

5. Phase Two: The Design of a Connective Program which Focused on Linking Primary and Secondary Discourses

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Five reveals the connective program which was designed once I had acquired a sound understanding of the Kindergarten students' primary Discourses of family literacy practices and the current ways that the school connected with families. The coded data from the Kindergarten parent questionnaires and the family literacy journals provided the initial thinking behind the activities included in the connective program. The classroom connective activities are described and this Chapter continues with the idea which first appeared in Chapter Four, of dividing the literacy activities into the four areas of 1) reading, 2) writing and spelling, 3) listening and talking and 4) technology. There were no activities created from the home generated technology events because the Kindergarten parent questionnaire and the family literacy journals revealed that the technology events of the Kindergarten students were similar to existing classroom activities. As mentioned in Chapter Four, coding of the data showed that there were activities already being conducted in the classroom prior to the research project which were consistent with some of the literacy events of the Kindergarten students. These links with existing school literacy events are further discussed in section 5.1.5. Following the discussion about the classroom activities is a description of the activities which were implemented to inform families about the secondary Discourse of school literacy practices. It is imperative to point out at this stage that this chapter merely describes the

6. Phase Three (a): Responses from the Participants in regards to the Connective Program

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five described the connective program which was designed to promote links between the primary Discourses of the Kindergarten students and the secondary Discourse of school literacy practices. This chapter addresses research question four, which describes the responses from the participants in regards to the connective program. Direct quotes from the participants' semi-formal interviews and literacy journals, as well as the results from the literacy morning tea surveys and the Principal's questionnaire are used extensively throughout Chapter Six.

6.1.1 Research Question Four - What were the responses from the participants about the implementation of a connective program which linked primary and secondary Discourses?

This research question reviews the responses of participants about the connective program, which was conducted during Phase Two of the research. It has been divided into a number of different categories. The activities which were based on the Kindergarten students' primary Discourses are firstly discussed. These activities include those based on the home generated literacy events of reading, writing and spelling, and listening and talking. Participant responses about the Home Reading Scheme are then included, followed by the Kindergarten students' views on reading and writing. Next, the

Kindergarten students' views on the connective program's activities are reported. Responses about the activities designed to link parents with the secondary Discourse of school literacy practices are then described. A review of the responses from the Kindergarten parent semi-formal interviews follows (see Appendix 4), with the chapter concluding by describing the teaching staff's responses to the connective program and school literacy development.

6.1.2 Activities that were based on the Home Generated Reading Events of Families

During the connective program the Kindergarten students, and when appropriate, the other students of Sunnyvale Public School participated in a number of activities which had been created based on the family literacy events. These activities included:

- bringing books in from home and sharing them with classmates;
- a group discussion documented as a mind map based on the question "Do We Read Anything Else Other Than Story Books When We are at Home?";
- examining newspapers; and
- examining the packaging on grocery items

The coded data used to form this discussion includes the classroom literacy journal, the Principal's questionnaire (see Appendix 9) and the Kindergarten students' semi-formal interviews (see Appendix 5).

Bringing in Books from Home and Sharing them with Classmates

Axial coding highlighted the fact that the strategy of students bringing a book to school was positively received by all Kindergarten students. In fact, in a semi-formal

interview held in term four Claire stated that she had enjoyed “bringing books in” (P008a SI, 2004:2). Her enjoyment of this activity was further clarified when Claire revealed that if she could choose some of the activities to do again next year, she would bring in her favourite book (P008a SI, 2004:2).

On reporting about the occasion when I read a book from my own childhood to the Kindergarten students I wrote in the classroom literacy journal that the “Year One students also joined us, as they begged to be involved, Ashley’s comment at the end of the session was, ‘Read it again’ ” (RE CRLJ, 3-4.6.2004:2). For me, this demonstrated just what a fond activity for children it is to have someone read them a story book.

The final look at the data using selective coding, showed a commonality between all three of the students when they brought a book in from home. When it was each of the students’ turn to present their text to their peers, they did so with great confidence and pride. For example:

Claire had a real sense of pride whilst she was showing her classmates [her book]. She requested that I read the book, but allow her to read her favourite pages... I think the reading of a book from someone’s home made the session very exciting and indeed meaningful to Claire (RE CRLJ, 11.6.2004:3).

Again, when it came to Ashley presenting her first book from home to her peers, she indicated her desire to read particular parts of the book: “Ashley had memorised some sections of the book and asked if she could read these parts herself. The wording used was not directly from the text, but it contained the same meaning... Similar to Claire, Ashley had much pride in showing the students her book” (RE CRLJ, 17.6.2004:4). Sarah

used the occasion of showing her first book from home as an opportunity to present it in a similar fashion as a teacher would model read to a class.

Sarah selected her children's picture atlas. Sarah was very familiar with the content of the atlas eg, flags of countries, some states of Australia and animals from particular countries. Sarah really enjoyed presenting her book to the other students and proceeded to 'play' teacher, by asking students to sit quietly and wait their turn. Sarah appeared to have memorised many of the facts contained in the atlas. The other students were intrigued by the atlas and spent a great deal of time looking at the pictorial maps (RE CRLJ, 18.6.2004:5).

On the second instance where Sarah had been invited to bring in a book from home the occasion had also been mentioned in Sarah's family literacy journal (n.d.6.2004:3), as Sarah had brought in a text which had been made at home with the aide of Sarah's parents. One of my classroom literacy journal entries illustrated Sarah's delight at sharing something so personal and family-orientated with her peers:

It contained digital photos with corresponding captions. Sarah was obviously very proud of the book and some of the captions had been learnt off-by-heart. Events covered in the book included: the birth of Sarah's baby sister and a trip to the zoo. The other two Kindy students were a little unsure of Sarah's book to begin with (I think the whole notion of Sarah having a book about herself was a little startling). However, they certainly enjoyed looking at the photos and asking Sarah about their content (3.9.2004:13).

Once during the connective program Ashley forgot to bring in her book from home, even though she had been given a reminder note the day before. This occasion highlighted how planned events may not always work out as intended, especially if the resource is coming from the student's home. Nevertheless, teachers must be prepared for

such occasions, and in this particular instance I simply took the opportunity to do some group reading using some of the library's big books (RE CRLJ, 10.9.2004:14).

In the Principal's questionnaire the Principal described this activity as a "very positive strategy used in this research project" (P011f PQ, 2005). Selective coding isolated this connective activity as something which had been well received by both the Principal and student participants.

Group Discussion Documented as a Mind Map: 'Do We Read Anything Else Other Than Story Books When We are at Home?'

This task involved the students and myself completing a mind map of the various reading activities which were completed in their homes, apart from the reading of story and picture books. The following points were identified by the Kindergarten students as the reading activities which occurred in their homes:

- all our mums read magazines
- Claire, Ashley and Sarah's dads all read the newspaper, some mums do too
- Ashley uses a dictionary
- Claire's mum looks at catalogues
- Nan and mum use recipes (Claire)
- Sarah looks at her atlas

Axial coding of the classroom literacy journal highlighted how the concept of identifying other activities which could be construed as a reading task was quite difficult for all of the students to grasp: "Initially students were unsure of what the task was requiring of

them, however, once they realised that there was really no right or wrong answer, the ideas began to flow” (RE CRLJ, 1.7.2004:6). Students came to the understanding that all of their ideas were valued and then the activity became an opportunity for students to develop their confidence in contributing to class discussions. As discussed in research question three the formation of the mind maps also allowed the implementation of the listening and talking activities including group discussions and encouraging students to ask questions. A number of home generated reading activities were identified by the students once they understood that anything which involved reading could be added. The suggested activities did not have to be something similar to what was completed at school. If nothing else, this activity demonstrated to the students that being involved in reading was not defined by the reading tasks completed at school, or by reading picture or story books. Reading became something which the students saw in their homes on a daily basis.

Examining Newspapers

All three Kindergarten students were familiar with newspapers, as well as who read them in their households (RE CRLJ, 12.8.2004:10). When asked why people read the newspaper Claire replied, “to figure out things that are happening”, whilst Ashley stated “If they haven’t watched the tele, they can read the paper to find out things” (RE CRLJ, 12.8.2004:10). Sarah had no response to the question. Selective coding demonstrated that the two students who were familiar with the purpose of a newspaper felt it was something used to inform us of current events.

When the students and I looked through a newspaper for the first time it became obvious that all three students were familiar with a number of icons and symbols displayed in the newspaper:

All students recognised the weather page and the map of Australia. I was fascinated by the number of icons that the children were familiar with, including Barbie, Harry Potter, Lego, Coles and Woolworths. This encouraged much discussion as to why they were familiar with them, such as where they shop (RE CRLJ, 12.8.2004:10).

The following week the Kindergarten students looked in the newspaper again, this time specifically searching for stories or images relating to the Athens Olympic Games. What became interesting about this task was the means by which each of the students went about sourcing appropriate material from the newspaper:

Ashley found appropriate pictures by looking for the Olympic Rings – a symbol of the Olympic Games. Sarah found a picture of a Wallaby player and thought it was an Olympic picture, as the Australian flag was in the background and the rugby player was wearing green and gold. Good recognition of symbols! Claire seemed to be just looking for people participating in sporting events (RE CRLJ, 19 & 20.8.2004:11).

Axial coding of this event illustrated how even at this young age children have the ability to use their prior knowledge to source an answer to a problem or task. I also believe that the students' diverse ways of identifying the Olympic pictures shows how we use knowledge from our primary Discourses to help solve problems in secondary Discourses.

During the individual semi-formal interviews held between myself and the Kindergarten students two out of the three students revealed how they felt about working with the newspapers. Sarah disclosed that one of the activities she enjoyed was looking at the newspaper. When asked why she had enjoyed it Sarah stated it was “because we got to cut out” (P010e SI, 2004:2). However, Claire affirmed that the reason why she thought the work with the newspapers had been difficult was because it was hard to find the correct picture (P008a SI, 2004:2). Selective coding uncovered that Claire’s unease of finding the correct picture was similar to the group discussion about reading events in the Kindergarten students’ homes. Both activities saw students concerned about doing something incorrect.

