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Three Families Speak About Their Lives: Reading As A Literacy Tradition.

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ABSTRACT

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Family lives enable children to communicate their thoughts and feelings about themselves and the world around them. Schooling continues this process and develops it further. Supportive families advantage their children in their literacy development throughout the primary school years. Three children who were successful in school-based literacy are the central focus of the research.
The purpose of the study was to explore whether or not some families possess a tradition of literacy that is passed from one generation to the next. A biographical method was used to analyse the literacy-related activities within three families using the narratives of children, parents and grandparents. Three questions are addressed; the first considers the extent and nature of family support for children in their learning of literacy. The second question considers the role of childhood remembrances and explores whether adults who were supported as children construct similar experiences for their own children. The final question considers the extent to which these supportive behaviours constitute a literacy tradition inasmuch as they occur in succeeding generations within families.
The main conclusions were that remembrances of literacy support in childhood identified family members other than parents as significant figures. A variety of literacy related activities were used to support children's learning. Adults within each family, who had not received support in their learning of literacy as children, did not engage with their own children's literacy learning to the same extent as adults who had childhood remembrances of support. The literacy tradition was embedded in the lives of the three families through the complementary roles that different members fulfilled.

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Abbreviations

CATs Cognitive Abilities Tests

DfEE Department for Education and Employment

NC National Curriculum

NLS National Literacy Strategy

QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

SATs Standard Attainment Tests

Chapter 1

Travelling Through Time

What are days for?
Days are where we live.
They come, they wake us
Time and time over.
They are happy to be in:
Where can we live but days?
Days by Philip Larkin

Introduction

This is the story of three children aged nine years who have made a head start on their journey towards becoming literate people. When they reach the end of the journey they will be articulate young adults, capable of logical thought and deduction and able to read and write texts for a variety of purposes. They will almost certainly continue to derive pleasure from reading, writing and discussion. They may develop these skills in other languages. Their social skills are also developing as they move along this pathway, they have begun to see how language can be used descriptively, figuratively and powerfully. They already understand what it means to be able to read and write; perhaps more importantly they are aware of others in their class at primary school who cannot do these things. They have been set on this journey by their parents, families, friends and teachers. I taught them for two years when they were seven years old in Year Two and again when they were nine in Year Four at Crossfields Primary School. Then they moved on to the next stage in their journey, to their new school and in leaving their primary school the children took their families with them because families move on too.

The pivotal focus of the research is an analysis of how the three children were supported in their literacy learning by their families told through the

recollections of the children themselves, their parents and grandparents. These literacy biographies are a few short years for the children but for the grandparents they span over half a century.

The three children were high-achievers in English (Appendix i) and had been so since they entered formal schooling more than four years previously, in 1994. At a national level similar paper and pencil tests in English (DfEE, 1998) have revealed low attainment in literacy amongst children especially amongst certain groups of boys (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, 1999). The thesis offers a different perspective of children's literacy as described in three case studies of successful, motivated children; their names were Fiona, David and Harry.

Not all parents or carers engage in opportunities with their children for raising their children's awareness of written or graphic text, but those who do prepare their children for the some of the challenges of formal schooling (Street, 1995). Such children are already privileged and their schools benefit from their readiness to assimilate the challenges of a more structured learning environment.

Three main questions are addressed within the thesis. Firstly, to what extent were Fiona, David and Harry supported in their learning of literacy by their families? Secondly, did the remembrance of family support in childhood reading experiences predispose parents to do likewise in respect of their own children? Finally, if family support for children's literacy learning is provided by parents and grandparents, to what extent is it valid to describe this commitment as a family tradition passed on from one generation to the next?

Underlying these questions were certain assumptions the first of these was that success in literacy attainment in school is in part an outcome of earlier parental support in pre-school and early years. A second assumption was that it is possible to draw conclusions about traditions of family literacy on the evidence provided through narrative accounts from parents and grandparents. Taylor (1983) used the narrative accounts of parents to describe literacy

traditions in her study of three communities and concluded that pre-school literacy learning within the home was effective in preparing young children for literacy taught in schools. The inclusion of grandparents in the families enriched the biographical accounts of family literacy traditions.

Literacy Events and Literacy Practices

Previous research has identified two categories of literacy supporting behaviours that occur within some families. Street (1995) uses the term 'literacy practice' to describe occurrences during the daily lives of families in which opportunities are taken to share understanding of written and spoken text. For example, a discussion between adult and child about the family's meals is a literacy practice in which the adult engages the child in a verbal decision making process that is integral to daily family life in a regular dialogue. There is not necessarily an expectation of a full and informed answer from the child, nor is the purpose to practice language skills per se, rather it is an inclusive social gesture from adult to child that infuses language. Heath (1994) uses the phrase 'literacy events' to refer to particular literacy related activities within the family setting that take place within literacy practices. The routine of the bedtime story is a literacy event that takes place within the regular social interchange between parents, children, and siblings. Within some families these social interactions are implicit and are also made explicit. The study set out to investigate to what extent these aspects of family literacy featured in the early learning not only for Fiona, David and Harry but also for their parents and their grandparents when they were children. A biographical method was chosen in an attempt to describe the contemporary historical settings in which these family literacy traditions had occurred.
For the purposes of the thesis 'literacy' refers primarily to reading but with reference to the pre-school years speaking and listening are taken to be of similar significance within the term. Fiona, David and Harry were asked to

comment on their writing skills during the interviews but this is not the central focus of the study.

Oral Literacy

The first of four attainment targets in English within the National Curriculum (NC) (DfEE 1999) is speaking and listening. This describes oral literacy. The three other attainment targets reading, writing and spelling address the teaching and learning of written text. Oral literacy precedes reading and writing, it underpins the subsequent development of literacy skills in the other three areas. Parents play a major role in the early literacy development of young children, especially oral literacy. It could be argued that the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (DfEE, 1998) has resulted in the marginalisation of oral literacy within the school curriculum. In the drive to raise levels of attainment in national tests, the focus has shifted from oral literacy especially in early years education.

Fluency in language infers power (Meek, 1992) whether in the pre-school play-time game or at societal level. Young children quickly learn that knowing the right words is important. Fiona, David and Harry were all articulate children when thy first began school as 'rising fives'. Fiona was able to converse easily with adults as well as other children; David would seek out adults at playtimes and talk about the make believe games he played and Harry quickly became a popular leader amongst his peers.

A Brief Description of the Setting for the Project

A biographical research method was used to provide the perspective on the study of family literacy using oral tradition and narratives. Data was collected through interviews and questionnaires over a four-month period. Each of the children was interviewed, as were their parents and grandparents. The theme of the interviews was remembrances of childhood reading experiences and adult support for children in their learning of literacy within the home.

The children and their families were selected on the basis of three criteria. The first of these referred to the children alone, namely that they were high-attainers. In this respect they represented pupils who were successful in their literacy learning at school. They were to tell stories that would be palpably different from accounts in previous research that focused on disenchanted boys and their failure to become literate (Epstein et al., 1998). The second criterion was that the selected group though small, would include at least one boy and one girl as previous research (Millard, 1997) had identified gendered differences in reading preferences and habits amongst girls and boys. The third criterion referred to grandparents within families. Three families were chosen in which the grandparents had maintained regular and frequent contact with their children and grandchildren. Narratives spanning sixty years or more offered contrasting accounts of social attitudes within families and between generations.

The fieldwork took place in a medium-sized primary school on an island. There was no sense of inner city deprivation, nor the hectic pace of life of a busy town. The geographical region was an island and had a discrete population, it was arguably less accessible to change than other parts of rural England. The local parish supported the school and generations of the same families had attended the school as pupils.

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to the growing site of research that focuses on family literacy at a time when government initiatives are shaping school based literacy. The research analyses how and in what circumstances parents had encouraged their children in reading.

Doing Parenting - Doing Literacy: A Biographical Note

When my daughter was about six months old I bought her first book, a board book, colourful pictures, no words, great fun. We would sit, I would talk and point and she would listen and look, some of the time. My son was shown books not only by me but also by his elder sister. This all started over nineteen

years ago. We still have the small library of books that we as a family learned to read and love throughout those childhood years. We learned how to pick out 'good' books for children and we developed preferences for certain children's authors. I took both our children along to the local library for 'Storytime' sessions for under nines, they would sit down with other children and listen to the library assistant read some children's stories to them. We bought all manner of books, fabric books, pop-up books, musical books, big books and minuscule books hardly bigger than a baby's fist. Our relatives did the same, they would come visiting bearing gifts. It never occurred to any of us not to do this. Our children looked and listened, read and re-read these different books and we all enjoyed them.

Five years of full-time parenting two young children was experientially different from one in which career and family might have been equal partners in a time-share. It presented an opportunity to look at formal education as a consumer, a concerned parent, who had some insider knowledge of how the system worked. Nevertheless, I was on the outside experiencing the prospect of formal schooling for my children. I felt that children should be prepared for schooling and that the school in turn should meet family expectations. I became aware of the power of education as a force outside and quite separate from family life. Schools, even cosy, friendly primary schools are nevertheless institutions with in-built systems and procedures that often jar the senses of newcomers. Teachers act as the interface between the two contexts of home and school cushioning the impact and pacing the structured day. They provide a setting in which young children are willing to learn in school, and in this way teachers continue to develop that which has occurred naturally at home.

As my children grew older reading became less of a family based activity. On returning to full-time teaching I found work in the primary sector. It was 1988 and the National Curriculum (Department of Education and Science, 1988) had just become statutory in schools. Issues of equality of opportunity,

provision and educational outcome for pupils were brought into a sharper focus as the new curriculum was implemented. As part of an MA dissertation, I undertook a small piece of classroom based research to investigate the influence of gender amongst six and seven year old pupils in the new subject of Design and Technology in the NC (Jackson, 1994). The conclusions underlined the importance of oral literacy in early years learning and showed that articulate girls took on key organisational roles in group tasks. This had raised my interest in children's literacy once again, but this time from a professional stance and as a researcher.

A decade later the introduction of the NLS (DfEE, 1998) provided me with the impetus to conduct another enquiry, this time into literacy. The prescriptive format and time framing of the Literacy Hour (DfEE, 1998) seemed remote from the easy nature, take-it-as-it-comes learning of literacy at home. A distance had been interposed between home and school literacy. School literacy currently enjoys a high profile in the arena of educational issues, it is of the moment and in the spotlight. But some families in supporting their children in the early years of learning literacy continue to prepare them for formal schooling in ways that other families perhaps are unaware of or eschew.

Outline of the Thesis

The following description outlines the path of the thesis.

Chapter 2: This provides a review of research that focuses on literacy in the contexts of home and school. Previous research into family literacy traditions notably by Brian Street, Shirley Brice Heath and Denny Taylor is analysed. The theoretical constructs of Basil Bernstein concerning codes and modalities in young children's learning are pertinent to the study and their relevance is examined. The influence of gender in the learning of literacy and within the classroom setting is also considered. The chapter concludes with an analysis of literacy and auto/biography.

Chapter 3: This chapter outlines the methodology of the research and includes a summary of the pilot study undertaken prior to the main fieldwork. The biographical method encompassed the narrative accounts from children, parents and grandparents. Within these are literacy events and practices that are implicit in the families' lives. Fiona, David and Harry spoke about themselves as readers and learners. Parents reflected on their own childhood as well as their parenting experiences. Grandparents provided a historical perspective of schooling and reading in particular. Three pen pictures of the children chosen for the study are included as are three diagrams showing the generations of family members.

Chapter 4: This is the first of three chapters that describe and interpret the interviews. Fiona, David and Harry talk about their reading, writing and their families. They speak about how they came to be readers, what kind of reading material they enjoy now and what they want to read in the future. They tell how writing is more problematical than reading for them. As experienced readers they recall their early memories of pre-school and home reading; they paint a picture in childhood narrative of family lives, telling tales on parents and making jokes about themselves. I re-tell their stories and in doing so I tell my own, their memories resonate with memories of my own childhood.

Chapter 5: This contains conversations with the three sets of parents. Each talks about their past, when they were at school and their recollections of family life, in particular their memories of learning how to read and activities such as bedtime stories. The relationship of parents as individuals vis a vis their children is also analysed. This chapter includes references to schooling, a comparison between education twenty or thirty years ago and the reciprocal expectations that schools and families have of each other.

Chapter 6: This contains family narratives as told by grandparents. All recalled their own childhood memories and memories of themselves as parents with young children. They talked about their involvement with their grandchildren's early years of childhood and the literacy related activities that they shared. Oral history is contained within the narratives in this chapter and this provides comment on education today and schooling during the first half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 7: This contains diagrams and tables that describe the findings of the second questionnaire and analyses the interviews. Various aspects of family literacy traditions are examined. Particular literacy related activities and the circumstances in which they took place are identified. The chapter draws together the common threads of literacy biographies in three generations and examines the contribution to childhood literacy made by adults through the memories of grandparents and parents.

Chapter 8: This chapter summarises the findings of the study in relation to the meanings of literacy construed by some individual family members. The chapter analyses the social context of the research in relation to the chosen method. Future research in the area of family literacy is discussed. Finally, the chapter analyses the accounts of the lives of family members and the significance of literacy traditions within families.

Chapter 2

Families, Literacy and Auto/Biography

I'll tell you a story about a weekend we went to Love River, the place we call Thuukal. On Friday afternoon Auntie came to our place. She told my dad she had bought some fuel so we could all go out to Thuukal next day. 'Let's take two boats,' she said. 'The milky-pine flowers are in bloom, and that means those oysters are fat and going to waste.' Dad agreed, and he sent me over to ask Grandad, because that place is his country. 'Be careful, my granddaughter. That's the story place of Yaatamay, the carpet Snake. If you swim in the eastern swamp, you'll never come back. 'Yes, Grandad, but aren't you coming to look after us?' I asked.

Going for Oysters by Jeanie Adams

Introduction

This chapter discusses research that is germane to the present study and opens with consideration of the meaning of literacy. There follows identification of the major issues that surround literacy within education and families. This is developed further by considering the significance of the social context of language in the development of young children. The theoretical constructs of Basil Bernstein (1975) and their implications for early learning are then discussed. The chapter concludes by problematising the contextualisation of literacy through auto/biographical accounts.

The Meaning of Literacy

The meanings construed around literacy change over time. De Castell et al (1986) stated that the term 'literacy' has a historical meaning that is a residue

of the past and refers to the privilege of the esoteric, lettered social class. This serves as a reminder of the contemporary disaffection amongst some working class boys whose failure to engage with school-based literacy is rooted in a socially constructed view that positions literacy as being irrelevant. A further historical perspective by Gerbault (1999) emphasised the arbitrary nature of definitions, referring back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when to be described as literate it was sufficient merely to be able to sign one's name. Any contemporary definition within the context of schooling must arguably now include some reference to computer literacy since children now passing through the education system could not be described as literate if they emerged without the necessary skills in information and communications technology (DfEE, 1999). The core skills of literacy are themselves open to modification. A purpose of education is to produce literate, young people, an agreed definition of what constitutes literacy seems essential. De Castell et al (1986: 9) discuss the relevance of the term 'functional literacy' in this context by stating that this applies to an individual's ability to fulfil tasks and that it may be used as a kind of benchmark of suitability for the job. A working definition of literacy is problematic requiring it to be both universal and context-specific.

Heath (1986) in focusing on the importance of family literacy suggests that a uniform definition of literacy should incorporate out-of-school contexts that are the modifications and counterparts to school-based skills. A further problem of finding a satisfactory definition is indicated when considering for example the several functions that reading as a sub-division of literacy fulfils. These functions go far beyond the reading of books in school and include the use of memory supportive texts such as telephone directories, news related texts, social items such as greetings cards and recipes to name but a few.

Gee (1990) takes a broader view when describing the function of language (literacy) as being about different ways of knowing and different ways of making sense of the world of human experience.

The constructing of definitions is perhaps less significant than Heath's view (1986) that verifies literacy within the home as legitimate in its contribution to the educative process. In this way it conflicts with the deterministic aspects of Bernstein's theory (1975) of codes and modalities in language. In a practical analysis of the home/school dynamic Heath (1986: 23) uses the words of a primary school teacher in the U.S.A. to describe the social context of literacy,

> Reading and writing are things you do all the time - at home, on the bus, riding your bike... You can read and you do every day before you ever come to school. You can also play baseball. Reading and writing are like baseball. You play at home...whenever you want to, but when you come to school you get help on techniques. School does that for reading and writing...we practice a lot. I'm the coach.

This re-focuses the role of teaching in literacy education; it is essentially a practical activity focused on improvement through practice. Home and school work alongside one another to bring excellence into the vernacular. Children are no longer treated as tabula rasa but rather as individuals who each have narratives to tell. The role of the family within the experience of learning literacy is to legitimise this story-telling by introducing other stories to children. Schooling builds upon literacy based learning at home and structures new cultural meanings for children.

Literacy in the Pre-School and Early Years

Children enter formal schooling already well versed in systems of communication both physical and verbal (Taylor, 1983) because families enable their children to communicate through these dialogues. However, these highly complex skills do not necessarily include those that are most relevant to schooling. The pre-school experiences of some children will not have prepared them for learning to read and write in a more formal setting, since their parents may be unaware of the importance of pre-literacy experiences in

young children's development. The classroom context for learning literacy is considerably different from those circumstances in which literacy related activities occur at home. The teacher's role is to ensure that textual work is explicit with connections being made between sentences, word and text, the modelling of reading by the teacher is used as a rehearsal before whole class practice. Although some similarities exist, the process of learning literacy within the school is fragmented and perhaps baffling for those children whose prior knowledge is scant. There are many cultural factors both within and outside the classroom which potentially disadvantage some children but arguably the explicit teaching strategies identified in the NLS (DfEE, 1998) minimise these. Prior to formal schooling emergent literacy is embedded in children's play insofar as it is self-regulating, self-selected and it serves the children's own purposes and interests (Solsken, 1993). But within the classroom setting a tension exists, the work-related nature of literacy is present. This impacts differently on the variety of cultural groups insofar as it is perceived in the work/play dimension. Young children who have been introduced to written and graphic text as part of a shared leisure activity at home are more likely to assimilate the more formal aspects of literacy learning in school as a re-visiting of these prior experiences.

Parents may unwittingly act as models for their children's early learning experiences, including those of literacy. There is, as might be expected, a wide variety of modelling behaviours amongst families, ranging from parents who themselves experience difficulty in reading and writing, and therefore avoid situations in which these activities occur, to those who use leisure time with their children for shared literacy related activities. This latter group introduce their children to the representation of the real world as written and graphic text. Children from these families have a smoother transition from learning at home to learning at school, although it does not necessarily follow that children who are successful in learning literacy at school have been exposed to parental instruction in reading. Weinburger (1996) describes how

literacy learning occurs at the margins of awareness, thereby indicating that success at learning school literacy is dependent on an array of family literacy practices that are embedded in home-life. Success in literacy at school is not an outcome of a checklist approach by parents keen to ensure that their children learn to read; rather it is an experiential strand of everyday family living.

Street (1995: 2) sees 'literacy practices' as significant learning activities that take place within family homes. They exist at a higher level of abstraction and refer to social and cultural conceptualisations that give meaning to reading and writing. The social interaction and meaning construed from the practice has significance beyond the activity itself. Taylor (1983) documents the analysis of literacy-related activities in previous research. This focused on the identifiable occurrences that are features of literacy learning in the home. The social and emotional ambiences in which these occurrences take place are signifiers of the reasons families retain their literacy traditions.

Language and the Social Context

Within the pre-school years the literacy focus is on language and pre-reading development. The acquisition of speaking and listening skills underpins later learning in reading and writing. This emphasises the social role of language and literacy and is significant when considering pre-school experiences as preparation for school. Walkerdine et al (1985) found that children were familiar with many discourses in their language learning even before they entered formal schooling. Fox (1992) reached a similar conclusion and summarised this by stating that children learn language in the company they keep. In this way children whose early experiences include the opportunities to converse and interact with adults other than their parents, namely pre-school helpers and day carers are thus practiced in a variety of discourses before schooling begins. The term 'discourse' is used here in accordance with

Halliday's (1975) definition that describes communicative, interactive language in which specific roles and relationships are implicit.
Larcher's work (1993) identified the sociocultural rules in language that are both omnipresent and redundant and described how in dialogue the speaker is unaware of these rules though they govern the social group. This work illustrates how language and social behaviour are connected and determine inclusion or exclusion from social groups. If the socially located meaning of literacy is embedded in linguistic practices both within and outside school, middle-class, literacy-oriented homes containing many of the practices found in school are privileged in terms both of opportunity and outcome. Language and codes of social behaviour are specific to the purposes of the social group. When young children first enter formal schooling they encounter a new discourse with which they become familiar, though some will already be experienced in behaviours and modes of understanding that are common to both school and home.

Primary Schooling and Parenting

Some primary schools constrain parental support to children in their learning of literacy skills by restricting access to specific reading materials that enable children to cross the threshold to literacy. This in effect denies less literate families opportunities of supporting their children. They are faced with the daunting task of buying suitably graded reading texts in shops or sorting through the maze of colourful texts in the children's local library to seek out appropriate texts. This process of safeguarding books describes the power dynamic between school and home. Schools operate and are seen by parents as the gatekeepers on education's pathway. In primary school this means in particular literacy. Historically, schools have discouraged parents from teaching their children reading for two main reasons. Firstly, teachers felt that the children would get too far ahead, and secondly, that the experience of the two differing teaching methods would confuse children. Contemporaneously,

parents are encouraged to become involved in their children's education. The concept of partnership (Alexander, 1998) between pupils, parents and teachers has become enshrined in government statute. Equal access for everyone presumes that parents are uniformly interested in their children's education. The present open door policy is differently divisive in privileging articulate and informed parents over those others less confident in educational discourses.

Oral Literacy and Schooling

Literacy is assessed at the end of Key Stage One, when children are seven years old. Orality is described in the first attainment target in English, that of Speaking and Listening. But opportunities for story telling drama and spoken narrative have been marginalised since the introduction of the NLS.
Street (1995) refers to this as the 'pedagogisation' of literacy whereby school-based forms of literacy are privileged at the expense of others. Taylor's findings (1983: 90) support Ferreiro's view of a decade earlier (1978: 26) by suggesting that children who are in deficit in their literacy learning when they enter school are unlikely to take up the opportunities on offer within the narrow range of pedagogic practices. But the NLS profiles a skills-based literacy, one that prioritises reading and writing. There is a tension between the oral and written traditions of literacy that privileges certain families. School literacy reifies written language though speaking, listening and reading are stepping-stones to the acquisition of writing. Halliday and Martin (1993: 118) juxtapose the roles of oral and written language and describe the fixative qualities of the written text as follows,

> Writing puts language in chains...it freezes it. Writing deprives language of the power to intuit.

But writing also creates a new kind of knowledge that is a scientific knowledge and facilitates categorisation and the power to create verbal structure. A greater degree of interaction and involvement exists in spoken language because of the paralinguistic features available in face-to-face situations in comparison to the detached, solitary activity of writing (Street, 1995). For young children spoken language is a multi-dimensional experience that has meaning beyond naming and ordering. But schooling requires a culture of oracy in children that can be assimilated to create further literacy skills. Oracy is socially located and school knowledge is privileged amongst other knowledge, even at home. The ways in which books are used at home and at school have similarities for children from middle class homes, these common processes appear 'natural' for such pupils. But a degree of conflict exists for others and schooling acts as an overlay to home literacy (Heath, 1994). Schooling is elevated to a structuring, acquisitional function in learning literacy. In effect, some families focus on a constructed view of literacy that refers to school expectation. All children need opportunities to explore the uses of printed material whether at home or at school as preparation for the later demands of reading and writing skills (Taylor, 1983). The demands for written text increase as children progress through school even though oral literacy remains a necessary underpinning to the development of more complex skills.

The Classroom as a Text

Literacy is imbued with ideology and is subject to politicising, it is no longer regarded as being neutral but embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices (Street, 1995). Nevertheless, it is internalised and disseminated throughout society largely as though these power and privileging features did not exist. The divide between orality and literacy is perpetuated in much the same way as the class divide is sustained. Indeed some would argue that school-based literacy plays a major role in this (Taylor, 1983). Within the

primary school pedagogic power struggles exist between competing factions of middle-class culture, the working class 'voice', although present is often not heard (Bernstein, 1990). Education acts as an amplifier for the bias in class culture and pedagogy is imbued with social class relations within pre-school, school and the home.

Bernstein's (1975) theory of codes, modalities and the process of cultural reproduction describe how children interpret learning tasks through previous experiences gained in their home environments. Class relations generate distinctive forms of communication and power. These tacitly acquired codes demarcate acceptable and unacceptable modes of communication. The codes also act as regulators between social contexts. In this way Bernstein points out how children interpret experiences gained in one setting and are able to expound their knowledge in a more structured learning setting. Bernstein offers a theoretical framework for the social bias within schooling that privileges middle class culture. Bernstein (1990: 16) uses the phrase 'orientations to meaning' to describe how children interpret the meaning of work and roles within the domestic and work settings.

In his study of middle-class and working-class children's thought and language, Bernstein concluded that middle-class children were able to prioritise the principles of classification using two categories, an external relation and a home relation. The task concerned grouping certain foods together, the middle-class children in response were able to articulate thoughts that indicated a range of knowledge and understanding of a variety of ways in which food is produced. Working-class children however tended to refer to their knowledge of food production only in the home as though unaware of other circumstances in which food is acquired. Bernstein (1996: 332) summarises the development of meaning acquired by children, firstly from working class homes and subsequently children from middle class homes as follows:

> The simpler the social division of labour the more specific and local the relation between the agent and the material base, the more direct the relation between meanings and a specific material base, and the greater the probability of restricted coding. The more complex the division of labour, the less specific and local the relation between an agent and the material base, the more indirect the relation between meanings and a specific material base and the greater the probability of elaborated coding.

The framing process is vital to children's learning because it is the negotiated organisation of the transmission of knowledge, including the selection, timing and pacing. This occurs within the pedagogic arena between teacher and pupil. Rules exist and are abstracted from the process of structuring social relations; they can become resources for appropriation in the construction of specific pedagogic practices. The orientations to meanings generate through selection, specific textual procedures. Thus, according to Bernstein (1990: 21) the specific text is the transformation of the specialised interactional practice,

> The availability, distribution and realisation of elaborated codes depends fundamentally upon the relations between the modality of education and the mode of production. Inasmuch as the regulations within and between education and production are class regulated, then code acquisition regulates cultural reproduction of class relations.

