in reading and writing?
- Does anyone read to _____?
- Do you remember how old _____ was when you started reading to him/her?
- How often do you read to _____?
- What sorts of reading materials do you read or look at with your child?
- Do you read books together?
- If yes, where are these books from?
- How many books would you say _____ has of his/her own?
- Does _____ have a favourite book at the moment?
- Do you try to teach _____ to read at all?
- Do you try to teach _____ to write at all?
- Do you do anything with your child which you would describe as reading and writing activities, that we haven't mentioned yet?
- How often would you say that the reading and writing activities take place?
- Does your child do anything on his/her own which you would describe as reading and writing activities?
- How often would you say that the reading and writing activities, done on their own, take place?
- Have you ever had advice about the teaching of reading or writing?
- Have you bought, borrowed, or made anything to help your child learn to read or write?

- Would you say _____'s interest in reading came from himself/herself or from you?
- Do you ever read for pleasure yourself?
- Do you have any memories of learning to read or books you remember from when you were a child?

APPENDIX 2

SUMMARY OF FINAL PARENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

READING

- Would you say _____ shows any interest in reading at the moment?

READING TO YOUR CHILD

- Do you, or does anyone else in the family, make up your own stories for _____?
- Does anyone read to _____ now?
- If no, How old was _____ when you/someone else stopped reading to him/her?
- If yes, - Who does this?
- Who does this most?
- How often?
- For how long?
- When _____ is read to, whose idea is it? Does it come from him/her, or from someone else, or both?
- What sorts of reading materials do you read to _____ ?
- What reasons do you have for looking at books together?
- Has there been a change in how you look at books with _____ as he/she has got older?
- Do you, or anyone else at home, ever read or tell complete stories?
- Do you ever read books all the way through?
- How long do you expect to go on reading to _____?

YOUR CHILD READING ALOUD AT HOME

- Does _____ ever bring home a book from school?
- If yes, how often?
- Does _____ ever read aloud to you (or someone else) at home?
- If yes, do they read aloud from their school reading book?
- From anything else?

- If yes, to whom?
- If yes, how often?
- (If did in past but not now) Was there any particular reason why you stopped listening to _____ read?
- Generally do you ask _____ to read to you, or does _____ ask you to listen to him/her?

If books sent home from school:

- Do you feel reading is sent home not enough/ often enough/ too often?
- Do you know what is expected of you/your child?
- Do you feel reading sent home is too easy/ at the right level/ too hard?
- Would you say _____'s interest in reading comes mostly from them/ siblings/ you/ other?

YOUR CHILD READING TO HIM/HERSELF

- Does _____ read to him/herself at home?
- If yes, is this silently, or out loud?
- If yes, what sorts of reading materials do they read?
- How often does _____ read to him/herself?
- For how long?

SUPPLY OF BOOKS AND OTHER READING MATERIALS

- Do you have a particular place where books or other reading materials are stored in your home?
- Is _____ allowed to help him/herself to books and other things to read at home?
- Does _____ borrow books from the library?
- How often?
- Does anyone buy books for _____?
- If yes from where?
- How many books would you say _____ has of his/her own now?
- Does _____ have a favourite book at the moment?

TEACHING OF READING

- Did you try to teach _____ to read before s/he began school?
- If yes, at what age?
- Do you help _____ with reading at the moment?
- Can you give me a specific example of a time when you helped _____ with reading?
- Do you know how reading is taught in school?
- Do you know what book _____ is reading at school at the moment?
- How do you think _____ is progressing with reading at the moment?
- Does _____ have any particular difficulties with reading?
- Do you know how they are being dealt with?
- How do you think _____ is progressing with reading at the moment?
- Has _____ ever been worried about getting something wrong when reading?
- Have you bought, borrowed or made anything to help _____ learn to read?
- Do you have any worries about how best to help your child with reading at this stage?

ENVIRONMENTAL PRINT

- Do you remember how old _____ was when he/she first showed you they could recognise environmental print? Age Example
- What sorts of things is _____ noticing in print around them now? Can you think of any examples?
- Did you ever make a point of using some of this print with _____?

WRITING

- Would you say _____ shows any interest in writing at the moment?

YOUR CHILD WRITING WITH OTHERS AT HOME

- Does _____ do any writing with you or someone else at home?
- If no, did you in the past?
- Do you remember how old was he/she when you started writing together?

