A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PRACTICES IN BLACK MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES: IMPLICATIONS OF RACE AND CLASS

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ABSTRACT

Naa Dede Awula Addy: A Multiple Case Study of Early Language and Literacy Practices in Black MiddleClass Families in the Southeastern United States: Implications of Race and Class
(Under the direction of Jocelyn Glazier)

Early literacy experiences, prior to formal school entry, impact children's academic success (Bradley, Corwyn, McAddo, & García Coll, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). However, much of this early literacy research has been based on the experiences of white, middle class families. Current understandings of early literacy practices in black families are based primarily on research limited to working-class and poor communities. This project highlights literacy practices in the black middle class families that have been largely overlooked in the literature.

Using a sociocultural definition of literacy based on New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1999; Street, 1995) and an ethnographic multiple case study design, this project examines the language and literacy practices of black middle class parents and their four-year-old children who live in the southeastern United States. Findings of this qualitative study demonstrate that these families are engaged in a number of oral, print, and digitally-based literacy practices that are highly similar to the practices reported in white middle class families. However, these black middle class families also engage in oral literacy traditions that potentially differentiate them from their white middle class counterparts. Furthermore, the financial resources and social capital associated with middle class status provide these families with a wealth of material objects and opportunities from which to choose. However, patterns of racial segregation and discrimination

force these families to negotiate both black and white language and literate traditions. In short, class-based factors provide increased access and choice for these families when it comes to literacy and language practices, while racial factors also impose particular choices upon these black middle class families. These findings serve as a reminder that educational professionals and scholars must address intersecting variables of race and class in both theoretical models and instructional settings. Perspectives shaped by race or class alone will necessarily fall short of explaining the full range of practices in which these families engage. Furthermore, there must be an appreciation for the role that immediate social and material contexts play in shaping literacy practices.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAE	African American English
SWE	Standardized Whitestream English

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Early Language and Literacy

Literacy skills are foundational in formal U.S. education. Much of academic success is dependent on a student's ability to learn through literacy. In fact, a young child's early literacy skills are predictive of that child's academic success not only in elementary school, but also through middle and high school (Diamond, Gerde, & Powell, 2008; Poe, Burchinal, & Roberts, 2004; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). For this reason, many kindergarten and even preschool classrooms have shifted from a focus on play-based learning to a more explicit focus on early literacy skills (Diamond et al., 2008, Graue, 2010). Graue (2010) notes that many of today's kindergarten classrooms appear similar to first grade classrooms of past decades. Children are now expected to possess increasingly advanced literacy skills at progressively younger ages.

Given this academic climate, educational scholars and practitioners have directed increased attention towards children's literacy experiences at home prior to formal school entry. Research indicates that the frequency and types of educational activities in which young children participate, or do not participate, prior to school entry influence their literacy performance in school (Bradley, Corwyn, McAddo, & García Coll, 2001; Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). For instance, early experiences with storybooks in the home are associated with increased language and educational outcomes later in school (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Exposure to large amounts of rare and complex words in the home has also been associated with larger vocabularies in school (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Based on this abundance of research, educational scholars and practitioners overwhelmingly agree on the need for students to develop strong literacy skills even prior to school entry. The term literacy itself, however, has been contested. Traditionally, literacy has referred to the cognitive ability to decode, represent, and understand orthographic symbols, or more simply put, to the ability to read and write. More recently, however, sociocultural approaches to learning define literacy as a wider range of skills than an individual's ability to decode orthographic symbols and connect them to the sounds of language (Bloome, Champion, Katz, Morton, & Muldrow, 2001; Gee, 1989; Qualls, 2001). Instead, sociocultural accounts of literacy define it more comprehensively as a dynamic cultural practice of using language within a community, in oral and written forms. This view of literacy highlights the culturally-based nature of literacy and its use among members of a particular community, rather than as an isolated cognitive ability possessed by an individual. As a social and cultural practice, literacy is dynamic and takes on various forms and meanings in the social contexts in which it is used, based on the needs and expectations of the communities in which it is used. Finally, sociocultural perspectives also highlight the interconnectedness of oral language and print literacy. In other words, both the written and spoken word are conceptualized as part of a larger shared system of communication. Although there are differences in how language is written and spoken, this framework of literacy assumes that the two inform one another. For all these reasons, I conceptualize early literacy practices in this project as encompassing aspects of both language and literacy, encompassing elements of both traditional and sociocultural notions of literacy. Therefore, I will often use the term literacy practices as an umbrella term that includes both language and literacy practices.

While there are some literacy activities in early childhood that are fairly common in the majority of U.S. households, such as reading storybooks together and practicing how to write the letters of the alphabet, there are also patterns that emerge along racial and class lines (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Vernon-Feagans, 1996). For instance, Purcell-Gates reports differences in the timing of the literacy activities explicitly aimed at increasing reading and writing skills, such as practice writing the alphabet. In her study of low-income urban families, their explicit literacy instruction practices quadrupled once children began formal schooling. This timing differs from higher-income families, in which explicit reading and writing instruction occurs regularly and at quite a young age, without a sharp increase at school entry (Purcell-Gates, 1996). In addition, the rate of reading books to and with young children differs across class lines. Though reading books to and with children is a common practice in most families in the United States (about 65%, Raikes et al., 2006), it more frequently occurs in middle class and white families than among low-income families or families of color (Bradley et al., 2001; Heath, 1983; Raikes et al., 2006).

On the other hand, scholars suggest that incorporating the practice of oral storytelling is more common in black families than in white families, in which storytelling is overwhelmingly print-based (Heath, 1983; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000; Ward, 1971). In their discussion of language traditions in black communities, Rickford and Rickford (2000) along with Smitherman (2000) refer to a variety of oral traditions, including the practice of sharing stories orally. Relying on empirical data, both Heath (1983) and Vernon-Feagans (1996) conducted ethnographies with low-income black and white families in the rural South (specifically in the Carolinas). Although these two studies were conducted nearly twenty years apart (Heath in the late seventies and Vernon-Feagans in the mid-nineties), findings from both studies regarding

storytelling practices mirrored one another and echo the accounts of Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Smitherman (2000). Both observed that the rural black families regularly told stories to one another. Children told stories to other children, parents told stories to other parents, and children and adults told stories to one another. Moreover, children who were particularly good at creating and elaborating on stories and creatively using language were praised, further encouraging the development of verbal and narrative skills. Instead of engaging in this kind of oral storytelling, the rural white families with preschool-aged children were more often observed to read storybooks to and with their children.

Various explanations for these racial and class-based differences have been proposed, ranging from the availability of financial resources to devote to child literacy materials in the home, to the use of various dialects of English at home, to differences in culturally defined views of literacy. For instance, when it comes to stories, Heath's (1983) research suggests that within black communities, stories are conceptualized more as oral accounts that are jointly created rather than as narratives written within books. She argues that stories are also meant to be fictionalized and elaborated, rather than necessarily representing a literal representation of reality. This approach to narrative contrasts with how narratives are typically framed in white communities, in which more emphasis is placed on accuracy and factuality. Furthermore, greater emphasis is placed on narrative in print, such as in children's storybooks (Heath, 1983). It is possible, then, that observed differences in the nature of early literacy practices are due to cultural variations in how literacy is defined. In other words, differences in literacy practices between these communities may be related to different expectations regarding the role of literacy and differing beliefs about how literacy learning does and should occur (Hammer & Weiss, 2000; Qualls, 2001; Sawyer et al., 2017; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006).

Whatever the underlying expectations for literacy may be, evidence suggests that the early experiences of white, middle class children position them well to succeed in the classroom. Those classrooms, in fact, are largely based on norms of white middle class families and therefore mirror many of the practices that occur in those homes (Heath, 1983; Gee, 2008). For instance, middle class parents routinely incorporate book-like or academic talk into everyday conversation, encouraging their children to develop expertise on a particular topic (Gee, 2004, 2008). Similarly, these parents often encourage explicit reporting of events or information in dinnertime conversations with their children. These kinds of language and literacy practices facilitate children's early school success by developing skills in what has been referred to as academic language (Gee, 2008; Cazden, 2001).

However, not all families participate in these types of literacy practices with their children. Again, children from low-income homes typically have less experience prior to school in developing islands of expertise or explicitly reporting events than those from middle class homes. Although they may come to school with strong language skills, these skills may not be understood by teachers or seen as strengths in the classroom. Michaels (1981) notes that the white teacher of a racially-mixed first grade class had much more trouble understanding and supporting the episodic or thematically-organized narrative styles typical of the black students in her class compared to the chronological or topic-centered styles typical of her white students. Cazden (2001) and Gee (1989b, 1989c) delineate a number of strengths in the storytelling styles of young black children, although those strengths are often misinterpreted by teachers as a lack of structure or comprehension skills. Black children, and boys in particular, display strengths in narrative skill and verbal play (Vernon-Feagans, 1996). However these abilities do not often translate into success in school-based literacy assessments (Vernon-Feagans, Hammer, Miccio,

and Manlove, 2001). In fact, they are negatively related to school-based literacy performance, in measures such as comprehension, production, rephrasing, spontaneity, fluency, and listening (Vernon-Feagans, 1996). Several decades ago, scholars like Kochman (1969) and Labov (1970, 1972), noted the high verbal ability of black students in their home communities, using their native dialects of English, but noted that these children were either silent or inarticulate at school, where academic or standardized English was used.

These studies demonstrate some of the ways in which early literacy practices differ along racial lines. Children who have fewer experiences with the kinds of literacy practices valued in school are at a disadvantage compared to students who have had more experience with school-based forms of literacy at home. This appears to be the case for many black children. Educational scholars have long noted that black children lag behind their peers in standardized measures of reading and in overall academic performance (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; NAEP, 2012). Even as early as preschool entry, black children score below their peers on standardized vocabulary measures (Washington, 2001; Washington & Craig, 1999). Certainly, there are a number of theories as to why this might be the case, including dialectal differences between home and school, culturally biased assessments at school that are based primarily on white, middle class norms, and persistent racial disparities in socioeconomic status and access to resources (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001; Washington, 2001). Nevertheless, because experiences in the home are tied to performance in school, it is important to continue to examine early literacy practices and their possible associations with later outcomes.

While a body of research indicates patterns of literacy practices that are less common in black families compared to white families, other research demonstrates the variety of rich language and literacy practices that occur in working-class black families on a near-daily basis

(Addy, Vernon-Feagans, and the Family Life Key Investigators, 2013; Purcell-Gates, 1996). As indicated earlier, particular literacy practices like storybook reading, which has gained the most attention in early literacy studies, may not be as common in black families as in white families. However, its relative infrequence does not equate to a lack or absence of literacy in these homes. Some of the literacy activities that frequently occur include helping children to learn the alphabet, using print literacy as part of daily routines like shopping, and singing nursery rhymes. Once more, further research is needed to more closely examine how literacy is practiced and understood in the homes of black families, beyond storybook reading.

Three primary gaps remain among the existing literature on literacy practices in black families. First, the majority of research with black families has been limited to low-income families. Because race and class have often been confounded in this country, it is unclear whether the observed literacy patterns extend across black families regardless of class status or not. Very little research has focused on middle class black families specifically. Among existing research on this population, the findings have been contradictory or otherwise inconclusive.

