

Community Literacy Practices and Schooling: Towards effective support for students

Vol 1

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CONTENTS

Section 1. Background to the Research

1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Objectives of the Project	1
1.3	Project Team	3
1.4	Outline of the Final Report	3

Section 2. Review of Related Research

2.1	Literacy as social and cultural practice	5
2.2	Social and cultural differences and the impact of these on school success	6
2.3	Studies of cultural difference	7
2.4	Identifying mismatches between home and school	8
2.5	The way ahead	9

Section 3. Methodology

3.1	Introduction	11
3.2	Phase 1 - Innovative Practices Phase	11
3.2.1	Participating schools	11
3.2.2	Data collection	12
3.2.3	Data analysis	13
3.3	Phase 2 - Home / School Phase	13
3.3.1	Sites	14
3.3.2	Participants	14
3.3.3	Overview of data collection	14
3.3.4	Family member co-researchers	15
3.3.5	Data collection at school	15
3.3.6	Data analysis	16
3.3.7	Conclusion	18
3.4	Phase 3 - Development of Strategies Phase	19

Section 4. Acknowledging Diversity: Case Studies of Innovative Schools

4.1	Introduction	21
4.2	Discussion of Key Issues and Findings	21
4.3	Essential elements of school change	23
4.4	Conclusion	27

Section 5. Literacy At Home

5.1	Introduction	29
5.2	The dominance of 'school literacy' in home contexts	29
5.3	Conclusion	33

Section 6. Literacy At School

6.1	Introduction	35
6.2	Notions of 'success' and support for learning	36
6.3	The child as mediator between home and school	39
6.4	Literacy from home to school	39

6.5	Taking ‘school literacy’ home	40
6.6	Conclusion	40
Section 7. Discourse Practices and Opportunities to Learn		
7.1	Introduction	43
7.2	Interactional structures	43
7.3	Identification of specific ‘constructions of literacy’	49
7.4	Conclusion	54
Section 8. Conclusions and Recommendations		
8.1	Introduction	55
8.2	Negotiating school literacy	55
8.3	‘School literacy’ as empowerment	56
8.4	Conclusions and Recommendations	57
8.4.1	Innovative Practices Phase	57
8.4.2	Home/School Phase	60
8.4.3	Methodological Issues	63
8.5	Conclusion	64
Section 9. Responding to Language and Literacy Diversity: Activities for Educators, Families and Communities		
9.1	Introduction	65
9.2	Classroom based activities and strategies	66
9.3	School based activities and strategies	67
9.4	Family based activities and strategies	68
9.5	Community based activities and strategies	69
9.6	Conclusion	70
Bibliography		71

Section 1

Background to the Research

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this project was to explore differences in the language and literacy practices of schools, families and community groups. In particular, it examined matches and mismatches between the discourse practices of home and school and the impact that any differences have on students' school success. The research was funded by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA).

The project was motivated by strong evidence indicating that schools inconsistently tap the social and cultural resources of society, inadvertently privileging specific groups by emphasising particular linguistic styles, curricula and authority patterns (Bourdieu, 1977; Gee, 1990). It has been suggested that involving parents more closely in school education may assist both parents and teachers to develop greater knowledge of the other's specific language and literacy practices (Cairney, 1994; Moll, 1993). This in turn may well enable both teachers and parents to understand the way each defines, values and uses literacy. As a result, schools might be able to adjust their practices to meet the needs of families from diverse social, cultural and language backgrounds. At the same time, it may provide parents with greater opportunities to observe and understand the literacy practices that schools support, and which ultimately empower individuals to take their place in society (Cairney, 1994). This project sought to:

- observe and analyse innovative attempts to create school curricula and learning environments that meet the needs of specific students and which facilitate effective partnerships between home, school and community;
- identify matches and mismatches between the literacy practices of specific families and the schools of their children and their impact on the school success of children.

The study involved detailed analysis of family, community and school contexts, and focused on families with children in primary and secondary schools. Observation of home, school and community literacy practices, the collection of literacy artefacts, interviews with all participants, and discourse analysis of a range of literacy events all informed our exploration of these issues.

1.2 Objectives of the Project

The four main objectives of this project as stated in the funding submission were as follows:

1.2.1 To observe the language and literacy practices of 4 school sites that are identified as adopting innovative practices to acknowledge the diversity of community languages and literacy.

This initial phase of the project was designed to examine current promising initiatives in schools that acknowledged and responded to the cultural and language diversity of communities. This phase was an attempt (in a sense) to establish a baseline of innovative practices in the areas that the project brief suggested are desired outcomes. Specifically, we addressed the following questions:

- What specific steps have the schools identified to acknowledge and value community language and literacy practices?
- What evidence is there of changes in school curricula and classroom environments to acknowledge and value the diversity of community languages and literacy practices?
- What processes and strategies can be identified that have been used within these sites to achieve these ends?
- What impact have these changes had on student literacy and learning in the school and community?

1.2.2 To identify matches and mismatches between the literacy practices of home and school and to consider their consequences for the success of children at school.

The purpose of this objective was to describe in detail the specific literacy practices of a number of diverse home, community and school contexts. The research in this project was an attempt to build on previous Australian work, particularly that conducted by Breen et al. (1994), Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe and Munsie (1995), Cairney, Lowe and Sproats (1995), and Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn (1995). The project sought to provide the following:

- Detailed description and discourse analysis of the literacy practices of students in a number of different schools (primary and secondary) paying particular attention to 'school' and 'non school' literacy practices in use within these sites by students and teachers, and the spoken discourse practices within which they are embedded.
- Parallel description and discourse analysis of the home and community literacy practices of students, and the teachers and community members with whom students have a relationship (eg. family members, community language school staff, homework centre staff, friends).
- Description of student school achievement in literacy and learning.
- Description and interpretive analysis of student, teacher, parent and community member accounts on English literacy and support of English literacy learning in school and community contexts.

1.2.3 To identify ways in which schools and communities can use the knowledge gained from the above explorations (as well as that contributed from previous research) to create school curricula and learning environments that meet the needs of all students, and to build effective partnerships between home and school.

Specifically, we sought to:

- identify the most effective strategies to enable teachers to examine and study the literacy practices of their children (as used at school, at home and in the community);
- develop school and community based strategies that will lead schools to be more responsive to the language and literacy complexity of the areas they serve;
- develop strategies to enhance communication between all parties involved in schooling;
- explore the development of more effective partnerships between school and community at several sites considering, in particular, the diverse needs of specific target groups.

1.2.4 Develop a comprehensive report of our work and an accompanying volume written specifically for schools and communities.

The first volume of our report has been written specifically for schools and communities. The second volume is a substantial report of our research, findings and implications. Both volumes have sections that include:

- What our research tells us about matches and mismatches between the language and literacy practices of home, school and community.
- Descriptions of effective strategies that some schools and communities have used to address these matches and mismatches.
- An outline of effective strategies for enhancing communication and partnership between school and community.
- Professional development starting points that attempt to encourage teachers to analyse the language and literacy of their classrooms; develop opportunities for dialogue between school and community; and develop strategies for more fully integrating the diversity of language and literacy evident in communities into classroom and school practice.

1.3 Project Team

The research team for this project was as follows:

- Professor Trevor Cairney
(Principal Researcher / Director of the Project)
- Ms Jenny Ruge
(Co-researcher / Project Co-ordinator)
- Mr John Buchanan
(Part-time Research Assistant, Innovative Practices Phase, Home/School Phase¹)
- Mrs Nerida Dalitz
(Part-time Research Assistant, Home/School Phase)
- Mrs Eira Sproats
(Part-time Research Assistant, Home/School Phase)

1.4 Advisory Committee

The work of the project team was supported by an Advisory Committee consisting of academics, educational practitioners, representatives of key interest groups, and representatives of DEETYA. The committee met on 4 occasions during the project to provide advice, respond to draft material, and monitor the research. The members of the Advisory Committee were as follows:

- Dr Paul Brock
NSW Department of Training and Education Co-ordination
- Ms Stephanie Gunn
National Co-ordinator, Children's Literacy Projects
- Ms Jan Hancock
Australian Literacy Federation
- Mr Paul Hardage
NSW Department of School Education
- Mrs Josephine Lonergan

¹ John Buchanan was also responsible for writing a draft of two site case studies included in Section 4 and for the Australian component of Section 2.3 of the literature review in Section 2.

Australian Parents Council
Mrs Gail Lonnon
Federation of School Community Organisations
Ms Christine Ludwig
Education Queensland
Mrs Natascha McNamara
Centre for Indigenous Development Education & Research
Ms Lynne Munsie
NSW Department of School Education
Professor Bridie Raban
University of Melbourne
Ms Sue Scott
State Library of NSW

Ms Irlande Alfred (formerly NLLIA) and Ms Nicole Gilding (formerly DEETYA, South Australia) were also members of the Advisory Committee at the commencement of the project. However, due to changes in employment both subsequently resigned their membership of the committee.

Advice was also given at several critical points in the research process by the following people:

Professor John Gumperz
University of California (Los Angeles)
Professor Judith Green
University of California (Santa Barbara)

1.5 Outline of the Final Report

The final report of the project consists of two volumes. This first volume is essentially an executive summary of the complete report contained in the second volume. The Executive Summary contains background information pertaining to the study, as well as a condensed literature review and brief statement of the methodology for all phases of the project. Included is a summary of the major findings and recommendations of the study, as well as a description of school and community based strategies for responding to language and literacy diversity. This volume is designed to be used by schools and community groups as a starting point for enhancing communication between all parties involved in schooling, and for building more effective partnerships between home and school.

The complete report is contained in the second volume. This includes background information, a detailed review of related research, and a complete statement of our methodology for all phases of the project. It contains case studies of the four schools included in the Innovative Practices phase of the research, as well as a discussion of the findings of this phase. The full report includes a description of the Home/School phase of the research, including identified differences in the language and literacy practices of schools and families, and the impact of these on students' school success. This volume also contains a report of our findings, conclusions and recommendations, as well as a range of strategies and activities designed to assist educators, families and communities to respond to language and literacy diversity. The final section contains a list of references cited in the report, as well as a number of appendices.

Section 2

Related Research

2.1 Literacy as social and cultural practice

A central premise of the sociocultural approach to literacy that influenced this research is that literacy is not a single unitary skill; rather, it is a social practice which has many specific manifestations (Gee, 1990; Luke, 1993; Welch & Freebody, 1993; Cairney, 1995). There are many forms of literacy, each with specific purposes and contexts in which they are used. This is experienced as a set of social practices embedded within specific literacy events. As such, literacy cannot be separated from the people who use it. Literacy is a process situated in sociocultural contexts defined by members of a group through their actions with, through and about language. To understand literacy fully, therefore, we need to understand the groups and institutions through which we are socialised into specific literacy practices (Bruner, 1986; Gee, 1990).

Literacy practices are situationally defined in and through the interactions and practices of students and teachers at school, and family and community members at home (Collins & Green, 1992; Cairney, 1995). When people engage in specific literacy events, they act and interact in ways which socially construct, and are constructed by, the general cultural ways of using literacy. Literacy events contribute to, and constitute part of, the literacy practices of the particular classroom, family or community group. In this research project, similarities and differences in home and school literacy practices were identified through intensive study of the myriad literacy events engaged in by the participating students at home and at school.

Like schools and classrooms, families can be understood as cultures² in which participants (family members) construct particular ways of acting, believing and valuing through the interactions among family members. Thus, families construct particular views of literacy, and what it means to be literate. As Hannon (1995) suggests, "The family's literacy values and practices will shape the course of the child's literacy development in terms of the opportunities, recognition, interaction and models available to them" (p. 104). That is, families' shared ways of participating in literate behaviour may be defined as the opportunities for literacy learning that family members have through the provision of resources and experiences, the recognition and valuing of members achievements, the interactions surrounding literacy events, and the models of literacy demonstrated by family members (Hannon, 1995).

Since literacy is a social and cultural practice, members of different cultures engage in different literate practices and differ in what they see as literate behaviour (Ferdman, 1990). In any culturally diverse society, there will be different conceptions of what it is to be literate, that is, there are "multiple literacies" (Gee, 1990). Research into family literacy practices across cultural groups, then, has the potential to contribute a great deal to our understanding of the relationship between literacy practices at home and at school, and the impact of this relationship on school success.

² Culture may be defined as the beliefs, values and ways of acting that mark membership of a specific group (Au, 1993). As she pointed out that this view of culture entails a number of characteristics: culture is learned through the interactions of members of a group; it is shared, as a way of thinking and acting shared by group members; it is an adaptation, in the sense that it adapts to specific political and economic conditions; and it is continually changing.

2.2 Social and cultural differences and the impact of these on school success

Two major theories have been suggested as possible explanations for schools' failure to ensure high levels of academic success for students from minority backgrounds. The first is the theory of *cultural discontinuity*, while the second can be termed the theory of *structural inequality* (Au, 1993).

The theory of cultural discontinuity, or cultural difference, suggests that cultural mismatches between teachers and students may result in difficulties in communication and interaction in the classroom (Jacob & Jordan, 1987). These differences, or mismatches, work against the literacy learning of students whose home culture does not reflect that of the school. The theory of structural inequality looks beyond mismatches between the culture of the home and the school. It suggests that the lack of educational success of students of diverse backgrounds reflects structural inequalities in the broader social, political and economic spheres (Ogbu, 1987; Au, 1993). This theory takes into account the power relationships between groups, and argues that schools function to maintain the status quo. Au (1993) argued that neither of these two theories on their own adequately explains the continuing educational disadvantage of students from minority backgrounds, and that both theories need to be considered in any attempt to improve students' chances of educational success.

Critical analyses of social and cultural differences and the impact of these on school success tend to adopt a 'structural inequality' perspective. They attribute educational disadvantage to "oppressive social structures that create vast inequalities in power and opportunity favoring the dominant group" (Au, 1995, p.87). Au suggests that critical analyses, while contributing to literacy research by making "the political nature of literacy and literacy learning overt" (p.89), concentrate too much on social class at the expense of issues of ethnicity and language. Ogbu's work was cited as an exception to this criticism.

Luke (1995) has adopted a critical analysis perspective in attempting to explain why it is that differences in literacy practices result in differences in school success. He argued that:

... some variations of holistic models naturalise particular interactional patterns and textual practices in ways that systematically exclude those students from economically marginal and culturally different backgrounds (Luke, 1995, p. 16)

He explained the process through which this exclusion occurs, and questioned the inevitability of school disadvantage of students of minority backgrounds:

... many contemporary folk theories of literacy assume that school acquired cultural capital is a causal factor for particular social, economic and cultural outcomes. Schools clearly can 'make a difference' in the construction of students' cultural capital. The selective traditions of literacy education may have a key role in shaping students' habituses and building their cultural capital. Schooling entails the acquisition of embodied practices, development of a 'portfolio' of discursive and material demonstrations of those practices, and achievement of actual institutional credentials. But educational institutions cannot provide product guarantees for the value of this capital. (Luke, 1995, p.18)

Coe (1995) pointed out that even the way in which 'school achievement' is defined and assessed can disadvantage certain groups of students. He argued that schools fail to recognise that literacy is situated, that it varies according to the context and purposes for which it is used, and that a person may be highly literate within one situation and not in another. Generally, the assessment of school achievement suffers similar bias.

The study which forms the basis of this report attempts to combine elements of a critical analysis with elements of a cultural difference analysis. That is, while it focuses on classroom level interactions and individual students, it seeks to understand these within the

broader context of cultural and/or linguistic differences, and differences between home and school.

2.3 Studies of cultural difference

Recent Australian studies (Breen et al, 1994; Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995; Cairney, Lowe & Sproats, 1995; Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995) have shown that there are differences between the language and literacy practices of school and community. In contrast, evidence exists which suggests that diversity of literacy practices within and between schools is far less evident (Cairney, Lowe & Sproats, 1995; Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995) than might be expected. This evidence is consistent with other research that has identified the difference between the language and literacy of school and that of homes and communities as a significant factor in the achievement or non achievement of students at school (e.g. Scribner & Cole, 1981; Heath, 1983).

A study of differences in the educational achievement of students from urban, rural and remote schools in Western Australia (Breen et al, 1994) found that location of the school did not significantly affect student performance. The two factors which were found to have most influence on students' school success were whether the student was from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, and the socioeconomic status of the school.

Foster (1992) suggested that research over the past two decades or so "has found that many of the difficulties African-American students encounter in becoming literate result in part from the misunderstandings that occur when the speaking and communication styles of their community vary from those expected and valued in the school setting" (p.303). Foster recognised that research has contributed to our understanding of differences in language use at home and at school, has helped us to recognise the contextually specific nature of language use, and has demonstrated that classrooms are cultures with culturally specific ways of using language. However, she argued that it has "done little to advance our ability to use knowledge about cultural and linguistic differences to improve classroom learning" (p.304) and, in particular, has had little impact on creating classroom environments, pedagogy, or curricula "specifically designed to improve the literacy learning of African-American children" (p. 308). Foster suggested that part of the reason for this is that researchers have concentrated on explaining cultural discontinuities and differences in linguistic codes, and have devoted little attention to differences in interactional styles and ways of using language at home and at school.

Willis (1995) has argued that children from cultural and linguistic minority groups continue to have difficulty in achieving school success because the dominant pedagogical approaches are based on "a narrow understanding of school knowledge and literacy, which are defined and defended as what one needs to know and how one needs to know it in order to be successful in school and society" (p.34).

As well, Cummins (1986) has pointed to power relationships as critical factors in determining success or failure at school. He has argued that the educational success or failure of minority students is "a function of the extent to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist within the broader society" (p. 32). His work provides a useful framework for evaluating the efforts of the schools included in this research. Cummins identified four structural elements of schooling which, he argued, influence the extent to which students from minority backgrounds are empowered or disadvantaged:

... these elements include the incorporation of minority students' culture and language, inclusion of minority communities in the education of their children, pedagogical assumptions and practices operating in the classroom, and the assessment of minority students (Cummins, 1986, p. 24).

2.4 Identifying mismatches between home and school

Classrooms are dynamic interactional spaces where individuals come together for the purpose of schooling to construct situated definitions of teacher, student, knowledge, values, and so on (Ferne et al, 1988; Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1991). Thus, "the culture of the classroom can be seen as a dynamic system of values, beliefs, and standards, developed through understandings which the teacher and the students have come to share" (Au, 1993, p. 9). Recognising classrooms as cultures entails acknowledging that literacy in classrooms is more than reading and writing, that "it also involves the communicative processes through which it is constructed" (Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992, p.121).

Using the methodology of interactional sociolinguistics, the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (1992) has shown how literate actions and what counts as literacy are constructed through the actions and interactions with and about text that occur in everyday classroom situations. They point out that students construct a model of literacy based on the literate actions in which they engage, and that the model or models that are constructed reflect school literacy and may support or constrain students' use of literacy in contexts outside the classroom. Thus, "student actions and statements (are) a patterned way of acting or communicating that students have learned from the opportunities afforded them in ... classrooms" (p.145) and do not necessarily reflect students' ability.

However, in attempting to understand how literate action is constructed in classrooms, the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group acknowledge a range of sources of influence both inside and outside the group (eg. family, community, peer group, education system). They suggest that studies of classroom interaction cannot, of themselves, illuminate the ways in which literacy is defined and used by individuals and groups:

... a focus on the actions and interactions of members of the group is necessary but not sufficient to define literate actions and to understand what counts as literacy (Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992, p.137).