- What sorts of things does he/she do now with someone at home?
- How often does _____ write with you or someone else at home?
- How long will they write with someone else for?
- When?
- When you write with _____, whose idea is it? Does it come from him/her, or from someone else, or both?
- Would you say _____'s interest in writing comes mostly from them/ siblings/ you/ other?

YOUR CHILD WRITING ON HIS/HER OWN

- Does _____ write on his/her own at home at all?
- If yes, could you describe the sorts of things he/she does, or show examples of what he/she has actually written
- How often does _____ write on his/her own?
- For how long does _____ write on their own?
- Does _____ ever bring writing to do (he's/she's done), from school?

SUPPLY OF WRITING MATERIALS

- What does he/she use to write with?
- Has what he/she uses changed since before he /she started nursery?
- Do you have a particular place where paper, pens and other writing materials are stored in your home?
- Is _____ allowed to help him/herself to paper and pens etc. at home?

TEACHING OF WRITING

- Could _____ write when he/she first began school?
- Did you try to teach _____ to write before s/he began school?
- If yes, at what age?
- Do you help _____ with writing at the moment? In what sorts of ways?
- Were you ever confused about whether you should use 'ah','buh','cuh', or 'aye','bee','cee'?
- Do you know how children write in school?

- Does _____ have any particular difficulties with writing?
- Do you know how they are being dealt with?
- How do you think _____ is progressing with writing at the moment?
- Has _____ ever been worried about getting something wrong when writing?
- Have you bought, borrowed or made anything to help _____ learn to write?
- Do you have any worries about how best to help your child with writing at this stage?

GENERAL

- Where do you feel you have found out most about how children learn to read and write?
- Have you received advice about reading and writing?
- Did you read or recite nursery rhymes with _____? yes (do now, used to)
- If yes, how many would you say _____ knew (or shared)?
- Does _____ use a home computer?
- If yes, Do you think they have gained any experience of reading or writing through using the computer? Yes No
- Do you ever go on outings with _____?
- Does this involve any activities with reading and writing, or noticing signs?
- Does _____ see you (or anyone else at home) reading at all in the day to day running of your home/for work/for pleasure?
- Did they in the past?
- Does _____ see you (or anyone else at home) writing at all in the day to day running of your home/for work/for pleasure?
- Did they in the past?
- Does any of your day-to-day routine at home give you a chance to spend time with _____ on activities that include some reading and writing?
- Do you expect that _____ will do much reading and writing when he/she is older?
- What do you think are the main benefits children receive from reading and writing?

HOME AND SCHOOL

- Do you discuss _____'s reading and writing with his/her teacher?
- Have you had any encouragement from school for reading/writing with _____?
- Do you feel there is any discrepancy between what _____ does at home and what he/she does at school?
- Are there any activities in school in which you can work with _____ on reading or writing?
- If yes, do you ever take part?

FAMILY LITERACY

- Do you take a newspaper or magazine regularly?
- Do you read anything else at home regularly?
- Do you ever write at home?
- Would you say you get much of a chance to read or write for pleasure yourself?
- Do you have any repeated illness that keeps you or anyone else in the family off work/school?

APPENDIX 3

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT: STORY WRITING

One fine day, early in the morning, Winston set out as usual. She waved goodbye to his mother, who was standing at the door watching. He walked along the pavement.

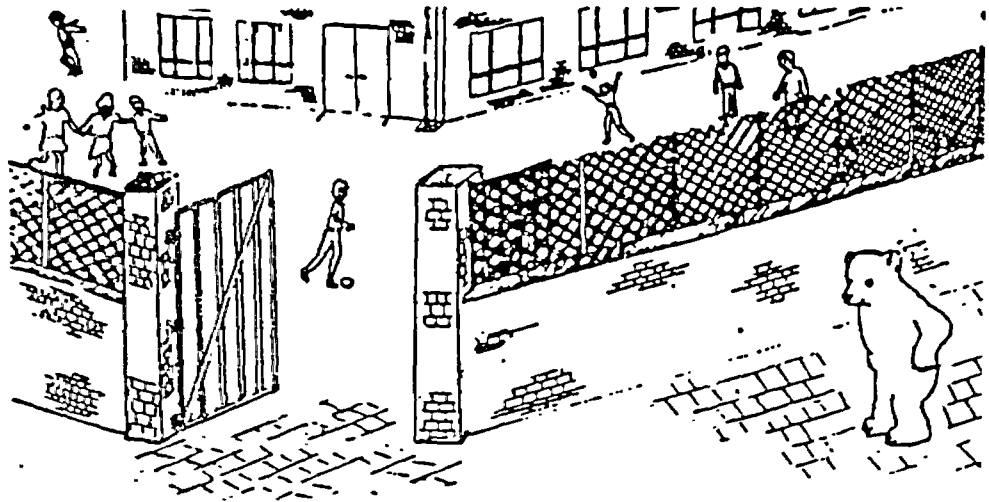
Suddenly, she smiled as she stopped outside a house with a large, familiar-looking green door. Winston knocked 3 times - that was their signal. There was hardly time for the third knock when the door was flung open and a girl, about Winston size, walked out. 'Goodbye Mum!' she shouted.