Some research with small numbers of black middle class families suggests that their literacy practices are fairly common to white middle class families. For example, sociologist Annette Lareau, (2003, 2013), in her study of families with elementary-aged children, suggests that black and white middle class parents both attempt to carefully shape the early learning environments of their children by enrolling them in as many activities as possible, including those geared towards language and literacy. This similarity in parenting styles, she contends, unites families according to shared class, rather than shared race. In other words, she contends that social class is more of a unifying factor than race.

Other research indicates that when it comes to literacy, race is a more significant variable to examine similarities. Multiple studies suggest that many black families, regardless of class background, do indeed engage in similar language and literacy practices. For instance, linguistic, anthropological, and educational research all indicate that the majority of black families in the US communicate with one another using a dialect, or variety, of English called African American English (AAE; Horton-Ikard & Miller, 2004; Lacy, 2007; Patillo, 2013). Other oral traditions, such as call and response, word play, and oral storytelling appear to also cross class lines in black communities (Lee, 2006; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000). Clearly, additional work is needed to tease apart these conflicting accounts regarding the role of race and class in the literacy practices of black middle class families.

In terms of literacy *performance,* middle class blacks form a sort of intermediate group, generally showing greater academic success than their low-income black counterparts, but not attaining levels reached by their middle class white counterparts (Washington, 2001). It is unclear whether the literacy *practices* of middle class blacks follow a similar pattern, positioning them as different from both other middle class and other black families. This study aims to shed some light on this possibility.

In addition to conflating race and class, few of these studies have directly examined how literacy is actually conceptualized in black families based on how those families actually engage in language and literacy in the communities in which they live. Clearly, the ways in which black parents and caregivers understand literacy will shape the nature of the home environment and the kinds of literacy activities in which they engage with their children (Hammer & Weiss, 2000; Lareau, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 1996). However, descriptions of literacy practices are often framed in terms of literacy skills, with emphasis placed on how these practices do or do not align with

school-based literacy. In a related fashion, literacy practices in black families are often discussed vis-à-vis their comparison to practices in white middle class families. Without attention to literacy practices as they exist in black families in their own right, their forms and functions become overshadowed by how literacy is defined in other, most often white, communities. Furthermore, the way literacy is practiced becomes distorted, often described in terms of deficiency, rather than understanding how literacy serves the purposes of the communities in which it is used. To reiterate, approaching this issue with a sociocultural lens allows a more accurate view of how literacy is actually understood and practiced by its own users, in this case by black, middle class families.

Finally, a third, and no less critical, gap remains. That is the lack of updated or current research on literacy practices in black families. Much of the seminal research in the field is based on studies that were conducted several decades and multiple generations ago. It is unclear if the same patterns persist between black and white families today. Similarly, partially because of the relatively small size of the black middle class relative to black working-class and poor families several decades ago, current understandings of literacy in black families are still primarily based on the larger population of working-class and poor black families. It is then possible that current educational models and instruction are based on outdated, and consequently, erroneous data.

Introducing the Study

The current research contributes to the literature by focusing attention on black middle class families and their literacy practices. The objective is to gain a better understanding of the literacy practices that black middle class parents engage in with their preschool-aged children

and to examine how race and class may contribute to how literacy is practiced in these families. More specifically, the research questions guiding this study are:

1. What types of early language and literacy practices do middle class black families engage in with their four-year-old children prior to school entry? In a related fashion, what purposes do those practices serve?
2. How are the material and social contexts in which black middle class families live related to the language and literacy practices in which they engage with their four-year-old children?
3. How do class and race impact the language and literacy practices and purposes in which these families engage?

To reiterate, this project contributes to the existing body of research in the following ways: 1) by helping to create a more comprehensive account of black literacy practices by including oft-overlooked middle class families, 2) by examining literacy practices and their purposes from the perspectives of families themselves, in the context in which they are used, and 3) providing an updated account of literacy practices in black families (although findings cannot be directly compared with prior research due to the different class background of these families).

This qualitative case study research is based on my short-term immersion in the lives of four black-middle class families throughout the southeastern United States. Through the current project, I attempt to center the practices of these black families. In the overwhelming majority of literacy research, white middle class literacy practices serve as the norm. Researchers have positioned language and literacy practices in black families, who are disproportionately low income, as deficient in comparison to these white middle class families. The proposed project represents an attempt to resist centering the beliefs and practices of white middle class families.

Instead the aim is to understand and value the practices of black middle class families from their own perspectives, based on the contexts in which they live. Furthermore, rather than focusing on literacy outcomes or academic performance, or how literacy practices directly relate to academic performance, I take a step back to simply examine the practices themselves and why parents may engage in those practices. Because research on literacy practices in black middle class families is still in its nascent phase, this study is primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature. In sum, the particular perspective of this project, along with the gaps which it serves to fill, positions this project as an important and groundbreaking contribution to the field.

Implications

As will be described in the following chapters, this study contributes to educational scholarship and practice regarding black children's early educational experiences, specifically those related to literacy. More specifically, the findings are intended to help scholars of early education to better understand the specific ways that race, class, and specific social contexts shape the early educational environments that children experience before they enter formal classrooms. By focusing on the factors that contribute to how parents and children engage in early literacy, it is then possible to discuss why parents engage in some practices and not others. This approach allows for examination of the processes linking race and class to literacy practices.

In the following chapters, I situate my study and findings among prior theory and research regarding literacy practices. In Chapter Two, I examine the relevant literature on this topic. In Chapter Three, I discuss my methods of data collection and analysis. Next I provide individual findings from each of my four cases in Chapter Four, with cross-case analyses and

findings outlined in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, I share the implications of this study for educational research and practice, and future directions that may further extend this research.

CHAPTER 2: FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AND THEORY

As discussed in the previous chapter, early language and literacy practices are related to literacy performance and overall academic success in school. Therefore, early childhood educators stress the importance of laying a firm foundation for learning in the years from birth to school entry, in order to provide children with optimal chances for later educational success. A substantial body of research is dedicated to understanding the specific types of language and literacy practices that are associated with increased literacy outcomes in school. In other words, these studies are invested in tracking children's literacy skills and development. Teasing apart that literature, however, is not the aim of the current research. Instead, this project functions as an exploratory investigation into the literacy practices in which families engage prior to their children's entry into formal schooling, regardless of whether those practices are tied to increases in their children's academic performance.

This exploration also involves an attempt to better understand the purposes or goals that parents consciously or unconsciously attempt to achieve through these practices. And finally, I examine the role of racial and class factors in shaping these literacy practices and purposes. This type of inquiry is unique and groundbreaking, given that black middle class families are often overlooked in the literature on early language and literacy.

I begin this chapter with brief definitions of language and literacy practices, race, and class as I conceptualize them in the current project. I also present the theoretical frameworks that shape this project. Next, I review existing research on language and literacy practices that have focused on middle class families and on black families, and the information that this

research has yielded. In reviewing the literature on literacy practices I focus primarily, though not entirely, on research in families with preschool-aged children under the age of five. I include studies that examine a broad range of literacy practices, although a large portion of this research is limited to book-reading practices in families with young children (see Fletcher & Reese, 2005 for a review). Finally, I offer suggestions regarding additional areas of inquiry that remain unanswered or unexplored.

Defining Concepts

Language Practices

I use the term language practices to refer to the ways that families use words to express themselves and communicate orally. In other words, I examine the practice of language in social settings, in which the social context is highly relevant. These practices may include having conversations, telling stories, reciting nursery rhymes or prayers and verses from religious texts, telling jokes, and even singing. At times I use the term oral language practices, with both terms referring to the oral use of language. I do, however, make a distinction between language practices and the term language itself. Language refers to the system of communication used within communities based on agreed upon conventions that connect sounds (or signs) with meaning. Again, I am interested in the practice of language, rather than the system itself. Furthermore, this project is not an investigation into the language *skills* or *abilities* of preschool-aged children. A wealth of research on early literacy is dedicated to studying children's various language skills, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary size, syntactic complexity. Although I mention some of these aspects of language skill as they relate to language practices, they are not the focus of this research.

Literacy Practices

The same distinction I make with language practices versus language itself applies to the use of literacy practices versus literacy. Traditionally, literacy has referred to the ability to decode, represent, and understand orthographic symbols, or even more narrowly, the ability to read and write. Therefore, many studies of early literacy have involved investigations of an individual's knowledge of the alphabet, letter-sound relationships, ability to recount stories, and so on. More recently, sociocultural approaches have influenced definitions of literacy to encompass a wider range of skills than an individual's ability to decode orthographic symbols and connect them to the sounds of language (Bloome, Champion, Katz, Morton, & Muldrow, 2001; Gee, 1989; 2008; Qualls, 2001; Street, 1995). This view of literacy highlights the sociocultural nature of literacy and its use within a community, rather than as an isolated cognitive ability housed in the individual (Mui & Anderson, 2008; Street, 1995).

In other words, literacy is more comprehensively defined as a dynamic cultural practice of using language within a community, both in oral and print forms. As a social and cultural practice, literacy is also dynamic and takes on various forms and meanings in the social contexts in which it is used and based on the needs and expectations of the communities in which it is used. This emphasis on the *use* of a system within a community or as *practical mastery* can be seen in the application of the term literacy to refer to mastery in various areas, such as financial literacy, cultural literacy, and digital literacy. Once again, this study serves as an examination of literacy practices, or the social uses of language, both orally and in print, rather than the isolated cognitive skills that are more appropriately defined as literacy skills.

While literacy practices still predominantly refer to language use *in print*, the term is also used to refer to oral language practices as well, with an understanding that oral language and print language are highly interconnected. Sociocultural perspectives also highlight the

interconnectedness of language and literacy. Cognitive or developmental studies of literacy also note the connections between oral language and literacy development (Gee, 1999; National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998 all taken from Gee, 2001). For instance, reading scholars connect awareness about the sounds of language, oral vocabulary, and abilities to comprehend and produce oral narratives with reading skills. For these reasons, I conceptualize early literacy practices as encompassing aspects of both oral language and print literacy practices. Therefore, I primarily use the term literacy practices to refer to both aspects of literacy, without specific references to language *and* literacy practices.

I also include in this study uses of literacy in digital or electronic forms. Although literacy in digital forms represents another form of print literacy, I have included it as a separate category due to the fact that it is not one that has been included in many of the prior studies I use as comparative cases, simply due to changes in technology since those studies were conducted. There may also be some particularities of digital forms of literacy that make it distinct from literacy on paper, either because methods of writing do not involve paper and pens or pencil but often involve the direct use of digits (texting, swiping on cell phones and tablets, etc.) and reading does not involve the physical turning of pages as in books, magazines, or newspapers. While these particularities may not necessarily lead to a qualitatively or substantially different experience with literacy, these small distinctions may be important to young children who are still learning about the forms and meanings of literacy and who may or may not encounter literacy in the same ways once they enter formal schooling. In recent years, literacy scholars have begun to examine links between electronic resources and traditional conceptualizations of literacy (e.g., Korat & Shamir, 2006). So far, findings concerning potential differences in learning between electronic or paper-based print have been mixed (Pace, Luo, Hirsh-Pasek, &

Golinkoff, 2017). It is clear, nevertheless, that the use of electronic devices, including computers, smartphones, and electronic devices, has increased substantially in the past decade.