Puro & Bloome (1987) have highlighted both the explicit and implicit nature of classroom communication in instruction. They suggest that the "implicit influence of classroom communication on instruction is often overlooked, yet it has powerful effects on instruction and on what children learn in school" (p.26). They point out that communication is interpreted using more than just the explicit content of the message, and that the interactional context is taken into account when teachers and students communicate with each other. They go further in suggesting that the interactional context is not something that simply exists in the classroom (or anywhere else), but is constructed by teachers and students in their interactions with each other. Puro and Bloome argue that classroom learning includes "learning the academic and social processes for acquiring knowledge and acquiring new learning strategies" (p.28), and that what constitutes classroom learning will be different for different students, depending on their social roles and status as well as differences in the frames of reference that students bring to the classroom. They define the concept of procedural display as "teachers and students displaying to each other those interactional behaviours necessary to get through a lesson without necessarily engaging the substantive content of the lesson" (p.29). They argue that students contextualise what they learn in the context of communication (both explicit and implicit) in the classroom, so teachers need to examine the nature of that communication and the effects it has on students' construction of learning.

2.5 The way ahead

Research from a broad range of disciplines and perspectives has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the interrelationships between culture, language, literacy and school success. No longer is the failure of children from minority backgrounds attributed to deficits in their family environments, linguistic codes, or the children themselves, at least among

researchers. However, the difficulties associated with applying these understandings to the development of culturally responsive classroom environments and pedagogy have meant that the research is still largely theoretical (Foster, 1992). As Foster warned:

If this line of research is to have a significant impact on practice, researchers must explain and practitioners must understand the cultural, linguistic, and sociolinguistic principles undergirding (culturally responsive) practices. If teachers are going to become reflective practitioners, they need to possess both theoretical and practical knowledge of how to use cultural, linguistic, and sociolinguistic information to develop ways of teaching that not only respect cultural diversity but insure high levels of literacy (p.309).

Gee (1990) has suggested that "short of radical social change" there is "no access to power in society without control over the social practices in thought, speech and writing essay-text literacy and its attendant world view" (p. 67). We need to ask constantly, what does this mean for the way literacy is defined and used at school, the programs we initiate with and for families, and the relationships that exist between schools and communities? (Cairney, 1994).

The match and mismatch in language and literacy between home/community and school is of vital importance in addressing the specific needs of all students, but in particular, those who experience difficulties with literacy and schooling. However, there is still much to be learned about this topic. What we do know is that classrooms are not simple places; they are dynamic interactional spaces where individuals come together for the purpose of schooling to construct situated definitions of teacher, student, knowledge, values and so on (Fornie, 1988; Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1991). In the words of Bruner (1986), they are a forum for negotiating culture. But whose culture, and on what (and whose) terms is this culture negotiated? Furthermore, what impact do such practices have on the achievement of all students? (Cairney, 1994).

We already know that talk associated with literacy within the home is related to differences in culture and language (e.g. Heath, 1983; Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995; Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995) and that this is related to school success. There is preliminary evidence suggesting that the way teachers shape classroom discourse is at times limited in scope and not reflective of the diversity of student language and culture (Gutierrez, 1993; Cairney, Sproats & Lowe, 1995; Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995). As well, there is preliminary evidence to indicate that changes in classroom programs and environments can be made to make them more reflective of the cultural and linguistic diversity of students (e.g. Wilson Keenan, Willett and Solsken, 1993; Neuman & Roskos, 1995). Finally, there is some initial evidence concerning the nature of family and community literacy practices (e.g. Heath, 1983; Teale, 1984; Wells, 1985; Breen et al, 1994; Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995; Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995). However, there are still a number of issues for which the evidence is inconclusive and which are of critical importance for ongoing research (Cairney & Ruge, 1996).

Identifying mismatches between students' home and school cultures necessarily involves understanding the different ways in which students construct their view of literacy through their interactions at home and at school. Developing such understanding requires detailed analysis of a range of literate actions and interactions in home and school contexts.

The project which forms the basis of this report breaks new ground in that it attempts to go beyond theory and to develop school-based and classroom-based strategies that not only take account of cultural and linguistic discontinuities, but empower all students to become literate and achieve school success. In doing so, it seeks to empower schools and teachers to develop closer ties with students' homes and communities so that mismatches can be recognised and understood, and so that curricula can be developed to support the educational success of all students.

Section 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The *Community Literacy Practices and Schooling* research project was conducted in three major phases which corresponded to the first three of the four major objectives described in section 1 of this Executive Summary. The fourth major objective was to prepare a comprehensive report of our work, which is contained in this volume, and an accompanying volume written specifically for schools and communities.

Each of the three major phases of the project utilised different data collection techniques and data analysis procedures. Therefore, it is necessary to describe the methodology used for each of these phases separately. This section contains a statement of the methodologies used in the Innovative Practices phase, the Home/School phase, and the Development of Strategies phase of the research.

3.2 Phase 1 - Innovative Practices Phase

This phase of the project was designed to address the first objective of the research:

To observe the language and literacy practices of 4 school sites that are identified as adopting innovative practices to acknowledge the diversity of community languages and literacy.

Specifically, it was designed to address the following questions:

- What specific steps have the schools identified to acknowledge and value community language and literacy practices?
- What evidence is there of changes in the school curricula and classroom environments to acknowledge the diversity of community language and literacy practices?
- What processes and strategies can be identified that have been used within these sites to achieve these ends?
- What impact have these changes had on student literacy and learning in the school and community?

In this phase, four detailed case studies of individual schools (3 primary and 1 secondary) were conducted. Individual case reports for each school, as well as a discussion of the findings of this phase, are contained in the following section.

3.2.1 Participating schools

The four schools³ included in this phase of the project, and for which extensive data collection and analysis were conducted, were:

³ The names of all the schools and participants involved in this project have been changed to protect the identity of individuals and families.

- Ridgehaven Girls' High School, with approximately 95% of students from language backgrounds other than English, with a predominance of speakers of Arabic and Vietnamese. The school community was predominantly low to lower middle socio-economic status.
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School with approximately 91% of students from language backgrounds other than English, particularly Vietnamese, Spanish, and other Asian languages. The school was in a community which is predominantly low socio-economic status.
- Parklands Public School, with approximately 75% of students from language backgrounds other than English, but no predominant language group. Families were predominantly low socio-economic status with a small middle socio-economic status group.
- Woodgate Public School, with approximately 25% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students from low-socio-economic status groups, approximately 5% middle socio-economic status group Aboriginal students, and a large proportion of students from predominantly English-speaking middle to upper socio-economic status groups.

3.2.2 Data collection

Each selected school site was visited on a number of occasions, with at least two members of the research team conducting each initial visit, and one member of the team taking responsibility for data collection on subsequent visits. The Principal Researcher was present for each initial visit, as well as subsequent visits to some sites. The Senior Research Assistant conducted visits to the secondary school and one primary school, while the Research Assistant conducted visits to one of the remaining primary schools. The final primary school was visited on a number of occasions by both the Senior Research Assistant and the Research Assistant.

Data collection during school visits was guided by the conceptual framework developed by the researchers (see Figure 3.1, Volume 2). For each element in the conceptual framework, key informants and sources of data were identified. Data collection was also informed by content analysis of documents provided by the school during (or subsequent to) the initial visit. A number of data collection instruments, including contact summary sheets, document summary forms and interview schedules, were developed to aid the data collection process in this phase of the research. These are included as appendices to the main report (see Appendices B to D in Volume 2).

The research team collected a variety of data utilising a number of methods, including:

- observation of the practices of the school (including making field notes and collecting artefacts);
- collection of school documents and artefacts describing their practices;
- interviews with a cross section of parents, community members, students and staff concerning the initiatives being run, knowledge of other participants in the school community, attitudes towards schooling, knowledge of literacy and student achievements;
- examination of school data on student achievements.

A flexible timetable of visits to schools was necessary to facilitate the observation of specific critical events or programs, including evening meetings of parents when appropriate. Due to the reluctance of some informants to be recorded, a decision was made not to audio-tape interviews. Instead, extensive notes were made during interviews, with detailed summaries written as soon as possible after leaving the field. Periodic audits of data collected were made to ensure that all research questions were fully addressed. This process continued until the completion of the Innovative Practices phase of the research.

3.2.3 Data analysis

Data analysis was a recursive process, beginning with the design of the project, and proceeding through to the writing of the final report. The methods of data analysis used in the Innovative Practices phase of this project are consistent with assumptions from interpretive/qualitative research traditions (eg. Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Erickson, 1986) and have utilised the constant comparative method to identify key issues and themes within the data. Content analysis was also used to analyse documents, policies and programs.

Preliminary data analysis was conducted immediately after each visit so that data collection in subsequent visits could be informed by the preliminary findings of initial data collection. In this phase, preliminary data analysis for each site was conducted by the research team member responsible for data collection in that site. Case analysis meetings involving all members of the research team for each site then reviewed preliminary findings to ensure consistency of data collection and analysis across sites. Once again, the conceptual framework developed for this phase of the research was used to guide data analysis and to shape the report of findings.

Extensive data collection and analysis for the four schools was conducted and individual case reports were prepared. These reports included information about the school and community context; the preconditions or critical events which precipitated the introduction of innovative practices; details of curricular, pedagogical and community participation initiatives in each school; and evidence of the impact key initiatives have had on language, literacy and learning. The reports were then returned to the schools for member checking. School staff members were given an opportunity to respond to the draft case reports either verbally (at staff meetings attended by members of the research team) or in writing. The case reports, together with a discussion of the findings of this phase of the project, are included in the following section of this report.

Table 3.2: Summary of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures for Innovative Practices Phase

Data collected	Data collection techniques	Data analysis procedures
Innovative Practices Phase		
Examples of innovative practices and strategies for recognising language and literacy diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of practices • Collection of documents and artefacts • Interviews with school and community members • Examination of school data on outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of largely interpretive analysis procedures • Content analysis of documents, policies and programs

3.3 Phase 2 - Home/School Phase

This phase of the project was designed to address the second objective of the research:

To identify matches and mismatches between the literacy practices of home and school and to consider their consequences for the success of children at school.

The project sought to provide the following:

- Detailed description and discourse analysis of the literacy practices of students in a number of different schools, paying particular attention to 'school' and 'non

school' literacy practices in use within these sites by students and teachers, and the spoken discourse practices within which they are embedded.

- Parallel description and discourse analysis of the home and community literacy practices of students, and the teachers and community members with whom students have a relationship (eg. family members, community language school staff, homework centre staff, friends).
- Description of student school achievement in literacy and learning.
- Description and interpretive analysis of student, teacher, parent and community member accounts on English literacy and support of English literacy learning in school and community contexts.

As in phase 1, data collection and analysis were guided by a conceptual framework developed by the researchers (see Figure 3.2, Volume 2).

3.3.1 Sites

The selection of sites for the Home/School phase of this project was made through negotiation with the individual schools involved in the Innovative Practices phase. It was also decided to include in this phase one school that had not involved in the Innovative Practices phase of the research. Parklands School which had only agreed to participate in Phase 1 and so did not take part in Phase 2. The school added was:

- *Jersey Road Public School* - Principal and staff readily agreed to be involved. This school was selected because it has a large non English-speaking population, but has not adapted curriculum in specific ways to acknowledge the diversity of its community. It was selected to provide a valuable comparison to the other schools included in the project.

3.3.2 Participants

This phase of the project involved the observation of 35⁴ students in a number of different schools (primary and secondary) and community contexts. The students chosen provided a methodological sampling procedure (through our tracking of them) to enable sampling of events leading to meaningful observations in the diverse language and literacy contexts experienced by the students. These students in effect guided our observation of diverse contexts with the team observing discourse in contexts where the students learn and use literacy. They served a 'tracer' role, allowing us to observe their literacy practices as well as those for the people with whom they interacted day by day.

3.3.3 Overview of data collection

The method of tracking individual students through their real world literacy contexts involved the collection of the following forms of data:

- Interview data from students, parents, teachers and other community support workers (where applicable) concerning the literacy practices of everyday life, and the role of school, home and community in the development of literacy.
- Student, parent and teacher self reporting of their own literacy practices utilising time sampling techniques.
- Observation of literacy practices at school, home and in the community utilising participant observation, self audio taping of interactions (eg. homework, story reading, playing literacy-related games, discussion of school activities). Selected

⁴ The application for funding for this project specified a cohort of 60 students. However, following advice from the Advisory Committee, this number was reduced to allow more detailed data collection in a range of contexts for each student.

family members acted as co-researchers with us, tape recording interactions and (in some families) taking photographs of significant literacy events (using disposable cameras).

- Audio recording of specific forms of literacy practice (eg. story reading at home and school; homework discussion at home and school; research/project work discussion and completion at home and school). This was later transcribed and subjected to discourse analysis (see methods below).
- Data on student achievement was also collected to enable comparisons to be made between high and low achieving students. These data were existing data in the form of school assessments, and teachers' records on individual students.

The data collection was conducted over a period of 4-6 months by a team of four research assistants. Each assistant spent an average of 1.5 to 2 days per week within one of the participating communities. This time was used for interviews with students, staff and family members; observation of classroom interactions; home visits; and meetings with family member co-researchers. In the sections that follow, the data collection procedures used in homes and in schools are described separately.

3.3.4 Family member co-researchers

One member of each family was asked to act as co-researcher. In three families with young children, the mother was co-researcher, while in one other family, an older sister acted as co-researcher. In nineteen families, the co-researcher was the eldest child attending the participating school (although not necessarily the eldest child in the family). Three student co-researchers were in Year 9, seven were in Year 7, three in Grade 6, one in Grade 5, seven in Grade 4 and two in Grade 3. In four families, the co-researcher was not the oldest sibling attending the participating school, but was the oldest sibling to be observed in class and to collect home data.

The Research Assistant responsible for collecting data in each site met with the child co-researchers on a regular basis (approximately weekly). In two sites, the Senior Research Assistant conducted the initial meeting with the co-researchers, in the presence of the Research Assistant responsible for that site. This ensured consistency of instructions to co-researchers across sites. At the initial meeting, each child was given a small tape-recorder and considerable time was spent in explaining how to record successfully. Each child was given the opportunity to practise using the recorder, and to play back samples of recorded talk. Each child was also given copies of the 'Audio Recording of Literacy Activities - Cover Sheet' which was developed by the researchers. The purpose of the sheet was explained, and examples were given. Examples of the types of home literacy events which could be recorded were discussed at length, both at the initial meeting with co-researchers and at subsequent meetings. The context of each recorded event was discussed with co-researchers when they returned tapes.

Our co-researchers also collected a range of other home data, including an audit of literacy resources in the home, and self-reported time-sampling of literacy activities. Audits of home literacy resources were conducted in a number of ways. Students who had difficulty in completing the audit were asked to draw a map of their home and then describe the literacy resources in each room or area of the house to the research assistant. Alternatively, students were asked to take an imaginary 'walk' around their home, describing the literacy resources room by room. The descriptions were audio taped and later transcribed. These methods were adapted from the work of Denny Taylor (1983).

3.3.5 Data collection at school

Classroom observations were conducted in a total of eight classrooms across the three participating primary schools. In addition, classroom observations were conducted across

seven subject areas in Years 7 and 9 in the participating secondary school. A total of eighty two days of classroom observation were conducted across the four schools.

The amount of time spent in each classroom varied for a number of reasons. For example, the total number of classroom observation days is greatest for the school which was included in the pilot phase of data collection. Some schools and classes had more interruptions to regular class timetables than did other schools. Also, the frequency of use of casual teachers varied across the schools and, while some casual teachers allowed the research assistant to observe in their class, on the whole we did not observe classes when casual teachers were present. Finally, 'tracking' the selected children involved observing, in some cases, a variety of class groupings. At St Joseph's School, for example, the children spend part of each day in 'Language Groups' and the remainder of the day in their regular class groupings. These changes in groupings make it difficult to calculate the number of days spent observing particular classes and/or students.

Since the selected children were to have a 'tracer' role (as described earlier), it was not considered necessary (or possible) to conduct extensive classroom observations of each child in each participating family. Instead, one child in each family was selected for intensive and long-term observation, with day-by-day interactions between these children and their siblings and friends providing data from a large number of additional children.

Field notes constructed during classroom observations were detailed and complex. One full day's observation in classrooms typically yielded 20-35 pages of such notes. In addition to constructing field notes, research assistants collected copies of artefacts used or produced by the participating students during observed classroom sessions.

Each of the participating teachers was interviewed at a time and place convenient to them. Interviews were conducted by the research assistant responsible for data collection in each site.

3.3.6 Data analysis

In this phase of the research two distinctly different (but complementary) methods of data analysis were used: qualitative and interpretive analysis of a variety of data, and detailed quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis utilising the method of 'cross case' analysis. The interpretive analysis involved the use of the constant comparative method as in the Innovative Practices phase and which is described in detail in a number of our publications (eg. Cairney, Lowe & Sproats, 1995).

The discourse analysis used in this phase of the research was designed to take account not only of the moment-to-moment interactions in classrooms and families, but also the broader social and literate contexts in which these interactions occur. It draws on a concept of discourse that combines a focus on the literacy practices engaged in by members of specific groups, the particular models and understandings of literacy constructed by group members, and a critical-linguistic focus on the actions and interactions through which these understandings are constructed. As Fairclough (1989) pointed out:

... in seeing language as discourse and social practice, one is committing oneself not just to analysing texts, nor just to analysing processes of production and interpretation, but to analysing the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions, both the immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures (p.26).

The discourse analysis employed a modified form of 'cross case' analysis and used all the qualitative data collected, as well as transcripts of language interactions in the varied literacy contexts outlined above. This analysis was essential to identify the matches and mismatches in the discourse patterns and literacy practices of school and community

contexts. This form of analysis was adapted from the work of Green and Wallat (1981), Bloome (1987) and Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993). The method required the careful analysis of transcripts of literacy interactions in association with other forms of data, and yielded both qualitative and quantitative interpretations.

The first step in the discourse analysis process involved *detailed observation and collection of audio tape data* of a broad range of 'literacy events'⁵ (in both home and school contexts).

The second step was to *construct Event Maps* representing ways members of the group engaged in literacy over time. These maps were constructed by asking a series of questions (see following section) about the unfolding activity among members participating in the literacy event. The purpose of *Event Maps* was to identify the full range of literacy practices engaged in by participating students both at home and at school, as well the texts used and/or produced during learning activities, and the purposes for engaging in literacy events.

The third step was to prepare a *domain analysis* (Spradley, 1980) of the event maps to identify the range of activities used as the participants engaged in literacy and the way this activity was shaped by the discourse. The purpose of the domain analysis was to identify patterns in the data by "going beyond mere descriptions of behaviour and things to discovering the cultural meaning of that behaviour" (Spradley, 1980, p.86). Domains are categories of cultural meaning that include smaller categories linked by a single semantic relationship. Steps involved in making a *domain analysis* include identifying cover terms, searching the data for included terms, and specifying the semantic relationship linking these terms.

The fourth step was to *identify from the observed literacy events 'cycles of activity'* (after Zaharlick & Green, 1991) that occurred over time, such as a sequence of literacy events concerning the completion of a project at home or the viewing of a series of television programs and associated reading and writing intertextually linked.

The fifth step involved the preparation of *transcripts* for each *key literacy event* (eg. a lesson on spelling; a homework session) or *'cycle of activity'*.

The final step was to *identify key events or cycles of activity* that were significant in the formation and shaping of school knowledge and success. This involved identifying the 'telling cases' that enabled us to see what counts as literacy in classrooms and families. This involved the careful analysis of the ways in which events were framed by teachers and parents, the norms and expectations for participation, and the roles and relationships involved with particular types of literacy use and learning. This analysis involved asking a series of questions about the unfolding activity among members participating in the literacy event: who can say or do what, with whom, when, where, for what purpose, under what conditions, in what ways, and with what outcomes? (Spradley, 1980; Zaharlick & Green, 1991).