Anna and Winston were both in the same class at school and had been walking to school together every day since the beginning of term.

As usual, nothing very interesting happened on their journey. Today seemed to be just like every other day. As usual, they crossed the busy main road at the lights and turned into the quiet street leading to their school.

It was Anna who first spotted the unusual shape of the baby bear standing on the pavement. She could not believe her eyes - a bear outside school! She must be dreaming.

'Can you see what I see?' asked Anna. The children hesitated and then approached carefully. . . .



NAME:



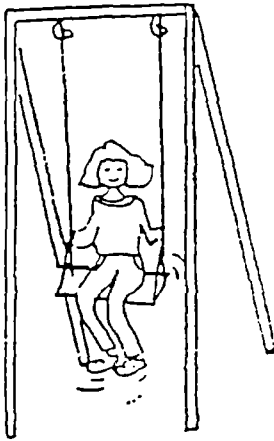
Source: Blatchford (1988)

APPENDIX 4

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT: EXPOSITORY WRITING



The man is climbing the ladder.



Source: Blatchford (1988)

APPENDIX 5

SUMMARY OF CHILD INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- Do you ever take books home from school? Yes No
- Did you take a book home last night?
- If yes, did you read it to yourself/ read it to someone else?
- What reading book are you on at the moment?
- What do you think about it?
- Why?
- Do you ever read (anything else) to yourself at home?
- Does anyone read to you at home?
- Do you ever borrow books from the library?
- Do you have a favourite book, (or something else you really like to read)
- Does your mum or dad, or anyone else at home, help you with your reading?
- Do you ever worry that you will do things wrong, or make a mistake, when you are reading?
- Do you ever do any writing on your own at all at home?
- If yes, when? what?
- What sorts of writing materials do you like to use?
- Do you ever do any writing with anyone else at home?
- Does your mum or dad, or anyone else at home, help you with your writing?
- Do you ever worry that you will do things wrong, or make a mistake, when you are writing?
- Have you ever played games at home, or gone on outings with your family, when you remember doing any reading or writing?
- Do you ever bring books or writing from home to show your teacher at school?
- Do you ever see anyone at home reading?
- Do you ever see anyone at home writing?
- Why do you think you do reading and writing at school?

ASSESSMENT OF CHILD'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS LITERACY

- You know that people sometimes read to themselves. Is that something you ever do? If yes, how do you feel about it? Can you point to the face which shows how you usually feel about reading to yourself?

- What about when Mrs _____ asks you to read to her. How do you feel about that? Can you point to the face which shows how you usually feel about reading to your teacher?

- Do you ever read out loud to someone at home? If yes, who do you read to? Could you point to the face which shows how you usually feel about reading to _____ at home?

- Do you ever write just for yourself? If yes, can you point to the face which shows how you usually feel about writing just for yourself?

- Sometimes Mrs. _____ asks you to do some writing for her, doesn't she? Can you think of some writing you have done at school? Now can you point to the face which shows how you usually feel about writing for your teacher?

- Maybe sometimes you write at home with someone else, do you? (with Mum, Dad, brothers or sisters, or friends). If yes, can you think of something you have written at home? Can you point to the face which shows how you usually feel about writing with someone at home?