Finally, I do not include a review of literature that attempts to quantify home literacy practices along any kind of scale using the framework of the home literacy environment (HLE, Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002). This line of research, typically used in quantitative studies, is employed as a means of categorizing the quality of literacy practices in children's homes and its relation to their subsequent literacy and overall academic achievement. However, I find these definitions to be rather narrow. Although they may take into account the unique sociocultural environments that exist in families, they implicitly define literacy according to its relationship to school-based literacy and often privilege shared book-reading practices to the exclusion of a myriad of other oral and print-based language and literacy practices. For similar reasons, I also avoid using the term emergent literacy (Clay, 1966; Rohde, 2015; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). Although the term expands literacy development beyond reading and writing skills to include surrounding contexts and includes precursors to formal literacy such as an awareness of the sounds of languages, an understanding of the mechanics and functions of books, and narrative structures, it again emphasizes a skills-oriented definition of literacy. Again, these definitions implicitly assume that school-based forms of literacy, based on white-middle class norms, are the standard, which necessarily frames other practices as deficient.

The current study is not intended to categorize practices according to their comparative value among groups. Instead, the goal is to examine the practices in their own right, the purposes that they serve within their communities, and offer insight about how those practices may be related to early educational experiences, not just limited to skills, but broadly speaking and not just for children, but for their families and teachers.

Literacy Purposes

Prior research has at times conflated what I separately refer to as practices and purposes. Some of the purposes that appear across studies include literacy for recreational or entertainment purposes, instrumental literacy or literacy to support daily life, literacy for interpersonal communication, literacy for spiritual growth, literacy for educational purposes (Heath, 1983; Johnson, 2010; Purcell-Gates, 1996). In my own project, not all of these four purposes are necessarily evident in each family, or some may be foregrounded, pushing others into the background. Although I use these groupings as a starting point, I primarily list the literacy purposes according to how they actually appear in each particular family, relying loosely on these groupings when relevant.

Separating practices according to these categories serves an analytic purpose, but it also overlooks the ways in which practices may serve multiple purposes simultaneously. For instance, families may engage in the academic tasks of learning to read and write in ways that also serve as entertainment or leisure activities for children who enjoy such activities. So while dividing literacy practices in this way serves an analytical purposes, the separation is a bit artificial, given that literacy practices often serve multiple purposes simultaneously, which has been noted by other scholars as well (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1996).

Sometimes conflated with literacy purposes are also literacy beliefs. These beliefs may include beliefs about the purposes of literacy, such as believing that literacy is meant to be an academic activity. Beliefs may also incorporate ideas about how literacy skills are best learned, whether through observation or explicit instruction, whether at home, or at school. Many of these beliefs are implicit in the practices and purposes, but few studies have examined them

independently. In the current study, I deal primarily with the practices and purposes, with secondary examination of the beliefs that underlie them.

Race

Social scientists have long argued that the concept of race is a social construct with no biological basis (Omi & Winant, 1994) and therefore, one that is unstable and changes in definition according to the dominant social groups and the historical, political, and social contexts in which it has been employed. More specifically, it has been used to the advantage of those who identify as white, with all other racialized groups deemed inferior. Whereas different racial categories were once generally assumed to be biologically based, scholars currently acknowledge that the concept of race is more superficially tied to phenotypical features such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features, but is also used to define different cultural groups that are more accurately defined by ethnicity rather than race (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). Some scholars suggest that in studying race, researchers are more accurately studying systems of racial stratification or the effects of racism and discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 2004).

That being said, I examine black families in this project, with the understanding that there is a level of heterogeneity among them, but also that they move through a society in which they are assumed to share a number of characteristics and life experiences, and by their reports, do indeed experience similar forms of discrimination based on their phenotypical features. In studying black families, I recognize the implicit assumption that these families are connected by the supposedly unifying factor of shared race and similarly, shared culture. I operate with the understanding that participants who self-identify as black are *likely* to share cultural heritage, which brings similar behaviors, beliefs, and values (Tillman, 2004, 2006). Nevertheless, this assumed shared cultural heritage does not suggest that each family's beliefs and experiences are

identical. Simply because all these families self-identify using the racialized label of black or African American does not necessarily mean that they share identical experiences, lifestyles, behaviors, or values. There is still a certain level of heterogeneity within and amongst black families, as there is within any cultural group. Differences exist along a number of dimensions, such as of religion, region, socioeconomic or class status, and residential patterns (i.e., rural, urban, suburban).

Keeping this heterogeneity in mind, I examine black families as a single racialized group, which is defined by patterns of historical segregation in the US that do indeed maintain some level of distinct cultural traditions that are reinforced by physical isolation. Finally, I use the term black to refer to these families because this is the more common term that the families use to refer to themselves, rather than the term African American that is more commonly used in academic circles or by people who do not identify as members of this racialized group.

Class

Defining social class has been notoriously contentious and problematic across various disciplines in social science research (Bennett, Lutz, & Jayaram, 2012). As a social construct, the concept of class is fluid and abstract rather than fixed and concrete. However, differences in income and social standing indeed contribute to disparate material conditions in which groups and individuals live (Wright, 2008). The most common components used to define social class are income or wealth, educational attainment, and occupational prestige (Jackson, 2010; Patillo 2013). Consequently, the proposed study will investigate the influence of social class, as the combination of these primary demographic variables and as the experience of particular material conditions, and their potential role in shaping language and literacy beliefs and practices in black families in the United States.

Theoretical Frameworks

Literacy Redefined: New Literacy Studies

The proposed project is guided by the theoretical contributions of New Literacy Studies (NLS; Gee, 1999, 2008; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Street, 1997, 2005). NLS offers a "culturally sensitive account of literacy that rejects static and homogeneous views of the literacy practices of cultural communities" (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009, p. 213). Literacy is also conceptualized in terms of its plurality. Literacy, or literacies, are multiply constructed. Using a sociocultural lens, literacies are understood to be social and cultural practices that take multiple forms and meanings depending on the contexts in which they are used (Street, 1997, 2005). In other words, they are a part of larger discourses and discourse patterns that reflect the particular worldviews of different cultural groups. In order to fully understand the literacy practices of any particular group, it is necessary to also understand the broader social contexts in which they occur.

Furthermore, in an NLS framework, literacy is inextricable from language, in both oral and written forms. Reading and writing take different forms that are necessarily tied to "oral language, social activities, material settings, and distinctively cultural forms of thinking, knowing, valuing, and believing" (Gee, 1999, p. 356). According to this model, literacy is more broadly about communicating. Rather than using the term literacies, I used the term literacy practices, also used in NLS theory (Street, 2005), to refer to the social acts to which literacies are tied.

Class-Based Theories: Concerted Cultivation

This study is also influenced by the work of Lareau (2011) and other scholarship in the field of sociology. Although Lareau does not focus on language and literacy practices specifically, she focuses on educational and parenting practices, including how parents approach

literacy with their children. Her work is particularly relevant to my own, given that she attempts to tease apart the relative contributions of racial and class-based factors in shaping the parenting practices of black and white families of working-class and middle class families. If her theory holds, it should also explain black middle class families' literacy practices, under the larger umbrella of parenting practices.

Lareau conducted an in-depth ethnographic study of parents of nine- and ten-year-olds, having a sample comprised of middle- and working-class black families, as well as middle-and working-class white families. Although Lareau observed racial segregation in the families she observed as well as differences in encounters with racial discrimination, she concluded that parents of similar class standing had much more in common with one another than did parents of similar racial backgrounds. In other words, the black and white middle class families operated under highly similar parenting logics, while the black and white lower-income families also shared many similarities in parenting practices. These class-based similarities far surpassed any similarities found within racial groups. To reiterate, Lareau argues that class distinctions, rather than racial ones, explain differences in parenting practices regardless of race. A critical component of Lareau's work lies in her attempt to explain not only observed behaviors but the systems of logic underlying those behaviors.

In regards to the specific differences that Lareau observes between middle class and working-class parents, Lareau argues that parents of different class backgrounds differ in the amount of parental structuring in their children's lives as well as the sense of authority that parents wield regarding what is best for their children. In terms of literacy practices, this may translate into parents providing numerous opportunities to support their children's skills, giving them the greatest advantages in school. Furthermore, they advocate for what they believe is best

regardless of what other educational "experts" may advise. Working-class parents, on the other hand, promote obedience both in their children, but also in themselves, in terms of acquiescing to the knowledge and expertise of educators and other professionals.

Lareau's theory of parenting practices, however, does not exist without substantial critique. Bennet, Lutz, and Jayaram (2012) for instance, argue that it is not the parenting logics that differentiate parents of different class backgrounds, but the access with which parents can provide educational opportunities. In other words, nearly all parents share the same parenting logics, but only middle- to upper-class parents have the resources to provide the highest levels of opportunities for their children.

Taking another approach, Lewis-McCoy (2014) argues that Lareau erroneously downplays the continuing role that the intersections between race and class continue to impact the lives of black families in the US. Through his examination of black families in a suburb who send their children to a private school with a reputation for providing high-quality education, he finds that racial discrimination and class differences affect the experiences of black families within that school. Furthermore, parents' varying degrees of social capital, impact their relationships with other families and school staff, leading to differential effects on their children's educational experiences. This social capital may appear in the form of social behaviors sanctioned by elites and social networks that provide material gain. Through an interactional analysis, Lewis-McCoy argues that middle class parents in effect engage in "opportunity hoarding" that reduces the amount of opportunities left for working-class parents.

So what does all this mean in terms of the literacy practices of black middle class families? In short, it appears that Lareau's account, while compelling, offers an answer that is but one piece of a larger, more complex puzzle. The current study draws on previous research, along

with new data, in an attempt to find perhaps more accurate or more precise answers to the role of race and class in shaping literacy and overall parenting practices.

Review of Existing Literature

The role of race: Literacy practices and purposes in black families

Once again, the majority of research examining black families has relied on samples that are working class and poor. Therefore, in reviewing the literature, it is unclear whether many of the findings are generalizable across black families or whether they are primarily a result of class-based differences.

In regards to literacy practices specifically, the foundational literature is primarily ethnographic or observational in nature. One of the most influential and widely cited was conducted by Shirley Brice Heath (1983) in the 1970s Piedmont Carolina region. She examined the ways in which children in two working-class, rural communities learned to use language to communicate. Her observations of the white community she refers to as Roadville and the black community she calls Trackton were among the first in the educational literature to demonstrate how children's home-based practices align with the needs and expectations of their communities. However, these practices do not always align well with the middle class-based norms expected at school. More specifically, she found black families at the time interacted with print literacy through print that existed in the environment around them (e.g., on product labels and instructions), as part of everyday living (e.g., searching in newspapers for local activities) and in order to communicate with school teachers and distant family and friends (e.g., in letters). However, she also found that these families rarely read storybooks with their preschool children, but were engaged in frequent oral storytelling practices. To summarize, children in the black

community engaged with literacy, but with less emphasis on print literacy than in the nearby white community.