The ultimate purpose of these discourse analyses was to identify the ways in which language and literacy practices shape learning in school and community contexts. These data then allowed us to describe in detail specific forms of matches and mismatches between the literacy and language of home and school. The final form of analysis conducted in this phase was a series of qualitative and quantitative comparisons of

⁵ The term 'literacy event' has its roots in the sociolinguistic idea of speech events dating back to the work of Dell Hymes in 1962, but it was subsequently developed by Heath (1983) to describe a distinct communicative situation where literacy has a key role. *Literacy events* are the particular activities where literacy has a role, whereas *literacy practices* are the general cultural ways of utilising literacy which people draw on in a specific literacy event (Barton, 1994).

outcomes data for students, and data concerning matches and mismatches in literacy practices from school to community.

From the complete set of audio taped home literacy interactions, approximately one quarter were selected for complete transcription and analysis. Selections were made on the basis of a number of criteria. First, interactions that showed a clear and explicit link to an identified classroom 'cycle of activity' were selected. Second, interactions which revealed other links to school events or artefacts were selected. Finally, additional interactions were selected to ensure that a broad range of families were represented, and that the full range of 'school-like' and 'non school-like' literacy events were included.

Transcripts of literacy events were analysed in two ways in this study. The first form of analysis focussed on the nature of the event itself. The second form of analysis focussed on the nature of the interactions between the participants within the event.

In focussing on the nature of the literacy event, interpreting transcripts involves asking questions about what participants need to know and understand to participate appropriately in the literacy event. Questions addressed in this study included:

Questions about the participants and the roles and relationships they construct: (*Who can say or do what, with whom,*)

Who are the participants represented in the transcript?
What role/s do they adopt?
What relationships are evident between participants?

Questions about time and space: (*when, where,*)

When does the event take place?
Where does the event take place?
Where does this event 'fit' in the home or school learning context of the participants?

Questions about the conditions for communicating and interacting: (*under what conditions, in what ways,*)

In what ways do the participants interact?
What are the sanctioned ways of participating?
What 'rules' govern the actions and interactions of the participants?
How do the norms and expectations for participating change over time?

Questions about goals and purposes: (*for what purposes,*)

What (if any) is the stated purpose of the event?
What implicit goals or purposes are evident in the actions and interactions of the participants?

Questions about the outcomes of the interaction: (*and with what outcomes?*)

What outcome/s are evident in this event?
What outcomes are expected?
What knowledge is constructed or privileged?

Questions about links between home and school contexts:

What (if any) are the links between home and school contexts made explicit by the participants?
What implicit links are evident in the actions and interactions of participants?
In what ways is learning in this event supported or constrained by learning in other contexts?

(Adapted from the work of the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group)

3.3.7 Conclusion

The range of data collection and analysis procedures described above contributed to our understanding of matches and mismatches in discourse practices at home and at school. The results of these analyses are presented in sections 5 to 7 of this report. Table 3.5 summarises the data collection and analysis procedures used in the Home/School phase of this project.

Table 3.5: Summary of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures for Home/School Phase

Data collected	Data collection techniques	Data analysis procedures
Home/School Phase		
Detailed observation of literacy practices in home, school and community contexts to describe the nature of matches and mismatches in literacy practices and their consequences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview data from students, parents, teachers and community members • Self reporting of literacy practices by students, parents & teachers • Observation of literacy practices in the school, home and community • Video and audio recording of literacy events at school, home and in the community • Collection of outcomes based data from school sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of constant comparative method for interview, self reports, observation data. • Use of modified ‘cross case’ analysis involving the following steps: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) detailed observations; b) construct event maps; c) prepare domain analyses; d) identify ‘cycles of activity’; e) prepare transcripts; f) identify key events or cycles of activity; g) identify matches and mismatches in literacy practices from home to community. • Secondary comparisons of outcomes data with data on matches and mismatches.

3.4 Phase 3 - Development of Strategies Phase

The final phase of this project was designed to address the third objective of the research, which was as follows:

To identify ways in which schools and communities can use the knowledge gained from the above explorations (as well as that contributed from previous research) to create school curricula and learning environments that meet the needs of all students, and to build effective partnerships between home and school.

Specifically, we sought to:

- identify the most effective strategies to enable teachers to examine and study the literacy practices of their children (as used at school, at home and in the community);
- develop and trial school and community based strategies that will lead schools to be more responsive to the language and literacy complexity of the areas they serve;
- develop and trial strategies to enhance communication between all parties involved in schooling;

- explore the development of more effective partnerships between school and community at several sites considering, in particular, the diverse needs of specific target groups.

At the time of the original submission for funding, the intention had been to develop and trial in Phase 3 a range of strategies and activities to minimise the educational disadvantages associated with mismatches between the language and literacy practices of schools and communities. However, at the completion of Phase 2, it was decided not to trial any strategies within the timespan of the project for a number of reasons.

First, given the limited time available (one school term), it would not have been possible to trial more than one or (at most) two specific strategies and, importantly, there was no possibility of evaluating the implementation. Without subsequent evaluation, any trial would have been of limited value. Second, all of the schools involved in the research had already contributed a great deal, particularly in terms of time allocated to the project, and were hesitant about accepting the additional challenge of adopting new strategies or activities without additional funding or resources. Third, our work has convinced us that the implementation of any new strategies or activities needs to be initiated by schools and their communities. We considered it unacceptable to impose upon any school or community our view of what they should do to enhance communications or build more effective partnerships. While researchers can provide suggestions and advice, only schools and their communities can ultimately decide what is appropriate for them.

In view of the difficulties described above, we sought an alternative approach to Phase 3 of the project which would allow us to fulfil a number of objectives. First, we wanted to be able to give the four schools the opportunity to be fully informed about what we had learned from the first two phases of the project. Second, we aimed to develop an extensive range of strategies and activities that would reflect the diversity of the schools and communities in which we worked. Third, we believed that to be most useful, any set of suggested strategies or activities needed to be jointly developed by the researchers and representatives of both homes and schools.

It was therefore decided, in consultation with the schools and with the endorsement of the Advisory Committee, that Phase 3 of the project would involve the facilitation of school and community based partnerships for all research sites. This involved a series of joint meetings between the researchers, teachers and parents from each school. The purpose of the meetings was to share the findings of the project and to develop a range of strategies and activities that would enable schools to respond to the language and literacy diversity of their students, considering in particular the specific cultural groups served by each school.

Section 4

Acknowledging Diversity: Case studies of innovative schools

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the key issues and findings of the case studies of four schools presented in detail in Volume 2. The case studies included one secondary and three primary, which were identified as adopting innovative strategies to acknowledge and respond to differences in the language and literacy practices of the communities they serve. Three of the schools had a large proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, while the fourth had a significant proportion of Aboriginal students. The four schools represented a range of educational systems and school types, and differed markedly in many ways.

Data for each of the case study schools were gathered over a period of 3-4 months and through a range of data collection strategies, including interviews with staff, students and parents, school and classroom observations, and the collection of documents and artefacts. Complete details of data collection and analysis procedures are contained in Section 3 of this volume. Data analysis was a recursive process, beginning with the design of this phase of the project, and proceeding through to the writing of the final report. Detailed reports were constructed for each of the case study schools. These reports include information about the school and community context; the preconditions or critical events which precipitated the introduction of innovative practices; details of curricular, pedagogical and community participation initiatives in each school; and evidence of the impact key initiatives have had on language, literacy and learning.

Once data collection was well underway, the focus of analysis moved from within-site analyses to cross-site analyses. Data analysis utilised the constant comparative method to identify key issues and themes within the data. Categories for analysis were continually refined as further interviews, observations and document analyses were conducted. These categories were then linked to the literature on effective schools, particularly the body of research concerning effective schools for minority students (eg. Lucas, Henze & Donato, 1990; Garcia, 1994). Chapter 4 of the full report (Volume 2) concludes with a discussion of the key elements that have contributed to the development of innovative practices in the case study schools, and these are presented next.

4.2 Discussion of Key Issues and Findings

The purpose of the 'Innovative Practices' phase of this project was to establish a 'baseline' of current practice in the area of responding to diversity in community language and literacy. In the case studies presented above, we examined the specific steps that the schools had taken in attempting to meet this goal, and searched for evidence of changes in

school curricula and classroom environments. However, the questions remain: To what extent have the four case study schools succeeded in acknowledging the diversity of community language and literacy? To what extent have the four schools succeeded in improving students' school success?

All four of the case study schools acknowledged their students' home languages and cultures and recognised mismatches between students' home and school worlds. Each had developed strategies for developing closer communication between home and school, and for accommodating cultural differences in school routines and practices. For example, St Joseph's School explicitly acknowledged the diversity of its community:

St Joseph's School ... recognises that Australia is a multilingual society. Such linguistic and cultural diversity is not always regarded with favour by the dominant English-speaking population. However, this school community now must recognise that all Australian children have the right to continue to learn at school in the language spoken in the home. Similarly, all Australian children need to be literate in English. (Extract from the rationale for the Bilingual Teaching/Learning Project, 1990-92.)

However, most of these initiatives in the case study schools focussed on developing effective home/school relationships, and little attention was given to recognising differences in language and literacy practices. Key initiatives in the area of community participation were the least developed innovations in each of the four schools. This is consistent with the findings of Lucas et al. (1990) whose study of six high schools found that:

The parent participation feature is the least developed component of the high schools we visited. The principals, counsellors, and teachers at all of the schools commented that more needed to be done to increase the schools' interaction with the parents of (language minority) students (p.334).

As the case study schools continue to develop closer ties between home and school, it may be that more opportunities will arise for identifying differences in home and school language and literacy practices.

In each of the case study schools there was only preliminary evidence that the innovative practices had begun to improve students' chances of school success. Most of the evidence was anecdotal, and can only be tenuously tied to the introduction of the innovative practices. This is not surprising, given that all of the innovations were relatively recent, and that most impact on only some aspects of school life.

Of the four case study schools, St Joseph's School was the only one which had implemented major structural as well as pedagogical changes. The introduction of the Bilingual Program and the Language Groups, as well as the development of explicit teaching strategies, had resulted in substantial changes to the entire teaching/learning program at the school. The experiences at St Joseph's School parallel the experiences of Richmond Road School, which has been described by Cazden (1989) and May (1995) as an effective multilingual, multicultural school in New Zealand. In recounting the development of innovative practices at Richmond Road, May reported that:

Those who were not willing to listen to other viewpoints soon became disillusioned. Those who were not willing to concede previously held positions of power met similar opposition. However, those who were able to make these accommodations have progressed towards establishing different discourses; discourses which are contesting the traditional hierarchies associated with school organisation (and the power relations implicit in these) and ascribing, in the process, status to all participants (p.13).

At St Joseph's School, staff were 'contesting the traditional discourses' in the sense that they were developing new shared discourses to which everyone (students and teachers alike) had equal access. Through the teaching of text types, in particular, and the establishment of a common language across classrooms, they were explicitly teaching all

children forms of discourse and shared thinking that were valued in this particular context. The extent to which these particular discourses were valued in other contexts (e.g. high school, work, etc.) is not clear.

4.3 Essential Elements of School Change

Each of the schools included in this research was recognised in the broader educational community as acknowledging and responding to differences in the language and literacy practices of the communities they serve. As such, it is likely that other schools seeking to similarly acknowledge and respond to their communities may have much to learn from the experiences of the case study schools.

However it is important to recognise at the outset that every school and community is unique. Learning from the experiences of other schools is therefore not simply a matter of duplicating successful programs or effective practices in other settings (; Foster, 1992; Au, 1995). Au (1995) pointed out that "instructional practices that work in one setting may not work in another, due to differences in students' cultural backgrounds" (p. 90).

Nevertheless it is possible to identify certain elements which seemed to be crucial to the development of innovative practices and programs in each of the case study schools. While not perhaps sufficient on their own to produce similarly innovative responses to students' needs in other schools, these elements at least form an essential starting point for any school's attempts at responding to the mismatches between home and school.

Recognition of the need for change

Corcoran and Wilson (1985) found that the common elements of effective schools for 'at risk' students included (among others) a willingness to question conventional practice. In each of the schools included in this research, there was a clear recognition and articulation of the need for change in structural organisation and/or curricular practices. While the circumstances which prompted this recognition, and schools' responses to it, varied across the schools, there was nevertheless commonality to the extent that these schools recognised difficulties and were prepared to take action.

At Parklands PS, the recognition of the need for change resulted from teachers' perceptions that their students were becoming increasingly passive in their approaches to learning, and that this was exacerbated by many of the teaching practices common throughout the school. At St Joseph's School, the recognition began with the arrival of a new Principal and her perception of the stresses caused by lack of integration across the curriculum, as well as staff perceptions of unacceptably low levels of language and literacy development among their students. At Ridgehaven Girls' High School, the origins of change are to be found in the increasing numbers of students from language backgrounds other than English, and the teachers' desire to meet the diverse learning needs of these students. In particular, teachers recognised the need to provide work at a level at which students could succeed, and which they would enjoy. Change at Woodgate was precipitated by a more external event - the tension created by the amalgamation of a predominantly Koori infants/primary school and a predominantly non-Koori infants' school.

Whole school involvement

The second element which seemed critical to the effectiveness of the case study schools was the involvement of the whole school in key initiatives. Connell (1994) pointed out that compensatory education programs which attempt to meet the needs of 'disadvantaged'

students are built on a set of assumptions that are, at worst, wrong and at best, misleading. One of these false assumptions is that the problem concerns only a disadvantaged minority of students. This may be part of the reason for the effectiveness of initiatives at Ridgehaven Girls' High and at St Joseph's School - these schools may have seen disadvantaged students as a minority in terms of the broader societal context, but they were a majority in terms of the schools' population. Any attempts to address the problems of disadvantaged students, therefore, involved the whole school. In the process, teaching and learning across all groups changed. This does not occur in schools where so-called disadvantaged students are a numerical minority, and where programs therefore tend to be add-on rather than pervasive.

A detailed study of one particular effective school for students with limited English proficiency and low socioeconomic status found that "all the school staff worked together in an ongoing effort to improve instruction, with teachers actively involved in studying the possibility for and strategies to change programs" (Garcia, 1994, p.97). Collaborative planning and instruction led to "a sense of total school ownership of the program" (p.97). At Ridgehaven Girls' High School, whole school involvement was achieved primarily through the widespread use of cross-faculty groups in any discussion, planning and evaluation sessions. It was apparent from observations conducted as part of this project that strategies for meeting students' needs permeated all areas of the curriculum, and that teachers in all faculties saw themselves as being responsible for promoting students' language and literacy development.

The importance of whole school involvement in efforts to meet the specific needs of students from diverse backgrounds was also recognised at St Joseph's School. The school's English Policy stated that:

All members of the Staff at St Joseph's School ... accept the responsibility of supporting the development of proficiency in English in all areas of the curriculum. ... All teachers will maximise their own expertise and that of the Language Resource Team through a sharing of ideas/opinions/strategies/learning processes at co-operative and collaborative planning sessions, Staff Meetings, informal occasions (St Joseph's School, English Policy, 1993-95).

Similarly, at Woodgate School, a democratic approach involving the views of all staff was in operation. For example, a whole-staff vote was the basis on which the school agreed to participate in this research. As mentioned above, the rotation system afforded a greater team approach, as teachers collaborated on matters of curriculum and classroom management.

High Expectations

Lucas, Henze and Donato (1990) suggested that "the most critical element in determining whether educators can work toward success for all students is the belief that all students can succeed" (p.318). All four of the case study schools in this research were marked by high expectations, both of students and staff. In each of the schools there was clear evidence that staff were constantly trying new approaches and strategies, that they were never satisfied with what they do, but sought to continually evaluate and refine current practice. This characteristic is exemplified in the following extract from one school's curriculum statement:

We believe we should continually challenge ourselves and the children we teach, and refuse to become apathetic. (St Joseph's School, Curriculum Statement, 1996.)

At St Joseph's School the high expectations of student learning were particularly apparent in the lower grades. Staff did not accept the common belief that children from language backgrounds other than English need to learn to speak English before they can begin to develop English literacy skills. Instead, the staff worked on the assumption that reading,

writing, speaking and understanding English are skills which can (and ought to) be developed in tandem. This assumption is consistent with the research findings of Carole Edelsky (1986) and the Bilingual Interface Project (McKay et al, 1997), and has resulted in standards of English literacy far above what would typically be expected of such students.

At Parklands Public School, the extent of staff expectations of themselves was acknowledged in a Quality Assurance Review, which noted that "Many teachers are keen to know more and to be at the leading edge of learning theory. They recognise that [the introduction of] Active Learning has provided the impetus for them to grow professionally." The Review went on to state that "The school, as a learning community, has the potential to expand the professional knowledge base of how children learn, (particularly non-English speaking background children) and the consequent implications for teaching" (Parklands Public School, Quality Assurance Report, 1995).

Staff at Woodgate Public School indicated awareness of the 'double-edged sword' created by the diverse range of socioeconomic and academic levels at the school. While the more gifted children could provide a role model for academic and social success, there was equally the risk that this group would frustrate their peers by their very achievements. Nevertheless, there appeared a consistency among staff in anticipating high standards from all students. On occasions, work was considered below standard by a teacher, and this was communicated to the student, in terms indicating that the child was capable of better work (perhaps with reference to previous work samples). In such cases, the child was sometimes given a choice to 'fix up' the worksheet, or do another one. There was rarely resistance to such suggestions.

At Ridgehaven Girls' High, members of the executive questioned our intended use of work samples from the school: they were concerned that we would present such samples in our report as examples of exemplary teaching practices. They pointed out that they were continually attempting to improve their teaching practices, and recognised that "we can always do better".

Key Personnel

Effective school leaders ... are described as actively coordinating curriculum; monitoring students' academic progress; having a clear mission for the school which they communicate to staff, students and parents; holding high expectations for student achievement and promoting the same among faculty and staff ... good leadership can and does come from program directors, department chairpersons, and teachers ... as well as from principals (Lucas et al., 1990, p.328-9).

In each of the case study schools, staff members consistently and repeatedly identified a small number of key personnel who were the driving force behind the school's development of innovative practices. For example, at St Joseph's School, the Principal and a former ESL teacher were credited with providing much of the impetus for the school's success in improving educational outcomes for its students. At Parklands Primary, the Principal, Deputy and an Executive Teacher were all identified as contributing greatly to a school climate that encouraged innovation and excellence. One teacher expressed the importance of working with a Principal who allows teachers "the freedom to take risks, to try new things."

At Ridgehaven Girls' High School, the support staff in particular were acknowledged throughout the school as being at the forefront of the school's efforts to meet the needs of its students. Teachers commented on the wide-ranging skills of the Support Staff, with one teacher remarking that they had "done everything" in terms of professional development. One Head Teacher, relatively new to the school, explained how the school's approach to curriculum development gave her the freedom and support to try new

strategies: "I brought my ideas with me, but I found in this school the conditions to be able to do what I've always wanted to do."

Similarly at Woodgate the Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA) was crucial to the School's relationship with its Koori students. The Principal and deputies were also credited for their creativity, be it with solutions to problems, or teaching approaches incorporating visual and performing arts. In particular, the AEA praised the Principal for her approach to the wider Koori community.

The role of key personnel in the case study schools reflects the work of Lucas et al. (1990), who found that key personnel in effective schools were "sincerely committed to educating (language minority) students and knowledgeable about effective teaching approaches for this population" (p.328). For example, the Principal at Ridgehaven Girls' High expressed her commitment to working with 'disadvantaged' students by explaining that "you can achieve something that is real".

Time

Curriculum and assessment reforms are not cheap, especially in the time and human energy they require (Connell, 1994, p.142).