Bernstein's (1990) exposition of the process of intertextualisation theorises how children from families which provide opportunities for the development of complex thought and language are privileged in their language and reading at school. His work also has implications for gender and literacy and the different ways in which boys and girls learn to read and write since the social relations that exist within families are transposed to the classroom. Whilst boys and girls from school-oriented homes are privileged in their readiness for schooling, there exists a gender difference in the orientation to meanings. The result of this is evident in the differential of literacy attainment

that exists between the sexes. Bernstein (1975) sought to explain the constraints upon working-class children within the classroom setting. He postulated that homes where parental roles incorporated a degree of diversity in respect of domestic and business tasks enabled children to interpret work tasks within the classroom by reference to contexts other than home or school. Whereas children whose home experience was characterised by less flexible parental role modelling were seen to approach classroom work tasks with a focus that related solely to their experience at home. The categorisation of 'working-class' carries with it an array of assumptions nearly all negative, which extend far beyond a description of parental occupation. This in itself illustrates how language constrains thought. The social relations within the home setting provide the internalised learning framework used by the children to interpret new tasks in the school setting. The everyday experiences of family life, its procedures and performances are fundamental to later formal education and reading and writing are located in social and linguistic practices that give them meaning. Street (1995) states that within the educational setting literacy is represented in idealised and prescriptive terms, and Bernstein's earlier work (1975) suggests that there is a selection process during which certain procedures are privileged, abstracted and re-focused within the classroom setting. Children whose pre-school and early years family experiences are attuned to these processes are able to assimilate the social interaction within the classroom as 'natural' events.

Bernstein's model (1975) problematised the differing cultural settings of home and school and in doing so it contrasted sharply with educational research at that time which described child development as a linear and creative process. This notion placed Bernstein outside the mainstream of educational research in the 1970s but his work has a contemporary, apposite quality now in that it focuses on the decoding of social texts.

Arnot (1995) highlighted the negative sense of determinism in Bernstein's theory that takes no account of mechanisms for change. The reproductive

aspects further contribute to a closed view of education and the internalisation of the rules of social order. Arnot's critique (1995) of Bernstein's work includes the observation that social identification is constructed via additional factors of age and sex-role and not solely via social class. Arguably, ethnicity is another category that must figure in the equation. Social categories are useful but they are not static, there are tensions within and between them. For example, there is not one femininity or masculinity, but there are different feminine and masculine identities. Education is a force for change, sometimes working against family culture to improve the life-chances of children. It is however dominated by a middle-class debate that focuses on form and content within the curriculum. The working class largely has no effective leverage and sense of ownership in the educative process. For some working class families education is remote and positioned as 'other' outside the experience of family life.

Gender and Literacy

Gender impacts on the learning of literacy and its attainment. Girls achieve higher grades than boys do in school literacy and more boys than girls occupy the low attaining groups. This may indicate that girls and boys use literacy differently and attach differing meanings to literacy learning. Graddol and Swann (1989) make the point that language is seen as a resource that is available in an unlimited number of ways to be utilised for purposes of communication. In this way language is seen as a product of the social group or setting in which it is used and practised and as such it is both limited and limits the thoughts of those who use it. Because of this there is a strong correspondence between the structure of society and the structure of the lexicon and patterns of language use. A sexist society for example requires a wide vocabulary in which to denigrate women. These conclusions point to the cyclical interaction of thought and language; there is indeed a self-

prophesying, deterministic dimension in social relations, a situation that resonates with Bernstein's (1990) theory of codes and modalities.

Graddol and Swann (1989: 153) used the context of school to describe the gendered expectations of teachers by referring to how good speech and 'linguistic deportment' of girls was encouraged, whilst the more rowdy linguistic behaviour of boys was tolerated. They found that boys were more inclined to interrupt others' conversations and were quicker to raise their hands in lessons thereby maintaining a dominant role in both unacceptable and acceptable behaviours.

Gendered differences in language also exist outside the classroom. Phillipson (1975) described how the culture of an urban neighbourhood determined sex role behaviour patterns. Men were found to devalue speech as a way of representing themselves and a linguistic intermediary was used in formal situations to speak up for them. Meanwhile, women were cast in the roles of supporters in social dialogue. Language constructs identity both in social relations. Tabouret-Keller (1985) discussed the use of language in relation to how people use speech to project a particular image of themselves and so infuse language with power that defines gender relations.

Children as Readers

Children learn gendered behaviour as they learn language. Research within the classroom setting by Solsken (1993) found that the relationship between literacy and gender was complex, and that whilst gender is centrally related to learning literacy, there is no single identifiable pattern. Tensions exist both in the classroom and at home surrounding social identities and literacy. Children confront and negotiate contradictions within the systems of interrelated gender and work relations. Gregory (1992) illustrates how they position themselves in the school setting and outlines a psychosemiotic framework that describes the ways in which children position themselves and which defines them as readers or not. Three contexts form the framework namely, situational,

interpretational and textual. The situational context refers to features and rules of the setting, the teacher, the classroom and pupils within the site. The interpretational context is one of the mind, the mental frame that poses questions such as what counts as reading? It refers to mental processes of individuals within the site. Finally, there is the textual context, a positioning within the text, the actual language used and the words or code in which it is expressed within the site. Children position themselves within a code so that they say to themselves, 'I am a reader' or conversely, 'I can't do this.' Bernstein's work (1975) describes how some children position themselves in a life-sense or home- oriented frame only, whereas children from school-oriented homes stay with the text and filter out or demote the 'life' references. It must also be the case that children are linguistically positioned by the teacher and/or that they alter their perceptions as a result of their interpretation of the meanings they attribute to the teacher's interaction with them. Solsken (1993: 168) aptly summarises this contention,

> There is thus no single story to tell about the way gender figures in literacy learning, but many stories connected by the themes and contradictions that characterise gender and work relations in the larger society.

Gender relations like the significance of literacy itself are socially constructed and are therefore subject to re-definition through the passage of time. Furthermore, as Walkerdine (1985) pointed out, children construct their own literacy practices as part of the ongoing construction of identity and their relations with others. Life is experienced in different arenas in relation to different discourses that form the socially sanctioned scripts for masculinity and femininity (Walkerdine, 1990).

Children as Writers

Halliday and Martin (1993) in their study of gendered aspects of writing within the school context found that boys are less inclined than girls to write in the early years and instead tend to dominate oral work in the classroom. Girls on the other hand, choose to be less vocal and excelled more readily in writing though in a restricted band of genres that is best described as fantasy, fairy-tale and later romance. Boys meanwhile engaged with the technical aspects of written language and subsequently excelled in the core of curriculum subjects that surround science. The power dynamic of language and literacy learning is inscribed in the subject choices those pupils and students make later in their school careers. Writing enables discourse to become technical and this depends not so much on the writing, but the meaning attached to the activity of writing. Scientific writing is not necessarily prolific or descriptive but is symbolic, sometimes annotated and graphically presented. It provides a succinctness that is singularly inappropriate in the narrative genre. In this way it may engage with boys' use of language whilst girls may pursue the romantic genre as an adolescent extension of the primary school years of fairytales and folk-tales. Membership of a social group infers that individuals know the required codes and meanings of the language of that group. The transition from being on the outside to being inside is made possible only by the learning of the codes and meanings. Differential gendered behaviour is evident throughout schooling in all aspects of literacy learning. Boys dominate the classroom setting in oral literacy but girls acquire writing skills more readily than boys do. In reading as in other aspects of literacy, boys and girls make choices as to what they read and how much time will be devoted to this activity.

Family Literacy

Parents differ considerably in their views and practices that relate to children's learning. Taylor's study (1983) of three communities asked some of the

parents why they thought it was that their children had failed to learn to read. Parents gave two reasons, firstly, that their children weren't interested in learning to read and write and secondly, that no one else had considered it important. Clearly, helping children to read and write are not meaningful activities within the lives of all families. Taylor (1983) suggests that more research into learning styles, coping strategies and social support would alter this and re-position reading and writing as meaningful activities in some families. Insightful though this is, it is a conclusion seemingly made from a position of privileged, middle-class ideology. New approaches to literacy require appraisal not only of expected outcomes but also of the stance taken by researchers. The oral tradition within family literacy is arguably an under-used resource.

Over fifty years ago the patterns of family literacy were described in a survey of the reading habits of different social classes conducted by the Central Office for Information (COI) (1944). The findings revealed that the majority of the homes of unskilled workers had few children's books while the majority of middle class homes had many. In working class homes of the 1940s parental encouragement of children's reading was not always the positive, persuasive experience that the term now implies. It was sometimes punitive and directive and not conducive to pleasure. Parents were revealed to be indifferent to their children's interests in reading and were more interested in those aspects of family life that centred on work. Children were expected to help in daily chores around the home and were admonished for reading. Additionally, there were parental concerns about the ruination of eyesight and the risk of poor posture resulting from too much time spent in reading. Some mothers especially amongst the working class, complained that their children took more notice of their teachers than they did of their parents. The implication being that the children spent too much time on schoolwork and not enough on domestic duties. The survey also showed that the reading of books was related to social class, inasmuch as lower down the economic scale families read

fewer books and there was less encouragement of reading in comparison to middle class families. These findings identified the class bias of literacy learning that still exists today. Amongst the working class families were some that would now be included in family literacy programmes to support children's learning via whole family participation.

Families are acknowledged as the early educators in children's lives, contributing social and linguistic skills which teachers develop further. Street (1995) describes this process as a kind of homogenisation whereby the mother:child home-learning interaction is replaced or replicated by the teacher:learner school-based experience. Family support for young readers is not confined to parents. Within some families older children act as role models for younger siblings. Weinburger (1996: 91) describes how youngsters sat down alongside their older siblings and pretended to have homework by announcing 'I'm going to do my homework now.' The school version of literacy is both dominant and is internalised within the family setting, even though parents may have ambivalent feelings towards the school.

Literacy Traditions within Families

Heath (1994) described the literacy practices of parents. She revealed the existence of rules to literacy events that were features of practice. For example at six months of age children paid attention to books and to information derived from books. Subsequently, they acknowledged questions about books. There was a conversational allusion to the context of books and the interaction between parents and children was such that they acted as questioners and answerers who had knowledge of books. Later, after the age of two years children used their knowledge of books and told stories that were both fictionalised and legitimised by the shared knowledge of fictional text. Pre-school aged children accepted books as entertainment and as a subsidiary activity whilst something else was happening, such as doing the shopping. By three years of age children's literacy incorporated listening to stories and

storing information for questioning at the end. They would on occasion choose to read to an adult. These rules determined what kind of literacy practice parents would adopt to engage their children's attention. Activities such as bedtime stories, reading labels, signs and instructions act as 'literacy practices'. The reading of the bedtime story is, Heath (1994) contends, the prime opportunity for parents to interact with their children. The representation to the child of the real world is transformed to two-dimensional text in a routine. It is a dialogic game wherein the parent asks questions about the story, points out and labels the parts of the pictures, this focuses the child's attention. In later years children naturally incorporate texts that they have seen and heard into their role-play and this enables them to empathise and rehearse a myriad of social skills and roles.

In a more recent study conducted by Weinburger (1996) parents described how their young pre-reading children behaved like readers in that they sat and talked to a book at bedtime and would point to words and fictionalise the context.

In describing more sophisticated ways in which text is used Heath (1994: 73) refers to 'ways of taking' that are characteristic of middle class strategies for using books or printed text. These are similar to those behaviours expected and nurtured at school and used by families who are attuned to the expectations of formal learning at school. Parents modelled and gave specific instruction in how to respond to written texts and children assimilate this so that it is 'natural' by the time they enter school. These 'ways of taking' do not merely refer to preparing children for school but to later work practices in the use of printed materials in business, between written and oral language, of knowing something and knowing ways of displaying it. This is the literate tradition.

Literacy and Auto/biography

The starting point of biographical method is its compatibility with the purpose of the research (Erben, 1998). Family literacy was explored through the auto/biographical accounts of family members. But it is also true that the biographies of the families were made available through the literacies they shared within their families. The purpose of autobiography is to bring to life the presence of the character albeit through constructions that results from human interventions. Narrative is mediated through the language of the narrator and that of the audience. As Ricouer (1991: 29) stated,

> We are justified in speaking of a life as a story in its nascent state, and so of life as an activity and passion in search of a narrative.

The interconnectedness between the passage of time and the life story are exposed in Ricouer's words. Arguably, the acquisition of literacy is the vehicle by which the narrative may be told. The development of language articulates thought, intention and remembrance, to oneself and to others. Taylor (1994) in a study of family literacy commented on the ease with which parents moved between past and present as they talked about literacy practices. In this way the coherence of the self in remembrance was articulated within the self referential thoughts of the self within the present time (Denzin, 1989). The roles of audience and narrator(s) are interchangeable during interviews insofar as the researcher is instrumental in the construction of the setting. In this sense the researcher is the narrator of a story that is integral to the research project itself. Wilkins (1993) points to the importance of the researcher's own understanding of the emotional context of the research. This results in emotional resources being engaged from an existentialist perspective for the purposes of interpretation. To 'take it personally' is to be aware of the social and emotional biography that one brings to the research context. Three locations of my own past experience are relevant, that of learning to read as a

child within my home environment, that of being a parent involved in family literacy and finally, working within the role of a primary teacher. They are presented as though separate but this is illusory. They are referentially intertwined in my life experience, and impact on the analysis of the biographies of the three families in the research. My own memories of learning to read and the social context in which this took place have sensitised me to the meanings of those behaviours in others, not least children.
Bruner (1984: 7) describes the situatedness of life history,

> A life as told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by cultural conventions of telling by the audience and by the social context.

Thus the framing of research its conventions that limit or prioritise what is discussed, by whom and in what circumstances are contextually located in time and place. Within these limitations research fulfils a function that gives voice to those who otherwise would not be heard (Lather, 1991). In describing how the researcher's role is one of removing the cultural barriers that prevent people from speaking for themselves, Lather (1991) cautions the researcher from becoming the universalizing spokesperson. This has a particular relevance to the present study in which family members have told their lives and their experiences of learning literacy with their own personal literacy skills. Lather's (1991) discussion of the educative role of research as a mutual learning experience, finds some resonance in auto/biographical method. For Lather (1991) research is a journey to further self-understanding and self-determinism, a collaborative praxis. Auto/biographical research in contextualising social history gives a window to the past and on a personal level may be instrumental in clarifying future goals through an understanding of the past within the context of the present.
Aldridge (1993) further develops the theme of contextualisation of the self. Memory is described as being selective, temporally constituted and

constructed, whilst what is salient in the present is used to construct relevant textual elements of the past. The meaning of the process of writing auto/biography becomes structured within the life of the writer and within the life (lives) of those who are the focus,

> The life that is written becomes a product of the temporal and contingent location of the author as well as that author's individual relevances and concerns. Conversely, the experiences of writing the life itself becomes part of the life of the author and thus part of his or her interpretative and analytic 'autobiography.'
>
> Aldridge (1993: 56)

Conclusion

The meaning of literacy is in itself a social construction and the research process itself is contextualised. This is not to discount enquiry as dubious but rather to underscore its location within time and place. Literacy related activities within families have been described in terms of practices and events that are embedded within daily routines. A tension between family and school literacies prioritises school-based learning. Almost fifty years ago research into family literacy (COI, 1944) identified social class as a significant factor in the extent to which parents supported children's learning. Middle class parents provided most support, whilst those at the lower extreme of the economic scale provided least support to their children in their learning of literacy. This information disembodied as it is from the cultural context of the 1940s, is factual but not informative beyond the minimum. The following chapter outlines the methodology of the research that set out to move beyond the bare facts to reveal some of the social history of the past fifty years and the cultural context of the lives of three families who found the time to support their children to read.

Chapter 3

Are You Sitting Comfortably? Then I'll Begin

One morning Toad sat in bed.
'I have many things to do,' he said.
'I will write them on a list
so that I can remember them.'
Toad wrote on a piece of paper:
A List of things to do today
Then he wrote: Wake up
'I have done that,' said Toad,
and he crossed out:
~~Wake up~~.
Frog and Toad Together by Arnold Lobel

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore through listening to the narratives of three children, their parents and their grandparents how these families supported their children in their learning of literacy and why they did so. This chapter describes the method and methodology; it begins with a description of the circumstances that led to the study being undertaken. Following this is a summary of the pilot study that was undertaken prior to the main study and the resultant modifications to the research plan. The chapter continues with the rationale for choosing a biographical research method and consideration is given to the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

Families

To find out about how the three families of Fiona, David and Harry had supported and continued to support them in their learning of literacy it seemed logical to talk to the children themselves and to their parents. To glimpse the

workings of family life over a longer period, with its cherished traditions and shared memories, the children's grandparents were asked to take part in the study.

Fiona, David and Harry were chosen from a Year Four class of eight and nine-year-olds for a number of reasons. The first of these was that they were successful in literacy and had been so since Reception Class. They had achieved above average scores in Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) at the end of Key Stage One and other standardised tests (Appendix i.). Fiona, David and Harry had highly developed language skills that formed part of their literacy profiles; this was the case at seven years and later at nine years. Sheldon (1997) comments on the different features of boys' and girls' conversations by stating that girls focus on co-operation and egalitarianism whilst boys use competition and hierarchy in their talk. Sheldon (1997: 231) described the 'double voiced discourse' as one in which there are elements of mediation, problem solving and an awareness of others' needs. This describes a social sophistication in language usage that transcends gender roles and one that characterised the talk of Fiona, David and Harry.

The second criterion for choosing the three children was that they had grandparents whom they saw frequently and who were willing to participate in the study. In contrast to the families in the study my recollections of my grandparents is of one very old lady who visited us just twice, when I was about four or five years old. It was only later that I found out that she was my mother's mother. The only other point of contact for me with other family members was an aunt who had kept in contact after my parents moved from London to the suburbs. She was one of my mother's older sisters who had distanced herself and her family even further from town life and settled in rural Sussex. My younger brother and I would spend a week or two with our cousins in the long, hot summer holidays, picking blackberries and roaming through fields of tall grass. There was no network of relatives living nearby in the suburbs of London. Both my parents had spent their childhood around

Battersea an area of London just south of the River Thames. They came from large families each with ten children. Their brothers and sisters had moved away some as far as the United States and Australia. There were remnants of family tensions that prevented contact between them and their parents. The absence of a family network became significant when I moved to the island and realised that for some people it was not like that. I found myself in a community in which generations of families stayed or just moved to another part of the island.

A Fortuitous Turn of Events

To talk to children about their reading is to make assumptions about their articulacy and their status as literate people, it is an intrusion into their lives that exist beyond the confines of the school day. To be able to discuss these matters, these out-of-school-selves is a privilege that I was able to negotiate as a teacher and to satisfy, a professional curiosity. I wanted to gain further insight into how children become literate individuals. Whatever assumptions I made about the children was undoubtedly influenced by prior knowledge gained during the previous months of working together and also when I had taught their class two years earlier in Year Two. They were six and seven-year olds then who had either made it as readers and writers or not, as the case may be. I had been their class teacher anxious for their success in English at the end of Key Stage One SATs.

So by the time we met up again in Year Four we had already been through a lot together. The prospect of teaching the class again had led me to wonder if they had changed as people in the two years since I had taught them and if they had maintained the progress and fulfilled some of the promise shown earlier. Two years on it would be like meeting up again with old friends. But they had grown in confidence and knowledge whilst I was in many ways less self-assured but wiser. They were still the same class of characters. Some had friendships that had endured, some were still loners and there were a few

people who joined the class from other schools, trying to find a niche, making some new friends, learning the subtle social rules. The unforeseen opportunity of teaching this same class of children again provided the impetus for researching literacy via a biographical method. There is a narrative here of how people and (I mean) specifically children, come back to us. We see how they have grown, we see ourselves as the children we once were and realise within ourselves the passing of time. There is a satisfaction of seeing children grow and learn it is a pleasure derived from the professional practice of teaching.

Fiona, David and Harry were coming to the end of their primary school education before moving on to middle school. It was for them an ending and a new beginning and perhaps the passing of time was in all of our minds. It was timely to embark on a biographical study. I wanted them to talk to me during the interviews in the ways that I hoped would enable them to recall their earlier childhood. I was aware that I wanted to dismantle some of the constraints that held us in our roles, as teacher and pupils. I was hoping for their honest opinions about reading as an activity in their lives and the avoidance of a dialogue constructed from a shared desire to 'please the teacher.' I was seeking stories of literacy in family lives told from the multi-dimensional perspectives of children, parents and grandparents. Children talk, as children will, but parents talk of themselves as parents remembering their own childhood days and in addition, they talk as the children they once were. Grandparents are in a social group that is apt to be dismissed as irrelevant, but they are storehouses of recollections and tales that enrich the lives of those who will listen. Grandparents are walking, talking texts of modern history and family experience, seeing the past and themselves within it.

McWilliam (1995) in considering the relationship between teacher and student refers to the desire of one to teach and of the other to learn and how in the education setting these roles shift and undergo negotiation. As I mentally re-labelled myself 'interviewer' our roles of teacher and pupils seemed suddenly

reversed. It was I who would learn and they who would teach. When I came to interview their parents I experienced another role adjustment and when talking to grandparents yet another. I hoped that the data from the interviews would tell the stories of family literacy traditions across three generations and that specifically the interviews with the children would set these traditions in a contemporary context of literacy at home and at school.

The High and Low Ground of Classroom Practice

Shortly after the start of the first term teaching the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in 1998, my professional curiosity was challenged as an imperative question that posed itself during each intricately-planned Literacy Hour namely, 'What is going on here?' The social interplay between groups and individuals, their differing behaviours during work tasks were features that remained untouched by the prescriptive nature of the newly structured English lesson.

There were at least two arenas of social interaction, one that I was promoting that carried the content of the lessons, learning objectives and targets and a second, the social interaction between the pupils. This chasm between the explicit strategy and the experiential problems that arise in the course of professional practice and which defy technical solution is not confined to teaching. Schon (1987) refers to 'the high and low ground of professional practice'. The high ground being that which is occupied by the manageable problems solved by application of strategies and rigour, technical rationality meeting the challenges of problem solving. The low ground is another reality containing those problems that defy a technical solution, whose nature and origin seem indeterminate and whose solution is negotiated through social interaction beyond the demands of the professional role. More recently McWilliam (1995) has suggested that effective education is concerned not only with the relatively safe terrain of quality assurance but also the stance of the teacher as the transmitter in negotiation with pupils/students as acquirers of

knowledge and the shifting roles in interaction. It seemed that children learn a form of literacy through their own social interaction whist intermittently engaging in pedagogic interchange with their class teacher.

Social interaction as a backdrop for literacy learning is implicit whether in the formal work setting of school or the domestic setting of the home. But whereas at home literacy is embedded in these social relations, at school language is positioned objectively. It is a 'thing' to be learnt, attained and tested. It becomes disembodied from social context. The introduction of the NLS as a prescriptive manual had re-defined literacy learning at school. It was now even more distinct from literacy learnt at home. This re-positioning provided a stark contrast and a starting point for the research.

The issue of gender and school attainment at a national level had attracted attention in the educational press (Skelton, 1998). Within the school, data from standardised tests and other assessment material revealed a pattern of progress in literacy. More girls than boys were attaining higher standards at Key Stage One, more boys than girls occupied the lower levels of attainment. This was in keeping with national trends (DfEE, 1996). In a study of reading strategies used by pupils Moss (1998) found that boys and girls behave differently in respect of meeting the challenges of texts.

Gilbert (1997) described how the democratic reform of schooling has been overtaken by a new focus on competitive and individualistic agendas in education. The broad base of consensus for the social contextualisation in educational practice has been undermined. The prescribed format of the NLS (DfEE, 1998) had left me distanced from the pupils. The delivery of information and developing skills within a brisk time-scale left little opportunity for reflecting upon the social agenda of the class. Issues of power and dominance amongst groups of pupils and the special needs of some other pupils seemed to be marginalised in favour of a checklist of learning objectives. It was a force field between me as teacher and the class. But from within the emotional wasteland of this imposed re-positioning grew an

interest in how those at home provide the emotional and practical support for their children that would enable them to develop this literacy experience.

The Setting

Family groups vary considerably in their arrangements, as do the routines of their lives. If literacy is embedded in family processes then literacy traditions will vary accordingly both in quality and quantity. For instance a shared parenting arrangement when two parents live apart and share custody of children through the week or month may result in a different framework in respect of children's home literacy learning than say a single parent family. A two-parent family will be different again perhaps in the quality and time available to focus on children's reading and writing. Families that are mobile, upwardly or otherwise such as travellers, have intermittently disrupted life-styles, this again may impact on the opportunities for home literacy learning. Crossfield Primary School where Fiona, David and Harry attend has less than ten per cent of families that are in single-parent arrangements and less than fifteen per cent of families that have step parents or other carers. Approximately eight per cent of children on roll are eligible for free school meals. The school is a faith school and is situated in a rural setting on an island off the mainland coast. At the time of the study there were one hundred and thirty five children on roll. The age range of the children was five to nine year olds, there was a middle school system in operation in the local education authority. There were less than five per cent of ethnic minority children on the school roll and these pupils are drawn mainly from families employed within the professional grades at the local hospital. The catchment covered a radius of approximately five miles.

Preparation-the Pilot Study

A pilot study was set up to clarify purposes, to reveal avoidable problems of the proposed main project and to enable some rehearsal of techniques for

collecting data, drafting questionnaires and interviewing participants. The focus of the pilot was gender and literacy though this was to be refined later. One pupil Eddy, was chosen to participate in the pilot study. He was a high-achieving pupil, his attainment was above average for his age. His parents Olive and Bill, and maternal grandparents Sheila and Rolf, were all available to participate in the study. The research aim was to identify ways that families encouraged their children's learning literacy in pre-school and early years. The view was both broad and specific. Itemised observation sheets were used by participant observers during the Literacy Hour to record aspects of learning, including how long it took for pupils to start work, the fitness of the task to ability level in a group and some commentary on the social relations within the work group. The purpose of this was to quantify gender differences in pupil response to questions and to attempt a description of gender differences in working pattterns. To find out how literacy is embedded in family routines, three interviews were conducted with Eddy, Olive his mother, and Eddy's maternal grandparents Sheila and Rolf.