Many of Heath's findings are mirrored by Lynne Vernon-Feagans in her observational study of rural communities in the Carolina Piedmont region during the late 1970s and early 80s and Martha Ward in her study of a low-income all-black community in New Orleans in the late 1960s. Vernon-Feagans (1996), like Heath, studied a group of low-income black children and a group of low-income white children also adding a group of mainstream or middle class white children who lived in the nearby university town. Ward (1971), Heath (1983), and Vernon-Feagans (1996) all note that children and their parents frequently engaged in oral storytelling and story-sharing practices in the communities they studied. Heath suggests that stories in black communities are more often conceptualized as oral accounts that are jointly created rather than as narratives written in books. Stories are meant to be fictionalized and elaborated, rather than necessarily representing a literal representation of reality. Vernon-Feagans also notes that stories for children were not necessarily conceptualized as written accounts recorded in books. Instead, they were viewed as oral accounts there were meant to be jointly created. In line with this conceptualization, children and their parents in both communities were observed to frequently engage in oral storytelling and story-sharing activities. Based on their work with working class families in the rural South, they conclude oral language and literacy practices, based on participant interaction, were particularly important in the black community.

Ward (1971) also observed that the printed word took a back seat to oral communication among the seven families who participated in her ethnographic study. Prior to Heath and Vernon-Feagans, she noted that storytelling skills and linguistic creativity were highly valued in black families. In this linguistic climate, parents did not frequently read books with their

preschool and elementary-aged children, nor did they make frequent trips to public libraries. Ward also finds few printed literacy materials such as books and magazines, but argues the purchase of such materials is easily explained by the lack of financial resources. Similarly, rather than literally raising their children "by the book" by relying on the latest research reports and popular magazine articles (e.g., Dr. Spock), parents relied on shared beliefs and tradition passed orally among those within the community.

Indeed, the oral tradition has historically been, and continues to be, particularly strong in black communities in the United States. The passing of knowledge and cultural traditions has often occurred through oral means. A number of historical accounts and essays written by scholars of black language and culture point to the central role of orality (Boutte & Johnson, 2010; Rickford & Rickord, 2000; Smitherman, 2000). Smitherman (2000) specifically asserts that "black culture is an oral culture" (p. 127). Even among young children, oral language skills, including narrative abilities are highly valued, and young black children display strengths in creating elaborate, fictionalized, imaginative, and jointly-created narratives (Vernon-Feagans, 1996).

Furthermore, the structure of stories reportedly differs between white and black communities. In research reported in various outlets, Michaels (1981) and Cazden (2001) examined the oral stories told by students during sharing time in an urban-first grade classroom. They observed that white children typically told stories in a topic-centered style that were chronologically ordered around a single event. Black children however told stories that were topic-associating in nature, which connected thematically-related episodes that did not necessarily occur in chronological order. These findings were corroborated by Gee (1989), who conducted a detailed linguistic analysis of the stories told by a working class black girl (Leona)

and a working class white girl (Sandy), two 11-year-olds who participated in the original project by Michaels and Cazden. Gee argues that Leona's story incorporates a technique of *spatializing* that connects elements through relationships that are not linear in nature. Gee also found evidence of a thematic ordering in her storytelling, which contrasts with Sandy's organization of a story around a single setting that more closely mirrors the teacher's expectations.

Books and book-reading practices. Black-white comparisons have not only been made in regard to oral literacy practices. Scholars have also examined storybook-reading practices in great depth and found both similarities and differences between black and white families. In the early 1990s, Anderson-Yockel and Haynes (1994) found that both black and white working class families regularly read storybooks with their 18- to 30-month old children. Families of both races owned many children's books, read to their children several times per week, and believed that reading books to their children was an important part of their development. In fact, researchers did not find differences in the length of book-reading sessions or in the number of books that families owned. However, findings indicate that the black families read books less often than the white families (one to five times per week as opposed to six to ten times per week). Furthermore, black parents questioned their children about the content of those books less often than white parents. So although the literacy practices were similar and frequent overall, they differed in relative frequency and style.

Using data from the 1995 US National Household Education Survey, Yarosz and Barnett (2001) examined the frequency of book reading based on interviews conducted with the families of 7,566 children under the age of six who had not yet started kindergarten. Data indicate that approximately 50% of the black mothers with at least college degrees read to their infants daily whereas about 70% of white mothers with similar education did. The nearly 20% difference in

daily reading frequency between black and white mothers applies to less educated mothers as well. Again, while many of these families read to their children frequently, if not daily, the data suggest that black parents engage in shared book-reading practices less often than their white counterparts.

Sawyer and colleagues (2017) interviewed 10 black and 10 Puerto Rican mothers whose children were an average of four and a half years old and enrolled in Head Start. All participating families were low-income and lived in an urban area of the northeastern U.S. The research team noted patterns among the participating mothers, with little difference between the two racial/ethnic groups. These patterns included the provision of educational materials, such as books, engaging in shared storybook reading at least several times a week with various family members, focusing on explicit teaching and learning of the writing skills and other pre-academic skills, and engaging in language together, sometimes with the explicit intention of increasing language development, and daily television-watching in most families, with some being educational in nature. Although there was variation in how best to achieve it, mothers expressed a commitment to their children's academic and life success.

Literacy Expanded: Beyond Books. Although decades of research suggest that black families engage in literacy less often than white families, more recent research indicates that this is not necessarily true. An altered portrait of early literacy in black families emerges particularly when these studies rely on expanded definitions of literacy that not only focus on reading and writing skills, nor on exclusive examination of book reading practices. In 2013, Tamis-LeMonda and her colleagues conducted a study of block-playing styles with 230 mothers and their four-year-olds in a block-playing study. Of those pairs, 51 identified as native-born black and the rest as immigrant families, of Dominican, Mexican, and Chinese descent. When income was

controlled, black mothers displayed the highest frequencies of teaching advanced literacy concepts in literacy during block play among all the groups. These findings align with the observational accounts finding that black mothers place great emphasis on literacy and academic success as an essential part of preparing their children for future success (Davis, 2013; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2005).

Multiple studies find that black families frequently and routinely engage in a variety of literacy practices, when expanded definitions of literacy are employed. Using observational and interview methods, both Davis (2013) and Johnson (2010) note multiple forms of literacy in homes with young children, such as recreational, educational, interactional, and spiritual uses of literacy. In other words, literacy served as a form of entertainment, to acquire knowledge and teach children with a focus on school success, to communicate and maintain relationships, and to foster spiritual growth, particularly through reading and reciting of Bible verses. Davis's (2013) findings are derived from her study of five families with preschool-aged children, while Johnson (2010) examined practices in a single black family with a three-year-old child. With similar participants, these studies yield highly similar findings regarding the variety of literacy practices and purposes in black families with preschool-aged children.

Harris and Schroeder (2012) also found a range of in-home literacy practices among mothers and their four-year-old children, although these families were specifically of middle class standing. Questionnaire data from their study of 40 families (58% black, 42% white), indicate that both black and white children are exposed to a variety of school readiness and narrative activities prior to formal school entry. The findings also indicate that many of the traditional school readiness activities such as learning ABCs, color names, and the location of objects are embedded in narrative activities in the home. Furthermore, children frequently

engage in a variety of oral narrative activities with their mothers, such as conversations, reading stories, making up stories, and reciting rhymes.

Decades earlier, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) found similar patterns of school-based literacy practices in the homes of black families. In their ethnographic study of elementary-aged children in four black families living in urban poverty in the northeastern United States, they found that the families mirrored school-based literacy practices at home. For instance, they frequently practiced writing their own names. It was also common for them to draw, read, and write, engaging in inter-related activities that supported their preparation for school-based literacy.

Oral Language. There are a number of language and literacy practices that are commonly associated with black communities in the United States. Most notably, African American English (AAE) is a language variety used in many black communities that cuts across class boundaries and unifies black families. According to linguistic scholarship, the majority of black people in the US use some form of African American English (AAE; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000). Also referred to as African American Language, African American Vernacular English, and Black English among other names, this language variety or dialect, has several features that differentiate it from other varieties of American English (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Green, 2002; Labov, 1972; Smitherman, 2000; Wolfram, 1969).

Certainly, speaking of AAE as a single, unified language variety belies the regional, age-based, and context-based complexity in AAE that undergoes changes in form and feature over time (Wolfram, 2007). However detailed discussion of its linguistic complexity is beyond the scope of the current project. Although the use of AAE in the national consciousness, and in much of social science research, tends to be associated with working-class and poor blacks, the

reality is that features of AAE can be found among blacks of all class backgrounds (Patillo, 2013; Wolfram, 2007). In their study of black children ranging from age six to eleven Horton-Ikard and Miller (2004) identified the use of several distinctive features of AAE among middle and upper class black children in four elementary schools. Language samples obtained through informal interviews revealed the use of AAE both in conversation and in a narrative task in which children were instructed to retell at least two stories they knew. Moreover, data revealed a pattern of dialect density comparable to rates of AAE use in other studies based in poorer black communities. Although features and patterns of AAE use may differ between middle and working class black communities, black communities of all classes are generally marked by its usage in some form, as Horton-Ikard's research reflects.

Part of its widespread use is attributed to connections between AAE and black identity. Indeed, reading, writing, and speaking in any language or language variety are necessarily linked with identity (Gee, 1999; 2008). Whereas Horton-Ikard notes the use of AAE among middle and upper class children, scholars suggest that middle class black adults also use AAE to signal solidarity and membership in the black community (Jackson, 2010; Lee, 2006; Morgan, 2001). It is used even used as a marker of identity among members of the black middle class who were not primarily raised with it as their native variety (Morgan, 2001).

In fact, multiple studies of the black middle class cite the use of AAE among adults. In ethnographic studies based in Washington, D.C., Harlem, and Chicago, Lacy (2007), Jackson (2010) and Patillo (2013), respectively, cite the use of AAE among middle class black adults. Lacy and Jackson, in particular, make connections between language practices and the construction of identity, noting that the nature and frequency of AAE use is variable, depending on the setting and the racial makeup of those around them. The variable use of AAE, as a

language practice, may thereby function as a distinctive feature in black communities. As a result, the black children in these families are acquiring literacy, with its accompanying traditions and styles, in both African American English and the dominant language variety of standardized whitestream English (SWE). Having numerous labels, this dominant variety of English is often referred to as mainstream American English or standardized American English. I prefer to use the label of standardized whitestream English. Drawing on Urrieta's (2009) label of whitestream schools, the term SWE explicitly demonstrates that this language variety is in fact associated with whiteness in the United States. Similarly, SWE provides a label that is more equivalent to that of African American English, identified by the racial group to which it is most closely associated.