From 25th August 2004 to the end of the Athens Olympic Games Kindergarten and Year One students were given the opportunity to select a picture from the newspaper and present it to the class. Years Three to Six were to select an article, read it, and then discuss its content with the rest of the class. The objective of this activity was to not only allow the students to talk about material which they had selected themselves, and therefore was obviously of some interest to them, but also to practise their public speaking skills. If they were having difficulties with thinking of things to say about their picture, Kindergarten and Year One were given the option to ask the class if they had any questions about the picture, thus, promoting some stimulus for the younger children to talk about. Ashley was the first Kindergarten student to be selected in this activity, and found the task somewhat overwhelming: “Initially [she was] a little bit intimidated by being in front of everyone, but answered questions about her picture very well” (RE

CRLJ, 25.8.2004:12). Possibly this indicated that, apart from the weekly news session, the younger students were not used to orally expressing their ideas and opinions in front of the entire class.

On one occasion a number of the students from the class were absent, so this enabled all Kindergarten students to present a picture from the newspaper. The following anecdotal notes were written in the classroom research journal about each of the Kindergarten students.

Table 6.1: Anecdotal Records from the Newspaper Discussion (cited in Classroom Literacy Journal 27.8.2004:12)

Kindergarten Students	Anecdotal Notes
Sarah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found it difficult to find a picture and present her own views. • Also struggled with letting other students have their turn at discussing picture/article.
Claire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very confident response. • Didn't want to say anything too daring though, as she appeared not to want to 'get it wrong'.
Ashley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much more comfortable with discussing her picture in a small group. • [The activity was] much more informal.

The anecdotal notes for Claire reminded me of the mind map previously completed by the Kindergarten students and myself and the comment made by Claire about not wanting to find the wrong picture in the newspaper. The students did not want to say anything that may have been regarded as being “wrong” by the teacher. This was Ashley’s second attempt at this particular task, and it was pleasing to see that she was much more at ease this time around (RE CRLJ, 27.8.2004:12). The above table illustrates how a simple activity like looking at the newspaper can reveal a student’s strengths and weaknesses

with public speaking. Hence, not only did the newspaper discussions give the Kindergarten students the chance to speak in front of an audience, it also gave me an insight into their listening and talking skills.

Examining the Packaging on Grocery Items

After observing how familiar the Kindergarten students were with icons and symbols I felt it would be of interest for the students to closely examine some packaging from a variety of grocery items, including such things as jelly, soup and canned food.

As a group we discussed how we can find out the name of a product, often see a picture of the product and find out about the ingredients, fat content etc, and are often provided with directions, or instructions as Sarah pointed out (RE CRLJ, 29.7.2004:8).

All three of the students were familiar with the idea that if they were looking for something in the supermarket, they would not necessarily need to know how to read the label, but rather look at the images on the item, whether it be pictures of the item or a specific brand logo which their family usually purchased. However, it was also pointed out that difficulties in selecting a product could occur if there was not a memorable logo or picture found on the product, hence, knowing how to read would certainly come in handy when doing the grocery shopping.

To see how much of the initial discussion about decoding grocery labels was retained by the Kindergarten students a follow-up discussion was held the very next day. One out of the three students had retained a number of key words which had been used in the previous discussion, and this student was Claire. During this session the students also

came to the conclusion that it would be beneficial (but mostly fun) to endeavour to follow the directions they had located on the jelly box, hence, the next week's task would be to make jelly with the entire class.

Prior to the jelly making session commencing Kindergarten were asked to explain to the rest of the class the objective behind the activity. Again, it was Claire who had retained the most knowledge about the packaging discussions, whereas Sarah struggled to remember what had previously been discussed. Ashley joined in Claire's explanation once her memory had been prompted. Of this activity I had written in the classroom literacy journal that "there was great excitement about the jelly making, especially when it came to stirring it! A most memorable literacy activity!" (5.8.2004:9). Despite the fact that I thought the event would be remembered by the students when Ashley was asked about the experience on another occasion, she initially had no recollection of it. When she did remember the event her most prominent memory was of swirling the red and blue jelly together to make purple (P009c SI, 2004:2). The fact that Ashley remembered the swirling of the jelly as opposed to the task of following the directions on the packaging demonstrated to me that what we plan for children to learn from school literacy events may not always be the memory that they take away with them.

6.1.3 Activities based on the Home Generated Writing and Spelling Events of Families

This section looks at the connective activities which were implemented in the classroom in response to the data collected on the Kindergarten students' family literacy events involving writing and spelling. The activities included:

- games to assist with the development of THRASS skills; and
- a group discussion documented as a mind map based on the question ‘When Do We use Writing at Home?’

Coded data came from the classroom literacy journal.

Games to Assist with the Development of THRASS Skills

During the implementation of the research project there were THRASS games used which had been in existence prior to the project, as well as some that had been designed specifically to boost the existence of primary Discourses in the classroom. Both styles of THRASS games, the previously existing and the newly implemented, were thoroughly enjoyed by the entire class. Even though this particular section deals with writing and spelling the various THRASS games contained elements from reading and listening and talking as well. Whilst each of the games specifically dealt with students learning more about particular components of the THRASS Program, students did not seem to realise this fact and participated for the sheer enjoyment.

Due to the positive student response to the games they were often used as motivators to complete less appealing tasks; the games were often conducted at the end of an activity as a reward for the students. However, every Thursday, when the students had segregated library lessons (Kindergarten and Year One for half an hour, followed by Years Three to Years Six for half an hour) a more theoretical approach was given to the games. This theoretical approach involved me regularly pausing the activities to point out key elements from the THRASS program. Whilst not specifically talking about the THRASS

games, in the classroom literacy journal the Principal discussed the impact that the THRASS program had had on the Kindergarten students:

THRASS has been very helpful to our students – they are segmenting words well and hearing the initial and final sounds (phonemes) really well. ‘BLUE LIGHT DISCO’ is an example of what one of our students wrote using the THRASS picture chart (P011f CRLJ, 15.11.2004:15).

The students thoroughly enjoyed themselves whilst playing the THRASS games. Selective coding linked the idea of games which challenged the students with a theme to evolve from the Kindergarten parent questionnaire: students enjoyed family literacy events which challenged them in some way.

Group Discussion Documented as a Mind Map: ‘When Do We use Writing at Home?’

This writing, listening and talking task required students to consider how they used writing within their homes. The activity gave me another opportunity to encourage students to participate in group discussions and feel secure enough to ask a teacher any questions or concerns they may have had about the activity. As the activity unfolded the students’ discussion turned to the writing tasks that they were involved in at home, rather than discussing the writing tasks of other family members. The Kindergarten students’ comments about writing in their homes included:

- I write stories about my kitty (Ashley)
- I wrote a letter to Claire (Ashley)
- Sometimes I write about things I have done, like going out to tea (Claire)
- I write about pictures (Claire)

- I write on birthday cards (Claire)
- I write stories about my dog and [family members] (Sarah)

Axial coding of the classroom literacy journal made it obvious that Claire participated in a great number of literacy activities at her home, as she was initiating the topics of the group discussion and was familiar with many different forms of writing (RE CRLJ, 2.7.2004:7). The mind map demonstrated to the students the diversity in range of writing activities utilised in everyday life.

6.1.4 Activities based on the Home Generated Listening and Talking Events of Families

The connective activities which focused on listening and talking included:

- group discussions and the THRASS games; and
- questioning

The group discussions and THRASS games have already been discussed in this chapter, and so are not addressed again at this point. My attempts to concentrate on my classroom questioning techniques were not something which I shared with the students or the Principal. Hence, the following is a reflection made on my observations of the study.

Questioning

The data collected in the family literacy journals illustrated how children frequently asked questions whilst at home. This initiated me to consider how I encouraged students to ask questions whilst they were at school. The areas that I mainly concentrated on were:

- queries about instructions;
- questions about the content or topic areas of set tasks; and

- solutions when having difficulties or concerns of a task

Whilst the data collected did not reveal how this conscious effort of encouraging the asking of questions affected the Kindergarten students I can reflect on my own experiences. Prior to the implementation of the connective program I always asked students if they had any questions once I had finished explaining a new task. Often questions would follow this prompt. However, I did notice an increase in questioning when I took on the approach of asking students on an individual basis if I could assist them as I was walking around the class during an activity. It could be suggested that this one-to-one contact would be quite similar to the contact that students have within their homes; they can ask questions of their family members on a one-to-one basis, rather than having to present their questions in front of their classmates. The Outcomes TES1.1 and TES2.1 were utilised in this activity (see Appendix 16 for more information about these Outcomes).

6.1.5 The Home Reading Scheme

When coding the family literacy events and practices of the Kindergarten students it became evident that a number of the school literacy events had similarities to a family literacy event. The most prominent of these was the Home Reading Scheme. The following section examines the effects and implications this literacy event had on the Kindergarten students.

In the classroom literacy journal entry dated 17th June 2004, a summary was given about Kindergarten's participation in the Home Reading Scheme. It was reported how Ashley changed her reader on a daily basis, and appeared to enjoy the experience of

taking a book home from school. During the semi-formal interview with Ashley it was revealed that she read her home readers to her Mum and Dad. When asked if she read to both her parents every night Ashley replied, “Not every night because sometimes Dad is doing different things” (P009c SI, 2004:1). This statement gave me the impression that in Ashley’s family the Home Reading Scheme was something in which both parents took part, rather than it simply becoming the sole duty of one of her parents. However, whilst discussing if the research project presented the Kindergarten parents with any activities from which other people in the future could possibly benefit, Ashley’s Mum said the following:

I think probably if [the study was not on], like your more inclined, you’re thinking all of the time, because of this study that you’ve got to actually do something, you know what I mean... Ashley will, you know, like she will come up to you and she will want you to read her a book or something like that. I mean, I would still read it, but, with this being on it’s probably more... You’re thinking, you know, like you’ve got to do it (P004c SI, 2004:3).