APPENDIX 6

SUMMARY OF TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- What do you think parents contribute to their children's early literacy development?
- Are there any ways in which you encourage them, or give them advice?
- Do you in any way encourage parents to read to their children at home?
- Do you encourage parents to hear their children read?
- Do you in any way encourage parents to write with their children at home?
- Do you have any worries about what parents will do?
- Could you broadly describe the way in which you teach reading?
- Could you broadly describe the way in which you teach writing?
- How much discussion (if any) do you have with _____'s parents about his/her education?

For each child:

- Would you say _____ shows any interest in reading at the moment?
- Would you say _____ shows any interest in writing at the moment?
- What book is _____ reading in school at the moment?
- Does _____ choose to read to you?
- Does _____ choose to read to him/herself?
- Does _____ choose to write at the moment?
- What sorts of things does he/she do?
- How do you think _____ is progressing with reading at the moment?
- How do you think _____ is progressing with writing at the moment?
- Does _____ have any particular difficulties with reading?
- Does _____ have any particular difficulties with writing?
- Does _____ ever take home books from school?
- If yes, do you have any record of how often?
- Do you get any feedback?
- Does _____ ever take any writing work home from school?
- What level of support for reading do you think _____ gets at home?

- What level of support for writing do you think _____ gets at home?
- Is there any discrepancy between what _____ does at home and what happens in school?
- Does _____ ever bring in books or other reading material from home?
- Does _____ ever bring in writing from home?
- Are there things _____'s parents share with you about _____'s literacy at home?
- Do you have any activities in school in which parents and children work together on literacy?
- Does _____'s parents ever take part in these activities?
- Does anything else strike you about _____?

APPENDIX 7

SUMMARY OF HEADTEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- Could you outline briefly how reading is taught in school?
- Could you outline briefly how writing is taught in school?
- Could you describe how the school relates to parents in general?
- Could you describe how these policies were developed over time, how they may have been different in the past, and any ideas you have for future developments?
 - a. Reading
 - b. Writing
 - c. Relations with parents
- Could you give specific details of ways the school is involved with parents regarding their children's literacy?
- Do parents ever come into school to hear their own child read?
- Do parents ever come into school to hear readers generally?
- What do you think are the main things that parents contribute to their children's early literacy development?
- Do you have any written documents about the school's policy on reading and writing?
- Is there anything else you think is important?

Information about the school:

Number of pupils on roll

Characteristics of catchment area

Number of pupils in receipt of free school meals

APPENDIX 8

SCHEME FOR SCORING SCHOOL ENTRY ASSESSMENTS

Name:

Child No:

DOB:

Date:

Sub-Test	Instruction	Response	Score	
Concepts about Print (circle score)	"Show me which is the front of this book. Where do we start? Present book with <u>spine</u> pointing to child.	Indicates front.	(No score)	
	Open book at Page 1. "Where do I start reading, show me?"	Indicates print not picture.	0 2	
	Turn to page 8. Point to print vaguely. "Exactly where do I start reading?"	Indicates a L.H. word.	0 2	
	"And then where do I go, where do I read next?"	Indicates L → R movement, next word	0 2	
	"And then where do I go after that?" (Repeat if necessary to see if next line indicated)	Indicates start of next line	0 2	
	Take 12 cards depicting numbers, letters, words, sentences. Place in random display on table. "Look at these cards. Can you show me <u>a word</u> all by itself." "Now can you show me another one?"	0 1 2	} 0 2	(10)
"Can you show me <u>a letter</u> all by itself?" "Now can you show me another one?"	0 1 2			
Word Matching	(As per testing instructions)	Copying (on the ground)		(10)
Writing (see full scoring details)	Name writing (no model)			
	(for long names, assess 1st 7 letters) No response, random scribble	0	No response or scribble	0
	Attempts at letter shapes, not more than once recognizable	1	Only one recognizable /correct letter shape	1
	Random letters - may include some from name, initial letter may be correct	2	Minority of letters correct and recognizable . . model could not be guessed	2
	Most letters present, some omitted/substituted/reversed/misplaced	3	Majority of letters correct, recognizable, in correct order . .	3
	All letters present, some or all reversed and/or one misplaced	4	All letters correct, recognizable, right order but poor size, diff/ base line spacing	4
Name written correctly	5	Letter, size, case, baseline spacing correct	5	(10)