In addition to language variety, communication styles in black families have long been a topic of inquiry. Much of the existing literature on early language practices touches on the ways in which black parents communicate with their young children and how these forms of communication often do not align with communication styles used in preschool and early elementary classrooms. Heath (1983) notes that parents in black families do not substantially alter language directed towards young children using infant-directed speech. Commonly known as a sing-song version of speaking to infants and toddlers, infant-directed speech often has a higher pitch, greater range of intonation, simplified grammatical structure (e.g., single words) and more repetition than speech directed to older children and adults (Broesch & Bryant, 2015). Rather than using infant-directed speech, which is theorized to help young children learn language, black parents do not regard themselves as explicit "teachers" of language (Ward, 1971). Instead, children are incorporated into everyday life and are expected to learn language

through observation and indirect learning, without explicit attempts to structure the environment to fit the child's level of development (Hammer and Weiss, 2000; Heath, 1983, Ward, 1971).

Ward (1971) also notes parents' expectations of children in her work. The parents of young children, as opposed to the children themselves, have the right and the authority to select the topic of conversation and determine its direction. More specifically, these mothers don't read ladies' journals, Dr. Spock or rely on the latest developments in the field of psychology in order to raise their children. They do not see themselves as "language and literacy teachers" for their children. Instead, children are incorporated into everyday life and are expected to learn language through observation and indirect learning, without explicit attempts to structure the environment to fit the child's level of development (Hammer and Weiss, 2000; Ward, 1971).

Clearly, orientations towards early language and literacy, therefore, relate to beliefs regarding child development, the role of children, and even the time and place for explicit instruction (whether home or school). Again, Purcell-Gates' (1996) work suggests that parents who are low-income and black may believe that shaping the child's learning environment is most appropriate after schooling has begun rather than before. This may reflect a belief that preschool-aged children should be free to play and explore, that they are not yet "students" in a formal sense, and that explicit teaching and learning should be relegated to school or at least occur in the home only after formal schooling has begun. On the other hand, research suggests that middle class parents tend to view parenting as involving an obligation to explicitly structure young children's environments to encourage learning and development (Hammer & Weiss, 2000; Rogoff et al., 1993; vanKleeck, 2006). In this way, means of engagement in language and literacy practices may relate to parents' beliefs about whether their role as parents involves

explicitly teaching children academic content or school-readiness skills and who are the most appropriate "teachers" for their children.

One of the few studies of language and literacy beliefs that also examined the role of class in Black families was conducted by Hammer and Weiss (2000; see also Hammer, 2001). They examined a group of middle- and low-income Black mothers and infants in the urban South, finding some commonalities and some differences within both social class groups. Their data suggests that low-income mothers, particularly those with less education, were more likely to believe language learning was a natural process, whereas middle class and more highly educated mothers felt language learning occurred explicitly. Middle-income mothers therefore, felt compelled to engage in more explicit forms of language instruction than low-income mothers. For instance, they would label objects for their children or make a conscious effort to use language in response to their infant's early vocalizations. The authors attributed this practice to parents' belief that they are instrumental in "teaching" language to their children.

As already mentioned, most of the studies on language and literacy in black families have privileged race and given little attention to social class. Many of these studies assume homogeneity across black families of various class backgrounds. Certainly, the majority of black communities in the US have been historically working class and poor, one of the legacies of the slave trade and legal racial discrimination. However, with a growing black middle class, recent scholarship has included mixed class samples of black families in order to examine potential similarities and differences. Race alone cannot explain observed differences in literacy practices. This is not only because race and class are often confounded, but because intersections between race and class lead to results that cannot be explained purely by racial differences or by class differences alone. In fact, Holt and Smith (2005) found that when statistical measures are

used to control differences in income between white and black families, associations between income and reading frequency are stronger among blacks than whites in regards to the reading of books, newspapers, and personal documents. Nevertheless, a large body of research has been dedicated to the examination of patterns of literacy in families differentiated by class.

Connecting practices, purposes, and beliefs. Just as literacy practices may occur in various languages and languages varieties, they occur with a variety of underlying beliefs and to fulfill a number of different purposes. Some of the existing literature conflates literacy practices with their purposes. For instance, Purcell-Gates' (1996) and Heath's (1983) categorizations include labels such as "reading religious material" and "literacy for survival." The former label refers more to a specific type of print whereas the second refers more to the function or purpose of the literacy activity. While both types of categorization are important, conflating the two can be somewhat misleading. Nevertheless, examination of the functions or purposes that literacy fulfills leads us closer to a better understanding of the underlying beliefs associated with those practices.

As I have briefly mentioned, literacy practices do not only serve particular purposes, but they are related to beliefs about literacy. Indeed, beliefs and purposes may be intertwined. If parents believe that learning to read and write is important for school preparation, then literacy practices in the home are structured in ways that are intended to teach literacy skills and prepare children for school success. If parents believe that reading should be fun, they may structure literacy practices in ways that encourage enjoyment or attempt to follow children's interests in structuring literacy activities. As in any family, language and literacy practices exist within larger cultural systems of beliefs and values. In fact, NLS argues that literacy itself represents the values and beliefs of the communities in which it operates. Included may be beliefs about the

nature of learning, purposes of oral and written communication, and orientations towards school preparation, children's roles in families, and beliefs about best parenting practices. In sum, discussing purposes of literacy practices relates to associated beliefs about how literacy practices, and children themselves, fit into their communities.

In the current study, the examination of practices, purposes, and beliefs together will provide an overarching account of how and why particular black middle class families engage in literacy practices in the ways that they do. This form of analysis also allows comparison to what Lareau identifies as the parenting logics that drive and undergird parenting behaviors.

Literacy Practices and Class Differences

Certainly, a long tradition of research has been dedicated to delineating differences between literacy practices in black and white communities, particularly among studies conflating race and class. However, more recently, some scholars suggest that language and literacy practices, and parenting practices broadly speaking, differ more by class than by race. The following section outlines research examining the role of class factors on literacy practices.

Oral Language Practices. Hart and Risley (1995) conducted one of the most influential studies of early language practices in families differentiated by class. Based on their study of language behaviors in black and white parents of upper-, middle-, and lower-SES background, they concluded that children in poverty hear an average of 30 million words less than children in higher-income families, by the time they are four years old. Although there are critiques of this study, their work is often cited as evidence that middle class parents speak to their children far more than working-class and poor parents.

But it is not just the *amount* of talk that has been observed to differ by class. Research suggests that the types of words, phrases, and sentences used also differentiate parents of

different classes, such that middle class parents use more complex language than working-class parents (Hart & Risley, 1995). Moreover, whether consciously or not, middle class parents tend to raise their children to be assertive and outspoken (Gee, 2008; Lareau, 2003). In an essay reflecting on the use of language in academic settings, Gee (2008) writes that many middle class families encourage their young children to orally demonstrate expertise through explicit and extended reporting on a single topic. Children may in fact be encouraged rather subconsciously through the common practice of dinnertime conversation, a tradition that Gee argues is more common in middle class families. This practice is significant because these dinnertime conversational routines are aligned to school expectations and mirror how children will be expected to demonstrate their knowledge in school settings (Gee, 2008; Snow, 1986).

As these studies demonstrate, and as framed in New Literacy Studies, literacy is not merely about learning to read and write. It is also a social practice. Therefore, a number of other social practices are embedded in the practice of literacy, though which children are also learning norms of language and social interaction within their communities. These norms of social interaction capture what Gee (2008) refers to when discussing the differences in dinnertime conversations between middle class and working class families. Those conversations typically allow children to take on the role of expert, sharing their knowledge about particular events and topics. Therefore, they are learning particular roles and identities within their communities.

Although these studies suggest that low-income families engage in less frequent talk than higher-income families, other research suggests that low-income families more frequently engage in oral literacy practices than middle class families and children demonstrate strengths in oral narrative or storytelling. The development of these narrative skills is supported by the frequency of its use in low-income communities. Again, both Heath (1983) and Vernon-Feagans

(1996) observed that low-income children in the southeastern United States in the 1970s and 80s more frequently told elaborate stories to one another and to their parents than did parents of higher class status. However, it is difficult to determine if these findings are more closely tied to class or to race, as these families were both low-income and black and compared to families who were white and middle class.

Other literacy practices indicate differing beliefs between families of different classes about literacy and its purposes. Some of those beliefs relate to the perceived appropriateness of explicitly teaching language and literacy skills prior to school entry. Research by Purcell-Gates (1996) suggests that low-income parents may believe that literacy skills are most appropriately taught and practiced in the home after formal schooling has begun and not before. In her study of 24 children between the ages of 4 and 6 years growing up in low-SES homes, Purcell-Gates (1996) observed that parents increased the amount of literacy practices in the home by approximately four times once the children began school. This may reflect a belief that preschool-aged children should be free to play and explore, that they are not yet "students" in a formal sense, and that explicit teaching and learning should be relegated to school or at least occur in the home only after formal schooling has begun.

Research with middle class parents, on the other hand, suggests that they tend to view parenting as involving an obligation to explicitly structure young children's environments to encourage learning and development (Hammer & Weiss, 2000; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). In this way, means of engagement in language and literacy practices may relate to parents' beliefs about who are the most appropriate "teachers" for their children.

Again, Hammer and Weiss's (2000) study of middle and low income black mothers also reveals some class-based differences in the ways mothers structure early language environments

for their children. Middle class mothers more explicitly structured their infants' opportunities for learning, seeing themselves as their child's language "teacher". Hammer and Weiss hypothesize that differences in education may drive this effect. Weigel, Martin, and Bennett (2006) find evidence to support this suggestion, in their study of literacy beliefs among 79 mothers and their three- and four-year-old children. Based on interview and questionnaire data, the research team found differences in how mothers view their role in their child's literacy development. Mothers with more education tended to see themselves as "facilitative," meaning they saw themselves as integral teachers of language and literacy in the home, whereas mothers with less education were more "conventional," viewing school as the primary location for literacy learning. These differing beliefs were also associated with differing practices, such as facilitative mothers actively sought to engage their children in literacy activities such as reading books, reciting rhymes, drawing pictures, singing songs, and telling stories together, with conventional mothers engaging less frequently in these behaviors with their children.

Heath (1982) also finds class-based differences in the norms and expectations of language and literacy, writing that "each community has rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge in literacy events" (p. 50). To reiterate, she bases her conclusions from her work in a white middle class community and two working class communities, one white and one black. She observes that the middle class children were accustomed to "bedtime stories, reading cereal boxes, stop signs, and television ads, and interpreting instructions for commercial games and toys" (p. 50) whereas these activities were less common in the working class families. Again, it is not simply the practices themselves that differ but the specific ways in which families participate in those practices, due to the fact that "participants follow socially established rules for verbalizing what they know from and about the written material" (p. 50).

Print Literacy & Book-Reading. In addition to studying oral language practices, language and literacy scholars have examined home literacy environments of families differentiated by class. Much of this research on home environments is centered on the number of books in the home as well as the frequency and style of book-reading activities. Multiple studies find that middle class parents read storybooks with their children more frequently than working class families (Adams, 1990; Bradley et al., 2001; Raikes et al., 2006).