The above quote suggests that perhaps one of the reasons why Ashley’s family was so consistent with supporting Ashley’s reading was because their involvement in the research project encouraged them to do so. In fact, it may be suggested that the research study facilitated the existence of school literacy within the students’ homes. Therefore, it is not possible to conclude if the family’s interest in Ashley’s literacy development would be of a similar level if the study had not been conducted.

Similar to the Kindergarten parent semi-formal interview, Ashley’s family literacy journal revealed how it was Ashley who often instigated reading activities in their house, in particular the reading of her home reader: “Ashley mostly instigates her home reading,

depending on her mood on the day” (ALJ, 20.7.2004:4). When asked why she swapped her home reader so often, Ashley disclosed it was simply because she had read the books (P009c SI, 2004:1).

The classroom literacy journal revealed that Claire was also enthusiastic about changing her home reader on a daily basis. On this occasion Claire had revealed that she particularly liked reading to her Mum (RE CRLJ, 17.6.2004:4). When asked in a semi-formal interview what she thought about the Home Reading Scheme Claire stated that it was good, that she read the books to her Mum and Dad, as well as disclosing the reason why she swapped her readers so often. This was because she wanted to receive gold stars (P008a SI, 2004:1). This may be viewed as an example of a student bringing an activity from a secondary Discourse into her primary Discourse environment, in the hope of being rewarded in the secondary Discourse for doing so. The entries for terms three and four in Claire’s family literacy journal exposed how Claire was indeed reading the books which she borrowed from the school on a regular basis: “Still trying to do at least a little bit of reading each night,” was the entry in the journal dated 27th September 2004 (p.10). It was pleasing to read a later entry in the journal about how Claire’s confidence in reading had grown: “Over the past week Claire has been doing a lot of reading. She likes me to read to her, but is getting a lot more confident reading on her own” (CLJ, 12.11.2004:12). When Claire’s mother was asked about how she felt the study had affected either the children or the adults she revealed how the study had affected herself:

I think it has because you tend to want to try and do a little bit more with them at home, try and fit a bit more in... you seem to take notice and you’re watching closer what they are doing, especially when she might write a note or

something, I think I'm a little more involved in it at home than I was before"
(P001a SI, 2004:1).

This statement illustrates how the project enabled the Kindergarten parents to consider their own involvement in their child's literacy development.

At the time when the entry was made in the classroom literacy journal Sarah had been swapping her home reader approximately once or twice a week (RE CLJ, 17.6.2004:4). However, by the time the Kindergarten semi-formal interviews occurred in term four 2004 she had begun to swap her home reader books more frequently. When asked why she had started to exchange her reader more often, Sarah simply replied it was "because I keep remembering it and sometimes I don't" (P010e SI, 2004:1). Sarah also revealed how her home readers were read to everyone in her house and thought the scheme was fun because it enabled her to read (P010e SI, 2004:1). Similar to the other Kindergarten students, Sarah's family literacy journal revealed in the entries for term three and four that her family had continued with supporting the Home Reading Scheme within their home. Sarah's parents had utilised the text contained within the home readers to create sight words (n.d.2004:5). One of the concluding comments written by Sarah's parent was "I have seen a great improvement in Sarah's reading and writing this term" (SLJ, n.d.2004:5).

6.1.6 The Kindergarten Students' Views on Reading and Writing

During the individual Kindergarten semi-formal interviews a number of questions were raised about reading and writing. This was done as a means of gaining a greater

understanding of how the children felt about their literacy development. The key points discussed were:

- the importance of knowing how to read and write;
- the enjoyment of learning how to read and write;
- the unappealing aspects of learning how to read and write; and
- the challenging aspects of learning how to read and write

Coding of the data revealed the most salient comments made by the participants in regards to the above themes and these comments are presented below.

The Importance of Knowing how to Read and Write

The students were firstly asked to comment on why they thought it was important for them to know how to read. This question was asked so that insight could be acquired into the students' awareness of the importance of literacy skills. When the question was put forward to Sarah, she simply stated that her knowing how to read was important for her reading skills. I then asked what she was going to do with her reading skills, with the response being: "I'm not very sure" (P010e SI, 2004:1). Axial coding revealed that Sarah recognised the importance of knowing how to read, but was not quite sure how the skill was going to be beneficial to her at some later stage. As an educator this highlights the importance of explaining to children the reason behind learning how to do things, such as reading, to make the "real" purpose known.

Ashley presented a very practical response: "Because when I grow up I won't be able to learn to read or swim and I wouldn't be able to swim or read" (P009c SI, 2004:1). Axial coding demonstrated how Ashley associated the importance of learning to read

with the significance of learning to swim. These were skills that would be useful to have as an adult, and she felt it was in her best interest to develop these skills early on in her life. It may be suggested that parental influence may have aided in the development of Ashley's opinions about the importance of learning how to read.

Claire also associated the importance of knowing how to read with her adulthood: "Because when you grow up you might have kids and you'll have to read to them" (P008a SI, 2004:1). Axial coding revealed that for Claire reading was something she would do with her own children, possibly a reflection of how she perceived her family members' roles and reading.

In relation to writing students were firstly asked to about discuss why they thought it was important for them to know how to write. Sarah stated that it was important so that she could tell her Mum and Dad that she could write (P010e SI, 2004:1), whilst Ashley said "because if I don't learn words I won't be able to get to learning the words" (P009c SI, 2004:1). Claire revealed that it was important to know how to write because sometimes you might go and do crosswords and write letters (P008a SI, 2004:1).

The inquiry into the importance of knowing how to read and write revealed how the young students saw literacy skills on a primary Discourse level. Ashley referred to learning to read like learning to swim and it is suggested that at this point in her life swimming would be an activity which Ashley participated in with her family. Claire's comments about being able to read to her own children and completing crosswords and

writing letters again can be linked to reading on a primary Discourse level. Sarah's idea about telling her parents that she could write highlighted how she felt it was important that members from her primary Discourse knew about her ability to write. It was interesting to note that the three students valued literacy skills on a primary Discourse level and were all competent with the secondary Discourse literacy skills found at school. This made me consider whether the same results would have been evident with children who did not value the development of literacy skills on a primary Discourse level. Would these children still be proficient literacy learners on a secondary Discourse level?

The Enjoyment of Learning how to Read and Write

The Kindergarten students were asked to describe what they liked about learning to read. Sarah simply stated that the process was really fun and when further questioned in regards to what she specifically found to be fun, she replied that it was fun because the class got to spell things that they did not know and they got to have a go [at spelling the words] (P010e SI, 2004:1). During her interview Ashley could not identify anything that she liked about learning how to read, but did reveal how she wrote things to help her learn how to read (P009c SI, 2004:1). When Claire was asked what she liked about learning to read she took the opportunity to divulge what made learning to read easier for her: "it's easy when the pictures are shown" (P008a SI, 2004:1).

When asked what she enjoyed about learning how to write Ashley exclaimed, "Handwriting!" I then proceeded to ask Ashley what she specifically liked about handwriting and the student revealed, "Because it has pictures up in the corner" (P009c SI, 2004:1). In this instance Ashley was referring to her handwriting textbook, where the

pages possessed a small picture which was coloured-in by the student. Claire said she liked learning how to write because she could learn how to go in competitions and she also claimed that she liked handwriting because it was something that she had to do really neat (P008a SI, 2004:1). Sarah could not identify anything by herself that she liked about learning how to write and simply agreed with my suggestions of enjoying handwriting, the THRASS charts and writing letters of the alphabet (P010e SI, 2004:1).

The Unappealing Aspects of Learning how to Read and Write

Sarah revealed that when reading became really hard, she found herself becoming really confused (P010e SI, 2004:2). Ashley initially stated that she did not find anything hard about learning how to read, but when asked to consider if she found any of the reading activities “boring” she stated, “Well the thing is sometimes it’s boring, but not all of the time” (P009c SI, 2004:1). For Claire the aspect of reading which she did not particularly like was when she had something hard to read. In response to this, I asked her how this made reading hard to which Claire replied that sometimes there were a lot of words to read (P008a SI, 2004:1)

Both Sarah and Ashley stated that they did not find anything unappealing about learning how to write. However, Claire revealed that there was one particular thing in handwriting lessons which she did not particularly like: “Well, sometimes you have mistakes and when you don’t want it to be messy you can’t help it, but you have to rub it out when you don’t want to rub it out” (P008a SI, 2004:2).

The Challenging Aspects of Learning how to Read and Write

Sarah initially took this question as meaning what she could do if she found learning to read hard, and thus replied: “If there is a word that you don’t really know, and you don’t really know, you could ask the teacher.” I responded to this question by asking Sarah if not knowing some of the words made reading hard, to which she responded: “No, not when you ask the teacher” (P010e SI, 2004:2). Ashley also raised the issue of dealing with unknown words: “Well, sometimes when you read you don’t know what the words are and that’s a little bit tricky. If you don’t know the words you don’t know the spelling” (P009c SI, 2004:2). Claire discussed the “hard parts” found within texts: “The hard parts are really hard and they have all these words that are like really hard to read” (P008a SI, 2004:2).

Sarah did not form an answer by herself in regards to what was challenging about learning how to write, but agreed that letter formation was hard. Ashley could not think of anything that was hard about learning how to write. Claire highlighted the problem of writing words when you do not know the correct spelling: “Well, sometimes someone will tell you to write, like a map or something. If you don’t know how to spell stuff you might have a spelling mistake” (P008a SI, 2004:2).

On reflecting on the students’ comments about reading and writing, selective coding isolated an interesting point about Claire. On one occasion Claire relayed how she liked her handwriting to be neat and on two occasions referred to her dislike of making mistakes. Whilst students were encouraged to try their best and complete written tasks neatly, Sunnyvale Public School did not place a negative emphasis on students making

mistakes. Since the other two Kindergarten students did not pass comments about making mistakes, this raises the question of whether there was something in the secondary Discourse environment of the classroom which was prompting Claire's fear of mistakes, or whether this was something which had commenced on a primary Discourse level.

6.1.7 The Kindergarten Students' Opinions about the Connective Program Activities

The Kindergarten student semi-formal interviews gave the students the opportunity to discuss the activities which had been employed during the connective program. Students were asked to comment on the connective activities which they had enjoyed, as well as to select activities which could be conducted with future students. Coding of the data revealed a number of interesting comments made by the students.