Time was an essential element in these schools' attempts to develop new programs and initiatives. Time was needed to identify specific needs, time to plan, time to consult with all groups involved, and time to evaluate the success of initiatives. In addition, it must be recognised that it takes time to change the beliefs and perceptions of major stakeholders. Gaining support for, and acceptance of, new initiatives can take a long time, with initial failures and setbacks often adding significantly to the process.

Applying the insights gained from classroom research on literacy to the issue of teacher learning and knowledge, the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (1992) has questioned whether teachers' apparent reluctance to embrace changes in pedagogy reflects "an unwillingness to engage in innovative practice, or the lack of opportunity teachers have to construct new patterns of action" (p.146). This is reflected in a statement by the Principal of one of the case study schools: "If you change the way people think, they will want to do different things, and doing different things always had a resource complication/implication."

In three of the case study schools, the most significant avenue for gaining time and resources was through the receipt of funding from the Commonwealth through the Disadvantaged Schools Component of the National Equity Program. The additional funding provided to 'disadvantaged' schools through this program has enabled the case study schools to initiate programs and undertake staff development that may well have been impossible without the support of the DSC funding. Invariably, the staff in these schools spoke highly of the enabling and empowering effects of DSC funding.

For example, at Ridgehaven Girls' High, "staffing supplementation through the regional Department of School Education and the Disadvantaged Schools Component of the National Equity Program has made it possible to allocate responsibilities for the support of staff in the areas of Active Learning, Girls in Technology, Post School Curriculum and Joint Secondary Schools/TAFE programs. ... Under (DSC) funding the school employs two Community Liaison Officers (Vietnamese and Arabic) who support the school by working with staff, students and community members in a variety of learning and welfare matters ... Their work is seen as integral to the success of many of the school's programs" (Ridgehaven Girls' High School, Quality Assurance Report, 1994).

Matching teaching to learning

Teaching and learning ... are dialogic processes in which the learner is challenged to engage in critical analysis and the teacher is challenged to enter the learner's world. (Au, 1995, p.88)

The characteristics of the 'learner's world' differ according to the age, cultural background, and previous educational experiences of the learner. One point, however, which seemed to be recognised in each of the case study schools is that the way to enter the learner's world is to develop a personal relationship with the learner. This characteristic was clearly expressed by a teacher at St Joseph's School who explained that they "teach children, not programs." It was also reflected in the efforts of staff at Ridgehaven Girls' High to seek special strategies for students who they saw as having special needs. The 'Buddy Teacher' program operating at Ridgehaven is just one example of this.

Recent changes in pedagogical approaches and practices were evident in each of the four schools. In each, there was a recognition that traditional teaching approaches and organisational structures do not necessarily meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. For example, at Woodgate PS, the introduction of the class rotation system, as well as the use of learning centres in the lower grades, were responses to the particular learning needs of students, particularly those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Both Parklands Public and Ridgehaven Girls' High had introduced active learning approaches across the curriculum. Both had recognised the increasingly passive approach to learning adopted by many students, especially those from particular cultural groups, and had acknowledged the key role that teaching approaches play in developing and sustaining such learning approaches. The Active Learning approaches adopted at both schools included the recognition of students' preferred learning styles, the introduction of effective groupwork, the provision of concrete materials to aid concept development, and student involvement in evaluation and assessment procedures (including self-assessment and peer-assessment).

At St Joseph's School, the emphasis was on developing explicit approaches to language and literacy instruction, including highly contextualised learning activities and the provision of repeated opportunities to learn basic concepts, so that students from language backgrounds other than English were provided maximum learning support. The levels of language and literacy achievement evident in the lower grades (in particular) was testimony to the success of this approach. Additionally, the provision of bilingual instruction for Vietnamese students, and the high level of consistency in teaching strategies across the bilingual and mainstream classes, supported these students in maintaining their first language while gaining proficiency in English.

4.4 Conclusion

The evidence presented in the case studies above indicates that the schools selected for the study had indeed adopted innovative strategies to acknowledge and respond to the diverse language and literacy practices of the communities they serve. Each of the schools was characterised by attempts to adopt pedagogical assumptions and practices which empower rather than constrain minority students, to incorporate students' languages and culture into school curricula, and to involve parents and community members in the education of their children. These attempts have, in some cases, begun to improve literacy outcomes for students, and enhance students' chances of school success.

It is important to recognise, however, that the particulars of any context (whether they be the language groups or teaching strategies at St Joseph's School, the rotation system at Woodgate Public School, or the 'active learning' approaches at Ridgehaven Girls' High and Parklands Public School), do not necessarily translate to another context with the same

results. This is because the particulars themselves are only an embodiment of, or a response to, underlying principles of teaching and learning. Transferring programs without grappling with the underlying issues will not accomplish educational change.

Educators cannot simply adopt the features of these ... schools and expect their institutions to become successful with (disadvantaged) students overnight. Schools can, however, begin to work toward such success by following the lead of these schools in ways that are appropriate and realistic for their particular school settings (Lucas, Henze & Donato, 1990, p.318).

In the end, there is no easy way to solve the 'problem' of education for disadvantaged children. It does not work simply to take someone else's 'solution' without thinking through all of the hard questions. In every school, there needs to be a commitment to recognising the questions and working through the answers. Each school, each staff, each teacher, has to make the commitment - there is no 'easy road'.

The lessons learned from the analysis of the experiences of the case study schools can inform the development of new strategies through which schools and communities can create school curricula and learning environments that meet the needs of all students, and build effective partnerships between home and school. The insights gained in the case study schools form a solid foundation for better understanding between homes and schools, and were vital to the research team when planning the more intensive Home/School phase of this research.

Section 5

Literacy At Home

5.1 Introduction

The results of our intensive investigation of differences in the language and literacy practices of schools and families are presented in three chapters in Volume 2 of this report. This section summarises those findings and describes the home literacy practices of the children and families involved in the project. The work draws on all of the home data collected in the Home/School phase of the research, and describes similarities and differences amongst families.

It is important, at this point, to define what we mean by literacy practices and literacy events because the two terms are often used interchangeably. The term *literacy event* has its roots in the sociolinguistic idea of speech events dating back to the work of Dell Hymes in 1962, but the concept was developed further by Heath (1982, 1983) to describe a distinct communicative situation where literacy has a key role. For Heath, a literacy event is "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" (1982, p.23). According to Barton (1991), "literacy *events* are the particular activities in which literacy has a role: they may be regular repeated activities. Literacy *practices* are the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy that people draw upon in a literacy event" (p.5).

Street (1995) explored the distinction between literacy practices and literacy events further by arguing that whenever people engage in a literacy event they have "culturally constructed models of the literacy event in [their] minds" (p.133). He used the term *literacy practices* "to indicate this level of the cultural uses and meanings of reading and writing. Literacy practices [refer] not only to the event itself but the conceptions of the reading and writing process that people hold when they are engaged in the event" (p.133).

As pointed out earlier in this volume, literacy practices are situationally defined in and through the interactions and practices of students and teachers at school, and family and community members at home (Collins & Green, 1992; Cairney, 1995). When people engage in specific literacy events they act and interact in ways which socially construct, and are constructed by, the general cultural ways of using literacy. Thus, literacy events contribute to, and constitute part of, the literacy practices of the particular classroom, family or community group. In this research project, similarities and differences in home and school literacy practices were identified through intensive study of the myriad literacy events engaged in by the participating students at home and at school.

Chapter 5 within Volume 2 contains a detailed analysis of literacy practices at home collected using interviews with parents and children, self reporting of home literacy practices and inventories of literacy resources. In the rest of this section we discuss 5 major themes that were identified as part of our analysis of these data.

5.2 The dominance of 'school literacy' in home contexts

One of the striking features of literacy practices in the homes of many of the families in this study was the extent to which 'school literacy' dominated home contexts. That is, the particular types and uses of literacy usually associated with schooling were prominent in

many families. This prominence was manifest primarily in the amount of time spent on homework activities and, to a lesser extent, siblings 'playing schools'. School-like literacy events embedded in play activities were discussed above, but the following account of Leslie Richards and her sisters Emma (Year 2) and Laura (Year 1) playing 'schools' clearly illustrates the point:

The three girls play 'schools' at home. Leslie [Year 10] at times gives maths exercises on a sheet of paper which she sticks to the door like a blackboard. The house has five bedrooms. The 'school room' is in what's called the toy room or the spare room, so that it can be left set up. Both younger girls are always keen to play 'schools', especially on weekends when there is "nothing to do". ... The 'classroom' has three desks. The [younger] girls' desks have two chairs at each of them so that Leslie can sit next to them to help. Leslie hopes to get into Law [at University]. The room looks like a classroom. There are books in a pile - mainly books from school. There is also a Quest Encyclopedia, bought in volumes by subscription. The girls have favourite stories, including *Alice in Wonderland* and *Cinderella*. They occasionally get bedtime stories. In the 'classroom', the girls have affixed work samples to the walls with super glue. Removing them also removes the paint. They did this without asking permission.

[Extract: field notes from interview - Leslie Richards]

Homework was very prominent in some homes, almost non-existent in others. The time spent on homework activities, and the ways in which parents helped their children with homework tasks, varied across families. This variability was partly due to differences across schools in expectations about homework, and the amount of homework set.

Although generally the demands of homework increased with the age of the student, this was not always the case. In some schools, even young children were required to complete a considerable amount of homework each night. It was not uncommon for the Year 7 students in this study to spend two or three hours on homework activities on some nights. Angela Lahoud explained how her father supervised her homework and helped her when necessary:

I told my Mum 'I am going to do my homework'. From 4.30 to 7.30, I studied for a Science test.

How did you study for the Science test?

Reading and writing - I wrote down some notes. I also did my Maths homework - I wrote and also we are allowed to use a calculator, so I used that as well. And my Dad comes in and checks how I am when I am studying and he looks through my Science book and he even told me some things - he explained it to me so I understood more - so some explanation as well.

[Extract: self-report of literacy activities - Angela Lahoud]

Like Angela, Fatima Younnis (Year 7) enlisted the help of family members in completing homework tasks:

Fatima said that her two uncles, her sister, and sometimes her mother and father help her with her homework. She said that these people were good because they help her understand the question if she was having trouble - they tell her how to pronounce the words because they know how to do it. They tell her step by step and work one to one. She said that the teachers [at school] were not able to help them individually because there were too many other girls in the classroom wanting help. She said that she, in turn, was "always" helping her two smaller sisters (aged 10 and 6 years) with their homework, and she even tried to teach her little 3 year old sister to "count and do the ABC".

[Extract from field notes: Fatima Younnis]

Like Freebody et al (1995) and Breen et al (1994) parents in this study were strongly goal-directed and varied in the strategies used, knowledge of school curricula and attitudes toward home work.

Many parents were well aware of the schools' expectations, and some (like Mrs Nguyen) even substituted alternative activities if no homework was given by the teacher:

You were saying earlier that Teresa spends a lot of time on her homework. Would that be every day?

Yes, every day.

About two hours every day?

Yes. Sometimes about half an hour, when no home work, like on the weekend, no homework I read the newspaper to her and explain the story in the newspaper.

Vietnamese or English?

Vietnamese. Vietnamese newspaper.

Is most of the reading material that you have at home Vietnamese?

Yes.

Now, with the homework, Teresa brings home the sheet on Monday, and when does that have to be done by?

The homework for Monday and Tuesday has to be marked on Wednesday. Homework for Wednesday and Thursday marked on Friday.

[Extract from interview: Mrs Nguyen]

Mrs Brennan explained how the demands of homework, even for Year 1 students, can intrude upon family life:

Do they get homework? - Yes! (Laughs) Every night. Sometimes it's not much, but sometimes it could take anywhere from an hour - which I spoke to Mrs T. about, because she said that the boys could get this - which I bought another type of homework book where they could do a page each night, and because they were getting so good at it, she gave them two pages each night, and sometimes it was getting to an hour to an hour and a half, so I just thought this is ridiculous and I spoke to her and she just said "Drop it back to one page", and now they're not having it at all because there's so many things going on in school, but some nights I feel the school gives too much homework, like I know a certain amount of homework is good, but too much I don't think - you have a life as well. They go to school all day, and they come home, and then you've got to spend every night doing homework - I don't think that's right. You need time to be a family, without thinking, of well, every night after the bath, tea, it's time to sit down and do your homework now. ... A lot of times you have to help with it a lot, and like, Mrs T. said that it's their homework and their responsibility, which yes it is, but you can't just say "Sit there and do your homework", because it doesn't happen like that.

[Extract from interview: Mrs Brennan]

Both Mrs Pellizon and Mrs Gardiner expressed concern about the impact of homework demands on their children. Mrs Pellizon felt that her son Stephen (Year 3) had difficulty in completing his work at school, and that this contributed to the amount of work he had to complete at home:

Yes sometimes I think Stephen gets a little bit too much homework than what he is able to cope with. But then again I think a lot of the homework that he gets set is work he has not finished from school. So it is homework on top of homework. But a lot of it I have to supervise, I just can't lock him in his room and say there is your book do your homework do it.

Is that because of the work that needs to be done or actually managing the tasks?

I think managing the tasks. Every child is different I suppose and maybe most of the children in the class can cope quite well on their own but my child needs to be watched or he will get sidetracked too easily.

[Extract from interview: Mrs Pellizon]

Mrs Gardiner described the tensions created by Ashleigh's (Year 1) fear of making errors in her homework:

Ashleigh gets [homework] every night, and she's really enthusiastic to do it. Probably Dale was more like that when he was in the younger class. She's very into it - like, we have to do it and that's that - there's no "Oh, I don't feel like doing it now. ... I've noticed that the better that she's got at reading and writing, the more enthusiastic she is about doing

homework. At the beginning of the year she was very upset about the homework and really worried that it wasn't going to be right, even though I'd helped her. You know, there was lots of sighing and crying and she was really threatened by it, but as she's gotten better at reading and writing, there's just no stopping her. Wherever we go, she's reading every sign. It's good. ... [At the beginning of the year] she would not make a mistake. She was just so afraid of making mistakes, and I did speak to [the teacher] about that and I said "Look, it just seems so competitive, you know, that you have to have it 100% right." I said "it puts them off even trying to do it because they're afraid that if they attempt it and they get it wrong they're in trouble." It just seemed wrong to me. ... With drawing she was alright, because my kids have always drawn since - as soon as they could hold a pencil, so they've always been confident about their drawing, but it was the reading and writing. And both of them compare themselves to other children in the class that might be a lot better than them at something. But [Ashleigh's] okay with that now - she feels that she's caught up.

[Extract from interview: Mrs Gardiner]

Despite the dominance of school-type literacy activities in many homes, one of the identified differences between families and schools was evident in the different ways that adults assisted children with such activities at home and at school. For example, Zita Singh (Year 7) found her mother's help with Maths to be "confusing", while Twee Loh (Year 9) suggested that her father simply found the Maths "a bit too hard".

It is different, like the kind of Maths we did in Fiji is different and my mum used to teach in high school and she teaches me differently like as if I am in Fiji with her. Like, there are certain ways to do it that are different, and sometimes that's confusing.

[Extract: interview transcript - Zita Singh]

Does anyone help you with your homework?

No, I do it myself. My Dad says "You begin what you are doing - all your homework." If I don't understand anything I can ask him. It's a bit like Maths is a bit too hard for him. But some words that I don't know I can ask him.

[Extract: interview transcript - Twee Loh]

A number of co-researchers described differences in the ways that parents helped them with homework tasks and the ways teachers helped them with work at school. Angela Lahoud (Year 7) expressed the difference clearly:

My Dad came in and checked how I am when I was studying and he looked through my Science book and he even told me some things - he explained it to me so I understood more.

Your Dad is good at helping you with your homework?

Yes, he is very good.

What's the difference between your Dad and your teachers?

I think my dad puts more explanation in when he is teaching me and I think I concentrate more because like in class there are people around me that aren't listening and I forget that the teacher is explaining. When my Dad is explaining, it is just by myself so I listen more and he makes me explain - like, he tells me "do you understand?" and if I say "no" he goes again and if I say "yes" he says "OK, what did I teach you?" so that he knows that I understand. If I don't understand he will keep going, he will keep explaining to me until I understand. But the teachers don't have time to do that, that's what I find. Teachers get interrupted, someone comes to the door, and then they forget where they are up to.

[Extract: interview transcript - Angela Lahoud]

Mrs Nguyen described the difficulties often imposed by homework tasks when parents and children are struggling with English:

When I explained something to her in my language, she understand but some words are very hard, but I couldn't understand by English, so I had to find in the dictionary the words and explain it to her. Very hard for me (laughs). Sometimes she said English with me like some words and I couldn't understand the words, so I said 'You write it down for mummy,

and mummy find out in the dictionary', but Vietnamese for me, then I find out in English to explain to her again.

And do you find now that that's mostly words connected with her school work?

Yes, yes. You know, sometimes we need nearly two hours for homework, because I have to explain with her by Vietnamese, then find out the word for English, and I explain with her by English and she told me by English and I find out by Vietnamese.

So swapping languages takes a long time?

Yes, takes a very long time.

[Extract: interview transcript - Mrs Nguyen]

Even in homes not dominated by set homework tasks, the influence of 'school literacy' was readily apparent. For example, homework was not an activity frequently undertaken in the Haynes home, and one of the few literacy-related interactions which Mrs Haynes audio-taped for us was an event in which she and her two children, Kevin and Sarah, were reading a book of *Cinderella*. Mrs Haynes did not 'read' the text of the story, but questioned the children about specific objects in the illustrations, and attributes of these objects. Like the homework sessions in many other families in this study, the interaction between Mrs Haynes and her children closely resembled typical classroom interactions (for further discussion of this literacy event, see Section 7).

While it was evident that the dominance of 'school literacy' in home contexts could, in most families, be directly linked to the requirements of the school (particularly homework), this was not always the case. In the Jennings family, for example, it was the parents who held the school accountable for maintaining the traditional 'standards' of school literacy. This is exemplified in the following extract from the Jennings' critique of the school newsletter. This extract is part of the audio-recorded home literacy interaction introduced earlier.

- 015 Mother: but it's a report and it actually should have a heading saying, you know, that
- 016 Father: 'cause otherwise you're reading along and suddenly you've got this change in the middle that, sort of-
- 017 Mother: it's a total change of, of style of writing, and you just wonder why instead of somebody talking about 'me' and 'we have done this', that somebody suddenly starts writing 'Mrs K's group' and starts writing in the third person as if it's about something, you know, you're describing it about somebody else, not talking about 'me' - yourself, so when you write-
- 018 Father: so D.'s one here she's talking about 'me', up here Bett-, Mrs Jones is talking about 'me', but when you get down to Mrs K., she's talking about 'her'
- 019 Mother: herself in the third person (.) instead of talking
- 020 Tara: what's the first, second and the third person?
- 021 Mother: first person is (.)
- 022 Tara: you
- 023 Mother: your own self, second person is the person that you're talking to, third person is a person you're talking about.
- 024 Tara: uh
- 025 Mother: okay? So it's sort of a bit like first and second cousins and all that sort of garbage. So I mean it's one of those examples of shocking writing style coming home (...) and it happens too often!

[Extract: Home Transcript - Jennings]

Yet, despite the preponderance of 'school literacy' type events in the Jennings household, and the explicit links between home and school events for this and many other families, there were fundamental mismatches between the social relations in which these events were embedded at home and at school. These mismatches in social relations are explored in Section 7.

5.3 Conclusion

The report describes the diverse literacy practices evident in the homes of the families involved in this study. It highlights the differences amongst families, and examined the dominance of school literacy in home contexts.

Like Breen et al (1994) and Freebody et al (1995) we found more diversity in home literacy practices. However, school literacy still occupied a significant portion of family time. In spite of this, even those practices common to school were realised in different socio-cultural and linguistic terms. This will be discussed in full in Section 7.

In Section 6, the school literacy practices in which these children engaged are described in detail.