Research indicates that children from families with greater financial resources engage in overall literacy practices more frequently than children with fewer resources. The difference appears to be partially driven by differences in the amount of literacy materials that children from higher income families have at their disposal. In a year-long study of four neighborhoods in Philadelphia, Neuman and Celano (2001) observe that children in middle income families would find it hard to avoid the presence of books in the stores and public places around them, whereas low income children would be hard pressed to find them. The ease of access facilitates or affords more frequent participation in literacy activities. This pattern of influence has been observed in interventional studies aimed at increasing the number of literacy materials in the home.

For instance, in a 1999 interventional study of children in child care centers, providing low-income families with greater access to books by providing them with books to take home increased the length and frequency of at-home book reading (Neuman, 1999). Robinson, Larsen, and Haupt (1995) found similar results, finding that shared interactions involving books increased when children were allowed to take home one book per week over the course of 12 weeks. Quantitative researchers draw similar conclusions. Using regression analyses, Holt and Smith (2005) isolated the impact of particular variables on literacy practices. They conclude that

the observed differences in literacy practices are "largely attributable to differences in the income level of both the family and the neighborhood in which they live" (p. 9). My own research (Addy, 2012) also indicates that "with more education, mothers, or other individuals in the home, tend to more frequently engage in literacy practices with target children. In other words, mothers with more education are more likely to say nursery rhymes with their children, watch television with their children, or name unknown objects and people to their children" (p. 45).

Beyond Books. Clearly, a substantial amount of evidence suggests that literacy practices are typically less frequent among working class and poor families than among middle class families. However, other literacy scholars note that the relatively low levels of literacy found in these families have been skewed by narrow definitions of literacy as well. In fact, these conceptualizations of literacy are often based on middle class literacy norms, which would necessarily be skewed in favor of middle class families. Similarly to how definitions of literacy favor white families over families of color, they also favor middle class families over lower class ones.

Again, numerous scholars call for the need to expand definitions of literacy beyond book reading (and beyond school-based definitions), though much of the literature still focuses on this domain (Britto, year; Mui & Anderson, 2000; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Reyes & Torres). Mui and Anderson (2008) argue that when literacy extends beyond both an autonomous model (Street, 1995), to include understandings of literacy as both social and individual, a more accurate and complete picture of literacy practices is reflected. In their observational and interview study of an Indo-Canadian family living between working class and middle class communities, they find evidence of school-based materials and literacy practices (e.g., skill-and-

drill workbooks, bins of notecards with practice questions, and numerous picture books). However, adults and children in the home rarely read the children's books alone or together. Rather than simply noting the dearth of shared storybook reading, Mui and Anderson note the use of print for functional, rather than entertainment purposes, citing its use with recipes and taking notes. They also note that singing songs, in multiple languages, is a common occurrence. Thus, children are learning literacy in many ways outside of shared storybook reading.

Remaining gaps

Certainly, the literature listed above demonstrates a body of work dealing with literacy in black communities in the US and literacy in families of various class backgrounds. At the same time, there are several gaps that remain in this existing body of research.

Many of these studies are now decades old, some dating back to the 1960s and 70s. Heath's (1983) work still serves as a standard in terms of black literacy practices and yet her study was conducted nearly 40 years ago. Since then, as Hammer and Weiss (2000) note, "great changes have occurred within American society and African American culture that undoubtedly have affected changes in child rearing practices" (p. 137). And still, limited work has been undertaken to update or expand upon prior research in the nearly two decades since that statement was made. More research is needed, particularly in regards to addressing the diversity among black families and how this diversity affects literacy practices.

As has been identified throughout this chapter, many prior studies have been limited to low-income black samples, and more specifically, many of the ethnographic studies have been conducted with rural black communities in US South. Therefore, the findings of these studies may not readily apply to other black communities, whether urban, suburban, middle- or –upper class, or residing in other regions throughout the nation. And because of the heavy reliance on

low-income black families, it is difficult to tease apart whether the practices observed in black families are influenced primarily by race, class, or intersections between the two.

There have also been a number of recent technological advances, such that children are increasingly engaging with digital forms of literacy. These differences have been hypothesized to contribute to even greater class divides, as children from middle class backgrounds may have greater access to these resources than working-class and low-income peers. Whatever prior advantages that middle class children had in access to print literacy, those advantages may be compounded by greater access to literacy in digital form as well. Therefore, additional research is needed to investigate the use of electronic devices and possible connections to literacy practices.

This study attempts to address these issues. First, re-examining literacy practices can allow for a comparison to older studies, to determine whether many of the same findings are still applicable. Secondly, by focusing on middle class black families, and comparing the findings of the current study with the more recent studies of black families, it may be possible to understand how class, and not only race, plays a role in shaping the literacy practices in middle class black families. Finally, the current project allows for an initial examination of how the proliferation of digital technology may impact literacy practices with preschool-aged children.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The current project is intended to contribute to a deeper understanding of how literacy is practiced in the homes of middle class black families with preschool-aged children. With a small sample size, it is not meant to be a definitive study of literacy practices in all these families, nor is it designed to capture the entire range of beliefs that support them. However, this study functions as a starting point in developing more comprehensive theories and research about how race and class influence literacy practices in specific families. The central research questions guiding this study are:

1. What types of early language and literacy practices do middle class black families engage in with their four-year-old children prior to school entry? What purposes do those practices serve?
2. How are the material and social contexts in which black middle class families live related to the language and literacy practices in which they engage with their four-year-old children?
3. How do class and race impact the language and literacy practices and purposes in which these families engage?

Research Design

In order to answer these research questions, I employ primarily qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Qualitative approaches are geared towards greater understanding and explanation of social phenomena in their natural settings and can help illuminate the reasoning or beliefs behind social practices (Mertens, 2010). In this project, I am not only

interested in what literacy practices families with preschoolers engage in, I am also interested in the reasons they engage in those practices. Qualitative methods of inquiry help to illuminate *why* parents are engaged in particular early literacy practices. Therefore, based on the goals of building understanding and examining underlying processes, qualitative methods are the most appropriate for the current study.

More specifically, the case study design is particularly suited to the project, facilitating examination into the phenomenon of interest with a fairly small sample size. The case study design allows for analyses that focus on depth rather than breadth (Yin, 2014) and again, helps to answer *why* and *how* questions (i.e., Why do parents engage in particular practices? How are material conditions associated with literacy beliefs and practices?).

Furthermore, I use a multiple case study design that is based on ethnographic methods. This study is comprised of four case studies, in which each participating family constitutes a separate case. The multiple case study design allows for closer examination of both commonalities and discrepancies that may extend across individual cases (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2014). By comparing and contrasting individual cases, the goal is to better understand the specific ways that race, class, and material and social contexts relate to the practice of literacy in individual families prior to children's school entry.

As a final note, I also rely on a small amount of quantitative data in this project, through the administration of a questionnaire. This questionnaire contained questions about family demographics as well as a Likert scale concerning the frequency of specific literacy activities. Demographic information was primarily used for eligibility purposes but also helped provide additional details about family income, education, occupation, and family history. Parental

report regarding the frequency of specific literacy activities also provided additional information about how literacy is characterized in each family

Participants

Initial Recruitment. I initially intended to recruit participants in two primary ways. I had identified a non-profit organization geared specifically towards mothers of color, with chapters located throughout the nation. The first method was to post an online notice to two local chapters of the group as well as to provide information directly to a single member of the group to distribute to others who may be interested. Parents were invited to contact me, the primary researcher, in order to learn more about the study, or to enroll. A second intended method was to recruit through a snowball sampling technique, based on my own personal connections. Although I did not intend to include families who I already knew well, I asked friends and acquaintances to inform their own friends, family, and acquaintances of the study. Finally, I did not include as participants parents who were also enrolled in the same graduate program as myself. My initial plan was to recruit four to six families to participate. Because the number of project participants was small, I fully anticipated that these two recruitment methods would rather quickly and easily yield four to six participating families. However, I soon learned that this was not the case, as recruiting the final sample of four families took approximately six months. The specificity of my eligibility requirements, plus the somewhat extensive nature of my observations, likely contributed to my recruitment difficulties. Nevertheless, recruitment occurred on a rolling basis, till the intended sample of four families was reached.

Recruitment Strategies. When initial methods of recruitment were unsuccessful, I turned to other methods to supplement my recruitment efforts. I chose to distribute flyers in person at a local library location. However, the library that allowed me to set up a recruitment

table catered to clients that were primarily white and who did not meet my eligibility requirements. I also sent out a posting through social media, advertising my project and the basic eligibility requirements.

I turned to friends and family in cities across the U.S., asking them to recommend families or spread the word in their parent's group, play groups, churches, and places of work. I continued to post flyers in additional locations, calling several local day cares and preschools and distributing flyers to teachers and administrators. Trying to maximize the possible effects of my own racial background and the strength of personal encounters, I attempted to recruit families at locations where parents would be able to interact with me directly.

The most successful strategies ended up being the posting I made through social media and word of mouth, spreading information through my own personal connections. In both cases, I was able to successfully recruit participants who had a common personal connection with me, a fact that surely is not coincidental. As I soon realized, although I intended to recruit middle class black families in general, my final sample ended up being a highly specific group of black middle class families. Although I sought families with at least one bachelor's degree, in each of the participating families, at least one parent held a graduate degree. Furthermore, all participants lived in major metropolitan areas and had fairly open and outgoing personalities. Finally, all participants ended up being referred directly or through connections (through mutual friends, family, or classmates). In this sense, my sample is perhaps an extension of my own network and families with a similar educational and occupational history as my own.

Eligibility. Families were defined as having at least two members: a primary parent or caretaker and a preschool-aged child. In each family, all caretakers (whether primary or secondary) identified as black or African American and were born in the United States.

Furthermore, this study is limited to black parents whose parents were also born in the United States in an attempt to align this study with previous studies of literacy practices in black families. Those studies have also been primarily limited to U.S-born blacks and families with long histories in the U.S., as opposed to including black families who are recent immigrants. This eligibility requirement also limits the variability in cultural backgrounds that may exist between individual participating families. While each individual caretaker is expected to have a unique cultural background, based on a number of variables such as ethnic heritage, religious background, or even the region of the U.S. in which they were raised, caretakers who were born in the U.S. are likely to share cultural traditions with one another than with those born outside the U.S. While I acknowledge that recent immigrants contribute large numbers to the growing black middle class within the United States, these families would most appropriately be examined in a separate study. Again, by selecting only families with at least three generations who are native to the United States, I hoped to limit the variability in this study to U.S.-based cultural experiences.

In addition to identifying as black or African American, all participating families also have a typically-developing child that is four years of age at the start of data collection. By typically-developing, I refer to children who have not been diagnosed with a development disorder or delay nor receiving any early intervention services. Parents of children who have developmental delays or disorders receive additional and individualized information on early language and literacy development which other parents are not likely to receive. Therefore, the practices in which these families engage, and the information on which they rely, may be highly unique and less representative of how the majority families engage in early literacy practices.