At the end of each day when class observations had taken place, there was time to reflect on what had occurred, many layers of overlapping experiences were uncovered. Events that happened almost simultaneously had been glimpsed and stored for later recall. In retrospect some were understood as being more significant than others and the writing and unravelling took many hours. The pilot study revealed that Eddy's parents interpreted their roles as a multifarious collection of duties and activities that wherever possible included child-centred experiences.

The main outcome from the pilot study was a re-focusing of the enquiry. Literacy emerged as a stand-alone topic in the research and the additional perspective of classroom performance was dropped from the research plan. The use of interviews as a means of data collection generated sufficient material with which to work and so classroom observations were omitted from the final fieldwork. The decision was made that the final study would focus

on three high-achieving pupils, including both sexes, their parents and grandparents.

Research is Not Life

An unforeseen event occurred shortly after the pilot study was concluded. Eddy's grandmother Sheila died. This happened during the Christmas vacation a week after the term ended. Olive's parents had recently returned to England after living in Australia for over twenty years and this made the death of her mother especially poignant. At school the news was shared amongst staff and pupils and prayers were said for the family. It was a time of sadness; a meeting that I had planned with the family members to enable me to report on the research project was no longer appropriate. Neither was it possible to continue re-drafting the fieldwork plan for the final study, it was a time instead for some reflection. It had been so easy to confuse research with life and vice versa.

Grandparents can enjoy a status in the family network built on their own love of sharing memories with their grandchildren and reminiscences with their adult children. The unexpected loss of one such family member is traumatic; part of the family narrative is suddenly gone, a chapter missing in a book, emptiness where there was once a cherished and vibrant person. Where it had been possible for me to talk animatedly with Sheila and Rolf about their family history a few weeks earlier, it now seemed almost obscene even to think about it. The talk was therefore limited to quiet words of condolence for a tearful nine-year old boy and a grieving middle-aged woman who had lost her mother with whom she had only recently been re-united. There was no talk of literacy or research for about a month afterwards.

Getting Started

The biographical method of data collection allowed the presentation of the children in terms of the past, the present and the future. Their parents shared in this sense of the present within the context of their own pasts and they

envisioned their own future partly through their children. The life experiences of the grandparents overarched the whole family group and spoke to its history.

Previous studies of family literacy have dwelt upon contemporary issues, such as the distinction between school and home literacy, or the take-up of interventionist strategies to improve family literacy (Hannon, 1999). But one of the aims of the present study was to offer a different perspective, a long-term view of family literacy over three generations. In this way not only are literacy-related activities identified but also the family and cultural context in which they have taken place. The focus was to be both in the present and in the past, for it was pertinent to know not only how families support their children now but also how this has occurred in the past and how this had shaped the future. Other issues arose such as the change in cultural attitudes that has occurred in the post-war years towards children's learning and the impact of school policies on the status of the family.

Researching from Within

Before starting the fieldwork for the main study it was necessary to appraise my own position in the school and the school's role in the community. As indicated previously the setting for the study was a small, discreet community. My position within the community as a long-standing resident and an established teacher within the school demanded some consideration before opening an enquiry into the lives of families and their literacy. It is not possible to envisage all the outcomes of such a venture even of the seemingly uncontentious topic of young children learning to read. A primary school may be viewed as an essential part of a locality, its role as an integrated piece of a larger network and the service it provides for those whose lives it touches can be a pivotal focus in a village community. Generations of families had attended the school and there was a strong sense of community that was underpinned by the commitment to the faith group.

To be in close contact with children five days a week is to become familiar with, if one pace removed from, the families that support them. Those who feed, wash, clothe and organise them, who present them at school ready to learn new skills have also taught them long before the school experience appeared on the developmental horizon. I was on friendly terms with the parents of the three children chosen for the study. This may be interpreted as a weakness in the study but it is also strength. The amiable social interaction with participants carries with it a risk that significant perceptions which do not 'fit' have been filtered out of the relationship before the research question was raised. But my professional bias draws me to seek out families whose children closely fit my ideal of how children should be. Apart from the academic goal of creating a minor ripple in the pool of knowledge that is family literacy, I actually wanted to know these families a little better than my role as a teacher allowed. Krisman (1986: 124) explained how her own experiences of researching from within enhanced her teaching. Her work was based on photographs that she took of her pupils and in showing them to others who were not teachers, she was able to interpret the images afresh. 'My eyesight had sharpened.' In a similar way the experience of writing about families and literacy has clarified my own understandings of school literacy and issues that surround attainment.

The Questionnaire

A letter was sent in February 1999 (Appendix iii) to the parents of the children in the study explaining the purpose of the research project. Within a month the first questionnaire was given to the parents, this was constructed with the purpose of introducing the topic of reading within the family. It was assumed that this would open a discussion within the family group around this topic. It had been agreed previously with parents that grandparents and children would be included in the study. The questionnaire (Appendix ii) explaining the purpose of the research was given personally to the mothers of the three

children during the second half of the Spring term in 1999. This personal contact was made possible because mothers of young children often collect their children at the end of the day in primary schools. There followed a few weeks before any of the parents approached me with the completed questionnaires. We discussed times for the interviews that were mutually convenient. During the previous weeks I was anxious to know whether they would fulfil their initial commitment to take part in the project which I had discussed informally with them some weeks earlier. I resisted my inclination to approach the parents for the completed questionnaires, given that teachers are directive and are seen as such by pupils and parents alike; it is part of the job. I hoped to side step this aspect of my professional persona. It was important that the parents were committed and interested in the project. Furthermore I had made a professional appraisal of their children's attitudes towards literacy. Furthermore I had made assumptions about their styles of parenting through previous contact. It was almost as though the first piece of verification of their commitment to their children's learning was to be their initiative in seeking me out with the completed questionnaire (Appendix ii) in order that we should move on to the interview stage. It was only after all the questionnaires had been returned that I fully realised that I was already preparing myself to take on the role of 'researcher' which was distinct from that of being the teacher.

The Interviews

Yow (1994) raises several issues for the would-be interviewer to consider before finalising preparations. These refer to aspects of the setting and the impact of the researcher upon the course of the interview. Firstly, the extent to which the interview itself will be shaped by the gender, age and social class of the researcher deserves consideration. Secondly, attention is drawn to the appearance and body language of the interviewer insofar as it directs the course of the interview. Finally, the part played by the researcher's attitudes in

the construction of the interview demands some consideration. This last point has a particular significance, for the setting because the interviews was a faith school, though none of the participants including myself were members of the faith. The topic of religion was not raised during any of the interviews though it is worthy of reflection that each of us owed our presence at that time and in that place to the fact that at some point in the recent past we each had agreed to support the religious life of the school.

Feelings and emotions that relate to past experiences may be explored through interviews (Denscombe 1998). Sensitive issues are raised and privileged information is revealed which otherwise would remain undisclosed through other research methods. The construction of identity is partially dependent on whether one sees oneself as a competent reader or writer.

The interviews with each set of parents were arranged to take place at the end of the school day during the early part of the Summer Term in 1999. Each interview lasted approximately between thirty and forty-five minutes. It was important that wherever possible fathers felt included in the project although they were likely to be less familiar with the school. Two of the fathers and all of the mothers were interviewed. The third father Tom, David's dad was in the army and was stationed away at the time. He was available at a later stage but indications from Eileen his partner, David's mother, were that he did not wish to take part, and in the event his parents David's paternal grandparents did not participate in the project either.

The conversations with Fiona, David and Harry took place during some free time in the school day in a small, quieter room adjacent to the classroom. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. There were familiar sounds and activities going on around us as we talked, it all seemed unremarkable to the children. The decision to use a familiar environment for the interviews with the children was based on the assumption that it would ensure a relaxed and informal response to my enquiries. It could be argued that the use of the school setting for all but one of the interviews might have

constrained dialogue but within a biographical method centred as it was on parents' and grandparents' own recollections of their childhood learning experiences, a quiet classroom provided an evocative setting. The message to be conveyed was one that told of an opportunity to talk at length about their past childhood and their memories of learning to read. The interviews with grandparents were intentionally arranged last of all at the conclusion of the interviews with parents. Parents acted as intermediaries since it was unusual for grandparents to be in contact regularly with the primary school. It was agreed that prior to the interviews, parents together with their own parents would discuss the project and its purpose. It had already been indicated that grandparents would be willing to participate. Subsequently the parents confirmed that they had indeed had discussions with their parents and were able to arrange times for meetings between the grandparents and myself.
The interviews with grandparents took place within the second half of the Summer Term in June 1999. Whilst there were potentially six sets of grandparents available only four sets actually took part. As mentioned previously, David's paternal grandparents did not participate, nor did Harry's paternal grandparents. Amy, Fiona's maternal grandmother took part but not Christine's stepfather, he had recently died. The interviews with grandparents like those with children and parents lasted for about three-quarters of an hour. The interviews (see Appendices iv and v) were semi-structured allowing for a degree of flexibility and open-ended answers (Denscombe, 1998). The same format was used for parents and grandparents. It began with memories of schooldays and in particular those relating to reading. The talk then moved to reading at home and memories of parents helping with reading. Significant others at home or as visitors introduced a broader social context to the recollections. The second section of the interview was more reflective and focused on how these past experiences had shaped the present and their dealings with their own children and grandchildren. The format for interviewing children focused mainly on their current reading habits and

preferences. This was followed by a discussion of remembrances of earlier childhood and learning to read.

The interviews were 'conversations with a purpose' (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 271). This purpose had been previously outlined through the questionnaires given to parents some weeks before (Appendix ii). The subsequent interviews focused on children's literacy success and parental support. Grandparents, came with their narratives to tell and these enriched the information about literacy. These narratives revealed family lives that encouraged their children to learn to read and provided clues to family social relations that came to be significant through later analysis of the data. Although interviewing is arguably a soft technique it is not a soft option (Robson, 1993). There are problems with social dynamics and analysis not least because much of what is communicated is not spoken and sometimes conflicts with that which is spoken.

The interviews were semi-structured. They followed a pre-set agenda which was scant in content but with an assumption that the structure would be enriched by the conversation and used as a main highway from which we could detour and rejoin at a later stage at our leisure. Robson (1993) outlines the broad scope of self-report techniques from the closed-answer questionnaire to the free-range interview but adds that a typical scenario occupies the middle ground with the researcher as actor in the piece. Whatever the means there are three categories of data to be sought, what people do, what they know and what they believe. Within the present study the behavioural aspect, what people do focuses on literacy traditions within the three families. The factual data, concerns not only children and what they have learnt so far in their literacy learning, but also their parents and grandparents. What the participants felt about themselves as literate people is within the realms of their beliefs and is constituted within the narratives of the lives of all those who took part.

Robson (1993) cites the limitations of factual data insofar as memory lapses and response bias serve to threaten the authenticity of the information. Response bias was a particular concern in the study. The desire to give the correct answer, or 'please the teacher' by saying what might be expected was a potential weakness in the study. This was the case when interviewing not only the children but also with parents and grandparents. However, the three generations in each family were interviewed separately providing differing perspectives of shared experiences. The primary concerns were the participants' concerns and taking some account of how speakers oriented themselves to the task. There were noticeable differences between each of the generations as to how they oriented themselves to the task. The children remained focused and their recollections related to their reading experiences. Parents used the interview to comment on schooling today as well as recollecting their own school days and childhood. Whilst grandparents for the most part told narratives about their lives within which were references to literacy in childhood, parenthood and grandparenthood.

Telling Tales

The biographical research method enables the interpretation of past events and serves to construct the present in the imagination of the researcher. Narrative studies are highly personalised and at some stage there must be a 'leap of the imagination' as the researcher conceptualises from raw field notes. This requires certain attitudes and qualities of creativity (Woods, 1986: 147).
It is my contention that the analysis of data for biographical studies is similar to that used in ethnography, in that it is theoretically laden and not necessarily wholly descriptive. Woods (1986: 164) states that life history as a methodology has moved ethnographical studies on, in a natural progression. He continues,

> Through life histories we gain insights into individuals coming to terms with imperatives in social structure.

Goodson (1980) reflected that research method that used life history had been criticised for being unscientific and theoretical. But as he contended, it is at its best when it is used in an exploratory fashion for generating many concepts, hunches and ideas, both at the local and situational level and on a historical structural level and within the same field, and in relationship to other fields. The theoretical aspects are covered by systematic thematic analysis and this blends individual's accounts with themes derived from theory. Theory can be generated by making comparisons and through a series of steps, by going through the data and organising it, re-reading the related literature and making notes against one's own theory through comparison and contrast.

The life histories of the parents and grandparents were both retrospective and contemporaneous in that they reflected upon the past and included accounts of their lives at the time of the research. Erben's (1998) analysis of the stages in biographical research was used as a framework within which the family biographies were analysed. Members of the families referred to specific events that related to their recollections of literacy experiences and the local context in which these occurred. The narratives from grandparents particularly illustrated the societal context including reference to family life during wartime.

The blurring of the abstract notion of self and the abstract notion of group identity (Erben, 1998) which are fundamental to biographical research was a distinct feature of the research including as it did conversations with three generations of each family. Individuals talked of themselves located within the membership of the family, although the role of the individual was somewhat subordinated to the purposes of tracing the literacy traditions within the families. Group identities of each family emerged that were located within their literacy traditions. The biographical method presented an opportunity to

record events of the past in such a way as to illuminate what it meant to be that person, in that place, at that time.

The constative and performative dimensions of narrativity within the interviews described the record of events with individuals themselves located within this as child, parent and grandparent. The performative dimension enabled a reshaping of events of the past within the context of the present. In this way the exploration of what the learning of literacy meant for each individual was made possible.

Dickinson (1994) attributes the development of biographical research to the work of Denzin, Erben and Stanley. She stated that biography had moved beyond merely a re-telling of the relationship between the account of a life and the reality of the life within the cultural context. Schratz (1993) suggests that there has been a democratising of the research process. Some researchers offer little interpretation for the data and the researcher's role is restricted either to stepping back and letting the subjects' voices speak for themselves or to giving them a particular perspective for further interpretation. In the present study interpretation is achieved through a thematic analysis and particular reference to the voice in the narrative account. The central theme of the research is family literacy and this is conveyed through oral literacy. The study was made possible through the oral traditions within the families although there was some variation in the degree to which family members were able or willing to engage in talk. In this way interviews with other family members were often informative in supplying a more complete contextual picture. Disclosure of self through interview is problematic perhaps particularly so in circumstances where the topic might be said to have a moralistic bias. There is arguably a general cultural expectation upon parents to provide for and support their children, including attention to children's literacy learning. More specifically schools seek explicitly to engage with parents for the benefit of children's development. Thus, a teacher conducting interviews that focused on the support of literacy at home may be seen as being at the sharp end of

monitoring parental input although this was not the intention. Goodson and Walker (1991) describe the tension that stands at the centre of the research process as being between the immediate questions about self, biography and identity and the nature of social and cultural legacies. Others sometimes alluded to the social and cultural legacies possessed by individuals during the course of interviews.

Voice

Voice is distinct from dialogue, which follows social conventions of taking turns, (Schratz, 1993). It precipitates contradiction through the individual's experiences and the socially structured meanings attributed by those taking part in the interview. Voice speaks to our conscience and reminds us as researchers of individuality and of the pressures of institutional conformity. These sharp observations describe the subtleties of interaction that pass unnoticed without reflexivity on the part of the researcher. The voice of the data is paramount in the social context of researching people as individuals. The development of naturalistic methods of research such biographical analyses allow the qualities of the individual to enrich the research process. Schratz (1993: 73) makes the point that the very language we use creates the frames within which we realise knowledge and determines that which we learn. In this way the very familiarity of language has a visible significance to qualitative research. 'Inevitably our research is always limited by what we take for granted.' The dialogue that takes place during interviews was the focus of Larcher's work (1993) on redundancy analysis. This process shed light on utterance laden with social meaning and experience, the individual's social conscience comes to the surface during linguistic interchange. Language in use is the best link between the subjective and the objective aspects of sociocultural life. There is relevance here to Bernstein's work (1975) in that the individual's personal use of language mirrors the set of sociocultural rules that operate for that individual. The speaker is constrained

despite efforts to express a personal point of view in a highly individualised language. Larcher (1993) suggests that language is a collective symbolic construct which functions like a social institution. Language stores in its structure and lexicon all the collective experience of a social group. Language is also like an open institution in that there are collective rules and individual freedom. But however creative the individual is there is always an objective meaning embedded within the subjective handling which is not intended by the speaker. In the present study the objective meanings are apparent within interviews with parents and grandparents. The recounting of past events carries with it the significance they hold at the time. The view of those events changes as time passes and the meanings are re-construed.

Ethical Considerations

Alcoff (1991) addresses one of the central issues for biographical researchers, namely that of speaking for others. But the researcher in speaking for others has interpreted what has been said not only verbally but also that which has been communicated emotionally and physically throughout the interview. Alcoff (1991) poses four questions that are discussed in relation to the position of the researcher vis a vis the researched. The first considers the impetus to speak, and in this the researcher is privileged above others. By speaking the researcher may suppress the message from those who have been asked to contribute. Those who research may be described as being amongst the most vociferous and powerful in the use of language. In this regard Gee (1990) points out that Western schooling empowers elites through social linguistics that enable recipients to sound as though they know more than they do. I was aware as a class teacher that this role implied authority, expertise and some degree of power to those who took part in the research. To this end I was cautious firstly, not to assume a leading role throughout the interviews and secondly, to reflect on how I was positioned in relation to those interviewed, sometimes as a parent and at others as a younger less experienced person.

The second question that Alcoff (1991) raises is the consideration of the location and its relation to the words that emanate from being so positioned. Language is contextualised and it has been part of the work within the research to underscore the implications of this for home and school literacies. But within the research process also, language is positioned subjectively. To take account of the effects of this Alcoff (1991) suggests discussion with others familiar with the research setting to reveal the concealed perspectives that exist from a singular standpoint. Discussion of the research with colleagues provided a useful sounding board for ideas and a re-visiting of shared professional memories concerning Fiona, David and Harry. Further discussion within the research community highlighted other issues of an epistemological and technical nature.

Alcoff's third point addresses accountability. To speak is to be responsible; it carries with it accountability and the caveat of being open to criticism and therefore re-appraisal of the purpose and effects of the research. This consideration led me to re-appraise my own reactions to some of the interviews.

Finally, Alcoff (1991) discusses the destination for the words, who is to hear them and what effect they may have. The research, set as it was in a primary school seeks to identify positive, supportive behaviours in literacy learning that may be utilised by parents and teachers alike. One of the outcomes of the research will be to explore the literacy activities of families whose children do not engage with school literacy. There may be a further issue to be addressed, namely the extent to which oral literacy which predominates in some homes may be enhanced within the confines of the NLS. In these four issues Alcoff (1991) addresses ethical matters that may otherwise be overlooked but for the purposes of the present study have been addressed.

Simons (1989: 118) analyses the tension between 'the public right to privacy' and the 'public right to know' in a consideration of ethics that surround educational research. The first of these concerned confidentially, the names of

the participants were not used in any written account and pseudonyms were used in the transcriptions and thesis. The tape recordings were temporarily available to the person who transcribed some of the interviews and as it happened, in her professional role she knew the children and their parents. Three other members of the teaching staff in the school knew the identities of the children. It was impossible from a practical point of view to keep identities entirely anonymous. The families had moved on by the time the research was written up and in truth school life is such that past pupils are mentioned from time to time but discussion in the school staffroom focuses on the current cohorts.

Nevertheless, it was agreed with the participants that data from the interviews could be used in the thesis and pseudonyms were employed for the purposes of anonymity.

As mentioned earlier ethical issues surround the activity of talking with children for purposes that are essentially outside the roles of teaching and learning in the school context. Our talk was not unlike previous reading conferences that had taken place between pupils and teachers in the school. But in reality there were ulterior motives for our discussions about reading, and as far as possible these were made clear to all concerned.

In addressing the issues of ethical behaviour in research I am aware of a lack of experience on my part that jeopardises my perception of sound ethical research practice. Hence I sought to address the questions posed by Simons (1989). The first question asks to whose needs and interests does the research respond? The research responds to the needs of families who do not know or are unaware of their status in respect of their children's learning. People have a right to know of their potential insofar as they engage with opportunities. One of the assumptions of the research was to focus on 'priveleged' children and privileging parental practice as a means of reflecting creative knowledge. The second matter concerns ownership of the data and here again complex issues are raised. In one sense the data upon which the study rests is within

my own personal biography of many years as a teacher and to the extent that I have formed congenial relationships with parents and children in the study, this is a shared experience, even co-ownership. The grandparents in the family groups were less familiar to me and serve to define more sharply my professional role as a teacher and my responsibilities as a researcher. The biographical method perhaps more than other research paradigms blurs the boundaries between researchers and the people they research.

Thirdly, in addressing the question of access and who is to be included or denied my primary concern was my personal stance within the research project by virtue of being a teacher researching within a school albeit not the school itself. One of the dimensions of professional practice is to share good practice with colleagues. An expectation of the research was to illuminate aspects of behaviour that encourage literacy development and to provide a greater understanding as to the reasons why this occurs.

The fourth question is the matter of who decides who tells the truth. I refer back to the issues raised by ownership. Research reportage is a form of narrative writing and research may be viewed as an activity of writing. The researcher tells the story knowing that corroboration of its authenticity comes from participants in the project and that critical analysis of research is a function of the research community.

The fifth question is what of the obligation on the part of the researcher to third parties focuses on matters of professional practice and representation of other peoples' lives. The activity of research is a privileging experience and owes its existence to the goodwill and compliance of those who support it. The outcomes of the enquiry may be of professional interest to others and in this way the researcher has an obligation to make these available and if possible, construct opportunities for their discussion within the professional domain.

The purpose of the biographical research method is to contextualise life stories and to seek to comprehend the specificities. The auto/biographer is writing for

others, the self as writer relays the experience of others as seen by the subject and parts of their stories are included in the narrative. In addition, the auto/biographer writes him/herself into the writing of the lives of others. Alcoff (1991: 7) concludes succinctly,

> The unspoken premise here is simply that the speaker's location is epistomologically salient.

The following three chapters contain the core of the research and are based on interviews with the three generations within the families starting with the children Fiona, David and Harry. Three pen pictures of the children precede the interview chapters.

Chapter 4

Talking With Children About Their Reading

Who knows the thoughts of a child?

Nora Perry (1886-1970)

Three Pen Pictures

This section introduces Fiona, David and Harry whose enthusiasm were inspirational to the research. All three were articulate 'rising fives' when they joined the Reception Class in Crossfields Primary School in 1994 able to use language to discuss ideas and share thoughts and feelings. They had attended pre-school or play-groups before starting formal schooling and in this way it could be argued they were exposed to a wider variety of social discourses and thus were better prepared for schooling than children who had not had these experiences. Each of the three children lived with their natural parents. Their family backrounds were middle class and both of their parents were in paid employment. Christine, Eileen and Ursula the respective mothers, of Fiona, David and Harry had all worked part-time when their children were of pre-school age. Keith was Fiona's father and Bob was Harry's father, they both worked locally. David's father Tom was a soldier and was stationed abroad at the time that the research took place and so he did not take part.

Fiona

At the time of the study Fiona was nine years old and lived with her parents on the outskirts of a village, Currock where she attended Crossfields Primary School. Although it was a faith school it was not necessary for families to be members of the faith and Fiona's family was not. Before starting school she

had attended a local pre-school group, 'Playtops'. During this time Fiona's godparent had helped with day care whilst Christine worked part-time.

Fiona had been at Crossfields since she was five years old. She was an only child and was popular amongst her peers, one particular friend in the class had Down's Syndrome. This was not a fully reciprocated friendship and Fiona's relationship was that of companion. Fiona was tall for her age and had an easy disposition. Her hobbies included reading but she also enjoyed cycling, swimming and pop music. Both sets of grandparents lived in the locality and kept in contact with her and her parents. Fiona's dad Keith, took her swimming and cycling sometimes at the weekend.

At the age of seven Fiona's attainments in the SATs were above average in Maths and English. Her class work in English was consistently above average. She was able to read texts that were suitable for children two or more years older than herself and her comprehension skills matched her reading level. She was able to write in a variety of styles for different purposes; her story writing was prolific, with few spelling errors and written in fluent, legible script. During class discussions Fiona was concise in her comments yet she had a keen sense of humour that owed much to her sophisticated language skills. Fiona's ambition was to be an English teacher.

David

David was nine years old at the time of the study and he lived with his parents in Frayling a village near the sea, four miles from Crossfields Primary School. He had attended Crossfields Primary School since the age of five years. He like Fiona, had attended a pre-school group, 'Swallows' in Cophurst, a town some eight miles from his present home. David had two close friends one of whom was Harry, the third child in the research group. David was a member of a large group of boys whose friendships were variable but long-standing. He was the tallest child in the class and had been noticeably tall for his age since entering the Reception Class. He tended to stoop just a little. His

movements were hesitant at times as though he was unsure of himself and yet he was able to be assertive if the occasion demanded.

He was a member of a local scout group and when his father Tom, was home on leave they would have days out together. David had talked animatedly about the time they had visited the Imperial War Museum in London on one of these day trips.

By the time he was seven years old his attainment in English was in the higher reaches of the average band of ability for writing and reading. His talents in literacy lay in speech and drama. He was an imaginative child who could think himself into dramatic roles and create adventure stories that he would act out with his friends. In class his work in drama put him centre stage. The hesitancy in his movement was lost in polished performance.

David's family had frequent contact with his maternal grandparents who had looked after him on occasion when Eileen, David's mother was at work. His grandparents lived nearby in another village close to where his grandmother Deirdre had attended school as a child.

Harry

Harry was nine years old and a keen sports enthusiast and computer games player. He had attended a pre-school group 'Spangles', which formed part of Pikefield Primary School in the village of Currock where he lived. He had attended Crossfields Primary School since the age of five years, though his family are not members of the faith. He is a popular person in the class group amongst girls and boys. His sporting prowess is a major factor in his status amongst a large friendship group of boys. He is easy-going in his manner, understated.