Sub-Test	Instruction	Response(circle letters correct)	Score
Letter Naming/sounding	(Check lower case first. Then in upper case only those not correctly identified in lower case)	a f k p u z	Total
		b g l q v c h m r w d i n s x e j o t y	Total : 2 (max score= 10) (10)
Word Reading (circle words correct)	Mum like No House Was Television In Bus-stop Go Look		
WPPSI Vocabulary	(Write in responses. Probe for all Score 1 responses and record probes (0) Discontinue after 5 failures).		
	Shoe	Snap	
	Knife	Fur	
	Bicycle	Polite	
	Hat	Moth	
	Umbrella	Join	
	Nail	Hero	
	Letter	Diamond	
	Petrol	Chisel	
	Donkey	Nuisance	
	Swing	Microscope	
	Castle	Gamble	(44)

Source: Blatchford (1988)

APPENDIX 9
SCORING SYSTEM FOR CHILDREN'S WRITING

Expository Writing

Adequate description	2
Inadequate or incorrect description, or inaccurate grammar	1

Story writing

Complete story, showing some use of story conventions: language, e.g. repetition, adjectival phrases, use of subjunctive tense, causal relationship between events, or ideas from children's stories e.g. fainting/falling asleep as way of dealing with changing expectations of reality	4
---	---

Episode with use of story conventions	3
---------------------------------------	---

Simple episode/story - written as expository text: story theme not developed. Simple description or own agenda e.g. description of school day	2
---	---

Incoherent/ inappropriate writing	1
-----------------------------------	---

In addition, both pieces of writing were scored for:

Level of independence in writing

Writing virtually independently	4
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Supplying some of their own words and initial letters	3
---	---

Asking for most words	2
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Copy writing/underwriting	1
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APPENDIX 10

Table A Summaries of reading book level and predictor variables using comparison of group means (ANOVA): pre-nursery

		Number	Mean reading book level	Differences in means	p (F-ratio)
Child had favourite book	No	8	4.9	2.9	<.01
	Yes	34	7.8		
Parent read more than newspapers and magazines	No	3	3.7	3.8	<.01
	Yes	39	7.5		
Mother employed	No	29	6.6	2.1	<.01
	Yes	13	8.7		
Social class:	working class	27	6.5	2.0	<.05
	middle class	15	8.5		
Child knew more than 12 nursery rhymes	No	27	6.5	1.9	<.05
	Yes	15	8.5		
Child library member	No	31	6.7	2.0	<.05
	Yes	11	8.7		
Child sensitive to rhyme	No	7	5.4	2.2	<.05
	Yes	31	7.6		
Child read to from storybooks	No	6	5.3	2.3	<.05
	Yes	36	7.6		

Table B Summaries of reading book level and predictor variables using comparison of group means (ANOVA): school entry

		Number	Mean reading book level	Differences in means	p (F-ratio)
Number of letters child knew	0	13	5.2	2.8	<.001
	more	28	8.0		
Child chose to read books in nursery	No	13	5.5	2.5	<.01
	Yes	29	8.0		
Child attended to stories read in nursery	No	5	4.2	3.4	<.01
	Yes	37	7.6		
Child able to write first name correctly	No	12	5.0	3.0	<.001
	Yes	29	8.0		
Child able to copy phrase correctly	No	21	6.3	1.7	<.05
	Yes	20	8.0		
Child listened to stories at home frequently	No	26	6.5	1.6	<.05
	Yes	15	8.1		

Table C Summaries of reading book level using comparison of group means (ANOVA) significantly related to other variables: children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1)

		Number	Mean reading book level	Differences in means	p (F-ratio)
Parent knew how reading was taught in school	No	30	6.6	2.3	<.01
	Yes	12	8.9		
Child read on their own at home	No	4	4.0	3.6	<.01
	Yes	38	7.6		
Child reported seeing someone read at home	No	14	5.9	2.0	<.01
	Yes	28	7.9		
Teacher assessment of support for reading at home	not much help	26	6.5	2.0	<.01
	great deal of help	16	8.5		
Parent worried about how to help with reading	No	30	8.0	2.3	<.05
	Yes	9	5.7		
Child wrote on own at home	No	2	3.5	3.9	<.05
	Yes	40	7.4		
Frequency with which child read on own at home	Never	5	4.2		<.05
	Not often	4	6.0		
	2/3 x week	10	7.7		
	most days or daily	23	7.9		
Parent said they received advice on literacy	No	34	6.9	1.2	<.05
	Yes	7	8.1		
Parent knew how writing was taught in school	No	32	6.8	1.9	<.05
	Yes	10	8.7		
Teacher reported child took books home	No	4	4.7	2.8	<.05
	Yes	38	7.5		
Use of computer at home	No	14	5.5	2.6	<.001
	Yes	28	8.1		