Connective Activities Which Were Enjoyed by Students

Sarah revealed how she had enjoyed working with the newspapers for the simple reason of being able to cut out from the papers (P010e SI, 2004:2). Initially Ashley stated that she had been partial to all of the connective activities which had been implemented in the classroom. However, on further questioning Ashley did disclose how she felt about a number of the completed activities. In regards to bringing in books from home to share with her peers Ashley said, "It was cool," whilst when questioned about the tasks completed with the newspapers she maintained that it was boring. Ashley also thought that the food packaging activities became boring, but enjoyed making red and blue jelly and remembered spinning the end products together to make purple jelly (P009c SI, 2004:2). As previously mentioned in section 6.1.2., bringing books in from home also

appealed to Claire, but she found finding the appropriate pictures in the newspapers tricky, as it was often hard to find the right picture (P008a SI, 2004:2). Selective coding identified students as enjoying bringing in books from home and in terms of Discourses this shows how these children liked sharing their primary Discourse with people found in a secondary Discourse situation. It has also been deduced that the students were fond of practical tasks, ones which required the students to physically participate, such as cutting up the newspapers and making jelly. It may be suggested that these practical activities were acquisition-based.

Suggestions from the Students for Connective Activities to be Implemented in the Future

All three of the Kindergarten students were asked to comment on which of the connective activities they would like to see continue within the school in the following year. Sarah did not comment on the area under discussion (P010e SI, 2004:3), whilst Ashley suggested the implementation of silent writing, as opposed to silent reading and thought she would also like to make a cake (P009c SI, 2004:3). Claire stated that she would bring in her favourite book, as well as materials to make cards (P008a SI, 2004:2). Ashley and Claire's responses again highlight the success of practical activities, which possess a sense of acquisition, as opposed to learning (see comments about Gee's work in Chapter Two).

6.1.8 Responses to the Activities Designed to Connect Families and the School

During the execution of the connective program there were activities implemented which had been designed to promote parental awareness about the secondary Discourse

of school literacy practices. The literacy morning teas and the production of the newsletter *Literacy Link* were the two methods designed to increase the parents' knowledge of their children's secondary Discourse of school literacy practices.

Introduction to the Literacy Morning Teas

The literacy morning teas were held in terms two, three and four. The morning tea in term two was used as an introductory meeting to the research project, for all possible adult participants (see Appendix 18). The morning teas in terms three and four were structured as information seminars for Kindergarten and Year One parents (see Appendix 19 & 20).

Term Three Literacy Morning Tea

In attendance at the morning tea were six parents including representatives from all three of the Kindergarten parent body (two Kindergarten families had both parents attending), as well as representatives for one out of the two Year One families. A survey was given out at the end of the session and five out of six surveys were returned (see Appendix 7). In total the respondents were asked to consider five statements and one question. The first five statements required those completing the survey to use the Likert Scale and circle either "strongly disagree", "disagree", "unsure", "agree", or "strongly agree". The sixth question on the survey gave parents the opportunity to give a written response.

Results of the Term Three Survey

The following table shows the results of the five surveys which were returned to me after the term three literacy morning tea. The statements which the respondents were asked to consider included:

- Survey Statement One: The information distributed today was useful to me and helped me to further understand my child's education.
- Survey Statement Two: The information was presented in such a way that it was clear and easy to understand.
- Survey Statement Three: I now feel that I am familiar with the terms "Outcomes" and "Indicators" (terms taken from the NSW English syllabus).
- Survey Statement Four: The general overview of the THRASS program has given me some insight into the spelling and handwriting program which my child is involved in at school.
- Survey Statement Five: The hints given to me to help my child decode an unfamiliar word in his/her home reader are strategies which I feel comfortable using in our home.

Table 6.2: Results of the Term Three Survey Statements One to Five

All of the below figures are out of five, which is the number of surveys returned.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Statement One: The information distributed today was useful to me and helped me to further understand my child's education				3	2
Statement Two: The information was presented in such a way that it was clear and easy to understand				2	3
Statement Three: I now feel that I am familiar with the terms outcomes and indicators (terms taken from the NSW English syllabus)				5*	1*
Statement Four: The general overview of the THRASS program has given me some insight into the spelling and handwriting program which my child is involved in at school				4	1
Statement Five: The hints given to me to help my child decode an unfamiliar word in his/her home reader are strategies which I feel comfortable using in our home				3	2

* One of the returned surveys had both "agree" and "strongly agree" circled in response to Statement Three.

The survey results revealed how participants felt that the term three literacy morning tea was beneficial to their knowledge of school literacy practices.

Results of Question Six

Three out of the five respondents took the opportunity to write down additional comments, whilst two respondents did not. Those surveys that did have personal comments written on them will now be referred to as the responses from Respondent One, Respondent Two and Respondent Three. The comment written by Respondent One stated:

This would have been especially helpful at the beginning of the year. Future topics: What is expected of the children this year? Where should they be up to? What if they are not? (R1 Term Three LMT, 28.7.2004).

The questions raised by Respondent One were of interest to the research project. I felt that the question “what is expected of the children this year?” was somewhat answered during the term three literacy morning tea, as the Early Stage One Outcomes found in the *English K-6 Syllabus* were discussed at some length. The questions “where should they be up to?” and “what if they are not?” were addressed at the term four literacy morning tea, as it was explained to the participants that ideally the Kindergarten students should be achieving the indicators associated with the Early Stage One Outcomes by the end of their first year of formal schooling, and aspiring to be working towards completing the Stage One Outcomes in Year One and achieving the Stage One Outcomes by the end of Year Two.

Respondent Two had written:

At the moment I don't have any ideas for topics at our next meeting, I thought everything was covered in our meeting on Wednesday, overall it was very helpful and interesting (R2 Term Three LMT, 28.7.2004).

Respondent Two revealed that they did not have further ideas for the next meeting. On reflection, I believe that perhaps it would have been more effective to have asked the respondents if they had any ideas for the next literacy morning tea a week before the morning tea occurred. Possibly it was too arduous to think about the next meeting straight after the term three literacy morning tea.

Respondent Three had the comment:

We appreciate the extra time being spent with us, especially as teaching methods have changed since we were at school (R3 Term Three LMT, 28.7.2004).

This reflection from Respondent Three suggests that the content of the literacy morning tea pointed out to the participants how literacy was now taught at Sunnyvale Public School. The written comments from Respondent Two and Three highlighted that although the Discourses from home and school may possess differences to one another, these parents obviously accepted that there needed to be links between the two entities.

Term Four Literacy Morning Tea

At this session there were representatives from two of the three Kindergarten families, as well as one of the two Year One families, in total three attendees to the morning tea. The Kindergarten family that was not represented telephoned the school in the morning of the meeting to inform me that due to illness they would not be attending. However, the participant did request the information sheet and the survey. All of the four surveys given out were returned. In this survey the respondents were given five statements where by they could select a response which best suited their views (see Appendix 8). Again, the Likert Scale of “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “unsure”, “agree” and “strongly agree” was used to record the respondents’ answers.

Results of the Term Four Survey

The following table shows the results of the four surveys which were returned to me after the Term Four literacy morning tea. The statements which the respondents were asked to consider included:

- Survey Statement One: The information distributed today was useful to me and helped me to further understand my child's education.
- Survey Statement Two: The information sheets that were given out are easy to understand.
- Survey Statement Three: Having a copy of the Outcomes for Stage One will be of some use for me.
- Survey Statement Four: The literacy meetings which were held this year were conducted at a time of the day which was convenient for me.
- Survey Statement Five: The hints given to me to help my child with writing and spelling are things which I can see myself using within my home.
- Survey Statement Six: I feel that I have a sound understanding of my child's school literacy development (for example, what is happening within the classroom and how your child is assessed with "Outcomes" and "Indicators").

Table 6.3: Results of the Term Four Survey Statements One to Six

All of the below figures are out of four, which is the number of surveys returned.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Statement One: The information distributed today was useful to me and helped me to further understand my child's education				2	2
Statement Two: The information sheets that were given out are easy to understand				2	2
Statement Three: Having a copy of the Outcomes for Stage One will be of some use for me				2	2
Statement Four: The literacy meetings which were held this year were conducted at a time of the day which was convenient for me				2	2
Statement Five: The hints given to me to help my child with writing and spelling are things which I can see myself using within my home				2	2
Statement Six: I feel that I have a sound understanding of my child's school literacy development (for example, what is happening within the classroom and how your child is assessed with "outcomes" and "indicators")				2	2

Again, these survey results suggest that the content of the term four literacy morning tea was beneficial to the participants. Of special significance was the fact that the Respondents felt that the hints about helping their children and the information distributed about the school literacy program were useful. This suggested that sessions such as these were a successful way of linking the school and the homes of children.

***Literacy Link* - A Newsletter for Families based on School Literacy Events and Information**

During terms three and four a newsletter containing examples and information about the school literacy events and practices was given to all families who had children attending Sunnyvale Public School (see Appendix 21 & 22). Whilst no specific information was collected in regards to the *Literacy Link* newsletter, when the term four

edition was handed out to each of the families, I was provided with an interesting comment from one of the Year One student's parents. On receiving the newsletter the parent asked what the newsletter was all about and was genuinely surprised to hear that it was in fact the second *Literacy Link* newsletter to be handed out to the students, as their family had not received the first volume of the newsletter, even though I had given a copy to each family via the students. Selective coding linked this comment to a previous one made by the same participant in their semi-formal interview about schools relying on parents actually reading the school's newsletter (see Chapter Four). For me, this raised the concern of just how often did notes and other such documents disappear on their journey from the classroom to the students' homes.

6.1.9 Semi-formal Interviews with Kindergarten Parents

The term four semi-formal interviews (see Appendix 4) with two of the three Kindergarten parent participants gave me a considerable understanding of the opinions held by the Kindergarten parents on the following topics:

- the effects on the Kindergarten students' families and the impact the study had on the parents' involvement in their child's literacy development;
- the connective activities which appealed to the Kindergarten parents;
- comments made by the Kindergarten students about the connective program;
- parental involvement in a child's education; and
- the different views of education held by the Kindergarten students' parents and grandparents

Coding of the data revealed the key issues of the interviews.