He was a member a variety of local clubs including football, cricket and basketball. He played in the school football team and a local village team. Bob, his father has taken Harry to watch a league football team play in mainland matches. Ursula, his mother has encouraged Harry in his sports and

has played ball games with him to improve his skills. He walked the few hundred metres to school by himself each morning.

At the end of Key Stage One Harry had attained above average scores in the SATs tests in English, but his writing skills had not matched this earlier performance two years later in the Year 4 English and Maths Tests (QCA, 1999). His particular talents in literacy were in comprehension of texts. Harry was able to read and interpret the meaning of written text, to see behind the writing the writer's intentions, in ways that marked him out amongst his peers. His family had maintained contact with his maternal grandparents who lived on the outskirts of a town some seven miles away.

Fiona's Viewpoint

Fiona is an articulate nine-year-old, in class she is sensible, hard working and wise. At the start of the interview I hear myself talking as though I'm talking to someone who is much younger than she is, I speak too slowly and over-articulate each word. She responds by talking to me as though I am someone to be listened to politely and helped if not actually humoured. She is patient and thoughtful and I feel initially like I'm watching myself being someone else, someone who is not used to being around children and who seems clumsy because they say the wrong things or they misjudge the pace of the conversation. I am out of role here and I'm not sure what to do. I am trying for this transformation from teacher to researcher in a matter of seconds. I feel that I should try and dissemble my authority as the teacher and speak casually, in a matter-of-fact manner as though we are having a chat. The problem is that I feel far from casual or matter-of-fact, but despite all of this, Fiona just talks to me like she has done so many times before when I've asked her opinion or we've discussed some work. I realise that planning the interview was time well spent and this preparation steers me through the first awkward minutes. Fiona is polite and measured in her responses to my questions about her hobbies and the kinds of books she enjoys. Throughout the interview we

acknowledge the rules of question and answer but I know that I'm talking to a person who is an avid reader. I realise that she reminds me of myself insofar as I remember enjoying reading to the exclusion of other people and pastimes when I was her age. Later, whilst interpreting her story I can see how I have become part of it; her present is in some ways my past. It is a kaleidoscope of experience, she is at the centre and I am constantly re-positioning, sometimes as a teacher talking to a pupil about reading, at others as the interviewer. I put aside my teacher-self and try and listen to Fiona's recollections of the past, and match my imaginary design of her family life to what she is actually telling me. Throughout it all we are acknowledging a mutual enthusiasm for books. I am reminiscing about my own childhood reading whilst contemporaneously sharing the enjoyment of current popular children's books. Whilst we are talking about her reading preferences as we have done before I am conscious that we are also engaging in talk that is a social activity more common amongst girls and women than boys and men. As she talks about her reading and of the totally absorbing pleasure that reading can bring, the feeling of not wanting to put a book down until it was finished, she almost laughs at herself as she describes how she reads.

When Fiona said that her favourite hobby was reading I believed her, it seemed plausible, I wanted to believe her because I hoped she would say something like this. Her motivation and attainment fit as part of a pattern that currently describes girls and their literacy, namely that it is for the most part unproblematic. As I listen to Fiona talk about her choice of books, how she likes 'life-stories' and adventure books, I can identify with her enjoyment as this success resonates with my own childhood experience and I feel that it reflects favourably on me as her teacher. Even when Fiona says that she prefers stories to non-fiction, I am the child-reader again agreeing with her despite the adult professional in me that extols the virtues of reading a 'wide range of texts.' Fiona has already enough independent reading experience to

have formed preferences about authors. Since the last time we spoke when she mentioned Dick King-Smith she has now discovered Jean Ure.
Fiona recalled experiences of learning to read before she started school and remembered learning letter sounds at play-school. Her tone is matter-of-fact about this but the recollections are crystal-clear. I realise that for her the memory is much closer and that I would not be able to recall such events easily. I am after all not the recollecting child in this, merely the camera lens that sometimes is in focus. When I asked Fiona if she remembered whether she could read when she started school I was aware that I was being manipulative because I knew that she could. I remembered her as a wide-eyed four-year old coming on six and she could read steadily and carefully from the beginning to the end of any Reception Class reading book put in front of her. Fiona remembered a title of one of the books she had read, 'Roger Red Hat' and we both laughed. In those few moments in which nothing was spoken, we somehow acknowledged that this book title was a signifier of a special event or realisation that seemed so long ago. The remembrance of the book title took us back to when Fiona started school and she probably realised that she could do something that few of her class could do and that this was highly valued in her new environment, she was able to read. She read not in any hesitant; stumbling way but in a manner that suggested it was as natural as breathing. By asking her to recall those early days and talk about her reading books we were able to glimpse how much she had changed. My purpose was to gain insight into how she was helped to read by her family, but in the course of our talking Fiona also momentarily looked back and saw how far she had come along the road to literacy.

Present Time

It was some five years since Fiona had first come to school. She read to herself now and acknowledges that this is much more enjoyable than having to read aloud to someone else. She reads at bedtime for thirty minutes and is a

member of the local library. She talks about the fact that she hadn't taken out any books lately because as she put it, 'At the moment I haven't taken them out because I got so many [books] for Christmas and my birthday.' I am given a momentary glance at the family that has brought her to where she is. She is self-reliant, she is an only child, but this is not someone who uses reading as an alternative to socialising. I know her to be a popular, if at times somewhat all-knowing member of the class. She is at ease with boys and girls and has the interests of most nine and ten year olds.

Fiona sees herself as being amongst the best readers in the class but even she is cautious about this and qualifies it by saying, 'I haven't heard everybody read.' Her strategies for becoming an even better reader were, 'to read bigger books and hard words' which immediately caused me to think as a teacher again and I found myself thinking 'Good girl, right answer.' I wondered again if we were engaged in a conversation of mutual appreciation of reading and realised that we were.

An End Product

I introduced the topic of the relationship between reading and writing partly because as a teacher I am aware that the gender divide in literacy is most sharply drawn across attainments in writing. Fiona saw reading as an activity which came before writing because, 'reading helps you because you know words and you can write them but... if you can't read that much you don't have any ideas.' Fiona is a storywriter whose work is above average for her age. She can write for many purposes and her spelling, use of grammar and punctuation is uniformly excellent. She is the model of the high-achieving, well-motivated girl, the very antipathy of the current stereotype used to describe some boys. In some ways she represents the seemingly unassailable female success story that currently dominates assessment data on literacy attainment.

Perhaps then this is a kind of success story, a self-congratulatory experience for myself as teacher in the guise of pursuing some research and a brief but pleasant reflection for Fiona on how well she has done so far. Our lives connect not only within the education setting but link our middle-class-ness, our whiteness and as such we share more than just an interest in books, social relations bind us within a particular social text.

Fiona had richness and wealth in her language that began long before she entered school rooted in family care that attended to her needs Her language was steeped in her self-confidence and security within herself.

David, Telling Me How it Is.

I felt easier at the prospect of talking with David, perhaps it was because this was the second interview and I felt that the first had gone reasonably well. But I think that it was more about negotiating the move from being 'the teacher teaching', to being 'off-duty' that made the difference and I think that held for him too. He is perceptive and Eileen his mother had discussed the project with him. Part of my working relationship with David is about him cracking jokes and providing an occasional commentary on the course of events during lessons with me accepting this on the understanding that a little humour in the daily round of classroom life is no bad thing. He is a risk-taker, sometimes he misjudges his ground, it's necessary to reproach him, and he is humbled. For he is also a sensitive person who would not knowingly give offence and would support anyone misjudged. He is tall, he looks a lot older than his nine years and he is already trying out ways of relating to adults as a young person and not as a child. His literacy is steeped in his talk, as well as being one of the comedians whose wit is at times irresistible, he is a political force in the class. In class discussion David is able to elaborate a point of view, give reasons for his standpoint and offer counter-argument and after a few moments into the interview I realise that this was going to be quite a different experience. David needed no prompting to expound his views and discuss reading preferences. It was as though he was just waiting to be asked, like some well-known public figure that has been solicited for personal comment, at ease with the microphone and ready to tell all. David has firm opinions about reading and he has strategies that he uses to organise his life. David is at a stage where he uses his language to experiment with and develop new ways of relating to adults, he subtly resists manoeuvres that position him as a child in discussions, he intermittently adopts a stance that is more adult than adolescent. There is in his talk resonance of the loving and beloved son. As he tells me about how he reads 'every night for thirty minutes but when I'm at cubs on Thursdays...I don't read then and I don't read on Friday 'cos I stay up late on Friday.' I

picture an untroubled childhood nestling in homely routine spiced with excitement; a child's view of life lived in the fast lane.

Competent or What?

David is able to name his favourite authors and has an accurate view of his reading ability. Without a hint of disingenuousness he says, 'I don't think I'm a brilliant, brilliant reader but I'm about average really.' His reading preferences include joke books, 'I'm a sort of comedy person,' he said as though he had worked this out some time ago. In this way he is representative of many boys who eschew narrative for cartoons and joke books. As I listened to David it became clear that reading preferences for competent readers are formed long before the start of secondary schooling. He is able to make judgements about different texts and their suitability for his present reading skill level. C.S. Lewis books are described as having difficult words he quotes 'quizzedly' as an example. He knows that he would not enjoy reading the C.S. Lewis books and does not reveal any emotion such as disappointment or feigned uninterest, 'I don't read great, massive, chunky books that I don't want to read'.

David has already discovered that books are advertised as special offers in newspapers and magazines and that it is possible to get hold of books through means other than on birthdays and visits to the library. He does not attempt to hide his enthusiasm not only for the books themselves, but also the fact that he has acquired this knowledge by himself. In talking about writing he is ponderous, as though he has already given the matter some consideration. He feels that it is more difficult than reading because as he admitted, 'I forget what my lines are and I have to think all over again and I have to write them.' Literacy for David is action and acting, as he talks of writing as 'forgetting my lines.'

For David learning to read did not begin at pre-school or before but during early schooldays. Once again the ubiquitous character of 'Roger Red Hat' who appears in graded story books for schools is mentioned. David is a good narrator, he tells of how at pre-school there was a favourite playground toy beloved by all the children and whoever was the first out at playtime would get to ride on the green tractor. One day when he was lucky enough to get a go on it, he ignored the call of a supervisory adult and rode away across the playground on this toy tractor. His long scarf caught in one of the wheels. 'It was a bit scary... but I was OK.' He remembers one of the girls who was with him at pre-school and for a few moments sounds much older than his years as he remarks, 'There was this girl, her name was Wendy and she was really nice.' This sounds like the voice of the young man describing a memory of childhood. But the tone hints at a long ago childhood admiration, the uncomplicated desire of wanting someone as a friend. This is a poignant moment in the interview, and it is not clear whether he and Wendy were ever friends.

David is a strategist and recalls a time when compromises were made with his mother when he was learning to read. He had pretended to use the flash cards as a 'play set' whilst Mum 'made me spell out the words'. He talks as though he had worked out the rules and how to turn them to his advantage, a boy playing games with his mother. This interview is humorous at times like many of our exchanges in the classroom but there is sadness too. David talks about the absence of his father who is posted away in the army for long periods, the pace of the talk is lost for a few moments and the words hang in the stillness until he remembers 'the fun times we have' when Dad comes home. Dad is not seen as involved in the reading experience but more of a companion to go with to the burger-bar.

For David, reading is one of an array of interests; it is not central to his being. If he has any central interest it is drawing and painting. When he was younger reading was something that he did because he was encouraged and guided by

his mother. Throughout this interview David elaborated his answers without any prompting, he seemed at ease and almost matter-of-fact about the conversation we were having. Again there was that easy dialogue that is arguably rooted in the family experience of a much-loved only child. As he describes his current reading habits and the part his parents play in them, he acknowledges that he doesn't just flick through a book because 'they'll ask me what's happened and if I don't know, they'll know I haven't read it.' This is spoken in a good-natured tone, an acceptance between child and parents, a games playing aspect to the parental investment in their child's reading. It has obviously occurred to David that a quick flick through a book to say that he has read it is an option, but parental interest is part of the literacy tradition within this family and the rules have been worked out between parents and child.

Talking Gender - Talking Different

David is a person who feels deeply and is able to share this in his conversation. His voice is at times full of enthusiasm and at times passion. It is clear why he has played character roles so successfully in class dramas in the past. In this recollection of his brief childhood he has re-lived the part of the child during those carefree days of pre-school, the obedient child practising his reading and now the boy who knows what's what. His literacy is steeped in his way with words, an only child at home with his mother, talking and waiting for Dad to come home. David at times dominated this interview. His replies to single questions developed a train of thought that led to other stories and I had to work harder than I did with Fiona to ensure that the questions or issues that I wanted to raise, were covered. But I also sat back a little and whilst listening was entertained. There was an absence of tension between us, I had been anxious that as his teacher it would not be possible to step out of that role somehow and use a different social language, another voice. But this did not present itself as a problem. David was at ease throughout the interview. In

this we perhaps reproduced a scene that resonated with his family experience, of himself talking about his reading with his mother, as he would have done many times before.

Harry's Story

The interview with Harry was different again from talking with either Fiona or David. In some ways it was like the post-match interviews between a TV sports commentator and one of the players. It's not exactly superficial but the agendas of the two speakers are explicit. There is a distance between us as the interviewer I am trying to encourage a viewpoint to be expressed whilst Harry is describing himself and his reading in a favourable but not too self-congratulatory manner. From the outset Harry described himself as an independent reader but one who would read only on certain conditions, the major consideration being that the material had to be interesting to him. It is as though he negotiates his commitment or participation with other interested parties. In this way he implied that the availability of suitably attractive reading material was not within his control; and that this being the case he would not always choose to read. This is difficult for me; my dispassionate stance of researcher is swamped by my feelings as teacher as I find myself thinking, 'Well, you ought to make more effort!' My neutrality as researcher is far less secure than I thought. Harry is a keen sports participant and his reading interests exist alongside other leisure pursuits such as cricket and football. This has been so for at least the past two years, he is also an avid television viewer and computer games enthusiast. At one point he talks about the constraints that have been recently imposed by his mother on his television viewing and games playing on the computer. He is accepting of these conditions and is able to rationalise that some aspects of his school work such as his handwriting, need improving and that this parental intervention, whilst not specifically directed at handwriting practice, will lead to better results all round. I am positioned as a teacher in this interview; Harry evokes my professional concern. In reflecting on this I realise again the significance of parental involvement with children's schoolwork, to some extent it is immaterial whether the outcome of their concern is complimentary or adverse, but that it must be critical and supportive.

Being Challenged

In talking with Harry I am more business-like, not brusque exactly, but more assertive in summarising what has been said. I found this interview challenging. It made me realise that the pre-formed ideas I have about Harry are not necessarily wholly favourable ones. I realise that I perceive Harry as holding back on some of his talents or those that pertain to success in literacy learning. I see him as a sensitive, articulate person and one who is popular with the other children. He has his own agenda that does not owe anything very much to my opinion, yet at the same time I am aware of him as a child and of his vulnerability. This is about gender, somehow I get sidelined and I have to work very hard in an 'in-your-face' dialogue. This is far from the cosy, understanding teacher that I had hoped to be in the classroom.

Harry is in the top ability band in English, his understanding of texts whether fiction or non-fiction shows sensitivity and perception. He has a way of understanding the message behind the text that marks him out as an accomplished reader in the class. He is able to talk about text in a way that is open and uncluttered by embarrassment or self-consciousness. He is willing to take risks and state that which the majority of the class has not even thought of. He is representative of a group of boys who perhaps are regarded as being in a minority, for Harry is seen to work hard at school work and is popular amongst his peers. He is talented in many ways, in sports, academically and in his social skills. There is a tension between his being conscientious about work and the demands of being a popular team player amongst his peers.

I sense the conflict created by this apparent success on all fronts. His education relies upon my professional expertise in ensuring that he takes up the opportunities throughout the whole curriculum. But the apparent self-sufficiency, the hint of self-satisfaction even complacency that I see in his presence arouses my anxiety. In truth I have a view of his written work that could be summarised using traditional, old school report jargon 'Could do better', and this is where my disquiet is lodged. He does enough and

occasionally more than that, but he does not share my ambition for him to do very well or excellently. (This high standard is typical of his attainment across other aspects of English).

The question in the back of my mind is always, 'Would it be palpably different if Harry's class teacher were a man?' Within the current debate on boys and their failure to attain comparable results with girls in literacy, there are perhaps feelings of guilt on the part of many teachers the majority of whom are women and who are primary based. It is difficult to distance oneself from feeling responsible at least in part for boys' failure. In listening to the interview I seem to have taken control and in doing so I have lost it. At times I feel that I am being fed a plausible story, for instance when Harry talks about his father reading him a bedtime story when he was younger and how his dad would 'try and get me to read a chapter.' Harry is clearly someone who has taken to reading and is encouraged to spend time reading by his mother and possibly his father as well. He is able to name some of his favourite stories and has been given books as gifts for his birthday. He used some Christmas gift money to buy books; 'I brought a couple of books in the Famous Five and really enjoyed them so my mum...for my birthday got the whole set of Famous Five.' He uses the local library and is allowed to go by himself to choose books though his mother escorts him across busy roads. His reading experiences have brought him to the point of being able to use the local library as a resource for his further development in enjoying books. He has family support for his leisure reading in that he and his parents see books as acceptable gifts and this affirms the status of literacy within his family experience. Harry remembered his early reading experiences taking place at home and then at school but in pre-school time was spent in playing rather than preparation for reading. However, it is possible that pre-reading activities took place during the time of pre-school but were not categorised by Harry as being related to reading. This may be because they were sufficiently dissimilar from school-based practice as to be interpreted as other activities

having a different purpose. However, it is possible that his pre-school experience ascribed to the 'learning through play' approach to early years and more formal guidance in learning did not occur. At the time of Harry's pre-school experience the regulation of activities was not a matter for routine inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) as is now the case.

Being an Only Child

Both Dad and Mum were mentioned as Harry recalled early reading experiences. Dad would read the newspaper with Harry sitting on his lap and Mum used to help, 'when I was a bit bored she used to sit down and help me read.' The picture is one of attentive parents each doing their part to fulfil their parenting duties in preparation for their son's first year in formal schooling. This is a child cared for and nurtured not only, in the past, but also in the present, an ongoing experience of being cherished and an expectation of the same. There is no intrusion of demands made by siblings; there is a solitary but self-assured confidence in his voice that speaks out as the sole possessor of parental love and concern. In talking about his reading within the family setting Harry shows no preference for either parent and his matter-of-fact tone suggests that this attentiveness to his reading is a long-standing routine and therefore an accepted family literacy tradition.

Harry's preferences are towards stories rather than non-fiction; 'I much prefer stories and good old things that you can have a jolly good go on, than factual books.' As I listen I have my reservations, I think probably Harry does enjoy reading books on football as much as any story book but maybe he wasn't including these as factual books. Books and magazines about football and computers fulfil the role for boys that narrative fiction and romance fulfils for girls.

I Like Reading But I'd Rather Be...

Harry is not a person to be found reading in odd moments in school. If there is a choice of activity he is more likely to draw, play a board game, or work on a computer than pick up a book and read. In this way it becomes clear that reading is just one of an array of activities which he enjoys and at which he is successful. About writing he focuses not on the content but says that his handwriting isn't neat and his Mum has encouraged him to do better by offering a reward such as going ten-pin bowling or ice-skating if his work improves. This is the reality of parents and schools working in partnership for their children. I recall how during discussions with parents unsure of the best approach to motivate their seemingly unwilling offspring I have said, 'Try anything that works, do not allow yourself the luxury of principles use bribery, coercion or trickery, anything that works.'

For Harry writing is not as enjoyable as reading and given that reading is not on his short list of favourite past times then clearly it is not rated highly. In this way he represents a group of boys whose attainments reflect this disaffection with a core skill in literacy. The chore of looking up in the dictionary the correct spellings for words diminishes the pleasure of writing for him. Harry is not a storywriter, he is not a person who writes at home for pleasure, and he will write letters to relatives and stories at school if told to do so. Writing equates with work for Harry; he wants to improve his skills and is capable of writing more successfully than he does at this time. Copying someone else's writing is a much more attractive prospect, but he recognises that this is not what is meant by writing. Writing is seen as something that is not easy, it is perhaps a solitary endeavour, the work of an individual, it is because of all this that it is seen as unattractive. We do not discuss different types of writing and on reflection perhaps I should have explored this some more. But I think I know how it is with Harry.

Conclusion

As a teacher I wanted these children to be successful in their learning, especially in their reading and writing. So it is of no surprise to me that they answered in ways that reflect the learning that we have experienced over the past nine months. It is also relevant that I taught these children two years earlier. They are more independent and experienced as learners than they were two years previously. They are more robust and have opinions that they are able to express. Fiona, David and Harry all interviewed quite differently. Fiona maintained a polite accommodating response to the questioning whilst David took to the role of interviewee with the ease of one who regularly appears on television. Harry's was less of a performance but offered a relaxed, matter-of-fact viewpoint on reading and writing. But I feel the need to be circumspect about Harry's account of his reading and in doing so I devalue what he tells me. Perhaps the trust that we have between us is conditional on him 'doing his best' and myself as 'accepting that this is how it is.' The interview mirrored our pedagogic relationship in the classroom.

They were all high attaining children in their literacy skills and I was conscious of the families who were absent during the interviews but whose presence was there in the ways in which the three Fiona, David and Harry spoke. Some of the memories were vivid and detailed but this in part relied on the teller as much as the tale. Each of them recalled at least one instance of learning to read when they were much younger, all mentioned their parents' active interest in helping them to learn about words. Reading is not an issue for these three children; there is no sense of tension or divisiveness that can surround the practice and acquisition of reading skills. Fiona, David and Harry had described how they had managed their own progress not only as competent readers but when they were learning to read, by indicating their preferences and negotiating terms for reading engagement.

The following chapter describes the interviews with parents and presents the literacy activities from a different perspective to those of the children.

Chapter 5

Something a Little Different from Parents' Evening

Talking with Christine and Keith, Fiona's Parents

I had known Christine and Keith for nearly three years prior to our interview. I regarded them as friends of the school that they had supported in a variety of ways over the years. Keith had helped out in the classroom regularly. However, it is rare to find men working in primary schools and even more rare for fathers to come and assist in classrooms during their spare time. In addition Keith and I had worked on the PTA (Parent Teachers' Association) together for a year, he as treasurer and I as the teacher representative. This was not an interview with parents known only to me through brief discussions on parents' evenings or via absentee notes handed to me by their child after a spell of sickness. There was no hint of tenacious ambition about Christine and Keith that some parents exhibit for their talented children, instead their gentle, unassuming manner had coaxed the best from their daughter and probably from me as her teacher. I had wondered many times in the past why they did not have any more children, but that marked the boundary of my familiarity and I did not ask the question, not even in the interview.

This was the first of the parents' interviews and I came to it with feelings towards Christine and Keith that were different from those that I held for the other parents. I already had second-hand experience of their family life through pieces of family narrative that Fiona had shared in the course of the daily social round as any children do in a class. These bite-size pieces of information provided an insight that enabled me to form an image of their family. I knew that this cognitive projection of a fictionalised home setting was about to be subjected to review and adjustment.

My professional role vis a vis parents concerned their satisfaction with the service that I provided as a teacher. The perspective changed as I left this role aside and put on the guise of an enquirer. To what extent this is an authentic, description of what actually took place is hard to imagine. If I speculate on how it would have appeared to me as one of the parents, I think that I would have simply seen my child's teacher asking me about my own memories of school days and how my child came to learn to read. But the disruption to my role allowed me to see parents from a different perspective, one which took account of their past within the context of our shared sense of the present. The best I could hope for was that we engage in some thought-provoking dialogue about how children come to learn to read within the family setting. But more than this there was the interplay between mother and father in respect of their child and men and women talking about their own learning in literacy.

Christine Talking and Keith Just Being There

Christine is quietly spoken but clear in her thoughts. Her voice is soft even melodious, only the clipped pronunciation of final consonants interrupts the flow. If it were possible to synthesise the voice entitled 'loving mother' I imagine that it would sound like her voice. Keith's voice in a much deeper register is rich and smooth; he interjects on some points and then is silent. His voice weaves through the women's talk, causing it to pause momentarily, we are attentive and then we resume. We are seated together but he is somehow distanced from us emotionally and experientially. He has already receded, the dialogue is between two women and he is patient and thoughtful. When directly addressed he is hesitant at first but stakes his claim to these family recollections of experiences that we are sharing.

Christine mentions her mother early in the interview as she refers to her own experience of learning to read. Shortly before the interview she had asked her mother whether she Christine, could read before she started school. Amy her mother had told her that she could recognise words and she knew letter

sounds. Christine mentions her sister Maggie who was three years older and describes how they would sit together and Maggie would sound out the letters for her, 'C for cat.' There were three years between the two girls, near enough to be close and share the experiences of growing up. I think of my own sister, six years older than myself, and too great an age gap to be close. Though the reference to her sister is brief, the tone of affection is there in Christine's voice. This seems to be a discussion about women and literacy in the family, there is no mention of men, brothers, father, uncles, anyone male. At the time I was pleased that they had both come to the interview and later I thought that I heard some of the gendered silences. Keith talks about his own experience as a child, he is matter-of-fact in his tone as he recalls changing schools and his family moving from Braystock to the island when he was thirteen years old. He talks about the transfer from infant and junior school and recalls the change in status he felt as a pupil. He found the grammar school different, standards were higher and it was not so easy to stay at the top of the class. Keith appears relaxed, easy-going as he talks about the competitive grammar school experience and he manages somehow to convey a distance between himself and the memory.

Christine's recollections of the move to grammar school are unhappy ones. The years of confidence and success in her infant and junior schools were left behind in the larger, less cosy institution of 'the big school'. She talks modestly about her love of writing when she was a child, she is slightly embarrassed. This creative pulse was thwarted during the years in secondary education. She had enjoyed success and received praise for her English but when she left junior school this did not re-establish itself. She seems sad and puzzled as she talks of losing the thread of it all. She still writes poetry the love of writing is not altogether lost but partially re-directed albeit temporarily towards Fiona's literacy needs. In the quiet voice is the intimation of a more forceful desire to communicate through another medium. I am aware of my own desires reflected in her voice. In speaking we have evoked wishes that

have remained unfulfilled over the passing years. I think of Fiona, the beloved daughter so much at ease with herself and the world, her early immersion in reading books and her own writing. It seems clear where this support comes from now.