Table D Summaries of Young's Group Reading Test score and predictor variables using comparison of group means (ANOVA): pre-nursery

		Number	Mean YGRT score	Differences in means	p (F-ratio)
Child had favourite book	No	8	76.6	13.3	<.01
	Yes	34	89.9		
Mother employed	No	29	84.9	7.9	<.01
	Yes	13	92.8		
Social class:	working class	27	83.6	10.4	<.01
	middle class	15	94.0		
Child library member	No	31	84.6	10.5	<.05
	Yes	11	95.1		
Child sensitive to rhyme	No	7	79.6	9.8	<.05
	Yes	31	89.4		
Child read to from storybooks	No	6	76.5	12.6	<.05
	Yes	36	89.1		

Table E Summaries of Young's Group Reading Test score and predictor variables using comparison of group means (ANOVA): school entry

		Number	Mean YGRT score	Differences in means	p (F-ratio)
Number of letters child knew	0	13	77.8	13.4	<.001
	more	28	91.2		
Child chose to read books in nursery	No	13	77.8	13.8	<.001
	Yes	29	91.6		
Child attended to stories read in nursery	No	5	71.0	18.5	<.001
	Yes	37	89.5		
Child able to write first name correctly	No	12	77.8	12.9	<.001
	Yes	29	90.7		
Child able to copy a phrase correctly	No	21	81.5	11.2	<.001
	Yes	20	92.7		
Child's score, concepts about print	poor	22	84.2	5.9	n.s.
	good	19	90.1		

Table F Summaries of Young's Group Reading Test score using comparison of group means (ANOVA) significantly related to other variables: children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1)

		Number	Mean YGRT score	Differences in means	p (F-ratio)
Parent knew how reading was taught in school	No	30	84.0	11.7	<.01
	Yes	12	95.7		
Child read on their own at home	No	4	74.5	14.2	<.05
	Yes	38	88.7		
Teacher assessment of support for reading at home	not much help	26	82.5	12.6	<.001
	great deal of help	16	95.1		
Child wrote on own at home	No	2	69.0	19.2	<.05
	Yes	40	88.2		
Frequency with which child read on own at home	Never	5	73.4		<.01
	Not often	4	82.2		
	2/3 x week	10	86.0		
	most days or daily	23	91.8		
Parent said they received advice on literacy	No	34	85.2	10.1	<.05
	Yes	7	95.3		
Parent knew how writing was taught in school	No	32	85.3	8.5	<.05
	Yes	10	93.8		
Parent gave examples of day-to-day literacy	No	4	69.0	20.3	<.001
	Yes	38	89.3		
Use of computer at home	No	14	82.0	8.0	<.05
	Yes	28	90.0		
Someone in family with literacy difficulties	No	12	80.1	9.9	<.01
	Yes	30	90.0		

Table G Summaries of SAT English level and predictor variables, using X²:
pre-nursery

	Chi-square	D.F.	Significance
Child had favourite book	3.3	1	n.s.
Mother employed	3.5	1	n.s.
Social class	5.5	1	<.01
Number of nursery rhymes child knew	6.1	2	<.05
Child library member	1.9	1	n.s.
Child sensitive to rhyme	5.5	1	<.01
Child read to from storybooks	3.5	1	n.s.

Table H Summaries of SAT English level and predictor variables, using X²: school entry

	Chi-square	D.F.	Significance
Number of letters child knew	12.1	1	<.001
Child chose to read books in nursery	4.8	1	<.05
Child attended to stories read in nursery	5.8	1	<.05
Child able to write first name correctly	9.9	1	<.001
Child able to copy phrase correctly	9.2	1	<.01
Child listened to stories at home frequently	6.0	1	<.01

Table I Summaries of SAT English level, using X^2 , significantly related to other variables: children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1)

	Chi-square	D.F.	Significance
Parent knew how reading was taught in school	9.2	1	<.01
Child read on their own at home	4.1	1	<.05
Child reported seeing someone read at home	3.6	1	<.05
Teacher assessment of level of support for reading at home	6.6	1	<.01
Parent worried about how to help with reading	0.05	1	n.s.
Child wrote on own at home	1.0	1	n.s.
Frequency with which child read on own at home	9.5	3	<.05
Parent said they received advice on literacy	6.7	2	<.05
Parent knew how writing was taught in school	0.16	1	n.s.
Teacher reported child took books home	4.1	1	<.05
Parent gave examples of day-to-day literacy	4.1	1	<.05
Use of computer at home	3.6	1	<.05
Child stored literacy resources appropriately	5.1	1	<.05
Parent read books through to child	0.35	1	n.s.