I chose to examine families with children of four-year-olds for a number of reasons. First, the project is intended to shed light on the nature of literacy experiences in which children participate prior to formal school entry. At four years old, children have not yet begun formal schooling and may also have little experience in preschool settings. However, they are old enough that their parents may have begun educational activities with them that are intended to prepare them for school. Additionally, their language skills at this age are typically advanced enough that many parents feel comfortable introducing more advanced language practices or explicit literacy instruction, such as lessons in reading and writing at home (Purcell-Gates, 1996, Raikes et al. 2006) In an attempt to limit the amount of direct influence that educational professionals may have in shaping parents' practices and beliefs, I also limited eligibility to parents whose only or oldest child is four. The reasoning for this is similar to the decision to include only families who are not receiving early intervention services. Again, I was interested in examining parent's perspectives on early language and literacy with minimal direct influence from school systems. While parents' beliefs and practices are certainly shaped by a variety of outside influences, many of which occur prior to formal school entry, I hoped to minimize those outside influences in this study.

Finally, in order to be eligible, participating families had to be classified as middle class. I acknowledge long-standing debates within the social sciences concerning how to appropriately define and study social class (Bennet, Lutz, & Jayaram, 2012). My own classification system was informed by indicators that are commonly used in other studies of social class, literacy, and educational outcomes, particularly those that are qualitative in nature. More specifically, these studies most often use measures of income, parental education, and/or occupation to determine social class (Bennett, Lutz, & Jayaram, 2012; Chin & Phillips, 2004; Lareau, 2003). Lareau

(2003) uses occupational status as the primary marker for middle class status. She classifies families in which at least one parent holds a professional or managerial role as middle class. Bennett, Lutz, and Jayaram (2012), however, use parental education as the sole marker for middle class status, classifying families in which at least one parent holds a four-year college degree as middle class. Chin and Phillips (2004) use both education and occupation to define middle class status, classifying families in which at least one parent holds a four-year-college degree or holds a professional or managerial position as middle class.

Along with employment status and educational attainment, measures of family income are perhaps the most commonly used indicator of class status in social science research, with many studies using indicators of poverty status based on income and family size (Allen, 2010). In many cases, social class is defined by a combination of education, occupation, and income. Because measures of education, occupation, and income tend to be correlated, I primarily relied on educational attainment to determine middle class status in my project. In the current sample, social class is first defined based on the highest education level reached by the primary or secondary caretaker. Families in which at least one parent or caregiver holds a bachelor's degree or higher were classified as middle class and were therefore eligible to participate. This type of classification is consistent with existing theory and research on social class (Bennett, Lutz, & Jayaram, 2012; Wright, 2008). However, I also collected information on each participating family's total income in order to provide additional support for their classification as middle class.

Data Collection

After parents expressed interest in participating in this project, they were invited to complete an introductory questionnaire (see Appendix A). Eligibility was determined based on

parents' responses on the questionnaire, using the eligibility criteria described above. Recruitment continued until I obtained a minimum of four families. Recruiting this number of families (originally set at five) took an unexpectedly long period of time, approximately six months. The very fact that recruitment was so difficult may be indicative of a variety of potentially overlapping influences, such as a lack of local available families meeting my criteria, an unwillingness to participate in what is perceived as a highly intrusive study, and my own lack of membership in social networks where eligible families may be likely. In total, six additional families expressed interest at some point but were not included in the final sample due to lack of eligibility (*n=2*), lack of follow-up after initial contact (*n=3*), or an unwillingness to participate due to the procedures involved (*n=1*).

After each family was selected to be included in the final sample, I proceeded by conducting two in-depth interviews and observations over the course of two days, with the exception of one family whose observations and interviews lasted three days. The interview and observational methods I employed are adapted from ethnographic methodology which informs this case study design. Fieldwork took place over the course of four months in the spring and summer of 2015. Data collection involved intensive participant observations and two to three in-depth interviews with families, primarily with mothers. I spent an average of twelve hours with each family, split over two (or three) days. The first day included at least five hours of observation as well as an initial interview, which occurred after an initial warm-up period with the family, allowing some time for the children and the entire family to get acquainted with me and get somewhat accustomed to my presence. I attempted to fit interviews into each family's routine with minimal disruption to their planned routine. Depending on the family's schedule for the day, interview one may have occurred at the start of observations or at the end of

observations on day one. The second interview occurred at the end of observations on day two. All interviews were conducted with the primary caretaker or caretakers.

The interview process was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol and broken into an initial interview (see Appendix B) and a closing interview (see Appendix C). The goal of the first interview was to gain insight into how, if at all, parents structure their children's daily activities and how they conceptualize early language and literacy development. This interview included questions such as: "What kind of activities do you do regularly with your child at home? What are some of your child's favorite things to do? How do you think children learn new things? How do you think most children learn to read and write?" Information gathered during initial interviews and observations on day one was used to help structure the second interviews. These closing interviews included a combination of predetermined questions, based on the protocol, as well as additional questions intended to clarify prior observations or preliminary findings. The protocol contained questions such as, "Would you say that I have gotten to see or experience a typical day in the life of you and your child? If so, how so? If not, how is it different?" and "In what ways do you think your child is similar to or different from other children his or her age, in terms of speaking, reading, and writing?" Initial and closing interviews lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes, averaging one hour each. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Observation sessions included at a minimum the child and at least one caretaker. These sessions served as an opportunity to directly observe how parents and children engage in early language and literacy practices. I participated in whatever activities the families were engaged in during the observational period. This included having meals together, making trips to various stores, attending church services and preschool meetings, going to parks and on play dates, and

simply sitting at home and talking and playing with the children and their parents. Informal conversations and questions occurred at multiple times during fieldwork, based on whatever felt natural to me. These observations provided me with a snapshot of the literacy environment and practices in these families, though it is possible they slightly altered their typical schedules in order to demonstrate an ideal portrayal of family life. The combination of interview and observation methods allowed me to triangulate findings. It also allowed for examination of similarities or inconsistencies between what parents reported and what they actually did.

In addition to audiotaping all sessions, I kept a small notebook and pen handy during observations to jot down notes and reminders. In order to capture as much information as possible, I listened to the audio-recording of the session soon after it took place (one week on average), expanding upon the quick notes I had written during the session, particularly noting any nonverbal interactions that were not captured on tape. I also used this opportunity to begin to reflect on what I had observed, making note of remaining questions that I may like to pursue in the closing interview.

Data Analysis

Preparing the Data. The empirical data are based on field notes and interview transcripts, which were transcribed and then analyzed with the assistance of Atlas.ti software, and on questionnaire data. Following recommended practice in qualitative research methods, I conducted analyses on an ongoing basis throughout data collection, rather than conducting all analyses after the completion of data collection (Mertens, 2010). Analyses followed three basic steps: preparation of data for analysis through transcription, exploration of data for common threads using open coding, and reduction of data to specific themes through focused coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Mertens, 2010). Again, these three steps did not necessarily occur as

isolated steps occurring in chronological order, but as overlapping processes. The three steps of analysis informed one another and occurred repeatedly as data was collected. This overlapping led to increasingly refined analyses and interpretation of data.

There were elements of my coding process that were both iterative and synergistic. Parts of the process were iterative in that they occurred multiple times. With each additional family added to my data set, I returned to my growing list of codes to either confirm existing codes or expand upon them. This process of "fitting" codes to the data as well as "fitting" the data to the codes speaks to the synergistic nature of the coding process. I attempted to see how pieces of this analytic puzzle fit together, or more specifically, how the codes and the data worked with one another.

Once again, this project is guided by the theoretical contributions of New Literacy Studies (Gee, 2008; Street, 1997). Gutiérrez and colleagues (2009) summarize New Literacy Studies as a "culturally sensitive account of literacy that rejects static and homogeneous views of the literacy practices of cultural communities" (p. 213). This theoretical framework influenced the types of practices that I collected information about. Whereas many prior studies focus on a small number of specific early literacy practices, such as shared storybook reading or explicit attempts to teach the alphabet, this study is concerned with literacy defined broadly and socially. Therefore, I collected data on a broad range of family practices. My own classification of literacy practices is informed by the kinds of activities that have been noted in previous research, as I describe in the process of open coding (Addy, Vernon-Feagans, and the Family Life Key Investigators, 2013; Hammer & Weiss, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Vernon-Feagans, 1996).

The following types of activities are examples of what I included as instances of language and literacy practices: 1) using language to construct oral narratives, 2) caretakers and children

reading storybooks together, 3) reciting nursery rhymes, poetry, or other forms of oral language that focus attention on phonological patterns, 4) singing songs that also focus attention on phonology and rhythm, 5) caretakers' explicit attempts to teach reading or writing, and 6) children's explicit attempts to read or write.

Open Coding. After transcribing all data, I began with a process of open coding using three methods of categorization: a) inductive coding based on what I found in the data itself; b) coding according to categories used in prior research (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Lareau, 2003/2011; Lewis-McCoy, 2014, Teale, 1986 and c) in vivo coding, based on words used by participants themselves. These three means of coding did not necessarily occur in a linear fashion but were used simultaneously as an initial means of categorizing my data. Open coding was used primarily to identify emerging patterns in the data itself, without directly attempting to answer my central research questions.

After completing my first interview, I initially relied on inductive coding to identify some preliminary themes. These primary themes were independence, individuality, instilling good manners, explicit language instruction, and educational preparation. Secondary themes were choice/options, dialect/language variety, milestones, concern, and playing/having fun. As previously mentioned, prior descriptions of literacy practices also informed my coding process. Across studies, categorizations of literacy practices have often attempted to classify and quantify literacy practices. However, these studies have sometimes collapsed various types of literacy practices (e.g., storybook reading) alongside various literacy purposes (e.g., literacy for entertainment). Certainly, the line between type of practice and type of purpose is not always clear. For instance, it could be said that the literacy practice of reading the Bible could also serve a religious purpose of strengthening one's faith. Whatever the case, I relied loosely on various

lists when coding my own data and when classifying the literacy practices and purposes I observed. More specifically, Purcell-Gates (1986), using Teale's (1986) categories, lists the following literacy practices: 1) entertainment, 2) daily living routines, 3) literacy for the sake of teaching/learning, 4) school-related, 5) storybook time, 6) interpersonal communication, 7) religion, 8) information network, 9) work. Heath (1983), makes a distinction between reading and writing practices, classifying reading practices as being 1) instrumental, 2) social-interactional and recreational, 3) news-related, 4) confirmational (of values and beliefs). She categorizes uses of writing practices as 1) memory aids, 2) substitutes for oral messages, 3) financial, or 4) public records. Finally, I incorporated the words and language of participants themselves into coding of my data.

As mentioned, I did not necessarily use these three means of open coding in a linear fashion. Instead, I attempted to do some preliminary coding as part of the process of compiling field notes after conducting interviews and observations with each family. With each subsequent family added to my data set, I also attempted to make some connections across cases.

In Vivo Coding. I also performed a word frequency analysis by examining word usage during interviews to see how often particular keywords associated with literacy appeared in interviews (see Appendix D). Interviews were certainly influenced by my own words and shaped by the questions I used to probe parents. This, by necessity, steered conversation in certain directions. However, when probing for word usage in interviews, I only included a count of when participants themselves used particular words, in an effort to tease apart the potential influence of my own use of the words. This of course, does not remove the effects of my influence, as my introduction of a particular word may have predisposed a parent to use it as

well, but it provides a rough means of comparing word usage *across participants*, as I posed similarly worded questions to each participant family.