Drawing to a Close

I attempt to conclude the interview a number of times but then re-open it with a chance remark about how things are or might be in their family. This gives me the chance to move the spotlight of the enquiry to another area of the family's literacy traditions. I hear myself using the strategy as I picture myself doing it. I'm pleased because I have re-invented my role as interviewer that seemed to be lost in the previous interview with Harry. I am working the script like a kind of sales pitch; even so it's hard to keep on track. I have learned a lot about interviewing already. I realise that I have been deferential towards Keith and Christine by virtue of knowing them quite well before the interview and because I want something from them. Our previous relationship of parents and teacher had pre-set the limits of our interaction. This had helped in some ways to encourage the dialogue along initially but it became redundant and at some point I forgot about my being the teacher or researcher and they the parents and I talked with them on the basis of a shared understanding of parenthood.

There is a contradictory nature in the job of teaching children, somewhere along the line it becomes necessary to take the professional goal of wanting to understand children a stage further and try and think as they think, feel as they feel. In doing this it subtly alters the ability to relate to adults, there is a residue of 'acting like a child' initially. There is a sense of vulnerability, of unsuredness that does not own its being to the rationality of the interaction, it is childlike. It has to be worked through until adult equilibrium is re-established and relations continue as normal. Throughout the interview I relate to Keith and Christine through the various experiential modes that I

occupy during a day, as a teacher, the child in me, the enquirer, the self-seeking researcher, as a friend.

Neither Keith or Christine can remember bedtime stories being read to them as children but both said that reading the nightly bedtime story was a tradition in their family when Fiona was younger. A favourite book with Fiona was 'Each Peach, Pear, Plum.' I find myself wondering if there is a kind of 'good books for children' club whereby everyone who knows what's what in children's reading knows the books to go for. A decade earlier I had read this same book to my own children. We moved on to talking about Fiona and her reading and Keith summed it up when he said 'It was fine right from the word go.' The dialogue is again calm and untroubled like Fiona's journey along the literacy trail from being a non-reader to being a reader of distinction at an early age. When Christine talks about Fiona's reading she describes an experience that is unproblematic. This is not a family where the mother stayed at home and looked after their child whilst she was very young. Christine did part-time work and Fiona's pre-school years were shared by a close family friend who cared for and encouraged her in her reading. The two families are close and each set of parents is godparents to the other's children.

This was the first reference to significant people outside the family group who played important roles in the children's literacy learning. When talking about their own childhood it emerged that Christine and Keith's parents were employed outside the home. Christine's mother worked part-time and did secretarial work whilst Keith's parents had their own business premises adjacent to the family home. As Keith said, 'It wasn't as if they were away from the home.' He as the eldest would have appreciated this more than his brothers. The dialogue resonated with flashbacks and once forgotten happenings within my life. The recollection of Keith's mother working in the family business next door to their house reminded me of my own mother working part-time at the cinema. This was next to the block of flats where we lived. My elder sister used to baby-sit my younger brother and me, but I

remember feeling that my mother was nearby but not accessible. My father worked shifts and would go across to the 'Odean' as it was called to check out what the arrangements were for tea. Women were required to orchestrate the daily happenings in the home although they were not present.

I am at ease with children and in the course of my work I have acquired skills that enable me to talk with them. Whereas in interviewing adults I am at first conscious that I am seeking or hoping for co-operation, when I talked with the children I assumed this, I was confident that I would get all of these things. Keith and Christine answered in ways that were similar to Fiona's. They were focused; we didn't digress too much from the points that I raised.

As a teacher I accumulate information about children's work and share it with concerned parents. In the role of researcher this was reversed and it is me who is seeking information in a concerned manner. Of the three children Fiona is the most accomplished in her literacy. Yet the interview was hard, there were no clear tales of family literacy traditions to be told. Here between children and parents was a self-effacing acceptance of 'that is how it is' which was difficult to unravel. There were bedtime stories, there were shared activities, I wanted hard evidence but I had soft story telling. For these parents it wouldn't have made any difference if their daughter had been slow to pick up on reading. They would still have supported her in a self-less, giving way. What I had been told was not only a success story for Fiona in her achievements in speaking, reading and writing but of other childhood experiences, those of her parents. Keith's challenging experiences at the grammar school and subsequent mediocre attainments, along with Christine's sense of loss in high school were significant memories. My first impressions were of a couple who were understated and caring in their approach to Fiona's schooling. The family support for Fiona's learning had been shaped by their own experiences not just within their homes.

Eileen, David's Mother

Eileen came along by herself one afternoon at the end of a school day. David's father Tom was in the army and had been posted abroad. So neither he nor his parents took any part in the research. Eileen was collecting David but we had agreed beforehand that she would be interviewed before they both left. David played on one of the class computers in a far corner of the classroom as she and I sat and talked quietly some distance away in another. The weird robotic noises from the interactive software took the edge off the desolate echo that sometimes fills a school when the exuberance and sheer physical vitality of children has vanished. It was a comforting; reassuring sound like 'wallpaper music' in shops or restaurants that imbues a sense of well being and relaxation. David was happily engaged in something that was both educational and fun, this was in itself a source of satisfaction to me as his teacher, and I think to Eileen as his parent. There was between us momentarily a sense of having engineered this rather skilfully so that we could attend to the business that had brought us together. My gaze is directed to this family's brief experience in time through the auto/biographical lens of a person who tells me about its members and in doing so, she tells me about herself.

Keeping on Course

Eileen is an articulate person, confidant and confiding the childhood disadvantages of her partner were the first glimpse of family life. David's father was an abused child, damaged by divorce and something of a young delinquent. He made good by joining the army at an early age and by implication escaped the unhappiness of his childhood. This disclosure was unsolicited on my part and I wondered at the time where this was going. I was suddenly alert to the fact that no interview is a breeze and I was going to have to work. The prospect of an easy time was a fantasy that dissolved as I listened to Eileen and wondered how to return to the interview plan that I had

in mind. There was the feel of a counselling session about this and I moved the interview on to childhood memories of reading.

Eileen's Childhood

Eileen could read before she went to school and she remembers having books at home. She also remembers being taken to the local library and Lorraine, her older sister reading with her. There is an eleven-year age gap between them and so they were not close as siblings. Lorraine had a baby when she was eighteen years old and Eileen found that her niece was in fact more like a sister to her. Eileen's great-uncle Donald, her mother's uncle lived with the family and had helped her to read and took care of her when her mother was at work. As she talks about him there is respect and affection in her voice more than a child's way of loving, it is the adult voice, reflective, reminiscent. Eileen remembered playing word games with her great-uncle and there being books available to share with him and her mother.

The pace of this interview is brisk and we talk about nursery school and the 'Janet and John' graded reading scheme books that were almost standard texts even as recently as fifteen years ago. Eileen remembers particularly Nip the dog and we laugh realising how awful these books seem to us now. Looking back at how reading is accomplished has its own gratification the more so if it's possible to share your literate sophistication with someone else. It's a sort of self-congratulatory experience, of having completed a rite de passage. It is only later when literacy is part of the persona that it is possible to look back and almost ridicule the process. It is by way of laughing at our own long-forgotten anguish and ourselves. Neither of us could remember much about our own time of learning to read but we had shared the experience of watching our own children struggle and succeed. We identified with that and neither of us, if asked would have wished to replace the system of graded reading books in schools as the mainstay of teaching children to read.

There is an emptiness beneath the words that tells of her mother Deirdre, working to earn money to help pay for the mortgage and Eileen as a child being cared for part of the time by someone else. Eileen was a child in the fifties, there were fewer opportunities for women to work and a greater expectation on women to stay at home at least part of the time. I wondered how a child would comprehend this separation, particularly one who was cared for by a grandfather figure. Perhaps this was not such a wrench in a household of an extended family group. Ted, Eileen's father was a prison officer and worked until late in the evenings, it was perhaps the great-uncle Donald, who fulfilled the father role for her and even the mother role during those pre-school and early learning years. Eileen admitted that she didn't see much of her father except at weekends and in these few words he appeared relegated to a subsidiary role in her life. I think about my own father and that he had two jobs, a full-time job as a bus-driver and another to supplement his wage. He had very little spare time. But in contrast to Eileen's experience my father is a major figure in my childhood memories. He used to make time to spend with me when he wasn't working. But we all had to be quiet when he was asleep after working the night shift. He was a central figure in our family life.

Although neither of Eileen's parents is enthusiastic readers they obviously ensured that she had opportunities to practice before she went to school. Eileen had kept some of her 'Peter Rabbit' books from her own childhood and re-read them with David. She said that there were plenty of books for David to use long before he went to school. Amongst these were board books, plastic books that squeak for the bath and fabric books. David was given books at an early age. He was two and a half years old when he began nursery school. We talk about David being tall for his age, I sense that I have strayed into a sensitive area, Eileen is quieter and speaks more slowly as she tells of how 'people expect too much of him' and I wonder if she includes me in this. I remember that David had been in school a few weeks in the Reception Class

when another boy bullied him. He solved the problem by physically retaliating. The other boy was smaller and made a disproportionate amount of protest considering his role as the protagonist. David was admonished disproportionately considering his part in the incident. This was a direct outcome of his being tall for his age. Tall children are doubly vulnerable in school settings, they become targets for bullies who are generally smaller than themselves and in being tall they share the blame in accordance to their size rather than justice.

Whose Epiphany is This Anyway?

The conversation wanders around the subject of reading and families, I have stopped asking questions, Eileen is remembering snippets of family experiences like visiting Lorraine, her sister in a nearby town and spending time reading with her young niece when they were children. The birth of her niece was a significant event in Eileen's childhood. She manages to convey the sense of shame and difficulty that ensued within the family as her sister had to leave college to have the baby. 'The house was cramped with us all living there.' The father of the child had moved away to a job in another area. This narrative had elements of the wronged woman and the carefree lover. Except that this wasn't fiction, it was the 1960s, and Lorraine was a single parent.

Later in the interview Eileen revealed that her one ambition as a young girl was to make her father proud of her. This was an unsolicited remark, a reference perhaps to the episode with the elder sister, the baby and the implied wrath of her parents Ted and Deirdre. Eileen's strong resolve was to avoid that happening to her. Eileen described her mother as someone who did not read very often and she recalled how when Eileen was a child her mother Deirdre, would say, 'You haven't got your nose in a book again have you?' Whereupon Ted would say, 'Leave her be she's educating herself.' This tale suggests that Ted was an important figure for Eileen when she was a child.

The desire to please her father, to educate herself, to achieve something for him to be proud of in her was an ongoing theme in her life.

Eileen describes how she is currently studying for an M.A. in nursing, her chosen profession. I have been talking to a woman whose family memories of literacy traditions centre on men, her great-uncle Donald and her father Ted. Eileen has overseen the learning of literacy with her son whilst Tom, her husband is away serving in the army. David enjoys a close relationship with his grandmother Deirdre, who not only shared in his early reading but now plays on his Sony Playstation with him. A grandmother who is a computer whizz-kid is an asset and gives a new perspective to the family's literacy traditions. Eileen mentions that David now reads by himself each night for half an hour and this confirmed what David had told me during our interview. Eileen also told me how David listens to talking books as well and I recollect that he hadn't mentioned those, maybe because they're fun and therefore aren't of any interest to teachers or they don't count as reading.

There was no doubt that learning to read via explicit instruction had featured in David's earlier learning and possibly his mother's. Books are valued in David's home partly because Eileen remembers the importance of books from her own childhood. In her talk Eileen had convinced me that her enthusiasm and commitment to David's speaking, reading and writing skills derived from her own experience as a child at home.

An Innings with Ursula and Bob

Ursula and Bob came along to the school on a Friday after the school day had finished, as this was a convenient time for us all. Since Friday is the end of the working week it was easier for me to leave the cares of the classroom teaching to one side and begin to focus on my role as a researcher. The preliminary questionnaire that I had sent out to the three sets of parents prior to interview had been successful. Its purpose was to raise awareness of the topic that I was hoping to explore with them during the interview. Recollections are sometimes difficult if spontaneity is required, I had hoped that if partners had discussed the questionnaires together before they came along to talk they would recall events more easily. This had worked very well. I could tell immediately that Bob had 'done the homework' on this, I was surprised at the brisk start I took in getting things underway. It was particularly interesting because I opened by asking which school Bob had attended in his infancy. I hadn't asked this previously of anyone and I think that it was my attempt at trying to appear assertive. Bob is a no-nonsense person, affable but there are no blurred edges to him. He had declined to contact his own parent (father) to explore the possibility of taking part in the study. Ursula joins the conversation immediately and we go at a cracking factual pace talking about whether there were classroom helpers in primary schools, whether books went home from school so that children could read at home.

Playing the Game

The discussion is punctuated by one-word answers and more bullet-like questions from me, it's a bit like a game of table-tennis batting the questions and answers back and forth in rapid succession, there's a lightness, an absence of reflection to it all. I'm reminded of the interview with Harry; again dialogue is used as a contesting scene like games playing. Then it slows. Harry is playing on the class computer whilst we talk, we were all oblivious of him for the first part of the interview. Bob talked about his schooling, he

could remember reading books. Throughout the interview he referred to his own feelings of regret that he had not made the most of his time at school. He describes himself at one point as a disruptive child who spent a good deal of time in the corridor because of bad behaviour in the classroom. He felt that Maths particularly was not well taught in schools today. He said that he could have achieved more both in English and Maths and was implying that boys would be more responsive to attention-catching presentation in lessons. Bob thought that some kind of options system could be put in place for pupils once they reached the age of nine years so that children could spend time studying subjects that they really enjoyed rather than waste so many hours in learning about subjects in which they had no interest. He has many suggestions as to how to improve primary schooling perhaps because of his own opportunities missed.

Neither Bob nor Ursula has any recollection of being able to read before they started formal schooling. 'We weren't expected to read before we started school,' said Ursula and she states that her own education lacked formal instruction in Maths in particular. She remembered having difficulties in middle school because she was unaware of multiplication tables. She has a low opinion of her primary school education and perhaps this is based on her experience in Maths. Ursula's recollection of the school day was one in which routine was largely absent but from the perspective of a young child some thirty years ago it is not easy to understand the systems of school. Her memories of the school day were of a timetable that was less structured than the National Curriculum with only five areas taught, English Maths, Religious Education, Physical Education and General Studies. When we talk about Harry's reading experiences the nightly bedtime story usually read by Mum is mentioned. Ursula declares herself an avid reader ever since childhood. She takes Harry to the library but not frequently. She says that he now reads to himself and his choice of book is often non-fiction, war books, or books on football are his favourites. When Harry was younger Ursula used to read cloth

books with him and alphabet books and by the time he went to school he had managed to write his name.

Their recollections of their early reading experiences suggest that they did not visit the local library but Ursula remembered having books at home and Bob remembers that he used to read comics such as the Beano.

At Home

Changes in education were discussed during the interview. Ursula said that she could remember doing the kind of work that Harry is now doing in primary school when she was at middle school. She concludes that more is required of primary school children now compared to thirty years ago. Both Bob and Ursula remarked on the absence of homework in their own primary education and were surprised that Harry was given some at his present school. There is a tension here between wanting higher standards and the demands that this incurs on self-discipline and leisure time. Classroom assistants were not a feature in either of their primary schools; there was just the teacher and the children in the classroom.

Harry's maternal grandparents Ernie and Margaret used to listen to him read from his school 'scheme' reading books when he was younger. But now that he is able to read to himself neither they nor his parents hear him read. Ursula describes Ernie, her dad as an enthusiastic reader and it was he rather than Margaret, her mum who used to share reading with her. Ursula and Bob said that they had books at home but would go to the library for information or use computer software such as Microsoft Encarta to search for information.

Ursula still reads for pleasure but I sensed that Bob did not. He points out that his own reading focus is driven by his job as a self-employed financial consultant and he is aware that he is trying to improve his writing skills so that he can produce succinct documents.

Bob and Ursula had formed views on education that illustrated the level of their concern about Harry's progress in school. This in itself is a form of

support for children. Bob remembered himself as a boy similar in many ways to the stereotype in popular press coverage of boys' failure in literacy. His self-description is of an underachieving, challenging boy who although he had ability, left school without qualifications in English or Mathematics. It is interesting to reflect that he has achieved success in a career that requires expertise in both English and Maths. I sensed that both parents had mixed feelings about homework as a feature of primary school education. Ursula is particularly keen on sport and encourages Harry to participate in after-school sports activities. This necessarily impinges on time required to complete homework tasks. This verifies the conflict that Harry alluded to when he mentioned reading as one of a number of after school activities. Harry's account of visits to the library implied that they occurred more frequently than they actually do according to his parents. Again Harry's description of his reading preferences also deviates somewhat from his parents' account in that he declares that he enjoys really long story books whilst Bob and Ursula have stressed his liking for non-fiction war or football books. There were elements of confrontation and critical appraisal of the school system in this interview. Harry's ambivalence is echoing as I listen to Ursula and Bob. Nevertheless, our discussions revealed that literacy traditions are embedded in this family's life.

Conclusions

Like the interviews with children these were three very different engagements with parents. Keith and Christine were relaxed and unassuming when they described how Fiona had picked up reading so readily. Shared literacy experiences with a variety of family members provided Fiona with many opportunities for engaging with adults who made her the centre of attention. The interview with Eileen was perhaps easier than the one with Christine and Keith. This was because Eileen seemed able to put me at my ease by starting to recount her family history with little or no encouragement from me. There

had been no need for a 'warm- up' period during which I had falteringly attempted in the past to put the interviewee(s) at ease by explaining what we might talk about and the purpose of the interview. This almost invariably left me feeling unsure about what I was actually after and a subsequent anxiety that I had disclosed this. I usually emerged from this to do some dialogic running repairs to get the interview underway again. But interviewing one on one is less problematic than working with more than one person. The tape recording only captures the words and the silences

In this way each interview with parents was quite different from the others. There were common experiences within their lives that connected with schooling and children and although the same interview format was followed for each, the remembrances of the life texts were starkly separate.

Eileen's practical support for David in his reading reflected her commitment to learning and education. Support from her parents was always on hand especially when Tom, her partner was posted abroad.

Ursula and Bob worked as a partnership to steer Harry in the right direction in his learning. Themes from these interviews are developed in chapter seven after the accounts of conversations with grandparents in the following chapter *'All Our Yesterdays.'*

Chapter 6

All Our Yesterdays

Amy, Fiona's Maternal Grandmother

Amy came along after school one sunny day in June. The classroom had emptied quickly; some of the children would be heading off to the beach with their parents or carers. The classroom was peaceful and still, already it seemed to me that these meetings with the grandparents of the three children would be different from the previous ones with parents. The meeting had been arranged through Amy's daughter Christine. It was the end of the week and I felt tired after the school day but I knew that Amy had taken time and trouble in coming to talk to me and so I let go the cares of the day and focused on my visitor.

In my workwear I found myself face-to-face with a person whose appearance was elegant and stylish and I realised that this was something of a social occasion for one of us and I felt less than prepared. I suddenly felt respectful of age and humbled that this person who knew far more about life than I, had taken time to meet me. I started the discussion by explaining that the purpose of the meeting was to find out how grandparents become involved in their grandchildren's early reading. In talking to someone older I felt inexperienced in life. I realised that ageing can bring authority along with it and I was positioned as representing youthful respect. As the interview proceeded I realised that I was being told much more than I expected. But I am not leading this, I am being told a life story during an interview that started with a tentative enquiry on my part about Amy's grandchild Fiona learning to read.

Amy's Childhood

Amy takes the narrative through the early stages of her childhood when both she and Violet, her mother nearly died during her birth. She was a premature baby in the 1930s, born weighing four pounds eleven ounces; she had a tenacious hold on life from an early age. The story is one of an only child and her mother, a life rich in companionship but also some unhappiness for an absent father, Dick. He was in the merchant navy and was sometimes away for up to three and a half years at a time. Violet would send a photograph of their only child to Dick each year so that he would have a memory of Amy growing up. It could have been that the periods of long separation created an emotional distance between Dick on the one hand, and Amy and Violet on the other. But this does not seem to be the case, Amy talks about her father with affection and there is no mention of tension or conflict between her two parents.

Violet had wanted more children but because her first confinement was such a life-threatening experience for both herself and her child, Violet had accepted medical advice given at the time against further pregnancies. This all happened in the early years of the twentieth century. Amy like Fiona her granddaughter was a single child. Amy described the special bond that existed between herself and her mother and later and as Amy grew up they were 'like pals'. Amy supported her mother throughout the times they were alone; she helped with the domestic chores without being asked and as a special treat they would go together to the Coliseum, the local cinema once a week. They were very close, by force of circumstance they had to rely upon each other for practical and emotional support. When Dick returned after being away at sea for months or even years, it must have been a time of joy and celebration but also a period of adjustment for them all. Amy lived as an only child and might have longed occasionally for a brother or sister. But this is speculation; the impression is that this small family group retained affection for one another despite separation. There is no mention of financial hardship and Amy's later comments about working mothers are said by someone whose own mother did not have to supplement the family income by working outside of the home. There is no

mention either of her mother's social contact with neighbours or local activities. This is a child's story of family life told through her recollections some sixty years later. Amy's own experience of reading was wrapped in the security and comfort that she experienced living with her mother. The tradition of the bedtime story is mentioned in particular. Glimpses of childhood experiences of reading are all that are evoked in the interviews with grandparents. Recollections are of adjacent occurrences that then bring to mind family routines in which literacy was implicit.

Growing Up

Amy spoke of one occasion in particular when Dick, her father arrived home from a long trip at sea and he was sitting at the kitchen table one evening when she returned from Girl Guides. She would have been about eleven years old, she remembers flinging her arms around him and saying, "Daddy, Daddy." This was a poignant moment in the interview, Amy remembering herself as young girl, seeing her father after years of separation. I wondered afterwards how her father must have felt at that moment? He had only known her through a series of photographs from her babyhood until that evening when he saw her as a girl on the brink of young womanhood. Amy remembered how attractive he seemed, sun-tanned from his stay in China, she spoke with a voice full of pride and admiration. To travel abroad was still a rare opportunity for most people in the 1930s. The times of loneliness for Amy and Violet would fade as they listened to Dick's stories of distant lands. They could bathe in the reflected glory of having someone in the family who had travelled the globe and had returned home. Amy's is an account of traditional story telling complete with adventures, a classic oral literacy tradition within Fiona'a family.

Dick used to play with her and because she was so frail he would try and strengthen her muscles by encouraging her to pull herself up whilst holding on to his fingers. She spoke affectionately, it was a childhood lived with an absent father and cherished moments. Violet played a major part in her learning that was different from the story telling at her father's knee. Violet would spend each night reading

with her. They slept in the same room and when Amy had gone to sleep, Violet would read long into the night since 'She did not sleep very well so she would read.' Reading was a shared experience when mother and daughter comforted each other at the end of each day. Their daily lives were so different but they were brought close together each evening. Reading offers escape from reality's constant demands. It can furnish a daily retreat and close the door on loneliness. In this narrative the meaning of literacy traditions is more than just the practice of letter sounds and the reading of words. For Violet it provided a window through which she glimpsed the small, secure world of Amy's childhood. For Amy, as for many children throughout generations, a bedtime story can be a treasured time, a ritual journey into fantasy and adventure. It was an escape for them both, a journey into make-believe.

Later when Amy had children of her own, Christine and Maggie, she did not go out to work. So she had time to devote to them in the way that she wanted. Both Christine and her sister Maggie could read before they went to school, Amy described them as 'both good readers.' She recounted how she would sit them either side of herself and read a story to them and how they would look at the pictures and she would explain them. Amy talked about her children learning to read as though there was no doubt in her mind that they would do so. This echoes sentiments expressed by Joe and Mabel, Fiona's paternal grandparents speaking about their sons, and Christine and Keith talking about Fiona. Amy believed that part of children's preparation for schooling was a familiarity with books and that this was the responsibility of parents. This belief was also expressed during the interview with Christine and Keith when they gave their account of helping Fiona to become interested in reading. It was not seen as an issue, a challenge or an additional task. It was described in much the same way as other milestones in child development like learning to walk. Parents offer encouragement and guidance and it just happens. During Amy's childhood schooling was quite a separate life experience from that of home and reading was for some a family affair taken on by older siblings who brought the younger ones on. To have sufficient reading skills was to be employable; it was too important a task to be left solely to schooling.

Changing Times and Family Support

In talking about Christine and Maggie, her own daughters Amy acknowledged that changing times necessarily impact on family routines. Although Amy did not go to work when her children were young, Christine her younger daughter had to go out to work when her own child Fiona was a baby, to provide additional income for the family. Amy acknowledged the conflict for parents as she reflected that children need their mothers but 'you have to move with the times.' She supported the young family by caring for Fiona some of the time when Christine was at work. As Fiona grew older she would read to her 'I had some rag reading books...cloth reading books...and I used to point out the animals to her.' This literacy tradition is unchanged in their family; the adults used a variety of children's books, whatever came to hand. When Amy was a child there were fewer books for children and less variety, children's education was not the marketable product it is now. The richness in the tales of faraway places that Dick brought back home had provided the oral tradition in style.

Joe and Mabel, Fiona's Paternal Grandparents

Joe and Mabel arrived early, about half an hour before the end of the day at Crossfields Primary School, one Friday afternoon. Theirs was the second interview with grandparents. The school was bustling to a close and there were children's voices throughout the building. I was on hand to welcome them as they arrived. I had expected two elderly perhaps frail looking people. I was surprised to find that a third visitor had come along too. Joe and Mabel had brought along their eighteen month old granddaughter Kirsty whilst their son and daughter-in-law were shopping. No one in the group looked old and certainly not frail. Their early arrival meant that there was no empty classroom. I realised that I needed somewhere immediately that would be quiet where we wouldn't be interrupted. The school's Resource Room was available for our purpose. This was a small room dominated by the school photocopier and used for storage. It doubled as the First Aid Room. At the time of the interview it had a child's canvas bed alongside one wall. I managed to fit three adult-size chairs in the room and we all manoeuvred ourselves so that our knees didn't actually touch, but this was not wholly successful. It was cosy. However, these cramped conditions provided a safe and quiet haven for our time together where we could talk uninterrupted about their family's literacy.