Table J Summaries of 'Having Literacy Difficulties' and predictor variables using X^2 : pre-nursery

	Chi-square	D.F.	Significance
Child had favourite book	5.6	1	<.01
Parent reads more than newspapers and magazines	3.6	1	<.05
Mother employed	4.0	1	<.05
Social class	2.9	1	n.s.
Number of nursery rhymes child knew	10.1	2	<.01
Child library member	0.7	1	n.s.
Child sensitive to rhyme	4.1	1	<.05
Child read to from storybooks	5.5	1	<.01

Table K Summaries of 'Having Literacy Difficulties' and predictor variables using X²: school entry

	Chi-square	D.F.	Significance
Number of letters child knew	12.1	1	<.001
Child chose to read books in nursery	8.7	1	<.01
Child attended to stories read in nursery	8.2	1	<.01
Child able to write first name correctly	15.3	1	<.001
Child able to copy phrase correctly	12.3	1	<.001

Table L Summaries of 'Having Literacy Difficulties' using X^2 , significantly related to other variables: children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1)

	Chi-square	D.F.	Significance
Parent knew how reading was taught in school	6.4	1	<.01
Child read on their own at home	5.8	1	<.01
Child reported seeing someone read at home	1.6	1	n.s.
Teacher assessment of level of support for reading at home	3.6	1	<.05
Parent worried about how to help with reading	0.0	1	n.s.
Child wrote on own at home	1.6	1	n.s.
Frequency with which child read on own at home	15.0	3	<.001
Parent said they received advice on literacy	4.9	2	n.s.
Parent knew how writing was taught in school	0.4	1	n.s.
Teacher reported child took books home	5.8	1	<.01
Parent gave examples of day-to-day literacy	5.8	1	<.01
Use of computer at home	3.9	1	<.05
Child stored literacy resources appropriately	3.6	1	<.05
Parent read books through to child	0.1	1	n.s.
Frequency of reading out loud at home	8.9	1	<.01
Number of books owned	7.1	2	<.05

Table M Correlation coefficients, point biserial correlations and contingency coefficients, levels of significance between outcome measures for children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1), and predictor variables, pre-nursery

	Reading Book Level (b)	YGRT Score (b)	Combined Writing Score (b)	SAT English Level (c)	'Having Literacy Difficulties' (c)	Significance for N of outcome measures
Child had favourite book	.44**	.44**	.44**	(.32)	(.39)**	4
Parent read more than newspapers and magazines	.38**	.27*	.39**	(.32)	(.36)*	4
Mother employed	.37**	.31*	.46***	(.32)	(.34)*	4
Social class	.37**	.42**	.47***	(.38)**	(.30)	4
Number of nursery rhymes child knew	.34**	.37**	.42**	(.36)*	(.44)**	5
Child library member	.34**	.39**	.24	(.26)	(.19)	2
Child sensitive to rhyme	.32*	.32*	.44**	(.40)**	(.36)*	5
Child read to from storybooks	.30*	.37**	.28*	(.34)	(.40)**	4

Significance Levels:

*** - p<.001
 ** - p<.01
 * - p<.05

(b) Point Biserial Correlation
 (c) Contingency Coefficient

Table N Correlation coefficients, point biserial correlations and contingency coefficients, levels of significance between outcome measures for children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1), and predictor variables, school entry