Section 6

Literacy At School

6.1 Introduction

In all of the classrooms in this study, there was an emphasis on learning *how to do* tasks, rather than learning embedded in authentic tasks. Many of the teachers attempted to make tasks meaningful for students by drawing on familiar topics and past experiences. However, most classroom tasks and activities were, at best, simulations of 'real' activities. This is exemplified in a task designed by a Year 4 teacher at St Joseph's School to teach children how to use language effectively to describe the position of objects.

T: Right, I want you to think about some of the words that we talked about on Monday, that describe the position of things.
Teacher explains that the students' task is to go into the playground with their draft book and write directions for finding a chosen place or object in the playground.
St: Miss, if we live near here, can we write how to get there?
T: No, no, no. We're doing something in the playground.

[Extract from field notes: Year 4]

It may have been a more 'authentic' task for the students to describe how to get to their home, directions which they could then give to friends. Despite the student's request, however, the task remained to describe how to get to a particular place or object in the playground, all of which the students already knew how to find. Thus, the main focus was on *doing the task*, rather than serving any real purpose.

There were other differences between literacy practices at home and at school. For example, analysis of classroom 'event maps' revealed that computers were used for a more restricted range of purposes at school than was evident in homes. In many classrooms, computer use was almost non-existent, while in others it was restricted to a small number of students. Jack Melville (Year 1) complained that he rarely had an opportunity to use any of the three computers in his classroom:

I write about my friends and that. They got girlfriends. (I write) on my computer.
Do you write on the computer at school?
I don't get a chance to play with it.
Are there not enough computers and too many kids?
Yeah, there's only three.

[Extract: interview - Jack Melville]

School uses of computer that we observed included: learning to touch-type; typing 'published' versions of texts (but not revising and editing); copying information already accessed by the teacher; playing simple drill-type Maths or Spelling games. Although the Year 7 students at Ridgehaven Girls' High School had had an intensive introduction to computers during an Orientation Program in first term, this time had been devoted mainly to the development of touch typing skills, and later observations revealed that computer use tended to be limited to one or two curriculum areas.

Although there was a reasonable amount of small-group or pairs work in the classroom observations, interactions between students of different ages were rarely observed in the case study schools. Even among same-age groups, few children were given the

opportunity to 'teach' another child. In some classrooms, peer teaching was explicitly discouraged:

Yes, like the other day, Teresa talk too much in her class, and she always finish her work very quick, very fast, and she want to help another friend, and she talk with another friend how to do her work, but the teacher doesn't want she show another - she teach another people, and talk too much, you know. And one day he wrote a letter to let me know about that and I came one day and the three of us sat there and talked about that, and Teresa said "In the future, I don't want to talk in class, because the teacher will get upset with me."

Did [the teacher] explain why he didn't want her to help the other children?

Yes, he did. He talked with Teresa and Teresa go home and told me about that. He said "Let them try, let them think about their work. If you finish, you just stay quiet and I give another work for you."

[Extract from interview - Mrs Nguyen]

The only instances of literacy interactions embedded in 'play' type activities that we observed at school were non-sanctioned activities, occurring usually without even the knowledge of the teacher. The following extract from field notes portrays one such interaction.

Six Year 1 children seated around a table. Supposed to be completing a Maths worksheet - write the number that comes before each number on the page, then colour the pictures. E., S., M., and A. are students.)

E. (to S.): I dare you to walk to the toilet and beat the big hand. You have to run to the toilet before the red hand gets to the twelve.

Teacher will not allow S. to leave the room. Several minutes later, A. watches clock as E. runs out to the toilet. E. returns.

M.: You didn't even go to the toilet.

A.: It went round twice.

M.: It went round two times.

E.: No, once.

[Extract from field notes: Year 1]

In summary, in all of the classrooms observed in this study, children's engagement in literacy-related tasks was overwhelmingly directed towards learning how to successfully engage in school literacy tasks. In an important sense, this is circular: students engaged in 'school literacy' in order to be better at 'school literacy'.

Chapter 6 within Volume 2 contains a detailed analysis of literacy practices at school drawing on direct observation, audio recording of interactions concerning or involving literacy, and interviews with teachers, parents and students. The chapter also provides a detailed description of these literacy practices based on 4 identified purposes - establishing relationships, accessing or displaying information, pleasure and/or self expression and skills development. In the rest of this section we discuss 3 major themes that were identified as part of our analysis of these data.

6.2 Notions of 'success' and support for learning

One of the stated objectives of this project was to examine the impact that identified differences in home and school literacy practices have on students' school success. However, the achievement of this objective proved more difficult than expected, for a number of reasons.

First, it proved difficult to obtain reliable data on participating students' school achievement levels. All of the schools involved in the project were unable or unwilling to provide objective data in the form of test scores. Given recent debates in the media surrounding the reporting of school and student data such as Basic Skills Tests results and HSC results, schools were understandably reluctant to expose their students to

scrutiny. The second difficulty in examining the impact of matches and mismatches on school success was that, while some teachers involved in the study were prepared to provide data in the form of classroom assessments and anecdotal records, many others were unwilling to do so. The variation in type and availability of such data made meaningful comparisons virtually impossible. Finally, the domain analyses of teacher and parent interviews revealed many different conceptions of what is meant by 'school success' and these differences make the notion of 'success' itself problematic. This section of the report describes some of the notions of 'school success' evident in the comments from teachers and parents, and explores how these different notions or conceptions impact on the type of learning support provided to students.

For some of the participants in this study, the notion of 'school success' seemed to involve the attainment of some pre-determined level of achievement. Regular school attendance was seen by some teachers as a critical factor in reaching the expected level of success. Donna Farrell was a Grade 6 student who, according to her teachers, began school with considerable potential for success. However, her school career had been marked by frequent absences and Donna's level of school achievement at the end of primary school was lower than was perhaps expected. The following extract from an interview with one of Donna's teachers illustrates how the teacher portrayed Donna as a committed student, despite frequent absences.

Donna came in with a fairly good little level, even though she was regularly absent. She struck us as someone with normal or slightly better than normal ability. I mean, she had it all together. Then she became a very reliable and regular student who was here and enthusiastic over a couple of years. There were a couple of times when she moved away for family reasons, but she was very methodical. It's only this year that it seems to have struck her that she hasn't made it to where she thought she might have made it, and there's been family moves ... She seems to be very withdrawn. She still tries. She approaches me with dogged determination, even when I'm difficult to approach. "What should I be doing now?" She doesn't give up at that level. Now she's telling you what she wants to be doing rather than asking. She's setting her own goals. She's a lovely kid. She had a rough start to her education, health-wise. ... She often arrives late at school, and the kids are doing something, and I tell her what to do, but she says, "Oh, but I've got my story writing. Can I go back to that?" or "Can you look at this?" Sometimes I can't help her. I've got something on my agenda and she's come in to sort it out, but she'll pursue and ask and dig out ways to sort it out later on. She's that sort of a keen learner. She's not someone passively trying to avoid it. She sees that school is academic, school is part of learning and work and that's what she's doing. She's quite focused.

[Extract: teacher interview]

Jack Melville was a student in Year 1 at the same school as Donna Farrell. He, like Donna, was frequently absent from school. However, his teacher portrayed him as a non-committed student whose parents let him have his own way, to the detriment of his school progress:

Some children don't make use of the bus. Jack doesn't - he gets driven. ... And he's one of those children whose attendance has made a tremendous difference ... He's basically: we're the shop, and if we don't provide the service he wants, he doesn't come back for a few days, or weeks. ... From what I've seen, (his parents) really indulge him. What he wants, he gets, so I think that for any child, that's wrecking him.

[Extract: teacher interview]

Laura Richards was in the same class as Jack Melville. Laura's school attendance was more regular than Jack's. Unlike Jack, she was portrayed by her teachers as a "bright" child "from a fairly good family". In the following extract from an interview, the teacher explained why Laura had been included in a group of eight Year 1 students withdrawn from class for "extension work".

For other participants, children's own efforts to learn were inextricably tied to 'school success'. Children who worked hard were credited with contributing to their own success,

while those who did not were often 'blamed' for any difficulties they encountered. For some teachers, children's efforts were seen as influenced by their home background.

Often, children who were perceived as lacking in self-confidence or motivation were presumed to need more highly structured learning contexts, and more explicit instruction in discrete skills. One teacher explained how she tried to provide support for particular students:

I try to break down tasks to be very specific, and with the children who I know are at risk of failing something, I will break it right down into small elements, and model it carefully first so that they're getting it and they're actually doing it properly, and their confidence rises and then they can start tackling the more difficult stuff. I find that if you just throw them something - it's particularly true for the Koori kids - they're bound to just collapse, and they want to give up then, and the only way is to build their confidence and do it carefully and in a structured way, and that's for maths or anything else. Probably you could apply it to anything.

[Extract: teacher interview]

Parents held a variety of views on success and how it was attained. According to some parents, much of the 'credit' for children's school success should go to teachers. The way it was judged to be 'successful' varied. For example, some of the parent participants in this project judged their child's level of 'success' by their happiness at school and the way in which they engaged in school-like activities at home.

An alternative view of 'school success' was bound up with conforming to school norms and knowing what the school values. Children who seem not to 'fit' the mould may be portrayed as older than their years, or of having a high level of natural intelligence. In either case, teachers sometimes perceive this as a difficulty, something the school needs to "stand against".

Sometimes, teachers made generalisations about students from particular cultural or linguistic backgrounds. These generalisations may be related to teachers' perceptions about students' need for support.

In this school the nature of the Vietnamese, and this is generalising, is to toe the line, give of their best, always trying to live up to expectations, what the teacher expects of them, perhaps what their parents expect of them, and what they expect of themselves. They always toe the line in a quite inoffensive way.

[Extract: teacher interview]

The influence of students' home background was seen by many teachers to be a critical element in students' chances of school success. This was evident in comments from teachers at all age levels involved in this project. Some teachers saw the influence of home background as being bound up with motivation and support, not just for students, but for teachers as well.

Peers were also credited with influencing students' motivation and effort, and thereby impacting on school success. One secondary school teacher commented:

You see the results of peer pressure by splitting up groups. What their peers expect can work positively and negatively. A middle of the road girl can achieve much better if she is with a group that expects her to achieve. Peer grouping gives them a happy environment, helps them to work.

[Extract: teacher interview RGHS]

It was clear that, among both parents and teachers in this study, notions of what is meant by 'school success' and 'achievement', and the factors that contribute to success, were vastly different. At times these views were influenced by perceptions of variations across

specific cultural groups. It is clear that at times teachers attribute characteristics of learners and parent support to specific cultural groups. These generalisations about specific groups are not supported by our data which display great diversity within, as well as across, cultural groups.

These findings support the observations of Freebody et al (1995) that teachers attributed a great deal of the responsibilities for poor school achievement to inadequate parental support. This finding is also consistent with previous studies that have noted that teachers can at times hold deficit views of parental knowledge about literacy and learning (see Cairney and Munsie, 1992).

6.3 *The child as mediator between home and school*

Consideration of differences in literacy practices at home and at school raised the issue of to what extent children act as mediators between home and school contexts. The role of the child as mediator has been noted by a number of researchers (eg. McNaughton, 1995; Power, 1997), but has not yet been explored in detail.

Taylor (1994) recognised the important role that both parents and children play in shaping literacy practices at home. She argued that this role begins very early in a child's life: "... the interplay of the individual biographies and educative styles of the parents becomes the dominant factor in shaping the literate experiences of the children within the home. And yet, from the very beginning, the children are active and reactive in the sharing of literate experiences with their parents" (p.72). In discussing the connections between home and school contexts, McNaughton (1995) pointed out that "children's development can be markedly enhanced in each of the socialisation settings if the settings are well co-ordinated" (p.11). He argued that the connections between settings or contexts can be carried in the products of activities, or in activities themselves. Power's (1996) notion of the child as mediator takes the connection further, by exploring the concept of the child as the message itself.

Through the child, home literacy practices may influence school literacy, and vice versa. While in practice it is probably more often the case that school literacy is transmitted to home, there was some evidence in this study of home literacy practices being transmitted or conveyed to school. The following sections draw on the analyses of literacy interactions both at home and at school to examine the ways in which children in this study acted as mediators between home and school contexts.

6.4 *Literacy from home to school*

Home literacy practices seemed to impact on school literacy practices in very limited ways. On a few occasions during the study, children took literacy artefacts that they had produced at home (eg. stories they had written, cards they had made) to show to their teacher. These were usually greeted with interest, sometimes shown to other students, and occasionally displayed in the classroom.

However, there was only minimal evidence of learning from home contexts being acknowledged and incorporated into school learning activities. For example, the following extract from a classroom transcript is part of a 'lesson' in which the Year 1 teacher, with the help of her students, was compiling a spelling list of words containing 'id'. The teacher was not familiar with the item that Mitchell suggested, but gave him the opportunity to display his knowledge, and incorporated it into the activity.

- 30 T: Mitchell?
31 M: Kidney belt what you wear on a motor bike
32 T: A what?

- 33 M: A kidney belt what you wear on a motor bike.
34 T: A kidney belt, what do you wear a kidney belt for?
35 M: To protect your kidneys when you are riding a motor bike
36 T: Have you got one at home? Can you bring it in and show us? He is right, there is an organ inside your tummy, actually it's more to the back here, I think, about here, am I right? can you touch here? that hurts a little but when you press, that's your kidney. So let's write k-i-d-n-e-y. Some people eat a dish called steak and kidney some people eat pies called steak and kidney pie.

[Extract: classroom transcript - Year 1]

A Year 4 teacher explicitly acknowledged students' home literacy practices by repeatedly reminding students that their homes and families were legitimate sources of information. This teacher encouraged her students to draw on their home resources, especially when completing homework assignments.

6.5 Taking 'school literacy' home

Just as in other Australian studies of literacy practices at home (e.g. Breen et al, 1994, Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn, 1995) this study found that school literacy had a strong impact on the literacy practices engaged in within the home. Two main ways identified in this study in which school literacy practices were transmitted or transferred to homes and families were through the completion of homework tasks, and through children playing 'school' or 'school-type' games. Several examples of these were included in the earlier section addressing the dominance of school literacy in home contexts. The following two extracts show one type of 'connection'. The first is an extract from a classroom transcript, and shows the teacher explaining a homework task to her Year 1 students. The second is an extract from an interview with Mrs Gardiner about precisely the same event.

- 01 T Homework tonight goes like this. Listen carefully. In your bag you have your reading which you did today about the squares you have to read that to mum and mum must sign it.

[Extract: classroom transcript]

[Ashleigh's] got things that they write in class that they have to take home and read. They had to write a poem about squares, and she had to read this poem to as many people as she could.

Was it a poem she had made up herself?

No, this was a set one about squares - I suppose they're learning about shapes, so she had to read the whole thing, it was probably about three or four verses, just to familiarise them with the same words I suppose. [Ashleigh read this poem over the phone to her dad.]

[Extract: interview transcript - Mrs Gardiner]

6.6 Conclusion

It was clear from our investigations that, apart from homework activities which were similar across home and school contexts, there were significant differences between literacy practices and events at home and at school. These differences were: the major purposes for literacy use in different contexts, the extent to which literacy activities remained within the child's control, the relevance and difficulty of literacy activities, and the dominant 'view of text' at home and at school.

In home and community contexts, literacy events and practices (other than 'school literacy' practices which dominated homework tasks and playing schools) were almost always embedded in everyday activities. The major purposes for literacy use in these contexts were: to establish and maintain relationships, and to meet practical needs in organising everyday life. There was little emphasis specifically on the development of literacy 'skills'. In contrast, and perhaps not surprisingly, the major emphasis in school contexts was on

the use of literacy for the purpose of developing literacy 'skills'. That is, the development of literacy was an end in itself, and classroom events and activities were structured to achieve that end. While there was some evidence of literacy being used for establishing or maintaining relationships, and for organisational purposes, these were peripheral to the main events and activities in all of the classrooms observed in this study.

Children's literacy practices at home tended to remain within the child's control. Even when parents gave considerable help with homework, they were more likely (than teachers) to allow the child to maintain a significant measure of control over what would be done, when, and how it would be done. In the classroom observations in this study, teachers were far more prescriptive and children were given little choice and control over activities. This is consistent with other studies. For example, Freebody et al (1995) also found that parents permitted greater participation rights in literacy interactions than teachers did at school.

Literacy practices at home were also often more suited to their interests, and more challenging, than literacy practices at school. This finding is related to the issue of teachers maintaining almost sole control over children's activities at school: children were given little opportunity at school to select activities or topics that interested them, and the dominance of whole-class activities meant that some children were rarely challenged by more difficult or complex tasks. Stuart Jennings (Year 1) described his frustration at this:

If I was Prime Minister of Australia, it'd be quite hard to decide what to do for the kids, because I don't want them to be locked up in school. Probably, maybe, yeah, if I was ... Education Minister I'd try and make it that the teachers have to give the kids interesting activities, but it takes a fair while to do that.

Do you mean it takes the teachers a long while to prepare them?

No, it takes the kids a fair while to do and it's a fun activity, so they'll like doing it for a long time.

[Extract: interview transcript - Stuart Jennings]

Finally, the predominant 'view of text' seemed to be different in home and school contexts. In home contexts texts were viewed mainly as resources, secondary to the accomplishment of a particular purpose. In classrooms, however, texts were seen as primary objects, as "sources of knowledge or bases for inference" (Baker, 1991, p.169) or as bases for the display of literacy knowledge.

Each of these differences was explored in more detail through the discourse analyses of transcripts of literacy-related interactions both at home and at school. A summary version of these discourse analyses are presented in the next section.

Section 7

Discourse Practices and Opportunities to Learn

7.1 Introduction

One of the objectives of the project was to identify matches and mismatches in home and school literacy practices, and to explore how these may impact on students' school success. In effect, we have attempted to understand how learning in one context may support as well as constrain learning in other contexts. In our analyses of literacy events, we examined the spoken discourse practices at the level of interaction unit as well as at the level of event. Using cross-case analysis, we then searched for patterns in discourse structures across events and contexts.

The discourse analyses were designed to investigate a number of key questions about literacy practices at home and at school in order to identify and explore specific types of matches and mismatches. Key questions included:

- ★ In what types of interactional structures are literacy-related events embedded in home and school contexts?
- ★ How do different interactional structures and ways of participating in literacy events construct, and become constructed by, different views of literacy?

We addressed each of these questions in an attempt to explain how differences in discourse practices impact on students' literacy learning. First, we described the major types of interactional structures evident in the different contexts included in this research, as well as provide examples of each. Second, we examined the way in which different discourse practices and norms for participation contribute to the construction of multiple views of literacy. Finally, by examining what happens when established patterns of interaction are violated, we explored how differing social relations support or constrain students' opportunities for learning.

7.2 Interactional structures

Our attempts to identify the major interactional structures in which literacy events were embedded in home and school contexts build on the work of several other researchers (eg. Green & Wallat, 1981; Collins & Green, 1991; Gutierrez, 1994) who have examined how patterns of activity and 'ways of participating' are constructed in classrooms. In particular, we have drawn on the work of Collins and Green (1991), who emphasised the situated nature of social interactions, and Gutierrez (1994) who used the notion of 'scripts' as "a way of describing organized interaction in order to better understand what is being done and how" (p.337).

Five major interactional structures were identified in the analyses of transcripts of literacy events in this study. These five structures differed in terms of the roles and relationships constructed by participants, as well as the norms and expectations for participation. We have extended Gutierrez' concept of 'scripts' to refer to patterned ways of participating in literacy-related events in homes and classrooms. The five interactional structures or scripts identified in this study were: the 'Exposition' script, the 'Recitation' script, the 'Elicitation' script, the

‘Responsive’ script, and the ‘Collaborative’ script. In what follows, each of these scripts is described, with examples drawn from home and classroom transcripts.