Talking about The Past

Mabel began to talk and Joe gave 'add-ins' sometimes factual and sometimes to create a fuller picture for me. They are courteous and I try and take everything in as Mabel begins to talk without any pre-amble about her childhood. I am unprepared for this attentive monologue so much to the point of my enquiries and so willingly given. I spend my working life persuading sometimes cajoling people children, to talk, to give, to communicate with me in a way that I have structured that tells me what I want and need to know. The chaos and inconsistency of communicating with children is in sharp contrast to the dialogue that I am about to engage in. Mabel's talk is part of her whole ensemble, a leisured luxury borne of hard-work and accrued

wisdom. She talks in a comforting but controlled manner, as a woman who has achieved much both inside and outside her home. She enjoys status within her family through the success that comes from bringing up her three sons and indirectly through their successes. Her voice is one used for other purposes outside the domestic setting, there is an authority behind it that comes with life experiences outside the home. It is a careful, caring, voice one that would be able to exert a loving discipline, a comforting orderliness. I feel that her life achievements are not confined to the home setting but have a resonance from elsewhere. I am talking to a woman who arrests my attention; I am unaware of Joe's presence.

The Family Moves to the Island

Early on in the interview Mabel tells how they all moved from their hometown of Braystock in the Midlands to the island. Their youngest son Niall, was in poor health, they followed medical advice when they realised that he would benefit from the sea air. There had been an offer of a boarding place in a special school on the island and this would meet his educational needs. Niall had not attended school very much at all before the age of seven. Rather than endure the long separation from their son, Mabel and Joe sold their business in Braystock and moved the family down south. This was a major event in their family's life. They had a successful business in which they had both worked over the years to build it up. For Keith this move had been a significant event. Whilst his younger brother Niall thrived and flourished in his new school, Keith 'collapsed' as both Joe and Mabel described. From being a successful student in a prestigious grammar school in Braystock he came to one of the island high schools which in Joe's and Mabel's opinions was about 'a year behind' mainland schools and Keith's interest in his schooling dropped.

This event was an epiphany in their lives. Keith, in his parents' eyes threw away his life-chance of a prestigious career. For Niall it was his chance for a new life that included a good education. Life on the island was generally so much better for

everyone, but this conflicted with the family work ethic and expectations for the children. Joe and Mabel were a self-made business partnership and all their sons were able children who in their words 'were fine from the word go', a phrase that Keith had also used to describe Fiona's grasp of reading. In educational terms, they all showed promise of successful careers. The notion that they would not work for that goal according to Joe and Mabel, did not occur to anyone until they came to the island. It was almost as though the island was to blame for Keith's failure to achieve because it offered a hedonistic life-style that was more attractive to a young person. Sun, sea and beaches, presented a whole new relaxed life-text compared to Braystock, there was no contest. The health and well being of Niall, the youngest son had been placed at the forefront of family concerns. This had meaning for other family members the needs of the one temporarily outweighed the needs of anyone else including the other children. Keith was then a boy of thirteen, successful at school, plenty of friends, helping father and mother in the shop with all the responsibility that entails. He was suddenly uprooted from the status that he had enjoyed, no longer working in the family business and transferred to a less academic school.

Gender Stereotype

During the interview Mabel, said, 'boys are lazier than girls.' I have heard this many times from some parents and teachers alike. This is a sentiment re-iterated over the decades, I feel uncomfortable, I don't wish to be rude but I'm not subscribing to this. I steer the grandparental view to looking at boys from a perspective that sees them as having interests that lay outside those on offer, not lazy but different. Then the next barrage takes me unaware, 'because girls, well girls know that they are a bit behind boys, so they know that they have to work that much harder, they are more conscientious really.' Mabel reflects on the positioning of girls and boys in the classroom and that of women and men in the workplace. She concludes that if a girl or a woman wants what she perceives to be that privileged status held by males, then extra work is necessary. Mabel believes that in school girls generally are willing to

put in the extra work to be conscientious. My role here is to listen and say little; a debate is not what I am wanting. I want to say that girls are not behind boys in attainment or ability but perhaps the view of males is that their achievements are without effort. Males are adept at masking a commitment to the work ethic. An image of Keith flickers across my mind. The notion that girls have to work harder to attain what boys have implies that boys do not work, or do not work very hard. This is a political minefield I felt that I had negotiated reasonably well in the interview, but it was not to be a contest.

Wisdom and Authority

This generation voice of the grandparents speaks also as parents. Suddenly, everyone else in the project is a child and the power, the status, the wisdom that comes with the ageing process is there. They speak about their lives, about how children are supported by their families in their efforts to learn to read. In doing so the spotlight falls on the older citizens, their status is realised. The strength and fortitude of the senior members of this family comes through and the present day parents busy with raising their own children are positioned within the text once again as children. There is little doubt that literacy traditions in this family are strong and ongoing.

Mabel talked about the visits that she and Joe have from all their grandchildren and how they always set aside some time to do 'work' and by this she meant reading and some writing. 'We don't just sit and watch television all the time, and our sons always send them with a book or something that they've been doing and we do it together.' Joe admitted that he 'never got involved in that side of things' when his sons were younger and from that I took it that he didn't do much now with his grandchildren. But that isn't to say that he doesn't spend time with them in other ways. In many respects Joe and Mabel expressed the stereotypical attitudes that frame gender roles. These two grandparents in their seventies did not seem old; they

were interesting people and interested people. They came to the project enthusiastic full of resilience and energy that radiated from them, particularly Mabel.

Margaret and Ernie, Harry's Maternal Grandparents

The bungalow where Margaret and Ernie lived was in a quiet residential road on the outskirts of one of the island towns, Stourcross. The island towns are small. The average population is five thousand so living on the outskirts of a town is not so very different from inside it except that you can probably see the countryside or the sea on the outskirts. Margaret and Ernie were both at home when I called and we sat in the lounge and chatted for about three-quarters of an hour or more. We had tea in the quiet, uncluttered house that was their home. The only clues to children in the family were the family photographs on the mantelpiece. There was neatness in the room, everything in its place and a place for everything. In the quietness there was a sense of the slow passage of time. This was not a home that would grace designer magazine pages; the furnishings told a story of well-earned retirement and a respect for treasured possessions. Ernie found his school-leaving certificate showing his achievements in different subjects at secondary school. It was a beautiful document, the plush embossed paper carefully worded, and its status had increased with age. Gold and red framed the text; I was humbled at how generous people are. I had not solicited this nor even spoken to Margaret and Ernie before. All our communication had taken place through Ursula their daughter. To be shown this treasured document some forty-odd years old, to watch as it was removed from the protective cover that held it and to hold it was to feel the sentiment that its owner had for it. It seemed that what I held for a few moments was the evidence of respect and authority that was vested in teachers, in schooling, in discipline many decades earlier. It took me back to my own secondary schooling, of traditions and rules, respect and authority. This document was of a time before home/school agreements, before sixth forms competed with further education colleges for students to fill their courses. It spoke of tradition, respect for the organisation that depended upon hierarchy and an accepted order of things. It was an artefact of contemporary history; this was a family that viewed education as important, valuable and worth pursuing. It spoke of

island community life, families that expect their children to learn at school and to find employment in the locality.

Attitudes and Age

In this interview Ernie mainly spoke to me. He focused at first on schooling rather than family life. He said that boys needed discipline, the unspoken part of this was that girls did not, or they needed less. Their two children Ursula and her brother Ian were 'as different as chalk and cheese.' Ursula was remembered as someone who would sit and read with her parents but Ian was different, he preferred to be out playing football. It was impossible to know if Ernie's comments about boys were his observations gained through the experience of raising a son and daughter or whether his set of attitudes pre-disposed his children to behave in the stereotypical gendered ways that define the learning behaviours of boys and girls. Ursula had described herself as an 'avid reader.' It was easy to imagine her doing so as Ernie asked her. It was also easy to picture her brother Ian, refusing to do the same. Ernie himself went to two schools when he was a child and like Margaret he could read by the time he entered formal schooling. They received support from their parents and Ernie could recall details of this. He could remember sitting and reading to his mother. She was at home when he was a child and Ernie felt that this was very important for children to know that someone would be there when they came home from school. He implied that children get into mischief if they are not supervised and I found myself wondering how much this spoke to his own experience.

It was difficult to develop the discussion towards family literacy as Ernie brought it back to schooling and the contrasting behaviour of his two children Ursula and Ian. Nevertheless, it had been instructive and had given some further insights into how children in some instances act as directors of their learning.

Ted and Deirdre, David's Maternal Grandparents

This was the final interview with grandparents; it presented a view of family literacy that was different again from earlier interviews with grandparents. Deirdre, Eileen's mother was physically small, she had seated herself slightly behind Ted. I found myself concentrating very hard to discern the words within Ted's broad accent which wasn't local and so was slightly unexpected. David had spent a lot of time with his grandparents as they took care of him when Eileen was working and Tom was posted abroad. I also knew that both grandparents are generous with their time. Ted opens the interview by telling me that his elder daughter Lorraine was not as bright as Eileen the younger one was was. Lorraine was 'more domesticated'. It was Lorraine who was an unmarried mother at eighteen and her shame resonates even now in the talk about her, she is powerful in her absence. I see in their recollections a variety of emotions, though I don't connect with it.

Ted was a prison officer, a member of a close community, working shifts. Deirdre and Eileen's great uncle Donald were at home. An absent father and a less than vocal mother, it was Donald who encouraged the girls in their learning of literacy. I listen to Ted's tone of voice, it is like shoes scrunching on gravel, it is not a bidding one, not one perhaps that would induce children to come and sit and share their reading books. There is no tone to Deirdre's voice, there is no voice. She says very little, although I try many times to include her in the discussion.

Other Members of the Household

Ted was critical of modern education, for example the arrangements for the storage of books and the desks and the school curriculum. Perhaps this is by way of a disguised criticism of me, the teacher. Both Deirdre and Ted are clear about not having read to their daughters unless the children came and asked them to read. I nod and say nothing, I try and imagine each in turn engaged in cosy bedtime reading with their children, and I fail. They continue by saying that there wasn't enough money for many books in the home. But I recalled Eileen saying how she has kept

her reading books from childhood and read them with David. Perhaps they were gifts or Great Uncle Donald bought books. Ted described Eileen as someone who would read by herself, she was more independent than Lorraine. I recall that Eileen mentioned her great uncle who helped her, but it was her father that she wanted to please. Ted continued talking about Eileen how she was successful in Maths and the Sciences, and that she had ambition. Lorraine is dismissed during this account perhaps because her 'brightness' did not fit this pattern; her talents were elsewhere and they were less important. She studied catering at the local college whilst Eileen became a nurse.

Reading and writing for this family appear not as ends in themselves, not intrinsically enjoyable, but as stages through which to pass on the way to somewhere else.

Conclusions

In conducting these interviews I began as a teacher struggling to find the researcher within. When I had finished I had a better understanding of what that means and why I wanted to do the research. In some sense to listen to people during interviews is to absorb their unspoken messages, to feel their passion. By posing the question the researcher initiates the recollection of those moments in time, the dialogue is tempered, but the flow is strong. In talking to grandparents I felt that I was being transported back in time, I pictured Braystock and Joe and Mabel's house with its views across twelve miles of countryside. I could see them both on their business premises. I imagined Ernie in the little village school with the stove in the middle of the schoolroom, as he sat amongst the other village children. I picture Ted, as a young father working in a prison, a harsh environment but well-paid and steady work. Shift work can make for a solitary life within family routine. These grandparents provided in different ways the literacy upon which their children thrived. The pattern is not a simple one with regard to gender, in two of the three families it is apparent that fathers or father figures were the guiding lights in

children's learning of literacy skills. There is a strong sense of expectation relating to boys' and girls' work habits; this is lodged with grandparents rather than parents. The presence of friends or people outside of the immediate family group broadens the picture of literacy traditions. A more detailed analysis of the literacy events and practices that were embedded in these family relationships is contained in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Themes and Memories

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.

Anias Nin (1903-1977)

This chapter analyses the data from two sources, the interviews with the families and the questionnaires given to parents (see Appendix vi) and grandparents (see Appendix vii). The research explored three questions using a biographical method. Firstly, to what extent did each of the three families support children in their learning of literacy? The second question was derived from the first and asked whether childhood recollections of literacy support predisposes parents and grandparents to do likewise in respect of their own children and grandchildren? Finally, do the activities that describe literacy learning constitute a family tradition inasmuch as they were childhood remembrances in three generations of the families? The findings from the questionnaires are presented on the following pages using diagrams and tables. These show the structure of the three family groups and the different members within each family who engaged in reading and literacy related activities. The questionnaires given to parents and grandparents focused on remembrances of childhood and parenthood. For the grandparents in the study a section of the questionnaire focused on experiences of grandparenthood.

An initial analysis of the interview data revealed that specific information relating to the frequency of literacy related activities and participation of particular family members was absent, or implied but unclear. The questionnaires clarified points of information and in this way it enabled

parents and grandparents to recall perhaps at leisure, childhood memories of reading.

Within this chapter the analysis of the interviews conducted with the children, parents and grandparents follows the analysis of data from the questionnaires. The chapter is summarised by drawing together the findings from the two methods of data collection.

The qualitative research paradigm describes the wholeness of the literacy learning experiences as recalled by individuals within each family. Moustakas (1994) states that descriptive first-hand accounts from participants serve to further the search for meaning and capture the essence of investigation. In this regard the findings from the questionnaires refer to the frequency of literacy routines but focus mainly on individuals within the immediate family group who engaged with the participants when they were children in literacy related activities. Suggestions are made as to why some family members did support the children in their learning of literacy whilst others did not. Other family members are mentioned as significant figures but were not included in the study. It emerged that 'significant others' played key roles in the childhood learning of some of the participants, for example Fiona's godmother and Eileen's great uncle Donald. The meaning of literacy for each family and for some of the individual members within the families emerges from the data, as does the significance of family support in the remembrance of childhood.

Establishing the validity of qualitative research findings is problematic. Denscombe (1998) states that the validity of research relies upon a number of factors of which one is the improvement upon existing theories through new generalisations. Existing theories that surround children and their learning of literacy describe the privileging of children from 'school oriented' families (Heath, 1986) through a parental pro-active awareness of social significance of printed text. Furthermore, the diversification of roles and family routines within middle class homes provides a complex

representation of the world that is internalised by children (Bernstein, 1975). The present study focusing as it does on three generations within three families describes the literacy practices and routines that were embedded in their lives during childhood. In this way the research extends the view of family literacy back through time from a starting point that is the successful attainments of three children in contemporary school based literacy. The regular, frequent and supportive behaviours in respect of Fiona's, David's and Harry's learning of literacy are features of the literacy routines within their families.

Denscombe (1998) further develops the analysis of the validity of the research by considering the importance of recognition of the complexity of the issues when interpreting the data. It had been hoped that clear statements within the recollections of childhood would describe patterns of literacy learning. This was the case when interviewing children; it was less clear when interviewing parents and grandparents. Memories of literacy learning were embedded in narrative that described other significant experiences. This was one aspect of the complexity of the data. Another issue was the initially scant recall of childhood literacy experiences especially amongst the grandparents. However, the questionnaires following on as they did after the interviews drew further recollections from grandparents and parents of childhood experiences of literacy learning.

The following pages list the literacy related activities together with figures and tables that show the family members who participated in these.

The findings from the questionnaire are identified under the following headings:

Reading Bedtime Stories to Children (Figs. i, ii and iii)

Relatives Who Listened to Children Read (Tables 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3)

Relatives Who Helped Children to Learn to Read (Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3)

Other Literacies (Table 3)

Books as Gifts

Books at Home

Shared Reading of Newspapers, Magazines and Comics (Table 4)

Reading Bedtime Stories to Children

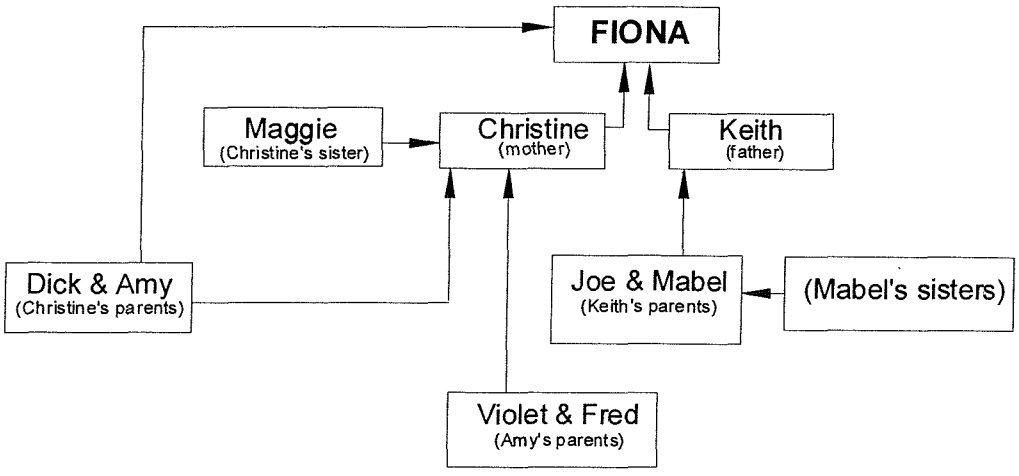
The bedtime story is a distinct feature of family literacy practices and is a routine in the lives of many families with young children (Heath, 1994). Parents and grandparents were asked a series of questions relating to the reading of bedtime stories to them as children, by them as adults to their own children and in the case of grandparents to their grandchildren (see Appendices vi and vii). Figures i, ii and iii show that adults who have been read stories as children in turn read to their own children. In Figure i, Amy's mother Violet appears not to have read to her daughter. However, during interview Amy's narrative of her childhood included reference to the routine of bedtime stories shared with her mother. This identifies apparent disagreement within the data. The differing circumstances of an interview and the completion of a questionnaire provide a possible explanation for this. The two methods of collecting the data served to complement each other rather than contradict.

Figure i

Adults Who Read Bedtime Stories to Children in

Fiona's Family

(Lines are drawn from adult readers to people as child listeners.)

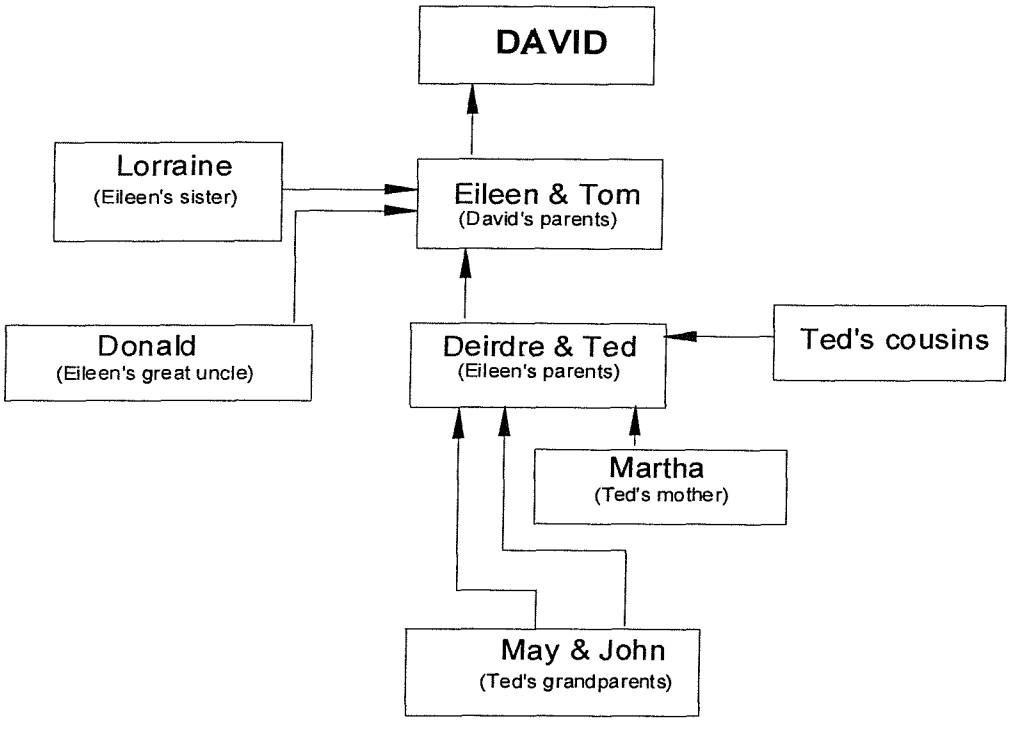


Christine, Fiona's mother stated that Violet, her grandmother had read to her as a child. However it was implied during the interview with Amy that bedtime story reading was a main feature of her own literacy learning as a child. It is likely that Fiona was read to not only by her parents and on occasion Amy, but also by Mabel. During the interview with Mabel she had implied as much but did not state this in her answers to the questionnaire (Appendix vi). The parents of Fiona, David and Harry read bedtime stories to their children. Tom, David's father is not included, he did not take part in the research. As a serving soldier he was posted away from home during the period the research was conducted.

Figure ii

Adults Who Read Bedtime Stories to Children in **David's Family**

(Lines are drawn from adult readers to people as child listeners.)



A variety of relatives read to Ted, David's grandfather when he was a child. He lived with his grandparents and his cousins during this time. His mother died when he was six years old. Eileen, Ted's daughter confirmed in her answers to the questionnaire (Appendix vi) her statements made earlier during interview, namely that her great uncle was a significant person for her during childhood. He had encouraged her to learn to read. During interview Eileen stated that her father would sit her on his knee to read but it was great uncle Donald, her mother's uncle who read bedtime stories to Eileen. There

is a broad base of family support from Ted's side of the family. The inclusion of grandparents in the research served to trace the traditions of literacy beyond parents and children that has been documented in previous research (Taylor, 1983 and Heath, 1994).

Figure iii

Adults Who Read Bedtime Stories to Children in **Harry's Family**

(Lines are drawn from adult readers to people as child listeners.)

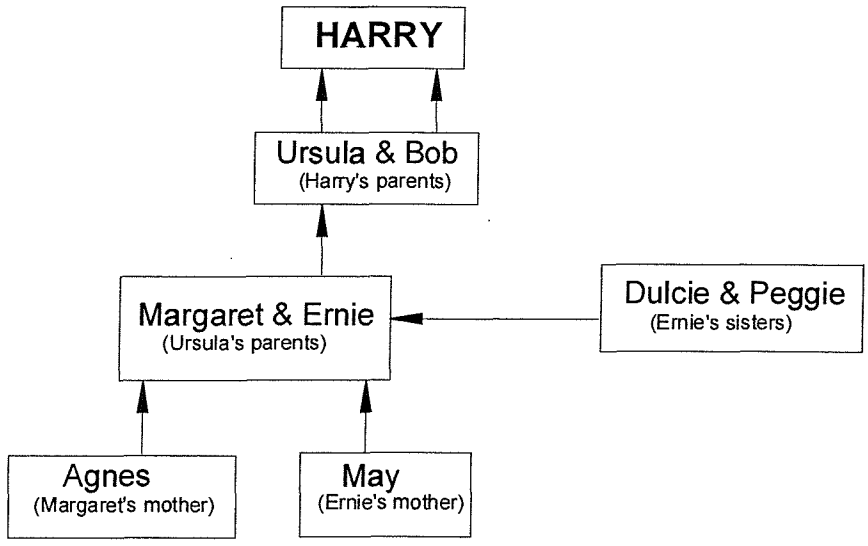


Figure iii shows that Ernie had bedtime stories read to him by his mother and his two sisters. As a father he was the significant figure in Ursula's early literacy learning. This in itself is a digression from the traditional pattern in which mothers play a central role in their children's reading (Mace, 1998).

Relatives Who Listened to Children Read

Listening to children read aloud is necessary for monitoring progress and is used with younger children in schools. But in the home setting it serves other purposes, it may indicate interest on the part of adults that goes further than 'checking' and serves as a shared experience. Young children enjoy reading aloud; it is an opportunity to show their skills. The significance of reading aloud changes, as children grow older, they may interpret the experience differently in a negative way. None of the children in the study read aloud to adults any longer but all recalled doing so when they were younger. Table 1.1 shows who listened to whom and the frequency with which this occurred.

Table 1.1

Relatives Who Listened to Children Read In **Fiona's Family**

Listener	Reader	Frequency
Christine	Fiona	Every day
Keith	Fiona	Every day
Mabel	Keith	Once a week
Amy	Christine	Every day

Table 1.1 illustrates the dominant roles of mothers in hearing children read in Fiona's family. Keith, Fiona's father shared this task with Christine, Fiona's mother. Bernstein's work (1975) on codes and modalities analyses the constraints on communication imposed by roles and the interpretation of 'work' within families. Christine and Keith share their parenting roles, both work outside the home and Keith helped in classrooms on a weekly basis for many years. This is uncommon in primary schools and is an indication of their flexible and supportive parenting roles that transcended gender

stereotypes. Fiona's language development as a young child was above average when she entered school. In this way Fiona is aligned with those children in Bernstein's study who were capable of conceptualising tasks beyond their home experiences through the diversity of experiences.

Within Table 1.1 'Once a week' approximates frequency and broadly equates with 'regularly'. The questionnaires (see Appendices vi and vii) also refer to 'once a month' and this was used to suggest 'occasionally' or even 'infrequently'. It is interesting that this last category was not used by any of the participants. It appears that it was not difficult for parents to remember these occurrences even after a number of years had elapsed. But during interviews parents and grandparents seemed less confident about their recollections of themselves as children. This raises the issue of authenticity. My interpretation of the interviews was based partly on memory of the interaction including hesitations. Answers to the questionnaires were definitive.

The questionnaires (Appendices vi and vii) which followed from the interviews clarified these points. In contrast, some people had quite clear memories of their childhood reading experiences during the interviews.

Table 1.2

Relatives Who Listened to Children Read in **David's Family**

Listener	Reader	Frequency
Eileen	David	Every day
Ted	Eileen	Every day

Some participants were not included in the verbal or written responses and this implies that these people did not hear children at all. An example of this was in David's family where Deirdre is not named as an adult who heard Eileen or David read.