	Reading Book Level	YGRT Score	Combined Writing Score	SAT English Level	'Having Literacy Difficulties'	Significance for N of outcome measures
Number of letters known	.51 ^{***} (b)	.53 ^{***} (b)	.50 ^{**} (b)	(.51) ^{***} c	.52 ^{***} c	5
Child chose to read books in nursery	.44 ^{**} (b)	.53 ^{***} (b)	.46 ^{***} (b)	(.36) [*] c	.45 ^{**} c	5
Child attended to stories read in nursery	.27 [*] b	.31 [*] (b)	.22 b	.48 ^{**} c	(.46 ^{**}) c	4
Child able to write first name correctly	.54 ^{***} b	.50 ^{***} b	.49 ^{***} (b)	(.48 ^{***}) c	(.56 ^{***}) c	5
Child able to copy phrase correctly	.33 ^{**} b	.47 ^{***} (b)	.40 ^{**} (b)	.46 ^{**} c	.51 ^{***} c	5
Child listened to stories at home frequently	.32 [*] b	.31 [*] (b)	.46 ^{***} (b)	.40 ^{**} (c)	.32 c	4
Child's score, concepts about print	.26 [*] (b)	.25 [*] (b)	.19 (b)	.09 c)	.15 c)	2
WPPSI score	.55 ^{***} (a)	.37 ^{**} a	.48 ^{**} a	.39 ^{**} (b)	.41 ^{**} b	5
EPVT score quotient	.53 ^{***} a)	.56 ^{***} (a)	.69 ^{***} (a)	.51 ^{***} (b)	(.52 ^{***}) b	5

Significance Levels:

- | | | | |
|-----|----------|-----|----------------------------|
| *** | - p<.001 | a) | Pearson r |
| ** | - p<.01 | (b) | Point Biserial Correlation |
| * | - p<.05 | (c) | Contingency Coefficient |

Table O Correlation coefficients, point biserial correlations and contingency coefficients, levels of significance between outcome measures for children aged seven (end of Key Stage 1), and process variables, by Key Stage 1

	Reading Book Level	YGRT Score	Combined Writing Score	SAT English Level	'Having Literacy Difficulties'	Significance for N of outcome measures
Parent knew how reading was taught in school	.41** (b)	.44** (b)	.43** (b)	(.46)** (c)	(.41)** (c)	5
Child read on their own at home	.40** (b)	.35** (b)	.30* (b)	(.37)* (c)	(.42)** (c)	5
Child reported seeing someone read at home	.37** (b)	.26** (b)	.37** (b)	(.32)* (c)	(.24) (c)	4
Teacher assessment of support for reading at home	.38** (b)	.51*** (b)	.37** (b)	(.41)** (c)	(.33)* (c)	5
Parent worried about how to help with reading	.37** (b)	-.25 (b)	-.33* (b)	(.10)* (c)	(.00) (c)	2
Child wrote on own at home	.32** (b)	.34** (b)	.35** (b)	(.26) (c)	(.30) (c)	3
Frequency with which child read on own at home	.46*** (b)	.50*** (b)	.42** (b)	(.43)* (c)	(.52)** (c)	5
Parent said they received advice on literacy	.38** (b)	.28* (b)	.24 (b)	(.37)* (c)	(.32) (c)	3
Parent knew how writing was taught in school	.31* (b)	.30* (b)	.36** (b)	(.12) (c)	(.16) (c)	3
Teacher reported child took books home	.31* (b)	.23 (b)	.34** (c)	(.37)* (c)	(.42)** (c)	4
Parents gave examples of day-to-day literacy	.25* (b)	.50*** (b)	.38** (b)	(.37)* (c)	(.42)** (c)	5
Use of computer at home	.47*** (b)	.32* (b)	.47*** (b)	(.32)* (c)	(.34)* (c)	5

Table O (Continued)

	Reading Book Level	YGRT Score	Combined Writing Score	SAT English Level	'Having Literacy Difficulties'	Significance for N of outcome measures
Literacy materials stored appropriately	.16 (b)	.26* (b)	.47*** (b)	(.38)* (c)	(.34)* (c)	4
Frequency of reading out loud at home	.14 (b)	.26* (b)	.34 (b)	(.46)** (c)	(.45)** (c)	3
Literacy difficulties in the family	-.20 (b)	-.36** (b)	-.36** (b)	(.32) (c)	(.39) (c)	2
Books read all the way through to child	.27* (b)	.26* (b)	.33** (b)	(.15) (c)	(.11) (c)	3

Significance Levels:

*** - $p < .001$
 ** - $p < .01$
 * - $p < .05$

(b) Point Biserial Correlation
 (c) Contingency Coefficient