Due to illness the third Kindergarten parent participant could not attend the organised semi-formal interview. When school commenced in 2005 this family no longer had any children attending Sunnyvale Primary School and so an interview with this family's parent participant was never completed.

The first aspect considered in the analysis of the Kindergarten parent semi-formal interviews was how the research study (and the connective program) affected the families and if it had any implications for the way that the parents involved themselves in their child's literacy development.

Participant 004c (Ashley's mother) revealed that due to illness she had not filled out the family literacy journal as often as she had in the past, but did not believe that the project had had a large impact on her life. When asked if she felt that her participation in the project had influenced the way she saw or involved herself in her child's literacy development Participant 004c stated, "Yeah, I think it gives you a, you're more – because I know you've got to do it, it's terrible to say that, but, um, yeah, it has, probably, yeah sure" (P004c SI, 2004:1). This comment coincides with the same participant's comment found in the section about the Home Reading Scheme: parental involvement in their children's home literacy development may have been at a higher intensity, due to the research study being conducted.

When Participant 001a (Claire's mother) was asked to reflect on how the research project had affected her everyday life her response supported what Participant 004c had

been suggesting: “Um, yes, I think it has because you tend to want to try and do a little bit more with them at home, try and fit a bit more in” (P001a SI, 2004:1).

In regards to how the research project influenced the way she saw, or participated in her child’s literacy development Participant 001a revealed that she was more conscious of the types of literacy activities that her child participated in whilst at home. “I think um, you seem to take notice and you’re watching closer what they are doing, especially when she might write a note or something. I think I’m a little bit more involved in it at home than I was before” (P001a SI, 2004:1). Selective coding illustrated how the project enabled the Kindergarten parents to consider their own involvement in their child’s literacy development. Again, this raises the question of just how often literacy activities would have occurred in the students’ homes if the study had not been conducted. It is not possible to make any assumptions about the frequency of family literacy events if the study had not taken place, but I believe that the study sharpened parental consciousness of literacy opportunities in family situations. In other words, to some extent the study forced literacy into the primary Discourses of the Kindergarten students.

The second aspect of the interview asked the parents if during the study they or their children had participated in any activities from which they thought other Kindergarten students or parents could benefit. As previously mentioned, Participant 004c revealed how her involvement in the study encouraged further involvement on her behalf in her child’s literacy development (P004c SI, 2004:1). When asked if she viewed the term three literacy morning tea as an imposition and just one more thing that the school required of

parents, Participant 004c stated: “Oh no, I don’t mind doing it, I mean, I think it’s good because you give out information about what they are doing. I think it is good that we know what they are doing in class and that sort of thing...” (P004c SI, 2004:3).

When asked what she thought about coming to the meetings (literacy morning teas) Participant 001a said, “No, I think that it’s a good idea to keep up with what they are doing, yeah, just keep involved in it a little bit more, what’s going on and then you can do a little more at home. Kind of know where you’re at” (P001a SI, 2004:2). I concluded the interview by asking the participant if she now felt that she knew a little bit more about what happened in the classroom, or if she felt she had the same level of knowledge that she had prior to the study. Her reply was: “No, I think I know a little more about what’s going on and Claire comes home with different things and says they have been doing this and that. Yeah, she seems to be coming along pretty fast. I think it’s good” (P001a SI, 2004:2). Axial coding linked the positive opinions about the literacy morning teas with the survey results. Both data conveyed the literacy morning teas as a successful mode of connecting the school and families.

The third aspect of the semi-formal interviews invited parents to discuss any comments made by the Kindergarten students to their parents about the research project. Participant 004c said that her daughter had not passed any comment, in fact “she never mentioned anything” (P004c SI, 2004:1). Participant 001a declared that her daughter had said that she liked working with me (the researcher), as well as being involved in literacy activities at home (P001a SI, 2004:1). One of the limitations of asking parents this

question about their children and the research study is that because the children were in Kindergarten and had not previously attended school full-time, they really had no way of knowing what school was like without having a research study conducted at the same time. For this group of Kindergarten students it was the norm to have a variety of connective activities included within the usual school time table.

The fourth aspect of the interviews considered the parents' opinions about parental involvement in a child's education. The participants were asked if they felt that there is increasingly more pressure for parents to be involved in their children's education.

Participant 004c claimed:

I think I find a difference from Ashley to [my eldest child]. We didn't have any of this, like they still had to do their home reading and that sort of thing, but I would say since we've done this I've done more, normally, anyway (P004c SI, 2004:1).

Again, the above statement reveals that the study itself encouraged more involvement from parents in their children's education. The participant was then asked if she felt that, apart from the study, there was more pressure in everyday schooling for parents to be more involved. To this, Participant 004c stated that she believed that there was not more pressure to be involved in children's education (P004c SI, 2004:1). When asked about her opinion about the possible increasing pressure for parents to be involved in their children's education Participant 001a said, "No, I don't think pressure, actually, but um, I think you should be involved, but I don't feel pressured" (P001a SI, 2004:1). Selective coding linked this comment with one made by Year One parent, Participant 003b (see Chapter Four). She felt that parents wished to be more involved in children's education

and that the connections between schools and families were more open today (P003b SI, 2004).

The fifth aspect of the interviews asked the parents to describe how they felt their own parents viewed education; and whether they took their children's education quite seriously, or was it something they were simply obliged to be involved in.

Participant 004c said:

I don't think it was as, how can I put it? Like I mean, you know, if you didn't do your homework, my Mum had four kids and it was like, you know, everything was so busy it was just like – I can't remember them sitting down every night and reading and things like that... There is a difference from my childhood to how we, I mean my friends read books to their kids every night, her husband will go in there and read a book every night. Where my kids might miss a night, it just depends on what's happened, you know, like if you've got dinner late and you think it's too late and they've got to go to bed and things like that (P004c SI, 2004:2).

Axial coding linked Participant 004c's comment about her children missing a night of having a book read to them with a comment found in Family Two's Kindergarten parent questionnaire. Family Two pointed out there was not always enough time to complete the family literacy events that they so wished to, due to a lack of time (Family Two, 2004).

When Participant 001a was asked to comment on her parents' view of education, she stated: "I remember Mum used to sort of help with homework, but she wasn't that involved. I didn't think that parents were that involved then." I then proceeded to ask the

participant if she felt that parents' role in their children's education had changed, to which she replied, "I think so, possibly" (P001a SI, 2004:2).

The Kindergarten parent participants were then asked to consider whether their own view of education differed from the view held by their parents. In reply to this inquiry Participant 004c mentioned how, "I think that you try to do as much as you can at home, but sometimes, like I said, you have things in your life that might happen, you know, you get side-tracked or something..." (P004c SI, 2004:3). Participant 001a's response was: "Yeah, I think so. My Dad wasn't involved at all, but Mum, it was just more or less homework and meetings, but other than that there really wasn't much parent input" (P001a SI, 2004:2).

One of the most crucial points to arise from the Kindergarten parent semi-formal interviews was that the study compelled the parents to look at their involvement in their children's literacy development, particularly on a primary Discourse level. As the literacy morning tea survey results suggested, the interviews supported the success of the literacy morning teas of informing parents about school literacy practices and events. There was a view that parents were wishing to be involved in their children's secondary Discourse of schooling and that parental involvement had increased since they were attending school.

6.1.10 The Teaching Staff's Responses to the Connective Program and School Literacy Development

Coding of the Principal's questionnaire and the classroom literacy journal uncovered a number of valuable comments made by the teaching staff.

The Principal's Questionnaire

Whilst the Principal of Sunnyvale Public School did not directly implement the connectives activities associated with the research study, she was asked at the end of the study to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix 9), in which the Principal could write about any observations made about the research study during its implementation.

Question three in the Principal's questionnaire asked the respondent to state whether or not she felt that the literacy research project had any impact on the school, students or their families. The Principal identified both positive and negative impacts of the study. In regards to the positive aspects of the study, the Principal listed the following points:

engaging parent participation and understanding of home reading; strategies parents could successfully use at home; improving parent/caregivers understanding of literacy and what it means for their child/ren; students in project developed a more rounded and thorough approach to particularly, reading (P011f PQ, 2005).

The Principal identified one negative aspect arising from the project, this being "engaging all parents in the process of project who were targeted" (P011f PQ, 2005). On discussing this statement with the Principal, I came to the understanding that the above negative aspect was in reference to the Year One family who did not have anyone attend activities related to the study, apart from the introductory literacy morning tea in term two and the Year One semi-formal interview. Whilst this was indeed true, it must be pointed out that the attendance by Year One parents at the term three and four literacy morning teas was not initially required, and only evolved after being requested by the other Year One parent participant.

Question four asked the Principal if she thought that the school's new-found ineligibility for PSP would affect the teaching and learning of literacy skills at Sunnyvale. In summation it was predicted that the loss of PSP would result in the loss of human resources, specifically the Teacher's Aide, who enabled regular programs to be conducted with "at risk" students and also facilitated more "one-to-one" teaching and learning experiences in the multi-stage classroom.

Question five of the Principal's questionnaire asked the Principal to recognise any activities or ideas which had been implemented in the research project that could be used in the future. The Principal highlighted the link between the act of students bringing in books from home and the quality teaching element of "connectedness" as being one of the positive approaches of the study (see Appendix 1 for more information about Quality Teaching and the element of connectedness). In regards to what else was regarded as being advantageous for students and families the Principal wrote: "Of benefit to other students and families is the detailed explanations given to parents about the learning of reading ie best practice; strategies to engage students; understanding the jargon" (P011f PQ, 2005). Linked to the literacy morning tea surveys and comments made by the Kindergarten parents about the morning teas, it would appear that this form of connecting families and the school may be a successful link with other parent groups in the future.