Table 1.3

Relatives Who Listened to Children Read in **Harry's Family**

Listener	Reader	Frequency
Ursula	Harry	Every day
Bob	Harry	Once a week
Ernie	Ursula	Once a week

It can be seen from Tables 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 that the incidence of hearing children read in the three families was a daily occurrence in most instances. It fell mainly to parents to hear children read aloud. The geographical proximity of grandparents was close enough to allow frequent visiting but this did not occur on a daily basis. All of the children in the study were heard to read aloud by a parent every day when they were younger. The pattern is less clear from the reports of parents on their experiences as children.

Eileen, David's mother and Ursula, Harry's mother recalled that it was their fathers who listened to them read aloud as children. Whilst Keith, Fiona's father did not recall anyone hearing him read aloud, and neither did Bob, Harry's father. This may indicate gender difference in early reading experiences insofar as boys are less inclined to read, aloud or otherwise, they read less frequently and read fewer books than girls (Millard, 1998). If reading has a different meaning for boys this may also be the case for men

and their recall of literacy related activities in their childhood years might reflect this.

The participation of Ernie and Ted in their respective daughters' early reading progress differs from the traditional view of family literacy practices in which mothers and not fathers play the central role. It may be significant that both sons of these mothers are successful in their own learning of literacy skills and in this they too differ from the predominant pattern that currently describes boys' literacy attainments. It would seem that the investment of time in childhood literacy learning can support success from one generation to another in families and may differ at a micro level from family traditions at a macro level. Heath (1994) describes the bedtime story as a natural way for parents to interact with their children. This was part of the literacy traditions within the three families.

Relatives Who Helped Children to Learn to Read

Table 2.1

Relatives who Helped Children to Read in **Fiona's Family.**

Relatives who Helped	Christine as a child	Keith as a child	Mabel as a child	Joe as a child
Mother	Yes	Yes		Yes
Father	Yes	Yes		Yes
Sister(s)	Yes, 1	NA	Yes, 2	
Brother(s)	NA		NA	

(NA: Not applicable, e.g. Keith did not have any sisters)

Table 2.1 illustrates the recollections of parents and grandparents in respect of named relatives who helped them to read. The empty cells in the tables contribute to the whole picture, examples of this are Keith's brothers and Joe's brothers, none of whom were mentioned as helpers or as being helped within the family in the reading process. Conversely, Christine and Mabel both mention their sisters as sibling helpers. Millard (1997) describes the subtle differences between boys' attitudes and those of girls towards learning to read because boys were neither as enthusiastic nor did they recall much about early experiences of learning to read. Reading is an activity shared more frequently amongst the female siblings than males.

Table 2.2

Relatives Who Helped Children to Read in **David's Family**

Relatives Who Helped	Eileen as a child	Ted as a Child
Mother	Yes	Yes
Father	Yes	NA
Sister(s)		NA
Grandmother		Yes, (maternal)
Grandfather		Yes, (maternal)
Uncle(s)	Yes, 1	
Cousin(s)		Yes

Table 2.2 contains a longer list of relatives. This reflects different family groupings particularly in David's family when Ted, his grandfather was a

child. Adults remembered as children being helped to read in ways other than being listened to when reading aloud. For instance Eileen, David's mother recalled, "I remember my mother sitting with me." The network of family support for Ted as a child is evident, as previously shown in Figure ii. Ted was an only child who lived with his grandparents, surrounded by a large family group; this is reflected in Table 2.2. Deirdre is not included in this table as in Table 1.2 because, as stated earlier, the tables illustrate information derived from the questionnaires, though not all of these were returned. In this connection Eileen, Deirdre's daughter stated during interview that her mother was 'not interested in books or reading', and this may have referred to printed matter generally including the completion of questionnaires.

Table 2.3

Relatives Who Helped Children to Read in **Harry's Family**

Relatives Who Helped	Ursula as a child	Bob as a child	Ernie as a child	Margaret as a child
Mother			Yes	Yes
Father			Yes	

In the above table neither Ursula nor Bob name their respective parents as helping them to read and yet in interview Ursula stated that Ernie, her father listened to her read and read to her. This discrepancy may be explained by the differing contexts in which memory occurs, namely the interview and

the completion of a questionnaire. Alternatively, 'helping children to read' may have been interpreted as something other than listening to or reading to children, more an instructional activity. Street's term (1995) 'literacy practices' describes the abstraction of literacy, its significance within the family. This was so for Ursula, the memory of Ernie, her father helping her 'a lot' was as important as the activity itself, if not more so.

In Table 2.3 Bob is shown as a child with nobody in his family who helped him to read. This was confirmation of the interview during which he focused on his difficulties at school rather than family and reading at home. This absence suggests that family literacy learning was not part of his childhood memories. Bob had described himself during interview as a troublesome pupil who spent a lot of his time in the school corridor because of his behaviour in class. Bob conveyed how successful he had become despite these experiences. In this way Bob's family was not 'school oriented' (Street 1995: 129) and as such was not part of the process of pedagogisation of literacy in ways that closely link school and home. The basis for a literacy tradition in Harry's family is traced from Ursula's side of the family.

Other Literacies

Literacy overarches a range of sub-categories of skills and knowledge. Children learn to read and are encouraged by concerned adults through a variety of literacy-related activities (Heath, 1986). This is not to say that any of the three families engaged in these activities solely to improve their children's understanding of written language; rather they engaged in social pastimes with their children which in themselves were pleasurable and educational activities. Table 3 below illustrates three such activities. Firstly, the use of talking books that are sets of stories and accompanying audiotapes allows the reader to read or follow the text as it is spoken on the tape. Secondly, the use of computer games and these can be solo or multi-player

activities and thirdly, the use of board games such as Snakes and Ladders or Monopoly.

Table 3

Other Literacies in the Three Families

	Fiona	David	Harry
Talking Books	Yes	Yes	Yes
Computer Games	Yes *Mabel*	Yes *Tom, Ted, & Deirdre*	Yes *Ernie & Margaret*
Board Games	Yes *Christine & Keith*	Yes *Eileen & Ted*	Yes *Ursula*

Table 3 shows the three families engaged in these pastimes, but not all of the participants in the study were involved. Joe, Fiona's paternal grandfather and Bob, Harry's fathers are notably absent. Grandparents in the three families have computer skills; they have been included in computer games playing by their grandchildren. Four of the five grandparents in the study stated that they played computer games with their grandchildren, Joe is the exception. The data illustrates the variety and family participation in literacy related activities. Millard (1997) found that boys were more likely to be using computers for example searching the Web, than were girls. In the present study Fiona, David and Harry had access to the home computer and made use of this.

Books as Gifts

Perhaps not surprisingly, all parents and grandparents in the study had bought books as gifts for children and grandchildren respectively. This serves not only as a statement about the status of books in each of the families but is also a reflection of the change in status of children in the latter half of the twentieth century. Children have become the central focus of family life. There is a large commercial interest that exists to clothe, feed and educate children, with products designed specifically to meet their youthful needs. Books for children are part of this, so too are computer games, talking books and a vast array of educational toys. All of the parents are within the social category of middle- class; all the children had a computer at home that was available to them. In this respect their privileged positions were made explicit by the provision of resources that promoted their learning of literacy to an extent that neither their parents nor grandparents had experienced as children.

References to books as gifts were made by Fiona, David and Harry during the interviews. Harry had mentioned Enid Blyton's 'The Famous Five' and how for his birthday he had 'the whole set' for his birthday. Fiona had stated that she had stopped buying books herself because, 'I've still got some from Christmas and birthday.' Amy, Fiona's grandmother, mentioned cloth books and board books when she talked about early reading with Fiona. Eileen, David's mother had said that she had kept some of the books from her childhood and had read them with David. She mentioned Beatrix Potter's 'Peter Rabbit' in particular. In this way the presence of a literacy tradition was made visible within David's family. It implied the status of books as personal possessions even family treasures. Some of my own children's books I kept over the years because they held memories for me that I share with them. Taylor (1983) describes the significance of past experience of the researcher in other roles as a contribution to the research. She describes

herself as a mother, a daughter, and teacher these other selves enable access to a particular discourse that describes the 'flavour' of the family in the research process.

Books at Home

Both grandparents and parents stated that there were books for children in their homes when they were children, all except Joe, Fiona's grandfather who wrote that in his home he remembered only that there was the complete works of Charles Dickens.

There was some discrepancy between the statement that Ted, Eileen's father made during interview and those of Eileen herself. In interview he and Deirdre mentioned that there wasn't sufficient money for books when Eileen was a girl. Yet in interview and in her questionnaire Eileen states that there were books for children in her home when she was a child. This suggests that remembrance may vary according to the circumstances in which it occurs. Questionnaire responses require specific focus whereas the dialogue of interview enables elaborate recall. It is possible that Ted speaking as a grandfather was recalling his feelings as a father when he said that there wasn't sufficient money. It may be that there were books but he did not buy them and that they were of interest to Eileen as a child and to the guiding light in her childhood learning, her great uncle Donald

Books remain part of home life in all three families though Ursula and Bob, Harry's parents said that they would use the computer for information searches rather than go to the local library. This suggests a change in family literacy practices and underlines the increasing significance of computer literacy within the broad spectrum of literacy skills at home and at school.

Shared Reading of Newspapers, Magazines and Comics

Sharing reading materials other than children's books may be interpreted as a leisure time activity for both adult and child. There is less expectation for the child to read purposefully perhaps or as a performance. Taylor (1983) refers to the complexities of social activities in which reading and writing are learnt. Harry had said during interview, 'I used to sit on my dad's lap and read the newspaper.' He had laughed a little at this point and so had I, we both understood the term 'reading' as a game of pretence played out between parents and young children.

Table 4

Adults Within Each of the Three Families Who Shared Reading Materials Other than Books With Fiona, David and Harry.

Fiona's Family	David's Family	Harry's Family
Christine & Fiona		Bob & Harry
Keith & Fiona		Ursula & Harry
Amy & Fiona		Ernie & Harry
Mabel & Fiona		Margaret & Ursula
		Ernie & Ursula

Table 4 shows the differences between the three families in respect of this literacy-related activity. In David's family it played no part in the family literacy traditions within David's family, whereas in the other two families it occurred between grandparents and grandchildren as well as parents and their children. However, in Fiona's family there is no mention of her grandparents when they were parents sharing newspapers, magazines and comics with their then children Christine and Keith. Though in Harry's family this shared reading occurred across all three generations. Within Harry's family there is a flexibility of gender roles in literacy learning from Ursula's side of the family.

Bernstein's theory describes the privileging of middle class children within the school setting through prior experiences that enable organisational understandings and conceptual development. Fiona, David and Harry during their interviews were able to consider different circumstances in their literacy learning and described themselves within these imaginary situations. When asked what it might feel like not to be able to read Fiona had said, 'I would be disappointed. I like to read on my own, I would have to have quite a lot of help.'

Summary of Diagrams and Tables

The diagrams and tables have drawn largely upon material derived from the follow-up questionnaires (see Appendices vi and vii) completed by parents and grandparents after the interviews. The purpose of the questionnaires was to clarify certain points of information and to verify earlier statements. The results revealed the scope of support within each of the families for the present generation of children, their parents when they were children and that of grandparents when they were children also. In Fiona's family, support for Fiona's learning of literacy was shared equally between her two parents. Previous research (Mace, 1998; Millard, 1997) locates family

literacy within the purview of females and in this way the present study suggests a more equitable pattern of family literacy support. In respect of Fiona's parents, Keith's remembrances included support from both Joe and Mabel his parents. Though Joe's note accompanying his completed questionnaire explained why he had been unable to participate to any great degree in his children's home learning, appears to contradict Keith's recollections. Joe's remembrances of his own childhood is of both his parents helping him to learn to read. For Mabel, her sisters were significant figures in her literacy learning. In David's family the support rested with Eileen David's mother. This illustrates the traditional pattern that positions mothers as the key figures in encouraging children in their early literacy learning. Eileen's own childhood remembrances are of the male adults in the family home supporting her own learning. Ted, Eileen's father named an extended family group as a support network for his childhood literacy learning. In Harry's family literacy support came from Ursula's side of the family. Bob, Harry's father took part in Harry's early learning of literacy. The limitations of the questionnaire are highlighted in this instance the interview revealed that Ursula was the key parent in promoting literacy learning but this is not apparent from the responses to the questionnaire (see Appendix vi). Ursula as a child received support mainly from her father. Whilst Bob did not recall having such back up from his parents.

The second question focused on the reasons for supportive behaviour of parents and grandparents towards their children's literacy learning. The remembrance of childhood experiences by adults of literacy learning within their families was addressed during the analysis of data from interviews. The third question addressed the issue of a literacy tradition within some families that is sustained from one generation to the next. The responses to the questionnaires describe an unbroken thread of support for children's literacy learning in all three of the families. There are instances of weaker links but these are strengthened by the participation of other family

members. For example Bob and Ursula's narratives of their own childhood experiences of literacy support offer contrasting images. But the literacy tradition is sustained through Ursula and is supported by Bob. Fiona's family has an established literacy tradition that is based on a clear gender role definition on Keith's side of the family as Mabel, his mother was almost solely responsible for her son's introduction to reading. The case for Christine, Fiona's mother is similar in that her mother Amy took the major part in Christine's early learning of literacy. The literacy tradition in David's family was sustained by Eileen's side of the family. Ted, her father remembered a broad base of support in his own childhood and he provided support for Eileen as did her great uncle Donald.

The findings from the questionnaires were not embedded in narrative but recalled childhood experiences that related to literacy learning shared with adults in the family. They present perspectives that differ in some instances from those gained during interview.

Data from the Interviews

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 contain the descriptions of the interviews with Fiona, David and Harry, their parents and grandparents. These three chapters form the core of the study. Denscombe (1998) refers to two categories of qualitative data firstly, that of meanings and the ways people have understood experiences and secondly, patterns of behaviour. The analysis of literacy-related events and behaviours was made accessible through my previous experiences as a parent, my ongoing professional role as a teacher and as the researcher. I brought to the interviews and to the construction of the questionnaires those remembrances that made accessible areas that might otherwise have remained barred to the enquiry.

Reissman (1993) describes the efficacy of trying to locate oneself as a prerequisite of analysis and by this is meant the identification of those

attitudes that have become internalised and invisible but that prevent the achievement of new perspectives. For Reissman (1993) this re-location meant a distancing of the self from the love of books to facilitate a more objective, technical appraisal of what constitutes a book. The purpose was the accomplishment of writing books. For me this re-location centres on the distancing of myself from the parents in the study and in this I include that part of myself that is a parent. In so doing I was endeavouring to achieve a non-judgemental view of how parents manage effectively to provide support for their children, enlisting others as well as themselves.

On the subject of narrative analysis Reissman (1993) lists four categories which support validation. The first is that of adherence and this relies largely on the rhetoric of the writer. Secondly, correspondence this links the interpretation of lives by the researcher with the interpretations of those researched. Thirdly, coherence and this has three sub-categories, firstly, global and this refers to overall goals of the research, secondly, themal which as the title suggests refers to themes within the interview texts. Finally, the third sub-category is that of local, this describes the purposes of the narrator in attempting to relate events within the narrative to one another. The fourth category for validation is pragmatic use. There is one condition to be fulfilled, that is the degree to which others use the research. In order for this to occur there are a number of preconditions: the research has to be made visible, the successive transformations have to be described, and by this I take this to mean the researcher's own interpretation of the data. Finally, the primary data has to be made available. Reissman (1993) adds the caveat that there is no canonical approach to narrative analysis. These four categories provide a useful check-list for establishing validity.

Grandparents talking about their Lives

Grandparents took time and trouble in their preparation to come to the interviews. I felt deferential towards them in much the same way as I had when as a younger person I had been told to show respect for my elders. Some of the grandparents were more vocal during interview than others. Of the seven who took part there were four grandmothers Mabel and Amy, in Fiona's family, Ted, David's maternal grandfather and Ernie, Harry's maternal grandfather. These more vocal grandparents came to the interviews with their stories ready to be told. They had accepted invitations to tell the stories of how they learned to read and how they supported their children and their children's children in their efforts to learn to read; there was some sense of preparation that had taken place before the telling. Their stories had come into existence through the study; it had provided opportunities to tell yet another story not to a child this time but about children and of being children.

In this way Heilbrun's (1989) phrase describing autobiography as 're-working of the self' seems appropriate. Their previous significant roles in family literacy had furnished them with stories and they were able to position themselves within their own stories because of this past rich in literacy experiences. Other participants namely Deirdre, David's maternal grandmother and Margaret, Harry's maternal grandmother and to some extent Joe had less to tell.

Mabel told the story for herself and Joe, indeed it was only after the questionnaires were analysed that Joe's scant recollections of his own childhood experiences of learning to read became apparent. This raised the question as to whether lack of remembrance signified an absence of events taking place, or whether the narrator in not attributing significance to those events at the time could not then recall them during interview or for the purposes of the questionnaire.

Neither Ted nor Deirdre seemed to have as many evocative memories to share as the other grandparents, but Ted turned to Deirdre for confirmation of his brief statements. For her part Deirdre spoke very little and of all the interviews this was the briefest and seemed to be the least satisfactory. It was only later during the analysis of Eileen's interview, she had said 'I suppose my great uncle Donald was the main person, he helped me a lot,' that the meaning became clearer. The key figure in Eileen's childhood learning was neither of her parents. This revealed an undisclosed assumption upon which the study was based; namely that parent(s) would play the major role in supporting children in their learning to read. This was clearly not the case here. Previous research (Padmore 1994) found that people used the phrase 'guiding light' to describe a key figure in their past who had been instrumental in their literacy learning. Great Uncle Donald fulfilled this role for Eileen.

The experience of interviewing Deirdre and Ted revealed a further hidden assumption within the study. This concerned narrative, namely that all of the grandparents would recall their experiences through story-telling enriched by longevity. This was not so. Neither Margaret, Harry's maternal grandmother nor Joe, Fiona's paternal grandfather engaged in sustained descriptive remembrances. Arguably, both Margaret and Joe had felt comfortable that their partners took the lead during interviews. The case for Ted and Deirdre is less clear. Through talking with Eileen I had learnt about her childhood and her parents' roles within it. These partially constructed perceptions had determined the degree to which I was prepared or able to engage with them during our interview. Fivush (1991) described how children learn personal narratives through social interaction and the form that those narratives take depended on the quality of that interaction. There was a sharp contrast between Eileen's engagement with the purpose of the interview and that of her parents.

Interviewing grandparents presented difficulties on two levels, either because as individuals they drove the dialogue for instance with Joe, Mabel, and Amy, Fiona's grandparents then the structure and purpose of the interview was subordinated. When I lead the interview as in the cases of Ted, Deirdre and Margaret and Ernie, there was no fluent dialogue and the structure did not achieve the purpose. This is not to say that the interview data was worthless rather that by letting go of the structure the narratives came through. In this way there was an ongoing tension between the narrators and me.

Sheridan (1993) raises the issue of truth in the representations of life stories and addresses the question as to how far is it possible to be sure that what is said is the truth and not self-aggrandisement or self-censorship structured through perceived expectations. In short it is not possible to establish absolute truth, but in this regard the tension throughout the dialogue may have served to present accurate accounts. The arrangement of separate interviews with Fiona, David and Harry and their parents and grandparents served to authenticate the family narratives that emerged during interviews.

Whilst gender and literacy was not the central concern in the study issues arose in the course of the interviews that referred to boys' attainments and their work generally. When asked about current concerns about boys' literacy attainments Mabel had said, 'Well, boys are lazy,' and later on, 'Girls are behind in their work compared with boys.' Both Joe and Mabel stated that, 'Boys need to be pushed.' Ernie, Harry's maternal grandfather had said that, 'Boys need discipline,' and 'Girls will come and read when they're asked.'

It was not the purpose of the study to challenge or explore these views but they are nonetheless indicative of constrained expectations for both sexes. Mabel's views were similar to those found by Walkerdine (1987) amongst primary school teachers who described girls as being less clever than boys.

Similarly, Ernie's description of girls' compliance is similar to observations made by Walkerdine (1987). Within the context of the classroom this expectation of compliance is one that teachers hold in respect of girls, but not of boys.

Parents Talking

Parents were the pivotal generation within the families, they were able to look back through memories of childhood, whilst presently experiencing parenthood and imagine their futures as grandparents. Giddens (1991: 244) describes identity as,

> ...the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography.

The identity of the parents was partially ascribed through their dual role in respect of the other two generation groups throughout the study. They were both children and parents, sometimes referred to as daughters or sons and at others as mothers or fathers and yet all the time adults. From the research perspective they began as parents but this description was inadequate towards the end. Each had re-told parts of their childhood narratives sufficiently to provide a view of themselves as children. Eileen's comment during interview encapsulated this passage of time when she said of Ted, her father, 'I wanted him to be proud of me...I hope he is.'

Freidman (1988) discusses how texts of women's autobiographical selves are essentially different than those of men in that they are concerned mainly with self and self-realization, as opposed to whole life texts that have until recently predominated. In this connection the interviews with Christine, Eileen and Ursula each focus on aspects of self or self-realization, notably when Ursula stated, 'When I went to middle school I realised that I didn't know my tables and that other people seemed to know them much better than me.' In contrast Bob used recollections about his own schooling to explain

how it had effected his later career, 'I wish I could express myself well... You need to be able to say what you want to get across in a side of A4...I never really understood what the teacher was on about.'

Children Construct Their Own Learning

Breakwell (1990) describes some of the hazards for the researcher in interviewing children. But my prior established relationship with Fiona, David and Harry was an asset in this for few of these pitfalls applied. For example Breakwell (1990) stated that there is a tendency for children to say 'Yes' and not to contradict or assert themselves. This was not the case with Fiona, David or Harry. The course of the interviews was conversational and flowing as we spoke about a topic in which we had a shared interest. Breakwell (1990) mentions egocentricity as another potential problem when interviewing children, but it could be argued that this was a legitimate stance for the children to take when asked their opinions or to describe their activities. Fiona, David and Harry each centralised themselves and their reading in their narrative accounts during the interviews. Their situatedness within their family relationships became entwined with the literacy practices that took place within their homes. I was able to consider their active roles in determining their engagement with literacy. I realised that I had viewed children as passive recipients of guidance and encouragement on their journey towards becoming literate people. An outcome of interviewing Fiona, David and Harry was that I acknowledged the view of myself as someone who related to children on terms that as far as possible inferred shared understandings, was flawed. I had presumed too much and in this way Lather 's observation (1991) that researchers have to practice empirical endeavours as they preach theoretical formulations, describes the difficulties of re-shaping one's perspective based on the evidence.

Lindzey and Aronson (1986) suggested two ways of minimising bias during interviews. Firstly, to use non-leading techniques and to formulate questions beforehand. The first of these was especially useful when interviewing the children but quite unnecessary when interviewing the some of the grandparents, namely Mabel, Amy and Ernie. In this way one of the hazards of interviewing is shown to be the presumption that one interview will follow much the same course as others. These diverse responses challenged my notions of the cohesiveness of family groups. Life experiences were so diverse when comparing the narratives both between and within generations that the common thread of the research enquiry sometimes threatened to be obscured.

The role of body language was crucial in forming my impressions of family members who described themselves as not being in the mainstream of family literacy activities. My recollection of their statements that described their non-engagement as children or as adults in literacy related activities was far more vivid than the transcripts revealed. I remember for example Bob shaking his head and making as though to speak when I asked him and Ursula whether their own parents had helped them to read. Ursula spoke and gave a detailed answer. Bob had started to speak but made a single sound that could have been, 'No,' and shook his head. But the sound was indistinct and lost as Ursula gave her account of her father promising to read 'Treasure Island' to her. The transcript contains Ursula's words but the clarity of Bob's response is in my remembrance of his gestures and facial expressions. In my interpretation of these non-verbal comments I realised that within the role of researcher I have utilised observational skills gained within my professional teaching role.

Marginalised People

Fiona, David and Harry successful as they were in school literacy had engaged my professional interest in their families for it was they who had been partially responsible for their children's achievements. Lather (1991) summarises this by her description of research as praxis; as the growing awareness of a situation through which dialogue, reflexivity, design, data and theory emerge. Lather's (1991: 20) view that 'women interviewing women is a two way process' provides a suitable starting point for consideration of family members who were marginalised during the research insofar as they did not participate fully during interview and in one case did not return the questionnaire. Margaret, Harry's maternal grandmother and Deirdre, David's maternal grandmother provide instances of this. The issue of reciprocity is an interesting one for I became aware of its presence and absence at different times during the fieldwork. My immediate interpretation was one of dominance in respect of gender roles, but subsequently the dominance in respect of myself as the articulate researcher enquiring into issues that required sensitivity, raised other concerns. Although Deirdre was described by her daughter Eileen as a person who read little and for whom reading did not play a significant role, I was unable to verify this through my own enquiries with Deirdre. Oakley's work (1981) pre-dates Lather's (1991) challenging feminist stance but is nonetheless insightful in construing the potential empowerment of women through research dialogue. Further reflection of my role in the research, my position within the school, my age and generation in relation to that of Deirdre and Margaret identified the danger of the researcher imposing a definition of resistance. Those on the margins constitute 'otherness' within the text of the research. The presumption for all who engaged in the research was the prioritising of literacy learning as a valued experience within and outside of the family. I became aware of the absence of space for the expression of an opposing

viewpoint. The quiet that emanated from the few might have been the physical expression of this opposition.

Conclusion

> Someone said that God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December.
>
> *J. M. Barrie (1922) Rectorial address at St. Andrews University*

Parents and grandparents described how they had 'naturally' read books to the children and encouraged children to read books. Not all of the activities were acknowledged as reading related activities but rather as opportunities for pleasure, and shared family enjoyment. In raising the topic of childhood reading it was evident that the adults in particular were able to recall memories of these experiences through discussion and reflection. The conclusion was one of extended literacy support in all three families. Close relationships between parents and grandparents ensured a continuing input and interest from the older relatives that supported parental routines of literacy learning with their children. The degree of concurrence between the narratives of parents and grandparents with regard to the efficacy of early introduction to the written text suggested that literacy is part of their family tradition. This conclusion is supported by the variety of activities present in each generation's experience and the complementary roles that relatives played in insuring that such experiences took place. The overall impression is one of supported literacy through previous experience. This contrasts with Taylor's findings (1994) that describes parents who were moved to provide the literacy experiences for their own children they felt they had lacked in their own childhood.

