

**Teachers' Perception of Children of Parents Who Had Participated in a
Family Literacy Program**

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The Sample

Of the children who participated in the main study, thirty-eight of them had started school at the time of the data collection.

Methodology

Teachers rated the children in terms of their literacy knowledge/involvement (Extremely noticeable, Very noticeable, Somewhat noticeable, Not noticeable) and gave the children rankings on these behaviours in comparison with other children in the classroom (demonstrated More, Same or Less of these behaviours).

Results

The behaviours are listed in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The ratings of the children's literacy knowledge/involvement was high. The overall mean was 3.32 (out of 4) or between Very Noticeable (3) and Extremely Noticeable (4).

In analysing the comparative comparative rankings, the data for urban and rural children were separated. Urban children were defined as living in cities of more than 20,000 people and rural children were defined as living in communities of fewer than 5000 population. There were 18 urban and 20 rural children.

For the rural children all behaviours for all children were rated as exhibiting Same or More of the behaviours than their peers. The urban children could be divided into two groups according to schools they attended: a group of eight and a group of 10. The group of eight (who came from two schools) were ranked similar to the rural children. The group of 10 except for two children were ranked as Less involved in the behaviours in comparison with their peers. Further analysis showed that the urban

children who had participated in the PRINTS Program were from low-income homes (usually social assistance). The two schools attended by the eight children were in low-income neighbourhoods; the group of ten children attended schools normally attended by middle and upper middle income parents. In the rural areas, the parents of the target children were not different in income status from the rest of the school population.

It is understandable that children of middle and upper middle income families would have provided support for their children prior to their entering school. Such parents tend to have sufficient money to purchase books, computers, and educational games. Generally, such parents have a higher level of education than parents of low-income and would be more likely to attend seminars, read books, etc. on child and literacy development. Such parents tend to feel comfortable around teachers and schools and would be more likely to interact with teachers regarding their children's enrollment in school and their performance.

Unless parents of low-income communities are involved in a program such as PRINTS which guides and fosters their knowledge in supporting their young children's literacy development, their children may be at a disadvantage when they enter school. The knowledge of the PRINTS children was rated highly by teachers. Yet, in comparison with children of middle and high-income parents, they were more likely to be rated lower in terms their level of literacy expertise. This raises a number of questions - whether expectation or actual knowledge was a factor in the comparative rating of the ten children. If children from low-income homes are rated on expectation rather than the knowledge they actually possess, then they face an obstacle in schools attended by children of middle and high-income parents in spite of the fact the low-income parents participated in the PRINTS Program and the children had developed a sound literacy base. There are many subconscious factors that may come into play in rating children's learning in school. Certainly, such factors as parent resources, parent involvement in school, parent ability to express their thoughts and expectations for their children all play a role.

Conclusion

Children's success in school is dependent on many factors. Certainly, one of these is their prior learning, particularly in terms of reading and writing. While children of middle and high-income families usually provide appropriate learning experiences for their children prior to entering school, this is not always the case for low-income families. Limited resources and limited understanding of how to best help their children provide challenges for them. However, more and more low-income families are participating in community based family literacy programs. This support certainly provides the parents and children with a knowledge base that is to their advantage when they enter school. However, if children of low-income families attend schools in middle and high-income neighbourhoods, they may be at a disadvantage in comparison with neighbourhood children. This suggests that a literacy knowledge base is not sufficient for expectations of success. Parents must become more involved in their children's schooling, and exhibit similar participatory school behaviours as middle and high-income parents in monitoring and advocating for their children's progress.

Table 4
Teachers' Rating of Children's Reading and Writing Behaviours

Interested in bringing school material home	3.70
Participates in reading and writing activities in class	3.66
Interested in books	3.60
Engages in printing/drawing activities	3.52
Attempts to write	3.24
Feels secure in a reading/writing environment	3.20
Attempts to read	3.10
Prints words that he/she knows	3.00
Talks about books read at home	2.94
Asks questions about books	2.85
Overall Mean	3.28