Question six invited the Principal to express any other comments she may have had in regards to the research study. The Principal responded to this question by writing: "Clear communication of ideas – some difficult concepts for non-specialists such as parents –

assisted in the parents' participation in this study" (P011f PQ, 2005). The Principal concluded this question by inviting me to share the research study's strategies so that they could be incorporated into the school plan: "I would welcome any suggestions or outline of how we could incorporate your research project strategies into the overall whole school yearly plan so that the positives of your research becomes part of a cyclical process" (P011f PQ, 2005). The completion of data analysis and the writing of this thesis will see the Principal of Sunnyvale and myself investigate the most appropriate ways of implementing the more successful aspects of the connective program within the school.

The Classroom Literacy Journal

At the end of the connective program the classroom literacy journal entries, written by the teaching staff were examined for any reflections made about the connective activities, or the Kindergarten's literacy development. Whilst the Principal's comments were not based on the implementation of the connective activities, they do give a valuable insight into the progress the Kindergarten students were making in the area of literacy. In the journal entry dated 7th, 8th and 9th June 2004 the Principal reflected how she, despite good intentions, did not complete with the Kindergarten students what she had originally anticipated:

Despite best efforts, just did not get around to reading for pleasure with K[indergarten] children as I normally try to do. Feel K[indergarten] students may not have been enriched as they have been (P011f CRLJ, 2005).

It is felt that the above quote is a meaningful insight into how teachers often feel; what they plan to do within a school day does not always happen, due to the many factors which can affect the time available to complete intended tasks within the classroom.

Selective coding linked the above comment with one made by Participant 004c in the Kindergarten parent interview, as well as one written by Family Two in the Kindergarten parent questionnaire. All participants recognised a lack of time as being a factor of literacy events not taking place in their particular setting. Perhaps participants felt obliged to make other activities a priority, leaving some literacy events neglected.

The Principal's entry dated 7th, 8th and 9th June 2004 was comprised of a short reflection about each of the Kindergarten students. Concerning the students the Principal wrote:

Sarah enjoys reading new text but continues to be easily distracted. Ashley just loves the texts, is very confident and is a cautious, yet very willing, participant in exploring words. Claire has a very good idea and understanding of how words/sentences work and is able to write her own sentence virtually independent (P011f CRLJ, 2004:2-3).

With there only being three students in Kindergarten, it was possible to have a very profound knowledge of the students' literacy development, and I believe that the above comment from the Principal exemplifies this point.

On 15th November 2004 the Principal wrote an entry in the classroom literacy journal which discussed what she believed contributed to the success of young children in the area of literacy:

On reflecting on the Kindergarten students there are several factors that are crucial for early literacy success. The first of these is the open dialogue between family and school. If there is the smallest misunderstanding between the role of the school and their expectations of family, and what the family think should be happening (despite what is clear communication) then this understanding can have the potential to become conflict. If expectations are

clearly set down then the written form is what is most likely to ensure families understand the school's expectations. With our three K[indergarten] students, this communication has been very evident that with two families written or spoken (less) communication has been more than adequate whilst with one – constant verbal and returning to written explanations has been required. The second factor is the oral communication level of the students when they arrive at school. Sounding out words is critical in THRASS and if you find –ck hard to say, then it is hard to write (P011f CRLJ, 2004:15-16).

The Principal believed that successful early literacy development for students stemmed from two factors: 1) open communication between families and the school; and 2) students commencing school with sound oral language skills.

The following entry written by myself contains information about the relationship which existed between the Kindergarten and Year One students and the older students of the school.

Both sessions [this week] were spent helping students to swap their home readers. Time was given for the older students to read to the [Kindergarten and Year One] students. Older students often ask if they can do this (reading to younger students, that is) I think because not only do they enjoy the stories, but because it puts them in a place of leadership. The younger students simply enjoy hearing the stories and having the opportunity to interact with the older students. Much more exciting than always having me read the story! (R.E. CRLJ, 22-23.7.2004:7-8).

This entry from the classroom literacy journal illustrates the important role that students, particularly those who are in one of the higher grades, play in a small school. The older students of Sunnyvale Public School were modeling to their younger peers that reading in the secondary Discourse of school was something which could be fun and interactive.

This is quite similar to the idea that children learn about family reading events from older siblings and parents, hence also have role models in their primary Discourses.

6.2 Concluding Comments

Research question four, Phase Three (a) of the research, uncovered the participants' opinions about the connective program. It shared with the reader how the students, parents and teaching staff reacted to the activities and gave further insights into their opinions about various literacy issues. Bringing in books from home to share in the classroom was positively received by students, teaching staff and parents, thus may be suggested as a successful means of incorporating the students' primary Discourses in the classroom. The group discussions about reading and writing encouraged students to present their own opinions about their primary Discourses without being concerned what would be viewed as being correct or incorrect in the secondary Discourse setting. The examination of newspapers showed how students use different strategies to solve problems, or in other words, knowledge from their primary Discourses to solve problems presented to them in a secondary Discourse setting. The task of making jelly demonstrated to me that what we as teachers aim to achieve from an activity may not necessarily be what students gain from a task. The THRASS games were enjoyed by the students and demonstrated how acquisition-based learning can occur in the small rural classroom. The small class size enabled me to ask students on an individual basis if they had any concerns or questions about activities and students took up this opportunity to ask me questions. The Home Reading Scheme was also embraced by teaching staff, students and parents and appeared to be a positive way of encouraging families to adopt a school-initiated literacy program in their homes.

All students recognised reading and writing as skills which were important to have, though the students varied in their responses about why it was important to have these skills, as well as what they liked and did not like about learning to read and write. These views will change and develop as the students mature and gain a greater understanding of the importance of these skills within different Discourse settings. For the students the most appealing classroom connective activities were those which allowed them to be involved in the content of the task, such as bringing in books from home, as well as those which were “hands on”, such as making the jelly. For me this reiterated the benefit of including acquisition-based activities in the classroom.

The results of the term three and four literacy morning tea surveys conveyed that the morning teas did achieve their purpose of furthering the parents’ knowledge about the secondary Discourse of school literacy. The *Literacy Link* newsletter emphasised how attempts of linking families with the school could only be successful if the information was actually reaching parents. One of the limitations of this study became evident in the Kindergarten parent semi-formal interviews, where it was revealed that parental involvement in their children’s literacy development during the research study may have been at a higher level, simply because of the parents’ involvement in the study. In other words, this is an example of a secondary Discourse affecting what occurred in the Kindergarten students’ primary Discourse. The interviews also revealed that the parents wished to be involved with their children’s education.

The Sunnyvale Principal invited me to share with her some of the strategies used in the connective program in one of her responses to the Principal's questionnaire. Discussion after the completion of this thesis with the Principal could see some of the more successful activities continue at Sunnyvale Public School. The classroom literacy journal highlighted how a lack of time can sometimes prevent literacy events from taking place, and also showed the positive role that older students can play in the school literacy development of younger students in a small school. The following chapter concludes Phase Three with Section (b). This section completes the case studies for the Kindergarten students and investigates the issue of rurality.

connective activities. The participants' responses to, and subsequent content of the activities are discussed in Chapter Six.

5.1.1 Research Question Three - What is the nature of a connective program which combines the family literacy practices and school literacy practices of a Kindergarten class in a small rural school?

Families and schools need to understand how each other views literacy. Cairney (1994:270-271) suggested that teachers and parents need to recognise how the two entities define, value and use literacy as part of their cultural practices. In order to answer research question one, it was necessary to collect data about the family literacy events in which the Kindergarten students were involved whilst at home. This in turn allowed me to revisit Cairney and Ruge's four literacy practices (1998b:111) and categorise the family literacy events found in this study in a similar manner to Cairney and Ruge (1998). Having accomplished this, a connective program was designed to incorporate some of the family literacy practices in the classroom, as well as connecting families and the school.

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, Gee (1996) referred to primary Discourses as the Discourses which are gained through acquisition. Therefore, by including some of the Kindergarten students' family literacy events I was also ensuring that there were acquisition-based literacy activities in the newly-designed connective program. Acquisition-based activities are important to have in a classroom as Gee (1991:6) suggested how it is through acquisition that students master literacy.

The main idea behind the classroom connective program was to complement the existing school literacy practices and events with items found in the students' primary Discourses. During 2004 I taught at Sunnyvale school each Thursday and most Fridays, hence, these were the days that the connective activities were implemented within the school. The activities occurred after lunch, during designated silent reading time for the other year groups. Prior to the commencement of the study I created a simple plan of the proposed classroom connective activities and revealed how the activities could be linked to the NSW *English K-6 Syllabus* (see Appendix 16).

5.1.2 Activities Designed to Incorporate Home Generated Reading Events in the Classroom

Activities in the connective program which were based on the reading events of the Kindergarten students included bringing books from home to share with classmates, a group discussion about home generated reading events, examining newspapers and examining the packaging on grocery items.

Bringing in Books from Home and Sharing them with Classmates

Reading for pleasure was a popular family literacy event for all three students. The Kindergarten students were invited to bring in one of their favourite books from home to share with the rest of the Kindergarten class. This activity encompassed a number of themes which arose from the data contained within the questionnaires and the journals. Themes from the questionnaires included: listening to family members read story books; looking at picture books; and reciting words from a familiar story or picture book. From the literacy journals the themes relevant to this particular activity included: reading for

pleasure; reading to family members; and reading books relevant to events occurring within the students' lives. From term two onwards, approximately once a term I gave the students a letter inviting them to bring in one of their favourite books from home (see Appendix 17). Depending on the difficulty of the book either the student or I read the story to the Kindergarten class. Sometimes the Year One students were also invited to hear the story, due to the excitement which arose in the classroom about someone being able to bring in a book from home. The books were read and discussed after lunch, whilst the older students were participating in silent reading. Each time a student had brought in a book from home they were asked to create an illustration relevant to the text which could be displayed within the classroom. I initiated the event of bringing in a childhood storybook from home by showing the students a favourite book from my childhood, as a means of demonstrating what the objective of the activity entailed. Some of the books belonging to the students which were shared with the class included *Pal the Pony: Sal to the Rescue*, *Little Red Riding Hood* and the *Children's Picture Atlas*. The Kindergarten students were in a position to have direct input into this activity, as the texts used came from their homes and were selected by the students.