There were links between the past and present as parents and grandparents talked about how they as children had been encouraged in their efforts to learn to read. These links were made explicit as a cultural expectation of the

role of parents. Parents support their children in learning of literacy for a number of reasons. The research considered one of these, that which relates to their recollections of being helped to read when they were children. The active and engaged presence of grandparents within the family group provided a set of expectations that related to parental role/duty in the provision of appropriate learning experiences for young children and these included The concluding chapter draws together the issues that have emerged from the research.

Chapter 8

The End of A Story

> A child is considered to be everything an adult is not, an adult everything a child is not. The two categories oppose and exclude each other, and so define each other. Neither makes sense without the other.
>
> *Patricia Holland (1986: 45)*

Introduction

The possibility of using a biographical method arose through a chance occurrence of teaching again a cohort of children whom I had taught two years previously. My remembrance of them as seven years old in 1997 when I had first taught them had caused me to reflect on the passing of time. Erben (1998) states that biography offers the surest indication of a particular era's intellectual climate. The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 was a significant feature of the structural context for the research. The political climate in education throughout the previous decade was one in which standards of attainment had become a cause for concern. The competence of schools to deliver appropriate levels of education had been re-defined as a marketable product providing value for money, or not as the case may be. Government intervention in education had begun with the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 and had continued apace. In the local context my professional role gave me opportunities to observe and engage with families who continued to support their children in the early learning of literacy skills. The unchanging patterns of family lives were set against a political climate of rapid change in education. As a teacher in a primary schooling I had in the

past experienced change in practice and policy and used this to innovate new perspectives in Design and Technology (Jackson, 1995).

My experience as a parent of young children and my professional role developed a dual understanding of literacy within two contexts, home and school. This underpinned the course of the research enquiry. On the purpose of research and the position of the researcher, Lather (1991: ix) states,

> The suspicion of the intellectual who both objectifies and speaks for others inveighs us to develop a kind of self-reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberating intentions.

My intention for the research was not to dominate, but through my remembrances of parenthood to objectify a pedagogic discourse that interpreted literacy learning within families. Home-based literacy supported school literacy. I had remembered Fiona, David and Harry as skilled readers at the age of seven and it was apparent how much they had progressed in the interim period of two years. Primary school teaching is unlike other sectors of education in that a primary teacher works with the same group of pupils for six or more hours each day throughout the school year. The children come to know the idiosyncrasies of their teacher just as she/he acknowledges the different personalities and their needs within the class. Fiona, David and Harry were well known to me and I to them long before I embarked on the research. Their parents within a positive and consistent framework had supported them in their early years learning.

The interviews revealed them as people in their own right and their locations as children within families for whom the acquisition of literacy skills had particular meanings. The path of the research followed the identification of literacy related activities in the lives of the three families. This was achieved through a retrospective view that spanned the first half of the twentieth

century. The perspective was inclusive as the biographical method revealed 'significant others' aside from parents who supported children in their learning of literacy. Moustakas (1994) described the features of qualitative research in terms of a search for meaning and essence by obtaining descriptions through first person accounts. Literacy like other treasured family possessions was handed down.

Constructed Meanings of Literacy within Three Families

Within the terms of Gregory's (1992) analysis of contextual positions that children adopt to identify themselves as readers then Fiona, David and Harry had acclaimed themselves as readers. To be a reader is to have membership of a cultural group that has entrance to further groups. To read is, in the context of the classroom to have achieved what is expected. To attain this earlier than others within the group confers status. My role as a teacher presented opportunities to observe the results of early success in literacy. It is feasible that there were in the three families' expectations of competency if not excellence for all three children. But this was not articulated. It was evident from the interviews that there was an assumption of unproblematic progression throughout literacy learning in the early years. The research identified social behaviours that supported children's learning of literacy despite the changing roles and circumstances that had impacted on family life over fifty years. Different family members assigned different meanings to literacy. For Ursula, Harry's mother, reading was an experience of success and pleasure. She had remembered how her father had shared in her early childhood reading and had spent time with her playing sports and games. Childhood literacy for Ursula signified parental care and attention. In this way she in particular had been attentive to Harry her son and in Harry's own memories his mother had encouraged his reading and participation in sport. The juxtaposition of sport and literacy within Harry's family had in one sense legitimised the latter. Sport is accredited a high status amongst boys whilst within the pervading

cultural context of school there is a tension that relates to boys and literacy. Harry had been able to manoeuvre between these two conflicting pedagogic arenas of sport on the one hand and literacy on the other and achieve success in each. Within Harry's family there was not only a literacy tradition but a sporting tradition also.

It was the mothers of the three children who played the major roles in their learning to read, although Fiona's godmother was a significant helper when Fiona was very young. Christine, Fiona's mother, Eileen, David's mother and Ursula, Harry's mother in turn had been guided and inspired by a parent but of the three only Christine's mother was a leading light. Eileen had construed the meaning of literacy in terms of success in career and ambition. In this way her own life contrasted with her mother's, 'My mum is not remotely academic I have to say.' The childhood parental role models for Eileen and Ursula were their fathers. Eileen had said of her father, 'He was really my main source of encouragement as regards my education.' This in some ways it at variance with later remarks in which she describes her great uncle as having, '...the most time for me.' Ursula said of her father, 'He used to read to me a lot, not so much my mum. Mums have always got to cook the dinner.' The inclusion of literacy is implied in Eileen's earlier reference to education, whilst Ursula's phrase about the dinner seems to echo a parental reason for not being able to sit down and read with a child. When Eileen and Ursula were young children literacy events and practices with their fathers conveyed a level of fun, excitement and adventure.

This enjoyment was apparent in David's account of his memories of learning to read with Eileen, his mother. Whilst Harry aligned himself with reading because it was one of a selection of activities that Ursula, his mother had encouraged and structured with him. It has been mentioned earlier that all three of the mothers were in paid employment when their children were of pre-school age and continued to work when the children started school. The implication from the interviews with Christine, Eileen and Ursula was that

they engaged their children in literacy activities and routines because their remembrances were of family or family friends spending time in similar ways. Their recollections were of encouragement and shared experience and this sociocultural context within which literacy learning takes place is part of family literacy tradition.

Early Investments

The social setting of family literacy during the early years was unproblematic. The parents were aware of the expectations of school. Street (1995) describes those families who are attuned to the pedagogy of schooling. Nevertheless, boys in particular have to contend with an early years education which provides few male role models and a work ethic amongst some boys that is problematic. The literacy traditions in these two families had twice crossed the gender divide in respect of grandfathers rather than grandmothers supporting their daughters and subsequently the daughters as adults and mothers supporting their sons. This flexibility in gender roles is situated at the margins of the dominant cultural stereotypes but I would contend that this has underpinned the success of David and Harry. It is a feature of literacy tradition at a local level that has moved against the cultural mainstream. Literacy activities were so embedded within family life that they were not identifiable as reading practice. The invisibility of reading related activities within everyday occurrences is part of the overall tradition that was preserved from one generation to the next.

The prior investment of reading time with children during the pre-reading phase of learning was an investment built upon later when it was the child who had to read to adults. This reading activity is a reciprocal relationship based on the child's remembrance of similar shared experiences. In this way the 'performance' aspect of reading aloud is mitigated in favour of a view that sees it as an outcome of earlier adult modelling.

Of the three sets of parents, two were confident that they had started to read before formal schooling. Harry's parents were both sure that they could not and qualified this by stating that 'we weren't expected to know anything.' For Bob and Ursula as children the reference point for starting to learn to read was not within the family but as an outcome of starting school.

The research was constructed to focus on the cohesive qualities of family life, togetherness and mutual support that nurtured children's literacy, but those who have been positioned at the margins also serve the purposes of the research. In this case those marginalised are the family members who are described as having maintained a distance between themselves and their children's learning of literacy. This may be construed as an outcome of their own childhood experiences that lacked such investment. In the broader educational context there is a concern for children who have similar experiences insofar as it impacts on their readiness for schooling and their support needs in early years education. This raises issues of family literacy, and re-directs the concept of partnership between home and school. Equality of provision in education implies some account of the variety of cultural backgrounds represented in primary school if the goal is the raising of standards through equitable outcomes.

The Educative Experience and Biography

Josselson (1996) described how one of the respondents in her research came to her subsequently and said how glad she was that Josselson had found her life interesting enough to write about. This sentiment describes for me the response of the grandparents and parents in the study. Joe, Mabel, and Amy had expressed a desire to give any further assistance if required. Taylor (1983) retold some of her own life story to American families in her study, including a description of an England that had long disappeared. In this way biography enables the narrator to re-shape his/her own remembrances and attribute new

meanings to lived experience. The narratives from grandparents raised an issue concerning their remembrances of teachers and education. All had described a regime that included physical punishment of children for misdemeanours and rigorous discipline in school. This led me to consider whether the narratives would have been different had someone other than myself as a teacher conducted the interviews. Their remembrances of teachers were different from those of their children. Bob and Ursula had spoken of their primary schooling as lacking curriculum structure and the neglect of teaching essential skills. Meanwhile Christine, Fiona's mother had described a contrasting account of her primary school insofar as she remembered how her teacher had developed and encouraged her own writing skills to a high standard. The quality of provision in schooling was arguably more varied in the previous generation than it is today. Changes in educational practice revealed in the narratives of these two generations provide a contrast with the pattern of literary experience embedded in family life that remained secure from one generation to the next.

Present Limitations and Future Development

The choice of the three children Fiona, David and Harry for the biographical study was based on the criteria laid out earlier that related to their success in school literacy and the presence of grandparents in their family lives. The children were well motivated in their desires to achieve in primary school. The framework of the research was constructed around their families. Discussion of some of the issues raised by the research was initiated through the presentation of a paper earlier in the year (Jackson, 2000).

A possibility for further development is a follow-up study conducted at the end of Fiona's, David's and Harry's middle school careers. The durability of family literacy traditions throughout early adolescence would be set in the educational context of literacy attainment in the middle school phase. The presence of conflicting sets of social mores at home and at school impacts

differently on girls and boys. Further study might explore how family literacy practices are modified through the passing of time and whether earlier shared literacy learning sustains and underpins later learning.

Summary

The embedded literacy traditions of the three families in the study have enabled this story to be told. A study of children who were failing in their literacy learning would have demanded a different methodolgy because the narrative skills of Fiona, David and Harry provided one of the starting points for the research. Their skills in literacy provoked my professional interest and the sustained support throughout their early years was evident from speaking with their parents. Speaking and listening, reading and writing fulfil the purposes of narrative and narrative is the purpose of these activities.
The children and their families have spoken for themselves. But I am conscious in this that I have also spoken for them. Stone (1987) states that narrative is the organisation of material into a single coherent story with sub-plots. The research is a story that in the telling sought to address three questions. The first question focused on the extent of support for children in the three families in learning literacy. The analysis of literacy related activities revealed a core of routines that formed part of literacy traditions within the three families. The sub-plots are those adults in the families who were marginalised in this. They did not recall childhood experiences of shared literacy learning in their families, or alternatively remembered that their childhood did not include these experiences. As adults they participated less with their own children's literacy learning than did those whose remembrances were those of shared literacy learning. This finding addresses the second question which focused on childhood remembrances of literacy support predisposing adults to provide similar experiences for their own children. The third question considered whether the literacy related activities that characterised family routines through the three generations constituted literacy

traditions. Parents were the pivotal generation in the research, looking back into their own childhood memories and deeply involved with their own children's lives. The evidence of literacy tradition rested with them as they described their memories of literacy support in childhood. Their own children Fiona, David and Harry described how they had learnt to read within their families. Trihn (1994: 10) alludes to the notion of change and the role of narrative as the means by which journey is accomplished.

> For memory and language are places both of
> sameness and otherness, dwelling and travelling.

The three children will continue their journey along the path that will lead them towards the goal of becoming literate people and sustain the tradition of family literacy.

Appendices

Appendix i

Tables of Test Results for Fiona, David and Harry

Key Stage One Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) (Year 2)

Attainment Target	**Fiona**	**David**	**Harry**
Speaking & Listening	Level 3	Level 2	Level 2
Reading	Level 3	Level 3	Level 3
Writing	Level 3	Level 2B	Level 2A
Spelling	Level 3	Level 2	Level 2

Level 3 is above average attainment for seven year olds.

Level 2 is average attainment for seven year olds and is sub-divided into A, B and C for Reading and Writing. A is at the upper end of the range of ability within the Level

Table 6 Cognitive Abilities Abilities Tests & Suffolk Test (Year 3)

CATs Scores	**Fiona**	**David**	**Harry**
Verbal	128	114	116
Non-verbal	99	95	93
Quantitative	120	107	108
Suffolk Reading Test	126	102	123

The average score for the CATs and the Suffolk Reading Test is 100 and a 10 point deviation either side of the mean is within the average range.

Year 4 English and Mathematics Tests (Optional SATs)

Attainment Targets	**Fiona**	**David**	**Harry**
Reading	Level 4	Level 3B	Level 4
Writing	Level 4	Level 3	Level 3
Spelling	Level 4	Level 2	Level 3

The Level in Reading is sub-divided into A,B and C. A score 3B indicates the mid-point within the average ability band, 3C is an attainment just within the low range in the average band and possibly identifies special educational need, (SEN).

Appendix ii

Questionnaire to Parents Prior to Interviews

The purpose of the questionnaire is to focus on the activity of reading in your family. Indicate the extent with which you agree or disagree by circling the answer that applies or most nearly describes your viewpoint..

1/ Learning to read is the most important task during the early years of schooling.

Circle the statement which most nearly matches your view:-

strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

2/ Parents are able to encourage and support their children in their attempts to understand letters and words.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

3/ Learning to read is a job best left to teachers, they know best, they know what to do.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

4/Reading is not so important as it used to be, computers will change the way we learn and communicate.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

This section is about family life and habits. (Family refers to the people who are normally living in your family home.)

1/ Do you have books and magazines etc. in your home?

Tick those items which apply :-

A/ fiction b/ non-fiction books c/ reference books e.g atlas, dictionary

d/ newspapers e/ magazines f/ comics g/ talking books i.e. audio tapes + book

2/ Who reads what?

List the reading materials from the list above which are read by people in your home:-

Adult Male Adult Female Young Male
Young female

3/ Does your family use the local library? Yes / No

3a/ If Yes, how often:-

a/ Weekly b/ Fortnightly c/ Monthly d/ Less often than this. e/ You have had occasion to use the local library more frequently than once a week.

3b/ Does everyone in your family use the local library? Yes / No

4/ Reading for pleasure is part of our family life.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

==========

5/ As far as you can you remember how old were your children when they:-

a/ spoke a word/words which you understood? Name
Age

b/ were able to point to a printed word/words ?

Name Age

What is your own earliest recollection of reading as a child? If you have no recollection then write, 'No recollection.'

Appendix iii

Letter to Parents of Fiona, David and Harry

25 February 1999

Dear Parents

Subject: - Families and Literacy Research Project

Earlier in the term we discussed the possibility of my interviewing some of your family to talk about reading and reading habits in your family. The project is ready to move into the next stage and I am writing to confirm our earlier discussion.

The purpose of the study is to investigate some of the possible influences that result in differences in attainment between boys and girls. You may already be aware of some of the public debate which has flagged up the lack of interest amongst some groups of boys in reading, literature and associated activities. This is currently an area of concern in education. A further purpose of the research is to gain some kind of historical perspective on education and learning to read. I would like to hear from parents and grandparents what they remember of their schooldays and how they learnt to read.

There are two parts to the study: -

- Questionnaires
- Interviews

The questionnaires will be offered to parents prior to the interviews and will focus on attitudes towards reading, reading habits and opinions about the importance of reading.

The interviews will cover the same kind of topics but will also call upon personal recall of schooldays and the experiences associated with learning to read.

The research will be completed this term but the finished report will be available in September 2000 if everything stays on schedule. All participants will be given a summary of the research project on its completion.

Within the documents produced for the project anonymity will be preserved and pseudonyms will be used for individuals' names.

Thankyou for your co-operation if you have any concerns about the project please contact me.

Appendix iv

Format for semi-structured interview with parent(s) and grandparents of pupil

Auto/biography:-

Memories of school days? In particular, recall of learning to read, reading lessons etc.

Memories of reading at home.

Home life, family situation and circumstances

Role of father and mother in the home - to what extent was there any sharing or role reversal in domestic and child-care

Major personalities/ influences in childhood

Major events in childhood, family, community, national

Family life today:-

Explore the ways that own childhood experiences have shaped theway(s) in which own children have been raised.

How is life different today for children than it was a generation ago

How/where is reading positioned in this

Aspirations/ ambitions for children in the light of own childhood experiences.

Appendix v

Format for Interviews with Fiona, David and Harry

Reading preferences - What sort of thing do you like to read?

Reading routines - When do you read? For how long?

Shared reading - Do you read with anyone else in your family?

Reading as a leisure activity - a favourite activity?

Reading as enjoyment - reasons

Learning to read - remembrances

Appendix vi

Questionnaire to Parents After Interviews

As a Parent:-

Draw a circle round the answer that applies or most nearly applies

1/ Did you read bedtime stories to your child /children when they were young?

Yes / No

If the answer to 1/ is 'Yes' please answer question 2/, if the answer is 'No' go to question 3/.

2/ How often did you read bedtime stories?
A/ almost every day/night. B/ about once a week. C/ occasionally (once a month or less).

3/ Did you or have you bought books as gifts for your child / children?

Yes / No

4/ Did you help your child / children to learn to read by:-
A/ sharing story books together (other than bedtime stories) Yes / No
B/ Reading comics, newspapers or magazines together Yes / No
C/ Reading labels, price tags, signs and notices during the daily routine of home-life Yes / No

---

5/ Did you play with games and puzzles when your child / children were younger? Yes / No

---

6/ Do you still play board games as a family ? Yes / No

7/ When your child / children were learning to read did you ask them to read to you? Yes / No

If the answer to 7/ is 'Yes' please answer question 8/, if the answer is 'No' then you have completed the questionnaire.

8/ How frequently did you hear your child / children read?
A/ almost every day. B/ about once a week. C/ occasionally (once a month or less).

When You Were a Child:-

(Circle the answers that apply or most nearly apply.)

1/ Did someone in your home read you bed-time stories? Yes / No

If the answer to 1/ is 'Yes' please answer questions 2/ &3/ if 'No' go to question 4/

2/How often were bedtime stories read to you?

A/ Almost every night. B/ About once a week.

C/ Occasionally (about once a month or less).

3/ Which members of your household read to you?

A/ mother. B/ father. C/ sister(s). D/ brother(s). E/ grandmother(s).

F/ grandfather(s). G/ aunt(s). H/ uncle(s). I/ cousin(s).

J/ other relative or family friend.

4/ Were you helped and encouraged to read in other ways? Yes / No

If the answer to 4/ is 'Yes' please answer questions 5/ & 6/, if the answer is 'No' go to question 7/

5/Which members of your family helped and encouraged you to read?

A/ mother. B/ father. C/ sister(s). D/ brother(s). E/ grandmother(s).

F/ grandfather(s). G/ aunt(s). H/ uncle(s). I/ cousin(s). J/ other relative or family friend.

6/ How frequently did this occur?

A/ every day. B/ about once a week. C/ occasionally (once a month or less often).

7/Were there books and /or other reading materials for children in your home?

Yes / No

8/ Were there books and / or other reading materials for the adults in your home? Yes / No

Appendix vii

Questionnaire sent via Parents to Grandparents after Interviews.

As a Grandparent:-

(Circle the answer that applies or most nearly applies.)

1/ Did you read to your grandchild when he / she was younger? Yes / No

If the answer to 1/ is 'Yes' please answer question 2/, if 'No' go to question 3/.

2/ How frequently did this occur?

A/ almost every day/ night. B/ about once a week. C/ occasionally (once a month or less).

3/ Have you bought books as gifts for your grandchild? Yes / No

---

4/ Have you shared any of the following activities with your grandchild:-

A/ reading story books together Yes / No

B/ reading comics, newspapers and magazines together Yes / No

C/ reading lables, price tags, notices and signs whilst out walking or Shopping Yes / No

---

5/ How frequently did these shared reading experiences occur?

A/ almost every day. B/ about once a week. C/ occasionally (once a month or less).

6/ Are there other shared reading activities that you have enjoyed with your grandchild that weren't available when your own children were young?

Yes / No

If the answer to 6/ is 'No' then you have completed the questionnaire, if the answer is 'Yes' please complete the final question, 7/.

7/ Which of the following have you shared with your grandchild:-

A/ computer games

B/ talking books

C/ If there are any other activities that I have missed please write them below.

Thankyou for your time and trouble in completing this questionnaire.

As a Parent:-.

1/ Did you read bedtime stories to your child /children when they were young? Yes/No (Circle the answer that applies or most nearly applies.)

If the answer to 1/ is 'Yes' please answer question 2/, if the answer is 'No' go to question 3/.

2/ How often did you read bedtime stories?

A/ almost every day/night. B/ about once a week. C/ occasionally (once a month or less).

3/ Did you or have you bought books as gifts for your child / children?

Yes / No

4/ Did you help your child / children to learn to read by:-

A/ sharing story books together (other than bedtime stories) Yes / No

B/ Reading comics, newspapers or magazines together Yes / No

C/ Reading labels, price tags, signs and notices during the daily routine of home-life Yes / No

---

5/ Did you play with games and puzzles when your child / children were younger? Yes / No

---

6/ Do you still play board games as a family ? Yes / No

7/ When your child / children were learning to read did you ask them to read to you? Yes / No

If the answer to 7/ is 'Yes' please answer question 8/, if the answer is 'No' then you have completed the questionnaire.

8/ How frequently did you hear your child / children read?

A/ almost every day. B/ about once a week. C/ occasionally (once a month or less).

When You Were a Child:-

(Circle around the answers that apply or most nearly apply).

1/ Did someone in your home read you bed-time stories? Yes / No

If the answer to 1/ is 'Yes' please answer questions 2/ &3/ if 'No' go to question 4/

2/How often were bedtime stories read to you?

A/ Almost every night. B/ About once a week.

C/ Occasionally (about once a month or less).

3/ Which members of your household read to you?

A/ mother. B/ father. C/ sister(s). D/ brother(s). E/ grandmother(s).

F/ grandfather(s). G/ aunt(s). H/ uncle(s). I/ cousin(s).

J/ other relative or family friend.

4/ Were you helped and encouraged to read in other ways? Yes / No

If the answer to 4/ is 'Yes' please answer questions 5/ & 6/, if the answer is 'No' go to question 7/

5/Which members of your family helped and encouraged you to read?

A/ mother. B/ father. C/ sister(s). D/ brother(s). E/ grandmother(s).

F/ grandfather(s). G/ aunt(s). H/ uncle(s). I/ cousin(s). J/ other relative or family friend.

6/ How frequently did this occur?

A/ every day. B/ about once a week. C/ occasionally (once a month or less often).

7/Were there books and /or other reading materials for children in your home?

Yes / No

8/ Were there books and / or other reading materials for the adults in your home? Yes / No

Appendix viii

Accompanying Letter with the Questionnaire sent to Parents after the Interviews

27 November, 1999

Research Project: Families and Literacy

Dear_____

Thanks again for helping out with my research earlier this year when you completed a questionnaire and agreed to be interviewed. I've enclosed a further questionnaire if you can find time to complete it as best you can I would be most grateful. If you could send it before Christmas that would be great. If you feel that you can't answer all of it then send it back anyway. I promise that this is the last one!

The research is going well and I hope to be finished by next September.

I've also enclosed a questionnaire for your_____ who was/were kind enough to take part also earlier in the year. I wondered if you would mind sending it on or giving it when the opportunity arises?

As I stated when we met earlier this year all information disclosed in this research project remains confidential. The thesis will contain pseudonyms only and each participant will receive a summary of the final draft.

Once again, thankyou for your co-operation.

Best regards,

Enclosures (2)

Appendix ix

Accompanying Letter with the Questionnaires sent to Grandparents after the Interviews

27 November 1999

Research Project:Families and Literacy

To whom it may concern,

Thanks for coming to the school to be interviewed earlier this year. It was very helpful to my research. I enclose a questionnaire about particular activities that help young children to read. Some of the questions refer to the past and some are about the present time. I would be very grateful if you could complete it preferably before Christmas and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided. The research is going well and I hope to finish by September next year.

As I stated earlier in the year when we met, all information is treated confidentially in the research project. The thesis will contain pseudonyms only and each participant will receive a summary of the final draft. Once again, thankyou for your co-operation.

Best regards,

Enclosures (2)

CDJ

Appendix x

Time Scale of the Fieldwork for the Research

November - December 1998 Pilot Study

January 1999 Informal discussions with parents of Fiona, David and Harry

February 1999 Letter to parents confirming the discussions and an outline of the research (Appendix iii).

End of February 1999 Introductory questionnaire given to parents of Fiona, David and Harry (Appendix ii).

April 1999 Interviews with parents:-Christine and Keith, Fiona's parents,
Eileen, David's mother
Ursula and Bob, Harry's parents
(Appendix iv).

May 1999 Interviews with Fiona, David and Harry (Appendix v).

June 1999 Interviews with :- Joe and Mabel, Fiona's paternal grandparents
Amy, Fiona's maternal grandmother
Deirdre and Ted, David's maternal grandparents
Margaret and Ernie, Harry's maternal grandparents (Appendix iv)

November 1999 Follow-up questionnaires from the interviews sent out to parents and grandparents (Appendices vi and vii).

January 2000 Completed questionnaires returned

Appendix xi

Family Members Who Supported Children in Their Learning of Literacy.

Fiona's Family

Christine and Keith (Fiona's parents)

Fiona's godmother

Joe and Mabel (Keith's parents)

Mabel's two sisters

Amy (Christine's mother)

Violet (Amy's mother)

David's Family

Eileen (David's mother)

Ted and Deirdre (Eileen's parents)

Great Uncle Donald (Deirdre's uncle)

Lorraine (Eileen's sister)

Ted's mother

Ted's grandparents

Ted's cousins

Harry's Family

Ursula and Bob (Harry's parents)

Ernie and Margaret (Ursula's parents)

Dulcie and Peggy (Ernie's sisters)

May (Ernie's mother)

Agnes (Margaret's mother)

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