7.2.1 The Exposition Script

What we have called the ‘Exposition’ script refers to interactional units in which one participant (usually an adult) initiated an extended speaking turn in which the role of other participant(s) was passive and implied. Interactions of this type could be either organisational or instructional. Interactional units of this type were found in only three of the classrooms studied. Examples of the Exposition script were found in audio-recorded home literacy events from only one family. This does not suggest that the Exposition script did not occur in interactions in other families, only that it was not found in any other audio-recorded literacy events.

Transcript 7.1, which is part of a longer transcript constructed from an audio-recording of a Year 7 English lesson, exemplifies the Exposition script. Students had read a novel titled *Freaky Friday* in which the main character, a young girl, had “swapped places” with her mother. In this particular ‘lesson’, the teacher informed the students that she was going to show them a video, and explained that she wanted students to identify the “themes” or “messages” or “lessons in life” portrayed in the video. The teacher began the particular section of the interaction (reproduced in the transcript below) by specifying the form of written response that the task required (“you are going to write points”), but did not clearly explain what information was to be written.

Transcript 7.1: The ‘Freaky Friday’ transcript - Year 7.

096	T:	Now
097		what you are going to do is
098		you are going to write points.
099		What you are going to do
100		as we watch the film
101		each time you think you have learnt a lesson
102		from the film
103		I want you to write down
104		the lesson you have learnt.
105		what is the lesson in life
106		that I am learning from this story.
107		Is that clear to you?
108		So it might mean something like -
109		oh well
110		I don't want to tell you
111		I want you to tell me.
112		I want you to think about it
113		as you listen and watch
114		I want you to write down
115		anything you learn
116		lessons in life.
117		They have to be general
118		not like a boy should always
119		you know, like
120		don't talk specifically about the character
121		but say what are the general lessons that you learn.
122		Is that clear?
123		Any questions?
124	S:	Like what...
125	T:	I don't want to tell you
126		because it will be too easy.

In the section of transcript reproduced above, the teacher not only specified what knowledge students were expected to ‘find’ in the text, but also how this knowledge was to be displayed in writing. What she did not model or make explicit was any strategy that students might use for finding the required information. At one point in the exposition, the teacher began to provide an example of an acceptable response (line 108), but then explicitly declined to do so (line 110). Examples of what would be considered unacceptable responses, however, were given (lines 118-119). On two occasions (lines 107 & 121) the teacher asked students if the instructions were clear, but on the first occasion she left no interactional space for students to respond, and on the second occasion (when a student attempted to make a space) the teacher explicitly refused to model a strategy for engaging in the task (line 124), suggesting that this would make the task “too easy” (line 125). Thus, the teacher effectively criticised, in advance, students who could not ‘find’ the required knowledge and the task became not only to find the “lessons in life” but also to construct an effective methodology for doing so.

The Exposition script was found in interactions from classrooms at all grade levels involved in this research. In contrast, interactional units conforming to the Exposition script were only found in transcripts of home literacy interactions from one family, and those few that were found tended to be brief in comparison to classroom examples of this script.

7.2.2 The Recitation Script

The second interactional structure identified in this study was one in which a participant (usually a child) was expected to recite or reproduce knowledge at the request of another participant. This type of structure began with a question from one participant (usually an adult, either teacher or parent), followed by a response from another participant, and concluded by an evaluative comment from the first participant. Evaluative comments generally took the form of a confirmation or denial of the acceptability of the response (eg. ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘right’), a repetition of the preceding response, or an evaluative term (eg. ‘good’, ‘well done’). This interactional ‘script’ corresponds closely to what Gutierrez (1994) called the Recitation Script, and her label has been retained.

The Recitation script was the most common of all the scripts identified in classroom contexts. It typically appeared in extended question-answer sequences involving several interaction units all conforming to the same interactional structure. In some interaction units of this type, the initiating question was implicit as several students responded in turn to the same teacher question. Often, students had to work hard to ‘read’ the initial teacher question in the way that was intended. This is exemplified in the following transcript constructed from an audio-recording taken in a Kindergarten classroom. The teacher and children were engaged in an extended question-answer sequence related to the cover illustration of a ‘big book’ titled *The Jigaree*.

The initial teacher question in this sequence began with “What did we decide...”, indicating that students were to ‘read’ the teacher’s question as relating to a similar question/answer sequence relating to the same text on a previous occasion. The teacher then discounted the response that might be predicted given students’ everyday cultural knowledge - that is, that “he’s jumping on his two feet”, and again signalled that a previously-agreed response was required (line 210). One student then gave the required response (line 211), followed by the teacher’s confirmatory remark (“yeah”), a repetition of the response (“a pogo stick”), and an alternate acceptable response (“or a jumping stick”). The teacher concluded the interaction unit with an extending comment (lines 215-216), then initiated a new interaction unit:

Transcript 7.5a: The ‘Jigaree’ transcript - Kindergarten.

		Teacher	Students
207	T:	What did we decide	18 Q
208		that this boy was jumping on?	12 Q
209		He’s not jumping on his two feet,	11 S
210		so what did we say he’s jumping on?	19 Q
211	S:	a pogo stick	27 r
212	T:	Yeah,	10 E
213		a pogo stick	19 E
214		or a jumping stick.	19 S
215		See, it’s got a spring there	18 S
216		and it springs up and down.	13 S

Transcript 7.5b: The ‘Jigaree’ transcript (continued).

		Teacher	Students
217	T:	What about the Jigaree?	18 Q
218		What’s he using to jump?	14 Q
219	S:	His feet.	27 r
220	T:	He’s using his two feet.	10 19 E

The teacher question (lines 217-218) which began this interaction unit ostensibly asked students to identify what the Jigaree was “using to jump”. However, implicit in the sequence unit was the requirement for students to ‘read’ this question (like the last) as relating to a previously-agreed response. Thus, the question was not so much “What is the Jigaree using to jump?” as “What did we agree last week that the Jigaree is using to jump?” Once again, a student provided the required response (line 219), followed by an evaluative comment from the teacher in the form of a repetition of the response (line 220).

Although the Recitation script was most commonly found in classroom interactions, it was also evident in the transcripts of particular types of home literacy events. Specifically, it was identifiable in the interactions surrounding homework activities in many of the families in this study.

7.2.3 The Elicitation Script

The third form of interactional structure identified in this study was one in which the emphasis was not just on reciting known information, but also on eliciting related knowledge. We have called this the ‘Elicitation’ script. This type of interactional structure was evident in many homes and classrooms in this study. The following section of transcript was recorded on a weekend trip to visit well-known caves. The twins were exploring the caves with their

mother and Aunt Helen, and chose to record their interactions as they read signs and experienced the beauty of the limestone caves. The following extract from the transcript exemplifies the Elicitation script.

Transcript 7.9b: The ‘Caves’ transcript - Brennan family.

	Child		Adult	
044	H:	What’s that one called Carl?	8	Q
045	C:	Stalagmite		23 r 26
046	H:	and why is it called that?	13	Q
047	C:	‘cause it might touch the roof		18 r 27
048	H:	good boy	10	E

In this interaction, Carl Brennan’s Aunt Helen questioned him about information that she had provided to him several minutes earlier (i.e. the names ‘stalagmite’ and ‘stalactite’, and ways to remember which name refers to which phenomenon commonly found in caves). Helen first posed a question (line 44), to which Carl responded (line 45). However, unlike the Recitation script described above, in this interaction no explicit evaluation of the response was offered. However, an additional question was posed (line 46) which required Carl to extend or explain his first response (line 47). Helen concluded the interaction unit with an evaluative comment (“good boy”).

Although almost all of the examples of the Elicitation script identified in this study were initiated and controlled by adults, there were a few examples in which children took the initiating and controlling role.

7.2.4 The Responsive Script

One type of interaction which we identified in this study, but which was not common, was what we called the Responsive script. In interactions of this type, the exchange was not ‘controlled’ by one participant in the way that the previous scripts revealed. Rather, participants drew on each other’s responses in constructing the exchange. This is exemplified in the following transcript from a Year 7 class. In this exchange, the school Librarian questioned Angela Lahoud’s understanding of a text about ballet.

Transcript 7.12: The ‘Ballet’ transcript - Year 7.

			Teacher	Students
98	L:	Which words don’t you understand?	8	Q
99		[Reading aloud] ‘Many people had grown tired of watching ballet with fairy tale stories.’	20	
100		Do you know any ballets at all?	14	Q
101		Have you heard of Swan lake?	13	Q
102	A:	No		11
r				
103	L:	The Nutcraker Suite?	18	Q

104 r	A: No		11
105	L: Do you know what toe shoes are?	13 Q	
106	Do you know what ballet is?	15 Q	
107 r	A: Yes		10
108 r	I know what ballet is.		19
109	L: Do you see it on TV?	12 Q	
110 r	A: Sometimes		10
111 r	not very often.		15
112	L: He thought people	15 S	
113	had got sick of all that	15 S	
114	with costumes	15 S	
115	and fairy tale stories	15 S	
116	so he wanted to find	15 S	
117	a new form of dance,	15 S	
118	a simple form of dance.	15 S	
119	He wanted to start	13 S	
120	a different style,	13 S	
121	break away from	15 S	
122	the old types of ballets	15 S	
123	and find a new form of dance.	15 S	
124	Try and put that in	17 S	
125	a simple sentence.	18 S	

In the exchange above, the Librarian used questioning to identify and respond to Angela's prior knowledge of the topic in order to make the text comprehensible so that Angela could complete the task. This type of responsiveness was found only in interactions involving two or three participants. It was not evident in whole class or large group interactions.

7.2.5 The Collaborative Script

In contrast to the linear nature of the interactional structures described above, there was one interactional structure identified in this study which was more circular in nature. In this type of interaction there was less emphasis on question-answer sequences and participants tended to build on each other's contributions. We have called this type of interactional structure the Collaborative Script.

The Collaborative Script was more commonly found in home literacy interactions than classroom interactions. Of those classroom interactions which conformed to this script, most were between only two or three participants, usually all students. For example, in the transcript below, Joanne Edmonds and her mother collaboratively constructed a list of the chores that each needed to do.

Transcript 7.13: The 'Chores List' transcript - Edmonds family.

01	M:	OK
02		I have to do David Jones bake recipe
03		that's on my list
04	J:	yes yes
05		that's under Mum
06		and I have to do cello practice
07	M:	and try and give a couple of minutes to get some tea
08		fill that up again
09	J:	yes
10		and piano and-
11		what do I still have to do?
12	M:	bath the dog
13	J:	that's under me
14		[writing] bath the dog
15		I have to tidy my room
16	M:	bake a banana cake
17	J:	me [writing] a banana cake

There were few examples of the Collaborative script found in classroom interactions. In classrooms, interaction units were most often begun by teachers - when a child attempted to begin an interaction unit it was usually 'read' by the teacher as interactionally divergent, and the child was either censured or ignored. In home contexts, both parents and children commonly initiated interaction units, and parents did not 'read' children's initiations as divergent.

In classroom contexts, sequence units were almost always initiated by teachers. This meant that, in practice, only teachers had the 'authority' to shift the focus of interaction or event. If a child attempted to shift the focus of the interaction by beginning a new sequence unit, this was usually treated by the teacher as thematically divergent.

Students rarely adopted the role of 'teacher' in the classroom, although they often did so at home, particularly in interactions with younger siblings. On the few observed occasions when students were given the role of 'teacher' in a classroom context, this was usually procedural rather than actual.

7.3 Identification of specific 'constructions of literacy'

Our second critical analysis of transcript data involved an attempt to identify how different interactional structures and ways of participating in literacy events construct, and become constructed by, different views of literacy.

Four distinct 'constructions of literacy' were identified through the discourse analyses in this study: literacy as knowledge, literacy as performance, literacy as negotiated construction of meaning, and literacy as 'doing school'. In what follows, each of these constructions or views of literacy is explored and illustrated with examples drawn from the transcript data.

7.3.1 Literacy as Knowledge

One set of interactions in this study was characterised by social and linguistic factors which contributed to the construction of a particular view of literacy that is best described as

'literacy as knowledge'. In these interactions, one participant (usually an adult) fulfilled the role of monitor of knowledge, while other participant(s) were accountable for reproducing knowledge to participate successfully in the literacy event.

In the following interaction from a Year 1 classroom (Transcript 7.16), the teacher and students (including Carl and Jeffery Brennan) were engaged in an extended question-answer sequence related to the text *Lester and Clyde Run Scared*. The teacher initiated all of the questions in the exchange and acted as arbiter of the children's responses. The children were required to participate by displaying their knowledge, not only of the text itself, but of the habits of creatures called 'feral cats'.

Transcript 7.16: The 'Feral Cat' transcript - Year 1.

56	T:	Carl
57		what's a feral cat?
58	C:	(inaudible)
59	T:	How did it get there?
60	C:	it got lost
61	T:	it could have
62	S:	it might have been hunting food
63	T:	They might have let it free to hunt food but-
64	S:	It might have been that human's cat
65	T:	yes
66		it might not have been that human's cat
67		but at some stage it might have been a human's cat.
68		What do you think the humans had done to it?
69	S:	(inaudible)
70	T:	I think the humans might have had the cat at their house.
71		Do they have the cat at their house anymore?
72	Ss:	Nooo
73	T:	Where is the cat living now Mike?
74	M:	At the pond
75	T:	at the pond
76		does anybody love that cat anymore?
77	Ss:	Nooo

Some of the knowledge that the students were required to produce in this event was directly related to the text (eg. "Where is the cat living now, Mike?" "At the pond." "Does anybody love that cat anymore?" "No."). Other knowledge, however, was drawn from students' everyday knowledge of feral cats (eg. "It might have been hunting food." "It might have been that human's cat.") Thus, the focus of this particular literacy event was not simply to construct meaning from the text, but to reproduce knowledge about feral cats.

When evident in families, literacy as knowledge was most common among those from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly when adults from these families assisted children with homework tasks.

This view of literacy as knowledge was closely aligned with, but not exclusive to, interactional structures which emphasised the authority of one participant (usually an adult) and was reflected in scripts which we defined as Recitation and Elicitation).

7.3.2 Literacy as Performance

A second set of interactions analysed in this project was characterised by a view or construction of literacy that we have called 'literacy as performance'. In these interactions, one or more participants (usually children) were held accountable (usually by adults) for demonstrating a certain level of proficiency in a literacy-related task. The focus of these

interactions was on the performance of the task. In some instances the adult also acted as arbiter of the quality of the performance.

The following exchange has been reconstructed from detailed field notes. Stuart Jennings (Year 1) and some of his classmates had just completed a worksheet in which they had to ‘fill in’ the number preceding each of the numbers on the page, then colour in the pictures on the worksheet. The teacher apparently judged that Stuart had not done the task well enough, even though all his numbers were correct.

Field note excerpt 7.1: The ‘Beautiful Work’ exchange - Year 1.

01	T:	Stuart, can you see the difference between that and that? I would do that again, so it was beautiful. Do you like beautiful work?
02		Stuart nods.
03	T:	Can you fix that up?
04		Stuart shakes head.
05	T:	Let’s get another sheet for you. Stuart, don’t forget the lines. We need to keep inside the lines so drawings look beautiful.
06	S:	I think it’s better when I do the drawing.
07	T:	That’s why you have to be careful with other people’s drawings. Teacher turns his attention to another child, then comments:
08	T:	He’s got some great ideas on colouring in.
09	S:	And I don’t?

In this exchange, there was no recognition of what Stuart counted as “doing beautiful work”. The teacher’s judgement of the standard of Stuart’s performance was based solely on the teacher’s criteria - keeping inside the lines. To Stuart, however, having the opportunity to produce his own picture to be coloured in counted as part of the performance. When the teacher commented on another child’s work (line 08), Stuart’s response (“And I don’t”) showed that he was aware of the differences between his own view of “doing beautiful work” and the teacher’s view. Not surprisingly, the teacher’s view prevailed.

The construction of literacy as performance was evident not only in many classroom transcripts, but also in some recorded family interactions. Varenne and McDermott (1986) recognised this in their research into families’ homework practices and reported that “the presence of school in the family kitchen is apparent in the way members spotlight the child’s performance. Even more striking is the fact that the specific talk that is generated as part of the homework scene is structured, as school talk is structured, to isolate individual competence displays” (p. 199).

There was also evidence of the construction of literacy as performance in some family literacy events that did not involve homework activities.

7.3.3 Literacy as negotiated construction of meaning

The third distinct view or construction of literacy identified in this study can best be called ‘literacy as negotiated construction of meaning’. Interactions of this type usually conformed to either the Responsive or the Collaborative script, although the focus of the exchange was more on achieving the task at hand than following any particular interactional routine. In these interactions, each participant had the right to contribute to the exchange at will. Students, for example, were not required to raise their hands and wait to be nominated by the teacher before speaking, nor did adults control the interaction by naming speakers.

The following two extracts from an extended transcript⁶ clearly illustrate this particular construction of literacy. The extracts are taken from a classroom literacy event in which a Year 4 teacher was leading a discussion about the cover illustration of a book called *Which Habitat?* In the first section of the transcript below the teacher signposted the structure of the

exchange by making a statement (line 57) rather than posing a question. Students responded to the teacher's lead by offering responses (lines 58, 59, 66 & 67) without being named or otherwise nominated by the teacher.

⁶ *The following transcripts employ techniques adapted from Bloome & Egan-Robertson (1993) and Green & Wallat (1981). The basic unit of analysis in each is the message unit. The form of the message unit (statement, question, response, evaluative comment, naming) is indicated in the transcripts with a letter in a box in the 'map' of the conversation (upper case for adults, lower case for children). Inaudible utterances are indicated by a shaded box. The next level of analysis is the Action Unit which may comprise one or more message units. These were coded according to Green & Wallat (1981), with the numbers representing specific categories of Action Unit (e.g 7 represents "telling" and 15 represents "clarifying"). The next level of analysis was the identification of Interaction Units which comprise action units and responses or potential responses by one or more participants. These are shown with vertical lines linking all related action units. A full description of the methodology is contained in Volume 2.*

However, it was not only the structure of the exchange that alerted students to the negotiated nature of this exchange: the teacher's use of "I wonder" and "it might be" signalled that 'correct' responses in this exchange were negotiable. In lines 63-65, the teacher lead the students to consider the evidence presented by the illustration in suggesting possible responses.

Transcript 7.23a: The 'Which Habitat?' transcript - Year 4.

			Teacher	Students
56	T:	This here,	24 S	
57		I wonder whether its a, a, ..	14 S	
58	S:	ocean		23 r
59	S:	land, land.		23 r
60	T:	or it might be a bird	13 S	
61		a long long way away.	12 S	
63		And this bird here certainly-	13 S	
64		look at the feet on that bird	8 S	
65		there.	24 S	
66	Ss:	[talk at once]		? r
67	S:it's like a duck.		23 r

In the next section of this exchange (Transcript 7.23b), students continued to offer suggestions without being nominated (lines 73 & 80) and the teacher continued to verbalise her reasoning (lines 76 & 81) rather than pose questions. Both the structure of the interaction (in which students were permitted to initiate contributions without being nominated by the teacher, and the teacher did not evaluate every student response) and the nature of the participants responses contributed to the view of literacy as negotiated construction of meaning.

Transcript 7.23b: The 'Which Habitat?' transcript (continued).