Group Discussion: 'Do we Read Anything Else other than Story Books when we are at Home?'

This activity involved the creation of a mind map, scribed by myself, with examples from the Kindergarten students of how reading took place in their homes in many different forms, other than story book reading. Obviously, because this task required students to participate in a discussion, it also tied in with the area of listening and talking, as well as reading. The aim of this activity was to demonstrate to the children just how

versatile reading can be, a skill which is used in our everyday lives and doesn't simply mean reading a story book.

Examining Newspapers

On completing the mind map about the reading experiences other than storybooks, it became obvious that a number of the students' parents read the newspaper. From the Kindergarten parent questionnaire and the family literacy journals the activity of examining newspapers possessed the themes of: finding familiar brands; children reading and asking about symbols; signs and posters; and listening and talking. The school had been receiving newspapers on a daily basis while the Athens 2004 Olympic Games were being held. This seemed like the perfect opportunity to introduce the Kindergarten students to newspapers. Students were to consider why people read newspapers, then the students and I looked through a newspaper, identifying items which the students found interesting, as well as any symbols and pictures that they were familiar with, such as Barbie, Harry Potter, Lego, Coles and Woolworths.

Students also created an Olympic collage from the newspaper, finding relevant pictures and headlines. The whole school participated in finding an article (or a picture for Kindergarten and Year One students) which interested them and if their name was drawn out of a hat they were to talk about their article or picture to their peers from Kindergarten to Year Six. This activity continued for the duration of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, as it became a wonderful opportunity for students to extend their public speaking skills, in front of a familiar audience.

Examining the Packaging on Grocery Items

Continuing on with the theme of identifying logos and images I created a session whereby students were given a number of grocery packages, such as a soup box, and were asked to identify what the box contained, how we found out this information, as well as investigating other information found on the box, such as ingredients and sometimes the directions. This activity directly linked to the mind map where students identified different forms of reading, as packaging may be regarded as another kind of reading material.

5.1.3 Activities Designed to Incorporate Home Generated Writing and Spelling Events in the Classroom

Many of the home generated writing and spelling events contained a similarity to an activity that was already in existence within the classroom, such as writing letters and cards, attempting to spell new words, using lower and capital letters and writing about drawings. Hence, it was not necessary to create new activities in order to incorporate what was occurring within the Kindergarten students' homes. However, the THRASS games did incorporate particular elements which were noted in the family literacy journals. The group discussion about home generated writing events gave further insight into the writing events occurring in the Kindergarten students' homes.

Games to Assist with the Development of THRASS Skills

It was Sarah's family's creation of the game whereby messages were written and then sent by the family's dog (SLJ, 22.5.04:1) that demonstrated how important it is for students to be involved in events that they find stimulating and fun. During the

Kindergarten and Year Ones' dedicated THRASS time on a Thursday and Friday, time was set aside for "games" which were created with some of the ideas found in the family literacy journals. For example, Claire discussed the use of lower case and capital letters at the beginning of words (CLJ, 4.6.04:3), so students were asked to spell words, having to decide if a capital or lower case letter was required. Teams were created and an element of competition was added through the distribution of points to those students who completed tasks correctly. The aim here was for students to acquire knowledge via fun, rather than having to focus on the activity being a structured learning task.

Claire also spent time trying to spell words on her magnetic board at home, so a similar game to this was created, this time with the focus being on spelling new and simple words. One person from each team attempted to spell a word and, once completed, a group discussion followed in regards to the grapheme or spelling choices students had selected from the THRASS chart, as well as examining what choices might have been more appropriate if the students had spelt the word incorrectly. It should be noted that all of the writing and spelling games also possessed strong links to the theme of talking and listening, due to the dialogue which occurred between myself and students, and indeed between the students as they presented their ideas and understandings to one another. THRASS related games also occurred on the days when I was not on class, hence, were in existence prior to the commencement of the research study, as they were a key component of encouraging and introducing the students to the THRASS program.

Group Discussion: 'When do we use Writing when we are at Home?'

Similar to the mind map created about reading within the students' homes, another

mind map was created where students were asked to describe all of the occasions when writing was used within their homes. Again, due to the element of discussion contained in this activity, this task also linked to the theme of listening and talking. This activity aimed at encouraging students to see the skill of writing as more than something which is used at school; it too, like reading, is an essential part of our everyday lives.

5.1.4 Activities Designed to Incorporate Home Generated Listening and Talking Events in the Classroom

The listening and talking activities which evolved from the analysis of the data included the THRASS games, group discussions and encouraging students to ask questions.

Games to Assist with the Development of THRASS Skills

Four main ideas in regards to listening and talking arose in the results from the Kindergarten parent questionnaires and the family literacy journals: reading and asking about symbols; asking questions; contributing to discussions; and games. The connection between games and listening and talking has, to some extent, previously been discussed in the writing and spelling section. However, there was another game created by Sarah's family whereby the skills being developed were mainly in relation to listening and talking skills. The game *Guess Who* allowed one participant to verbally describe an animal, whilst the other participant had to listen carefully to the clue in order to determine what type of animal was being described. This concept was used in order to allow the Kindergarten and Year One students to familiarise themselves with the THRASS chart.

Students would take turns to select an item from the chart and give clues to where it was positioned on the chart, or clues in reference to what the item physically looked like.

Group Discussions and Encouraging Students to Ask Questions

From reading the three family literacy journals, it was obvious that the children all lived in environments where they felt comfortable to participate in discussions, as well as to ask questions about things they were unsure. Of course, participating in discussions and asking questions would have occurred in the classroom even if the research project had not been conducted. However, I extended the skill of participating in a discussion by asking students to become involved in a group discussion about concepts relevant to the research project, thus becoming a means of collecting data. As previously mentioned in both the reading and the writing and spelling sections, these group discussions were documented in the form of mind maps. Mind maps were used as a means of documenting the students' ideas in a format that was easy for them to follow. Whilst the Kindergarten students could not read all of the words written on the mind maps they could locate their names, which had been written with their responses.

Whilst not becoming a specific activity within the classroom, the fact that the family literacy journals reported how the Kindergarten students asked a variety of questions at home, illustrated that if a child is in an environment where he or she feels at ease and comfortable with the people around him or her, then they will seize the opportunity to ask questions freely. Hence, I took it upon myself to be conscious of whether I was creating an environment within the classroom, and indeed in all areas of the school, whereby

students felt secure enough to present questions to me. The types of questions which I encouraged the students to ask were:

- queries about instructions;
- questions about the content or topic areas of set tasks; and
- solutions when having difficulties or concerns with a task

If nothing else, I wanted the students to have the confidence to let me know when they did not understand something that was being presented within the classroom, regardless of which KLA the lesson was dealing with.

5.1.5 Existing Classroom Activities which Supported Family Literacy Events

On reading the data presented in the Kindergarten parent questionnaires and the family literacy journals, it became apparent that there were numerous activities already taking place in the classroom which encompassed many similarities to the home generated activities of the students. Thus, it was not necessary to recreate these activities, but simply to report on how these existing activities connected to what was occurring in the students' homes. These activities have been categorised the same as the connective program, including reading, writing and spelling, listening and talking and technology. In the area of reading the existing events included the Home Reading Scheme and silent reading. The school literacy events of daily writing in the Kindergarten students' big books and the creation of cards linked to the home generated writing and spelling activities of the Kindergarten students. Listening and talking events at the school saw Kindergarten students participating in news and the existing THRASS games. The home generated technology events included using the computer and watching television, both of which were also used at school.

Reading

The Home Reading Scheme

As previously stated two of the main reading activities that the Kindergarten students were involved in whilst at their homes were reading for pleasure and reading to another family member, and the Home Reading Scheme supported these two concepts. Firstly, the scheme ensured that the students had access to literature within their homes which could be read for fun and secondly, the texts which students could select to take home had been organised in such a way that students were taking books from an easier level than the ones they were using for guided and independent reading activities in the classroom.

By taking home texts which were not too hard for the students to read, it was envisaged that students would feel comfortable and confident reading the books to a family member. Its sole purpose was to ensure that students were prepared to participate in quality and enjoyable reading whilst they were at home.

Silent Reading

Each Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon, and indeed on some Thursday and Friday afternoons, when I was on class, students were given time to simply read for pleasure, and this activity was referred to as silent reading time. For the Kindergarten students this meant that there were occasions when they would spend the time looking at texts which they had selected themselves, or the teacher on class would select a text to read as a modeled reading activity. The modeled reading activity was a favourite activity of all the Kindergarten students and sometimes the Year One students were also invited

to listen, due to the whimsical looks on their faces when they saw the younger students being read to! It seemed that because the students often had stories read to them at home by a family member, it was something familiar to them, and this assisted with the activity being very popular within the classroom.

Writing and Spelling

Daily Writing in the Students' Big Books

In all three of the Kindergartens' family literacy journals reference is made to writing activities, from writing letters, creating cards to drawing pictures and writing on the pictures. Prior to the research study commencing the Kindergarten students were already participating in an activity which supported these home generated writing practices. Each morning the students were required to write in what was commonly referred to as their Big Books. The Big Books were simply very large exercise books that, initially contained blank pages, and then later on, during the school year, had half a blank page and half a lined page. The Big Books that simply contained the blank pages were used at the beginning of the year, for the students to draw a picture on and then the teacher would write a sentence about the picture below. The students were invited to draw anything they desired, whether it was something which had happened to them in real life, or a narrative which they had made up. As time went by students were encouraged to start writing some of the words by themselves in their Big Book entry, leading up to being able to attempt writing the sentence themselves - the focus moving away from the drawing and onto the writing. This activity continued and developed throughout Year One to Year Five, as the students wrote daily entries in a journal, a place where they could write about all of the things that were happening in their lives.

Creating Cards

Two of the family literacy journals referred to the students making cards: one resulted from the purchase of a letter writing kit; and the other due to the birthdays of relatives. On special occasions such as Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Christmas and Easter the students were given the opportunity at school to create cards for their family and friends. This procedure had been in place prior to the commencement of the research study.