			Teacher	Students
73	Ss:	yes, it swims		10 r
75	T:	It swims.	19 S	
76		So it must be a bird that lives near water and perhaps feeds from the water	15 S	
80	S:	fish		23 r
81	T:	near where it lives.	13 S	

82	From fish.	13 S
83	So if you look at its beak it tells ou that it's a water-going bird, doesn't it.	10 Q

The view of literacy as negotiated construction of meaning was also evident in audio-recorded literacy events in a small number of families. One example of this is in the following section of transcript from the Jennings family (Transcript 8). This interaction is part of a home literacy event in which Tara Jennings was writing a list of groceries the family needed to buy. All four members of the family - Mr and Mrs Jennings, Tara (Year 5) and Stuart (Year 1) - contributed to the list as they sat at the dinner table. At one point in the exchange, Mrs Jennings noticed the way in which Tara had written 'yogurt' on the list.

Mrs Jennings' comment that Tara had made a spelling error (line 10) prompted an admission from Mr Jennings that he, too, was not a proficient speller (line 11). Mrs Jennings then questioned whether "the companies" knew how to spell because the spelling of the word had changed from 'y-o-g-h-u-r-t' to 'y-o-g-u-r-t' (line 12). What followed was a negotiation of ways to confirm the correct spelling of the word, including checking the actual containers and consulting a number of dictionaries. Through this exchange, a common view of the correct spelling of the word was negotiated among the participants. Exchanges such as this one, in which language was discussed as an object that could be held up for scrutiny, were common in the Jennings home.

Transcript 7.25: The 'Yoghurt' transcript - Jennings family.

07	M:	hey, did you write 'spread' too Stuart?
08	S:	no
09	T:	no I did
10	M:	I was going to say it looked like two different people's writing, and Tara you can't spell 'yoghurt'
11	F:	that's all right, I can't spell 'yoghurt' either
12	M:	well I don't think the companies can spell 'yoghurt' cause 'yoghurt' always used to have an 'h' in it, now they've stopped putting it in
13	F:	(inaudible) Tara laughs.
14	T:	yeah.
15	M:	well how do you say it?
16	T:	yo-gurt. Yoghurt.
17	F:	(Sings) Yo-o-gurt.
18	M:	well it used to have an 'h' in it.
19	T:	(inaudible) a yoghurt in here so I can't see. Oh yes there is
20	M:	yeah, there's plenty of containers
21	T:	(reads from container) Y-O-G-U-R-T
22	F:	so you reckon if you looked it up in the Macquarie dictionary it'd give you an option with 'h' do you?
23	M:	no, I don't think it probably would
24	T:	it doesn't have an 'h'
25	M:	no it used to have
26	T:	an 'h' there?
27	M:	it used to. Go and find that old dictionary of - that was Grandad's.

7.3.4 Literacy as 'Doing School'

The final construction of literacy identified in this study was a view or construction that we have called 'literacy as doing school'. This is similar to what Street (1995) meant when he noted that "the way in which rules for the engagement of participants as teachers and learners

are continuously asserted and reinforced within practices supposedly to do simply with using and talking about literacy: while apparently simply giving instructions about handling a text for instance, teachers and parents are also embedding relations of hierarchy, authority and control” (p. 114).

This particular construction of literacy was only evident in classrooms, and was characterised by an emphasis on procedural displays of classroom competence rather than on the literacy demands of the task. For example, in the following extract from an audio-recorded event in a Year 1 classroom (Transcript 7.27), the teacher and children were preparing for a reading of the book *Lester and Clyde Run Scared*. It is evident from the transcript that the teacher’s focus was on the way in which the children were sitting, rather than on talking about or focusing on literacy.

Interactions such as the one below were common in all of the classrooms in the primary schools in this study, but were not noted in the secondary school. In particular, it was frequently encountered in Kindergarten and Year 1 children, as they became socialised into school ways of participating and interacting.

Transcript 7.27: The ‘Enjoying a New Story’ transcript - Year 1.

010		Christopher read it for us
011	C:	Lester and Clyde Running Scared
012	T:	Run Scared
013		This is part two
014		and you will notice it is very similar to the other one
015		and the ending is very different - some very different things happen.
016		Are you ready?
017	Ss:	yes
018	T:	Are you comfortable?
019		Are your legs crossed and your hands in your lap?
020		Remembering when we are enjoying a new story we are not talking about it.

7.4 Conclusion

There is an assumption among some researchers and educators that children will ‘do well’ at ‘school literacy’ when discourse structures at home replicate or reflect the discourse structures at school. In some of the families in this study, the interactional patterns identified in literacy-related tasks in home contexts were very ‘school-like’, while in other families they were not. Our analyses show that parents from low socioeconomic and/or non English speaking backgrounds can and do adopt a ‘school-like’ stance in interactions with their children in learning contexts at home, particularly interactions surrounding homework activities. This ability to adopt a ‘school-like’ stance supports school learning in the sense that children become adept at interacting in ‘school-appropriate’ ways.

One of the major differences in discourse practices in the families and classrooms in this study was in the conceptions of literacy constructed by the actions and interactions of the participants. That is, home discourse practices emphasised collaboration and negotiation, while school discourse patterns emphasised more authoritarian interactional patterns. Thus, literacy at home was negotiated, while at school it was more imposed. These differing constructions of literacy were embedded in, and contributed to, interactional patterns and processes that served to reproduce the existing social relations and authority patterns in classrooms.

Part of the process of reproducing dominant culture in the classroom is the interweaving of interaction and knowledge (see Ellsworth, 1989; Baker, 1991). This was exemplified in the ‘Jigaree’ transcript, in which Craig interacted in a way that did not ‘fit’ the established

interaction patterns in the classroom. The result of his 'interactional transgression' was that his knowledge was rejected as invalid. Yet, the problem was not that Craig needed to learn how to interact 'appropriately' in the classroom context (indeed, other exchanges showed that he already knew how to do so). The problem was that the established interaction pattern (bidding to speak by raising his hand, then waiting to be chosen by the teacher) left no space for him to challenge the teacher's (ie. dominant) construction of knowledge. What Craig did in this particular interaction can be seen as an attempt to 'create' such a space. Therefore, what are sometimes seen as interactional problems (or naughty children) may be, in fact, reflections of the opportunities (or lack of them) to challenge the existing power relations in the classroom.

Freebody et al (1995) also identified similar variations in the possible interpretations of students participation in interactions. Interestingly, they found that there were variations for students from disadvantaged classrooms when compared with students from classrooms judged to be advantaged in terms of human resources. Self initiated talk tended to be interpreted as violations of class rules and ignored or reprimanded for students from disadvantaged classrooms, whereas in advantaged classrooms this was generally accepted and responded to as 'learning motivated'. Such variations across social and culturally diverse student groups warrant further research.

Section 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

As outlined earlier in this executive summary, the primary purpose of this research project was to explore differences in the language and literacy practices of schools, families and community groups. In particular, it was designed to examine matches and mismatches between the discourse practices of home and school and the impact that any differences have on students' school success.

As pointed out in earlier sections, determining the impact of mismatches between home and school on students' school success is a complex matter. The degree to which any individual student's home literacy practices and discourses represents a mismatch with the mythical 'typical' school literacy practices and discourses varies along multiple axes, including the discourse structures, patterns of authority and interaction, and constructions of literacy encountered by the child at home and at school. In addition, the consequences of such mismatches in terms of student achievement vary along multiple axes, including teacher/parent notions of 'school success', degrees of 'empowerment', and the dominance of school literacy in home contexts. In short, we have found that there is no single or simple answer to the question of how matches and mismatches in home and school literacy practices impact on students' school success. We did, however, identify two key issues that need to be considered in detail in any attempts to provide answers to this question. The first relates to the difficulties that students may encounter in negotiating school literacy, while the second relates to the notion of school literacy as empowerment.

8.2 Negotiating 'school literacy'

Successfully negotiating 'school literacy' involves learning the norms and expectations, and ways of participating, that are valued and reproduced in school contexts. In most discussions of the impact of literacy on students' school success, there is an implicit assumption that 'school literacy' is best - that what students learn at school is somehow 'better' than what they learn at home. This is reflected in Street's (1995) question: "among all of the different literacies practised in the community, the home, and the workplace, how is it that the variety associated with schooling has come to be the defining type, not only to set the standard for other varieties but to marginalize them, to rule them off the agenda of literacy debate? Non-school literacies have come to be seen as inferior attempts at the real thing, to be compensated for by enhanced schooling" (p.106). The implication is, therefore, that any student who can competently negotiate 'school literacy' will achieve school success. Yet, this is not always the case. In some of the families in this study, the 'school literacy' that children encountered was more restricted than their home literacy experiences.

In our sample of families, the students who were most academically successful were those whose family literacy practices reproduced school literacy practices. Those who were less academically successful did not share the home dominance of school literacy. Some, like the Jennings family, shared the home dominance of school literacy to a large extent, but their home literacy practices were not always recognised or acknowledged in school

contexts. This contributed to the teacher's view of Stuart Jennings as a child who was "old before his time". Other families, like the Brennans, actively resisted the dominance of school literacy by explicitly challenging the types of 'school literacy' in which their children engaged.

Recent research on classroom interaction patterns has clearly shown that classrooms offer multiple and varied opportunities for learning (eg. Tuyay, Jennings & Dixon, 1995). The extent of the opportunities for learning seemed more limited at Woodgate Public School than at the other two primary schools involved in the Home/School phase, at least in the lower grades. By concentrating their efforts on making school a place where Indigenous students want to be, the staff may have unwittingly narrowed the opportunities for learning offered in their classrooms.

Ogbu's (1992) work on primary and secondary cultural differences would suggest that Aboriginal children, like children of other groups that have been dominated or repressed, face much greater difficulties than children of other minority groups. Ogbu argued that immigrant or voluntary groups interpret cultural and linguistic differences as obstacles to be overcome, whereas involuntary groups interpret these as differences to be maintained as an expression of identity. He stated that both types of minority group develop a range of educational strategies that may or may not lead to school success, but that involuntary groups have a larger proportion of strategies that will not lead to success, and therefore are the groups most likely to need culturally compatible schooling. The educational experiences of the Aboriginal children and families in this study suggest that further research in this area is needed.

8.3 'School literacy' as empowerment

This research attempted to address the question: "Why does school literacy empower some and disempower others?": Since literacy is constructed by members of groups, through their interactions, school literacy differs from school to school. While it may have many common characteristics, and be very similar across schools, we must nevertheless recognise that when we talk about school literacy we are not talking about a single 'entity' that is constant, but rather about 'literacies' which are changing and evolving. To make sense of the question above, we must therefore recognise that we are talking about the specific school literacies that particular students encounter. Thus, the school literacy that the Indigenous children encountered at Woodgate was different from the school literacy that Vietnamese children encountered at St Joseph's School. Whether school literacy empowers children or not is a question about the relationship between the school literacy practices that particular children encounter, and the home literacy practices of those same children. Thus, there cannot be an assumption that school literacy is constant and universally empowering to those who master it.

One important finding of this study that needs to be understood is that children from 'minority' language and cultural backgrounds are not the only ones who may find school literacy less than empowering. Many children from the dominant or mainstream culture encounter a more restricted range of literacy practices at school than the literacy practices in which they engage at home. While these children may be academically successful relative to their peers from minority backgrounds, that is they are 'good at' school literacy, their learning is nevertheless constrained by the mismatches between literacy at home and at school.

One parent involved in this study, Mrs Le, expressed her view of literacy as empowerment when she said in an interview that she wanted her children to be able to control their futures in a way that she could not. She explained that she was forced to work as a piece-worker in the clothing industry because she did not have the skills to "cut out the middle man". She recognised that she was constrained, both economically and socially, by her lack of English literacy skills. She saw 'school literacy' as being the means of overcoming this lack of power for her children.

"Clegg argue(d) that power is not a property held by persons, as some forms of episodic agency would have it, but that power is *relational*, and is the product of structured sets of relations among people, relations which are not attributable to or created by particular people, but are more historically, institutionally and discursively produced" (Gilbert & Low, 1994, p.7). Thus, 'empowering' students through school literacy is not simply a matter of improving students' skills in reading and writing, it is about changing the relational structures so that the whole basis of institutional power is transformed.

In concrete terms, this means that empowering children does not mean 'teaching' them how to interact 'appropriately' so that their knowledge will be accepted and privileged - it means accepting their knowledge regardless of how they interacts. In so doing, we change the relational structures in which the power is based.

Street (1995) drew attention to "the close association of literacy practices with identity, authority, and concepts of knowledge" (p.110). The mismatches that we found between home and school literacies were not so much in terms of literacy practices, but in terms of authority and concepts of knowledge. Matches between home and school literacy events and practices allow children to develop situated expertise which enhances or supports the development of 'school literacy'. However, mismatches in home and school literacy practices (particularly in terms of authority structures and concepts of knowledge) constrain children's development of non-school literacies. School achievement may be ensured, but empowerment is not.

The findings of this study support Corson's (1991) contention that "education can routinely repress, dominate and disempower language users whose practices differ from the norms that it establishes. ... Whoever has the power to define the context and the language code that describes it is empowered; all others who accept that definition without question accept their own disempowerment in that setting" (p.236). In this study, it was not only those children who could not successfully negotiate 'school literacy' who were 'disempowered'.

8.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.4.1 Innovative Practices Phase

The detailed investigation of the four case study schools involved in this project revealed a number of key elements which can be taken as forming an essential starting point for any school's attempt to respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity of its community.

There is a need to examine seriously whole school approaches to the development of culturally responsive pedagogy. Our detailed case studies in Phase 1 of our research confirmed that it was possible to identify key factors correlated with a school's ability to respond effectively and equitably to the complex cultural and linguistic diversity of communities. These included:

- Recognition of the need for change.
- Whole school involvement.
- High teacher expectations.
- Key staff.
- Community participation initiatives.
- Adequate time for professional development.
- Planned efforts to match approaches to teaching and learning to student needs.

These findings are consistent with those of other researchers including Lucas, Henze and Donato (1990), Ladson-Billings (1995a; 1995b) and Cummins (1986) all of whom argue strongly for responsive curricula that consider the relationships between teachers and students, and schools and communities.

First, schools and systems need to be willing to closely examine their own programs and practices. It was clearly evident in this study that one of the essential elements of school improvement is recognition and acceptance of the need for change.

Recommendation 1.

That existing school-based and system-based reviews be expanded to include evaluation of the programs and strategies currently in use to recognise and respond to cultural and linguistic diversity.

Given the important role that additional funding played in enabling the case study schools in this research to implement innovative programs, there is a need to examine the criteria for schools gaining additional funding from a range of sources. In addition, the recognition of (and response to) cultural and linguistic diversity was an on-going process over long periods of time. It is not feasible to provide one-off, short-term funding for innovative projects and expect these to have a significant impact on students' school success. In all of the schools in this project, it was the combined effects of a number of programs permeating many aspects of school life that ultimately resulted in improvements in student outcomes.

Recommendation 2.

That a review be conducted of a range of sources of additional funding for schools, with a view to broadening the criteria for gaining funds. The review should ensure that all schools have the opportunity to access funds for specific programs, and that funding be provided for on-going projects.

Many effective programs in schools hinge on the presence and involvement of one or two key personnel. Often, when key personnel are promoted or transferred to other schools, there is disruption to the programs, or they may cease altogether. Attention needs to be given to formally recognising and mandating approaches or programs that have proven to be effective. At present, schools are ultimately at the whim of Principals - whether it be by taking a leading role in innovative programs, or by empowering other staff members to manage real change, the role of the Principal is crucial to the success of the school.

Recommendation 3.

That there be an investigation of avenues for identifying and supporting effective programs, and for facilitating the transfer of responsibility and expertise when key personnel leave a school.

To be effective, attempts to recognise and respond to cultural and linguistic diversity must involve the whole school. Although not all staff members need be involved in all programs, there nevertheless needs to be a commitment from the whole school to support

innovative programs and to participate where possible. As well, the first phase of this study showed that success in this area includes long term commitment from schools and education authorities.

The findings of this study support the need to examine alternative means to create more responsive classrooms. One possible way forward is to be found in the work of Luis Moll and his colleagues who have explored the idea that all families possess 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll, 1993). This work has suggested schools might explore ways in which the accessing of the unique 'funds of knowledge' that all families possess, could be a pedagogically useful way to bring about much needed educational change.

Recommendation 4.

That schools be supported in their attempts to recognise and respond to cultural and linguistic diversity. A funding program should be established by DEETYA and implemented through state education authorities for the purpose of funding innovative programs which encourage whole-school involvement.

There is also a need for schools to continue to explore innovative ways to build effective partnerships between home and school. Programs which attempt to bridge home and school literacy have frequently consisted of parent education packages designed by schools to conform parents to school defined definitions of literacy (Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995). As Auerbach (1989) points out, family literacy programs that do no more than teach parents to do school-like activities at home are simply new applications of deficit based views on learning.

Recommendation 5.

That state departments of education should consider targetting literacy funding for innovative community-based initiatives that attempt to establish reciprocal opportunities for parents and teachers to learn from each other.

One of the major difficulties identified by Woodgate Public School in its efforts to meet the needs of its students, was the high turnover in staff. Staff members reported that, when a vacancy occurred, it was not uncommon for new appointments to stay for only a short time, finding the demands of this challenging teaching situation to be too great. When this happened, sometimes two or three times in succession for the one position, it resulted in considerable upheaval and uncertainty for all concerned. Despite this, however, the Principal and the school community have no say in the appointment of classroom teachers. There is a case to be made that all appointments to Priority One Aboriginal schools should be made through a process such as the 'Special Fitness Appointments'. In this way, unsuitable appointments would be avoided, and staff with appropriate skills and knowledge of teaching Aboriginal students could be appointed in the first instance, instead of the current process of 'trial and error'.

Recommendation 6.

That consideration be given to making all teaching appointments to DSE Priority One Aboriginal schools through the process of 'Special Fitness Appointments'. The School Principal and members of the Aboriginal community should be consulted in the appointment of all teachers to such schools.

8.4.2 Home/School Phase

In describing a university course designed to challenge existing power relations between students and teachers, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) pointed out that "the most important interruption of existing power relations within the university consisted of transforming business-as-usual - that is, prevailing social relations - in a university classroom" (p.299). In the same way, existing power relations in education at any level will not be 'interrupted' until teachers are able to step out of their classrooms to allow themselves to see the social relations (who can say or do what to whom, etc) that perpetuate inequality of access and authority (ie, who has opportunities to learn, and whose knowledge is validated). In order to do this, schools need access to professional development opportunities in the area of analysing classroom discourse.

Recommendation 7.

That professional development funding be tagged to enable teachers and administrators to acquire the skills necessary to critically examine the social relations and discourse structures they perpetuate in their classrooms.

There is also a need for teacher educators to address the findings of this study. Our research shows that teacher knowledge of families and the impact of social and cultural diversity on school learning is critical. Teachers need to understand the difference between the literacy of home and school and the impact that such differences can have on school success for some children.

Like other significant Australian studies of literacy (e.g. Christie, Devlin, Freebody, Luke, Martin, Threadgold and Walton, 1991; Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe and Munsie, 1995; Freebody et al, 1995) this study suggests that teachers require greater knowledge of discourse. One minor point of departure however, is that our recommendation is for a much more comprehensive introduction to discourse analysis than has been suggested in earlier reports as well as knowledge of strategies to build more effective partnerships between home and school.

Recommendation 8.

That all teacher education programs include a subject that addresses the need for teachers to acquire knowledge of:

- * **the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of families;**
- * **the effect that matches and mismatches between the literacy of home and school have on success at school;**
- * **strategies for building more effective relationships between home and school;**
- * **strategies for developing more socially, culturally and linguistically responsive curricula.**

The families who participated in this research came from a broad range of social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Of all groups, however, it was the Aboriginal families for whom the data collection methods were least successful. Many factors contributed to this, not least of which were the social and economic circumstances of most of these families. Frequent school absences, difficulty in maintaining regular and frequent contact with families, and difficult personal circumstances of some family members all contributed to the problem of adequately exploring the literacy practices of Aboriginal students and their families. Future research needs to take account of these difficulties, and develop (in particular) data collection methods that are sensitive to the social economic and cultural diversity of families.

Recommendation 9.

That funding be provided for additional research into the home and school literacy practices of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The development of appropriate methodology for such research should be developed in consultation with members of relevant communities.

Like Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn (1995) our study indicated considerable variation in parents' attitude to homework and knowledge of how to deal with it.

The major link or 'common ground' between home and school contexts in this study was clearly homework. Although homework generally takes place in homes or community contexts, it differs from other familial and community uses of literacy in one important respect: family members are accountable for homework in the same way that students are accountable for their literacy in classrooms. Teachers sometimes judged the effectiveness of students' home support on the basis of whether or not homework tasks were regularly and satisfactorily completed.

Homework activities can serve as an important link between students' home and school worlds. However, if teachers and parents do not understand the importance of this potential link, then homework becomes just another task to be completed in any way possible. Taking responsibility for ensuring that homework tasks are completed away from families (eg. in homework centres), denies families the opportunity to become familiar with school ways of using literacy. Homework centres may serve a much greater purpose if they simply provided support to families by requiring that a family member be present to assist a child with homework.

However, it depends on the perceived purpose of homework. If, for example, the purpose of completing homework activities is seen as simply to give children additional practice at skills currently being developed at school, then it may be that completing such activities at a homework centre, with assistance from a 'teacher' rather than a family member, adequately serves that purpose. However, this denies family members any opportunity to become familiar with the skills and tasks being assigned, or the ways of completing such tasks. Thus, it denies family members opportunities to become a little more familiar with 'school literacy'. On the other hand, if the purpose of homework activities is taken to be to provide a link between home and school worlds, then sending a child to a homework centre obviously does not meet this purpose. Instead, what is needed is some way of ensuring that family members are able to assist in the activities in a non-threatening way.

Teachers of Indigenous students involved in this project were, in effect, displaying tacit complicity in these children's 'school failure'. In response to parents' differing demands in relation to homework (ie. some wanted it, others did not), the school assigned homework tasks but these were described by teachers as "optional". Although this was no doubt done with the best of intentions, trying to relieve the pressure on Indigenous families, it in fact contributed to the gap between 'successful' and 'non-successful' families. Making homework optional gave 'successful' families another opportunity to build on or reinforce the positive evaluation of students' home support, but gave 'non-successful' families no opportunity to thwart the negative evaluation that contributes to 'school failure'.

Recommendation 10.

That further research be conducted into the role of homework in supporting students' school success. Schools should be encouraged to examine, with their communities, the purposes for assigning homework, as well as the types of homework activities assigned.

While there were certainly many cultural mismatches between the homes and schools included in this research, there was less evidence that pervasive linguistic mismatches contributed to the educational disadvantage of certain groups, particularly students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Within a relatively short time - sometimes as little as one generation - the existing linguistic mismatches become subsumed by the emphasis on 'doing school'. Children from non English speaking backgrounds may struggle in the early stages of their educational careers, but they quickly 'learn the ropes' and are often adept at passing on their knowledge of 'doing school' to their younger siblings. The lack of English language proficiency is, undoubtedly, a disadvantage for such students in their first few years at school, but we found little evidence that second generation English speakers fail at school because of mismatches in discourse practices and linguistic styles at home and at school. We did find evidence, however, that the influence of older siblings plays an important role in socialising younger children into the ways of 'doing school'.

Recommendation 11.

That formal structures be developed to support the involvement of older siblings in the education of young children from non-English speaking backgrounds.

8.4.3 Methodological issues

One of the aims of this project was to explore new ways to observe literacy practices in a range of contexts. We wanted to identify literacy practices in all their forms, and we recognised that this would require the development of innovative approaches to research. The key development in this project directed towards this end was the involvement of students as co-researchers. This approach was most successful in families in which both parents and children were willing to be involved.

Researchers working with families need to be flexible both in what they ask of families, and in how they conduct the research. For example, if we had insisted on visiting homes to conduct parent interviews, three of our families would have declined to participate. On the other hand, if we had not been willing to visit another family at their home in the evening, then they would not have been able to participate because of the work commitments of both parents.

In the Innovative Practices phase of our work we found that key personnel were vital to the building of schools which developed curricula more responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of communities. We had anticipated, as a result of our Phase 1 case studies that key personnel in each school would play a very important role in securing the cooperation and involvement of many families. This proved to be the case, and the role of these personnel should be acknowledged.

So too, in the second phase of our research, school personnel were of critical importance. In one of the research schools, the relationship between the Bilingual teacher and the Vietnamese families was crucial in obtaining the participation of these families. In another of the schools the assistance and co-operation of the two Community Liaison Officers was instrumental in gaining the support of Arabic and Vietnamese families. Our work with Aboriginal families in a third school would not have been possible without the assistance and support of the Aboriginal Education Assistant and two Aboriginal teachers at the school.

It is perhaps inevitable that complex programs of research will not proceed exactly to plan. In our case, child co-researchers sometimes forgot to return their tapes and/or recorders to school on the appointed day. This resulted in a delay in collecting completed tapes and cover sheets, discussing the activities and interactions recorded, issuing new tapes and sheets, or transferring recorders to other co-researchers. Planned classroom observations were sometimes delayed by class excursions or interrupted by various school activities. Work, family and other commitments of various participants (parents, teachers and researchers) sometimes conspired to make unforeseen delays unavoidable.

Despite the difficulties involved in undertaking a complex project such as this one, however, there are also many benefits to be gained. In the past, researchers have tended to confine their efforts to classrooms and have seldom tackled the more difficult task of obtaining data from families and homes. Where family-based research has been conducted, it has tended to involve white middle-class English-speaking families who do not feel threatened by the presence of researchers in their homes, or non English speaking researchers working in their own communities. In either case, it is difficult to generalise findings across language and cultural barriers.

The involvement of children as co-researchers opens many opportunities for gaining insight into the homes of traditionally hard-to-reach families. It allowed us to 'observe' family members as they went about their daily activities, untroubled by prying eyes. It allowed us to document family literacy practices without intruding on family privacy. Finally, it overcame the danger faced by many researchers that their presence in a site alters participants' actions and interactions to the point where the data collected no longer presents a 'true' picture of life in that site.

Recommendation 12.

That further research develop the methodology of involving children and families as co-researchers. This should be expanded to include teachers, students and family members in analysing data and reporting findings.

8.5 Conclusion

It is clear from the evidence provided in this study that families and schools differ markedly in their literacy practices and values. What is also clear is that there are significant differences amongst families in the way they define and use literacy. Thus, knowing that a student is a member of a particular subgroup (eg. a member of a socioeconomically disadvantaged family; a recent Vietnamese immigrant; a third-generation Australian-born 'native' Arabic speaker; etc.) does not entitle us to assume anything about that student's literacy practices or 'ways of participating' in the cultural practices of the group.

The findings of this project raise a number of additional questions about the relationships between home and school literacy practices. When restrictive school literacy practices are transmitted to home, what factors contribute to whether or not parents/families acquiesce? How do parents construct their role as supporters of their children's learning? What factors influence parents' sense of self-efficacy in improving their children's educational outcomes.

Also needed is further exploration of the role that children play as mediators between home and school. Does this role differ for different groups? How do students construct the role of mediator? How do students respond to differences between home and school? Is there any evidence that children from different minority groups respond in different ways? For example, do Indigenous children respond to differences by clinging to home practices, while children from non English speaking backgrounds respond by embracing school practices? If so, does this support Ogbu's (1992) theory of primary and secondary cultural differences? What do 'mainstream' or 'dominant culture' children do when faced with mismatches between home and school?

The findings of this study strongly support Connell's (1994) argument that it is misleading to assume that problems in school achievement concern only a disadvantaged minority of students. Educational change is not something to be 'done to' minority groups, and effective programs cannot exist as 'add-ons' to the 'real' work of schools. What is needed is fundamental change in student-teacher-parent relationships. The activities and strategies suggested in the next chapter are intended to serve as a starting point for the development of more effective partnerships between homes and schools.

Section 9

Responding to Diversity: Activities for educators, families and communities

9.1 Introduction

The introduction to this project speculated that involving parents more closely in school education may assist both parents and teachers to develop greater knowledge of the other's specific language and literacy practices. This in turn, it was suggested, may enable both teachers and parents to understand the way each defines, values and uses literacy (Cairney & Munsie, 1992). However, parent or family literacy programs to date have focused mainly on helping parents to understand school literacy practices, and have done little to inform teachers about home literacy practices. If schools are to be adjusted to meet the needs of families from diverse social, cultural and language backgrounds, then a necessary starting point is to develop strategies for teachers to find out more about the home language and literacy practices of their students. Equally important, teachers need to find ways to use the knowledge gained to broaden their conceptions of literacy, and to ensure that school literacy practices build on, rather than replace, students' home literacy practices.

In a major DEETYA funded review of family literacy programs and parent education and family literacy, Cairney et al (1995) recommended that efforts to establish partnerships between home and school need to consider the content, processes involved, source of the activities and programs, and control of the initiatives. Cairney et al (1995) gave shape to each of these dimensions through a series of key questions designed to challenge parents and teachers to consider the nature of the relationship between home and school embodied within any program or activity that was being used (see Table 9.1 below).

Table 9.1: Framework for evaluating Home/school partnership initiatives

Content (What?)

Any initiative will have content. Who will share what with whom? But what will the content be? While packaged programs usually make these decisions for participants, there are other possibilities that offer varying degrees of shared responsibility between parents, schools and other organisations.

Process (How?)

The process involved in the delivery of any initiative might vary from the straight transmission of information, to a collaborative program of individual inquiry. This variable seeks to address the key question: How will key content be presented? Will it be adult centred, or child centred? Will it be experienced based or more didactic in format? Will it involve transmission of information or interaction and collaboration? Will it be short term or long term?

Source (From where?)

Every program is initiated by someone with a range of purposes in mind. Who has initiated the program? What are the terms and conditions for initiating it?

Control (Who sets the agenda?)

This dimension is closely related to the above. Who exercises control in this Family Literacy initiative? Who sets the agenda, implements the ideas, invites the people to be involved etc?

While the above framework of basic questions is useful to provide shape and direction to a partnership initiative, the actual starting point for any home/school initiative can vary greatly (see Cairney & Munsie, 1992 for a more detailed discussion) and will reflect the needs of students and their families.

The activities and strategies described in this report are suggested starting points for the development of effective partnerships between families and schools. They are designed to assist schools in recognising and responding to the language and literacy diversity of their communities. Although they are categorised for the purposes of presentation here, most of the suggested activities and strategies cannot be neatly 'boxed' as pertaining only to classrooms, schools, families or communities. While many of the suggested strategies may seem relatively minor, it is the use of a range of such strategies that facilitates effective partnerships. No single strategy or activity can accomplish that alone. For additional details on a variety of other initiatives consult Cairney et al, (1995).

In selecting a specific starting point, schools and communities need to consider the cultural and language groups served by the school, as well as the social and economic circumstances of the school community. It is only through consultation and cooperation between all groups involved in the school that decisions can be made about appropriate programs, strategies or activities. Researchers or 'outsiders' cannot make decisions for schools: responsibility for acting remains within the province of the school and its community.

9.2 Classroom based activities and strategies

1. Devise homework activities that are an integral part of classroom cycles of activity.

As discussed in the previous chapter, homework activities can serve as an important link between home and school contexts. However, the value of homework as a mediating tool is rarely recognised. If homework activities form an integral part of classroom cycles of activity, they not only provide greater support to students, but also serve as a means for family members to understand classroom activities and practices.

2. Invite parents into classrooms in roles they feel comfortable with: observer; helper; teacher; learner.

Many teachers are reluctant to welcome parents into their classrooms simply to observe. At the same time, many parents are reluctant to go into their children's classrooms unless they feel competent to assist in some way. Yet, if teachers understand that encouraging parents from diverse backgrounds to observe in classrooms helps to build vital links between home and school literacy practices, then they may feel less threatened, less open to criticism, and more open to passive parental presence. Similarly, if parents felt welcome to observe in classrooms, free from the expectation that they assist in instruction in some

way, then they may be more willing to build direct links with their children's school, rather than rely solely on their children as mediators. One way to overcome these misunderstandings is to encourage parents to visit their children's classrooms in any role in which they feel comfortable.

3. Encourage children to take literacy artefacts from home to school, and from school to home.

The importance of literacy artefacts as mediating tools between home and school contexts was noted in this research. Stories, pictures, cards, books, projects and myriad other products of literacy activities can be easily transported between home and school. The interactions surrounding the use of such artefacts in both home and school contexts can serve to inform parents and teachers about children's literacy practices in and out of school.

It is important to do more than simply share texts across these contexts. It is important for such texts to be seen as cultural artefacts embedded within the home and school practices from which they have been used. Careful consideration of the sociocultural significance of such texts is important. To simply transfer texts from one context to another is tokenistic (see Cairney & Munsie, 1992c).

9.3 School based activities and strategies

4. Assist teachers to closely examine their own classroom interactions and literacy practices. Encourage them to problematise existing social relations in classrooms.

Heath (1983) recognised the value of working with teachers to help them examine the social relations existing in their classrooms, as well as the ways in which they engaged in literacy practices. She explained:

I work with teachers to enable them to become participant observers in their own domains and to use the knowledge from the ethnographies of Trackton and Roadville to inform their motivations, practices, and programs of teaching. ... Children and teachers across cultural groups, if provided adequate information in suitable forms, could learn to articulate relations between cultural patterns of talking and knowing, and, understanding such relations, to make choices (Heath, 1983, p.12-13).

By engaging in recording and analysis of interactions in their own classrooms, teachers can increase their understanding of the ways in which the interactions and practices they promote can impact on students' opportunities to learn.

5. Establish avenues for greater communication across teachers and schools.

Expanding communication networks amongst teachers and schools would provide greater opportunities for teachers to share in the knowledge and experiences of their colleagues. Many schools have developed innovative and effective programs. However, little is known of many programs beyond the immediate community of the school.

6. Examine school programs and policies to ensure that a range of services and opportunities is provided to families and students.

No single strategy or activity will be sufficient to build effective partnerships between homes and schools. Schools need to examine the range of programs and services they offer to ensure that the varied needs of families are being met.

There have been many studies which have considered the merits of various parent or family literacy programs (e.g. Cairney & Munsie, 1992; Cairney et al, 1995). Schools should consider the merits of such strategies within a consideration of the extent to which such initiatives provide genuine partnerships between home and school.

7. Listen to what parents have to say about their children's learning. Give them opportunities to say it.

Traditionally, the main form of personal contact between parents and teachers has been in parent/teacher interviews. In most cases, these have been seen as an opportunity for teachers to inform parents about their child's progress at school. Only recently has the view of parent/teacher interviews been broadened to include opportunities for parents to inform teachers about their child's learning at home. While this broadening of view is helpful, it still is typically a once or twice a year event. There is much to be gained from providing more regular and frequent opportunities for teachers and parents to share their knowledge of children's learning in a range of contexts.

8. Review school homework policies and practices.

While individual teachers can devise homework activities that serve as a link between students' homes and the classroom (see above), a whole school review of homework policies and practices is necessary if homework is to fulfil its potential. Questions such as whether or not completion of homework activities is compulsory, how parents should support their children in doing homework, and what support structures (such as Homework Centres) are provided, are matters for whole school and community discussion and decision-making.

9. Use technology to broaden the school community by establishing partnerships with other schools and communities.

Cummins and Sayers (1995) propose "that we reframe education around critical inquiry and the collaborative generation of knowledge in such a way that the experience and cultural contributions of all students are valued. In this scenario, rather than passively internalizing the cultural literacy of socially powerful groups, students actively generate their own intercultural literacy through dialogue and collaborative research with colleagues in their own classroom and in classrooms across the globe" (p.13). They suggest that this can be done through "the adoption on the broadest possible scale of long-distance teaching partnerships across cultures, intercultural networks of partnerships that - to the greatest extent feasible - seek to take advantage of accessible and culturally appropriate educational and communications technology" (p.11). They call these partnerships *Intercultural Global Learning Networks*. Cummins and Sayers present numerous examples of such learning networks in action, and argue that they "require and promote higher-order thinking and literacy skills to a far greater extent than the narrowly focused curriculum envisaged by much of the back-to-basics rhetoric of the educational reform movement. The information superhighway offers unprecedented opportunities for educators to create collaborative learning environments that will stimulate critical thinking skills and academic excellence among *all* students" (p.15).

10. Provide opportunities for participation in Family Literacy Programs that meet the needs of parents and the school community.

Family literacy programs that increase parents understanding of school literacy practices help parents to effectively support their children's literacy development. However, it is important to ensure that any programs offered actually meet the identified needs of parents and families. In some school communities, it may be appropriate to provide access to adult English and literacy classes. In other schools, programs to inform parents about ways to assist their children with projects may be more helpful. What is important is that the school and community work together to identify needs, and then develop programs to meet those needs.

9.4 Family based activities and strategies

11. Encourage families to contribute to their children's literacy portfolios.

The use of literacy portfolios is one way to encourage the exchange of literacy artefacts between home and school. Literacy portfolios are now common in many schools, but are usually restricted to products of activities that children have engaged in at school. By encouraging families to contribute home literacy artefacts to children's portfolios, it is possible to broaden the 'picture' of children's literacy experiences.

12. Involve Community Liaison Officers and/or classroom teachers in home visits to those families wishing to participate.

Not all parents or family members are willing or able to participate in meetings and activities on school premises. On the other hand, some families are unwilling to allow teachers or Community Liaison Officers to visit them at home. What is important, however, is that the school provide opportunities for all families to form effective relationships with the school. For some families, the best way to do this is through home visits.

13. Provide support networks to encourage the involvement of older siblings in young children's literacy development, particularly in NESB families.

The important role that older siblings often play in young children's literacy development should be acknowledged in school contexts. Support could be provided to such students by establishing networks within the school. Opportunities to talk with other students who also assist younger siblings would be beneficial, as would opportunities to seek advice from teachers.

9.5 Community based activities and strategies

14. Inform families and community members about school activities through a range of media (eg. community radio, community or local newspapers, etc.)

As all schools know, not every parent reads the school newsletter. To ensure that all families have access to information about school policies, programs, and activities it is

imperative that a range of media is used. Regular articles in local or community newspapers, and broadcasts on community radio stations, can be effective ways of communicating information to families and community members. In particular, parents who spend most of their time at home and who do not read English are often overlooked by schools' information dissemination processes.

15. Provide greater access to interpreters, for the benefit of both families and schools.

Many schools provide families with access to interpreters for important school events such as parent/teacher interviews. However, there is much to be gained from expanding this service to include a range of events or circumstances. For example, even though many schools encourage parents to visit classrooms, those with limited English proficiency are often reluctant to do so. If schools were able to provide an interpreter on a regular (not necessarily frequent) basis, many more parents would avail themselves of the opportunity to observe classes or attend school meetings and functions.

16. Establish mentor programs involving members of the broader community supporting individuals or groups of students.

Building strong community relationships need not be confined to the parents of students attending school. Members of the broader community often have much to offer in terms of time and expertise. Establishing mentor programs in which community members with particular expertise support individuals or groups of students is one way of utilising the community's full resources as well as building strong partnerships.

9.6 Conclusion

It is clear from this study that there is no single or simple answer to the question of how matches and mismatches in literacy practices at home and at school impact on student's school achievement. However, what we have attempted to do is to describe the many ways in which literacy is used in homes and schools, and to understand some of the factors that influence students' chances of school success. It is our hope that the findings of this research provoke reflection and discussion amongst educators and families as they seek ways of building closer relationships for the support of all students.

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