Listening and Talking

News

Every Monday morning all of the students were given the opportunity to participate in telling their peers some news about things that were happening in their lives. The students from Kindergarten to Year Six were broken up into two groups, one working in the classroom, and the other in the library, which adjoined the classroom. As each child presented his or her news one of their peers was required to pay particular attention, as it would be their duty to summarise what the speaker had discussed at the end of the activity. Thus, the students gained experience at speaking in front of a group of people, as well as being required to listening closely to someone speak. These activities aimed to develop students' oral and aural skills. This activity directly linked to the home generated listening and talking activity of participating in a discussion which was referred to in the family literacy journals.

Games to Assist with the Development of THRASS Skills

As previously mentioned, there were already THRASS games being played in the classroom prior to the extra games which were created after reading the term one and two

family literacy journals. The existing games invited lots of discussion from the students and, of course, also encompassed the themes of reading, spelling and writing.

Technology

Computers and the Television

From looking at the Kindergarten parent questionnaire it was deduced that all of the families allowed their children to watch educational television programs, however, reference to a child watching any type of television program was only mentioned once during the term one and two journal entries. This was in Sarah's journal where her selection of a library book was initiated by a Dreamtime story she had seen on the ABC (SLJ, 20.5.2004:1). At school, when deemed appropriate, the students were allowed to watch television programs which had some relevance to a particular area they were studying in class, for example videos about the planets or life cycles to link up with the KLA of science. There were also occasions when students could watch a G-rated (General Viewing) movie over a period of several weeks on a Friday afternoon, as the school term drew to a close.

In the family literacy journals reference to using computers within the home environment was made by two of the families. Both of these families reported how their children played education games on their computers, and this was indeed something which also occurred at school. Since attending pre-school at Sunnyvale Primary School the 2004 Kindergarten students had been given access to the school's computers to play some of the educational computer programs. These games were played before school, on rainy days, and sometimes as a treat when classroom activities had been completed.

5.2 Activities Implemented to Connect Families and the School

The connective program was not only designed to bring the Kindergarten students' family literacy practices into the classroom, but it was also created to enlighten parents about the school's literacy practices. Parent involvement in a child's education can increase a child's self-esteem (Canter & Canter 1991:5; Greenburg 1989:61). When Cairney and Munsie (1995:402) discussed the Talk to a Literacy Learner (TTALL) program they revealed how the initiative saw parents and the school working closer with one another. They also reported how those involved in the program had a newly developed appreciation of either the home or the school. These findings motivated me to create some activities which, if nothing else, increased the families' awareness of and familiarity with how literacy was taught within the school.

The research project was initially introduced to prospective participants via a morning tea held at the school and this section discusses the introductory morning tea, followed by the morning teas held in terms three and four. Next, the newsletter entitled *Literacy Link* is described. Finally, the role of the family literacy journals and the classroom literacy journal is described.

Introductory Morning Tea

In order to introduce the research project to the Kindergarten and Year One parents a morning tea was held in April 2004. Once the objectives of the project had been explained to the parents (see Appendix 18), they were then invited to participate in the project and were given a consent form to take home and read at their leisure before making their final decision about participating. I believe that by initially presenting the

project in a relaxed setting, over morning tea, then the potential participants were more comfortable to ask questions about the study.

From analysing the results from the returned Kindergarten parent questionnaires it was revealed that two out of the three respondents were open to the possibility of attending a morning or afternoon tea once a term. The other respondent to the survey had selected the option of attending a morning or afternoon tea approximately every five weeks. Due to these results I decided that a literacy morning tea would be held once a term. Initially it was envisaged that the morning teas would be attended by the Kindergarten students' parents only, but after interest shown by one of the Year One parents who was also participating in the study, the invitation was extended to include the Year One parents as well. The inspiration behind the literacy morning tea sessions was to further extend the parents' knowledge of what was occurring within the school in regards to literacy. The sessions were also created as an opportunity for parents to raise any concerns or queries that they had about the literacy program which was being conducted within the school.

Term Three Literacy Morning Tea

The literacy morning tea for term three was held in July 2004. As previously mentioned parents were invited to use the morning tea sessions as a means of asking any questions that they had about literacy learning at the school, however, I also planned a specific outline for the morning tea (see Appendix 19). This was to ensure that the session actually had some direction and hopefully enabled parents to leave with further knowledge about what was occurring at the school.

During the term three literacy morning tea there were three areas of discussion raised: the *English K-6 Syllabus* (Board of Studies NSW, 1998); the THRASS Program; and the school's Home Reading Scheme. The English Syllabus was selected as a topic area because I wanted to show the parents exactly where the school's literacy program had come from. The examination of the Syllabus also gave parents the opportunity to review the definitions behind the terms "Stages", "Outcomes" and "Indicators". Parents should already have had some understanding of the terms, as they were used in the students' work sample folders to assess their work.

The THRASS Program was another area of discussion at the term three literacy morning tea. I decided to give parents an overview of the THRASS Program because it was a relatively new program within the school, and consequently parents were not familiar with it. Also, one of the Kindergarten parents had suggested a talk about the THRASS Program on their returned questionnaire. The presentation about the THRASS Program entailed a general introduction to the program, as well as some insight into some of the terms used and their definitions, such as "phoneme" and "grapheme". Parents were also shown the picture chart used within the classroom and the handwriting chart, which had been sent home with the Kindergarten students for them to practise their letter formation.

Even though the Kindergarten students were already involved in the Home Reading Scheme, as were the Year One students, I used the literacy morning tea as an opportunity to explain how students were rewarded at school when they exchanged their reader. (The

classroom had a reward system where gold stars were distributed to students on a number of occasions, such as frequently borrowing readers). The tips on the back of the record sheet were reviewed, and this section of the morning tea concluded by reflecting on what parents could do when confronted with a child who was struggling on a word whilst reading at home. A general question time followed this discussion.

Prior to the parents leaving the morning tea they were given an evaluative survey to complete at home and return via a stamped and addressed envelope. Parents were invited to complete and return the survey so that I could gain feedback on whether the discussion at the morning tea had been a valuable experience for the participants. The results of these surveys are discussed in Chapter Six.

Term Four Literacy Morning Tea

The term four literacy morning tea was held in December 2004, with two out of three Kindergarten families being represented and one parent from Year One attending. During the year all parents had been given a kit that had been devised by the NSW Government, entitled *Helping Your Child - to read, write, spell and speak* (NSW DET n.d.). According to the covering letter written by the then NSW Premier, Bob Carr, the purpose of the kit was to give parents some extra support by offering them practical tips on helping to develop their children's literacy skills. The term four literacy morning tea focused on the content of these kits, with the main points being summarised in a handout for the participants to take home (see Appendix 20).

This morning tea also looked at the Stage One Outcomes of the *English K-6 Syllabus* (Board of Studies NSW, 1998) so that the parents had the opportunity to look at what their children would be aspiring to achieve during Years One and Two of their schooling. A handout of these Outcomes was given to the parent participants.

***Literacy Link* - A Newsletter for Families based on Literacy Activities and Information**

Whilst interviewing the Year One parents during Phase One of the research, the possibility of creating a monthly school literacy-based newsletter was discussed. Participant 006d thought that the monthly newsletters would be a good idea (P006d SI, 2004:3), however, as previously mentioned in Chapter Four, Participant 003b raised the point that the newsletters would only be of some use if they were actually being read once they were sent home (P003b SI, 2004:4). In the returned Kindergarten parent questionnaires only one out of the three respondents selected the option of receiving a literacy-based newsletter from the school.

After considering the above information, as well as thinking about the time that would be involved in creating a newsletter, it was decided that a literacy-based newsletter would be sent home on a termly basis. It was hoped that the decision to limit the editions of the newsletter would encourage parents to read it once the newsletter had been sent home.

The foremost aim of the literacy-based newsletter was to create another bond between the school and the families of the students. The term three edition of *Literacy Link* (see Appendix 21) contained a review of the literacy activities which the children had been

involved in during class time and an overview of what had been happening in the THRASS program. A section was dedicated to examples of the students' work and some parental tips about helping children to read had been taken from Paul Jennings' book entitled *The Reading Bug: and how you can help your child to catch it* (2003).

The term four edition of the literacy-based newsletter *Literacy Link* (see Appendix 22) gave parents an update on what students had been doing in the THRASS program. There was also a section allocated to examples of the students' work and an overview about the *Sunnyvale Co-ee*, the school's magazine which was distributed to the community at the end of the school year.

Family Literacy Journals

As previously discussed, the parents of the Kindergarten students kept a journal which documented the types of literacy activities that their children were involved in whilst they were at home. The families continued to write in these journals during Phase Two and coding of this data was completed during Phase Three of the research cycle.

Classroom Literacy Journal for Teachers

As a means of gaining an insight into the literacy activities of the Kindergarten students on the days when I was not at the school, the Principal contributed to a classroom literacy journal. The classroom literacy journal enabled me to collect written data in the following areas:

- how the teachers felt about the literacy activities which were occurring in the classroom;

- accounts of the students' reactions to the classroom literacy events; and
- comments about student progress

Having the Principal contribute to the classroom literacy journal ensured that another teacher's point of view was considered in regards to the literacy development of the Kindergarten students.

5.3 Concluding Comments

Phase Two saw the creation and implementation of the connective program. The part of the program which was implemented in the classroom provided students with literacy events in the areas of reading, writing and spelling and listening and talking. The fact that the Sunnyvale classroom was already conducting activities which had links to the Kindergarten students' primary Discourses of literacy illustrates how these connections between primary and secondary Discourses may occur without this being the initial intention of the literacy events. The literacy morning teas and the family literacy journals were both activities which encouraged direct contact between myself and parents. The *Literacy Link* newsletter was dependent on the students giving their parents the newsletter, so that they could further their knowledge about school literacy practices. The classroom literacy journal enabled the Principal and myself to remain in contact about the Kindergarten students' school literacy development.

Phase Three (a) of the research saw the completion of data analysis, and thus uncovered the participants' responses and the content of the connective activities described in this Chapter.