A first full pass of the data yielded 50 unique codes (See Appendix E). Next, I examined all codes that occurred three times or less (i.e., authority, authority with teachers, being outdoors, birth order, diversity, improvement, literacy-practices – oral dictionary, region, written communication). Among these nine codes, I considered which, if any, overlapped with other, more-frequently occurring codes. If so, I recoded those passages using the other remaining codes. After this process, I ended up eliminating the single code of "region." I originally intended this code to serve as a reference to the geographical region of families. In the end I discarded this code entirely for a number of reasons. It was not used often, nor was it highly salient given emerging patterns in the data. Finally, I had enough variability in my small sample to compare or contrast families across geographical regions. This process of recoding and collapsing codes reduced the total number of codes from 50 to 41 (See Appendix F).

Next, I examined the remaining 41 codes more closely and identified the ones that occurred most frequently across all interviews and observations. Each of the following codes, listed in order of frequency, appeared over one hundred times:

1. Language use/language and dialect
2. parent-child interaction
3. access to resources – opportunities
4. material objects
5. technology/electronics

Particular conversations or observations may have received more than one code. For example, observing an instance of storybook reading between a parent and child was coded as:

reading, parent-child interaction, and material objects to encompass the act of reading, the direct interaction between parent and child and the physical book itself. I examined code co-occurrences such as this to see if there was additional information that I had missed from the first two coding passes. However, this query did not yield additional data in what I found to be informative over and above the existing patterns in coding I had already identified and was therefore not included in final analyses.

Focused Coding. Next, I combined the 41 codes that I had initially identified into larger, more comprehensive codes or code families, keeping the list of most frequently occurring codes in mind. I attempted to group thematically-related codes into single families, based on the open coding process. This method of coding reduced the number of code families to five. There was some overlap between these categories, such that they were not mutually exclusive. In other words, some codes were listed in more than one of these coding families. These five code families were:

1. Access to Resources
2. Material Objects
3. Choice
4. Interpersonal Interactions
5. School Preparation

(See Appendix G for the full list of codes subsumed by these five codes).

Identification of Themes

Open, focused, and in vivo coding were all employed as a means of identifying and determining themes that appeared across my data. Not only was I interested in common themes, but I was also invested in identifying how those themes relate to my central inquiry areas of

literacy practices, purposes, race, class, and social contexts may be related among the participating families.

Along with focused coding, I also relied on the process of in vivo coding to identify codes that appeared to be highly salient in the data. Words that families frequently used themselves in conversation and interviews, as well as ideas that they often stressed as being important to them were deemed highly salient. By combining the most frequent codes with the most salient codes, I was able to collapse the remaining 41 codes. These combined coding methods led to the identification of these final themes: access to resources, material objects, choices, interpersonal interactions, school preparation, experts and authority, and daily life. Across these themes, three emerged as particularly salient: school preparation, access, and choice.

Across the four participating black middle class families, the single, most unifying factor related to literacy practices and purposes was school preparation. Overwhelmingly, the ways they engage in literacy serve as a means of setting the foundation for success through traditional educational settings, which parents recognize as being based on strong school-based literacy skills, such as fluency in SWE and book-reading. Under this larger umbrella of school preparation, access and choice serve as the mechanisms through which they are able to position their children for academic success. Based on combined factors or class-based and racial positioning, these families have access to increased opportunities and unique choices presented to them. I discuss these three themes in greater detail in the discussion of findings.

Ethical Dilemmas and Concerns. I approached data collection with an attempt to refrain from expressing opinions or viewpoints about childrearing that might sway parents to respond or react in one way or another. However, it is not possible to remain completely neutral or

objective in social situations. If anything, I attempted to err on the side of agreement with parents in cases in which they asked my opinion. Rather than refuting parents' views and opinions, I attempted to validate their own beliefs (as their own) and encourage them to elaborate. At times, I would provide details from my own background that mirrored their own, in an attempt to build rapport, but also to be a more or less natural conversational participant during interviews and observations. In this way, it is quite possible that I introduced bias. At the same time, I do not believe that it is possible to remain objective or without any form of influence on the research process or on parents' responses. My mere presence alone, accompanied by various social factors, such as my race, gender, age, education, and association with a university, have already introduced bias. Rather than ignoring the possible influences I may have had on data collection, I interpret findings based on my own positionality and on the comments and reactions I myself displayed during interviews and observations.

Certainly, there are conflicting views on the role of the researcher, regarding levels of involvement and the desired degree of self-disclosure. My goal was to act primarily as an observer participant (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), in which I became a temporary participant in the lives of these families while I collected data. As such, I served multiple roles that included attending church services with families, meeting family friends and being introduced as a friend myself, taking part in a holiday meal with extended family members, reading bedtime stories to the children, helping to take care of children on a trip to the playground, and attending a parent-teacher conference. In these ways, I was involved in a variety of family events that included more or less routine, everyday activities. As a testament to one family's acceptance of my presence, one parent noted that after the first day, she momentarily forgot that I was a new houseguest and would not know where to look when she mentioned that she had put my coat in

the upstairs closet. Instead, it was as if I had been enough of a regular presence that she expected me to find my way around the house on my own. Similarly, other parents told me how the children would ask or comment about me in my absence. These instances highlight the ways in which I attempted to become involved in the lives of these participants, rather than acting solely as an observer. As an observer participant, I hoped to gain insight into how each family operated and gain a sense of what it was like to be a member of each family.

This decision meant that I sometimes acted less like a researcher and more like a friend or minimized the social distance that often exists between researcher and participant. I borrowed these guiding principles of observation from ethnographic methodology, although I did not spend nearly enough time immersed in the lives of these families or their communities for this study to be considered an ethnography. Nevertheless, the decision has implications on the assumed bias or influence I may have exerted by my presence and involvement in families' lives. Similar to the ways in which my own words and reactions necessarily introduced bias, my presence alone was something of a novelty that altered how families typically operated. But by becoming involved in families' lives, I attempted to become integrated into a new, temporary sense of relative normalcy.

Researcher positionality

In initiating this project, I was interested in how markers of class and race influence the beliefs of middle class black parents. Therefore, I made an attempt to understand how race and class operate in their own lives, and how the specific contexts of their own lives shape their literacy practices. While I examined these aspects in the lives of my participants, I also considered how race and class operate in my own life and may possibly influence what I "see"

and "do not see" in my observations. This reflexivity constitutes an important element of qualitative research in which the researcher is the instrument of analysis (Mertens, 2010).

As a black female with a middle class upbringing, I have a sense of shared community with other middle class black families in the U.S. But as the child of Ghanaian immigrants, I also consider my cultural heritage to be West African. Thus, I am sometimes a cultural Other in black U.S communities. Nevertheless, part of my interest in this particular research topic stems from my own childhood experiences. My parents, Ghanaian immigrants who also hold advanced degrees, firmly believed in the power of education to increase career opportunities. This belief shaped the language and literacy practices in our home. For instance, strong reading skills were highly valued and our home was filled with children's books, academic journals, and religious literature. Additionally, my parents' views helped my siblings and me to develop strong English language skills, though this occurred at the expense of developing proficiency in my parents' native Ga language. Thus, my desire to undertake the project is partially based on a desire to support parents from potentially marginalized communities in promoting their children's academic success while also maintaining their cultural heritage. Finally, I approached this study with a desire to affirm the perspectives of black parents of all class backgrounds who may be silenced in traditional educational circles. These perspectives necessarily impacted how I interacted in the settings and how I interpreted the data. Because of my commitment to strengths-based models, it is possible that I subconsciously sought positive factors that would support this viewpoint. As a result, I may have overlooked factors that I may have found problematic or potentially negative. I revisit this possibility in discussion of my analyses and findings.

CHAPTER 4: INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY ANALYSES

In this section, I analyze findings from each of the four individual case studies. I begin with a description of the family members and the setting in which they live. These individual family descriptions are guided by examination and comparison of the common in vivo codes associated with each case as well as data from the parental questionnaire (see Appendix H). As I outlined in the methods sections, my analyses are based on in-depth interviews and several hours of observation with each family. I conducted interviews with parents in their homes. I conducted observations at whatever locations and spaces that family frequented, such as churches, preschools, public parks, shopping malls and other stores, restaurants, and at the houses of family members. A snapshot of family life follows these descriptions. The snapshot is intended to provide a detailed and representative account of how literacy operates within each family.

This introduction allows the reader to get an intimate view of each family that serves as a backdrop for the findings that follow. These findings include a description of the literacy practices and purposes in each family, along with an analysis of the dominant factors that shape literacy practices and purposes in each individual family. These individual case study analyses also lead into the cross-case analyses outlined in chapter five.

Chapter 4a: The Washington Family

Literacy through Everyday Experiences

The Family Members

The parents. Nancy and Randolph Washington are parents to two daughters, Jessica and Julia. Nancy is also visibly pregnant with a third child, a boy, who is born several weeks after my observation period. Both parents welcome me easily into their routine. I have actually met them both before, due to traveling in similar social networks. I attended college with Nancy; she and her family became participants in this study by way of a mutual friend.

Nancy quickly strikes me as a straightforward, practical, no-nonsense kind of woman. She speaks her mind easily and with confidence, which likely serves her well in her career as an attorney. In her own words, she does not paint her nails or wear make-up, nor does she buy fancy or very trendy clothes. Instead, she says that she doesn't like to spend money at all and isn't really into amassing material things. When I meet her on the first day of observations, her comfortable clothing and lack of make-up confirm her tendency to dress plainly and comfortably. She is wearing her hair straight and it is falls slightly below her shoulders. Aside from her pregnant belly, she is small woman, who appears even smaller when standing next to her husband, Randolph.

Randolph is quite tall, at a height of 6'3"or 6'4." He sports a bald head and is quick to smile. He is fairly slim, which perhaps makes him appear even taller. Randolph and Nancy both identify as black and I would describe them both as light brown-skinned in complexion. Randolph seems to be fairly easy going, certainly the more easy-going of the two parents. For instance, he has no problem when Jessica goes through a phase in which she calls him by his first name, which Nancy finds inappropriate for a child to do with a parent.

Randolph is present during most of my time in the house; he could easily fit the description of a "hands-on" father. Nancy asserts that the two of them are their children's primary caretakers and that they split duties. Although I would still consider Nancy to be more involved than Randolph, my observations support her assertion that they split caretaking duties. She does the girls' hair, drops them off and picks them up from school, and takes them on play dates. Randolph bathes and dresses the two girls, he gives them snacks and helps with meals, works alongside his wife in carrying out bedtime routines, and disciplines his daughters as easily as he verbally expresses his love for them.

In contrast to her own frugal ways, Nancy describes her husband as a spender. While their opposing approaches to money and spending can cause disputes, Nancy sees how their differing approaches also work in complementary ways; she helps Randolph to save money and he helps her to spend it. The two of them give off an air of being very relaxed. Even with the addition of a new person in the household, they seem to go about their day as they normally would, with little adjustments for my presence. Instead, I quickly feel like a member of the family, free to move about the house on my own, and even accompanying them to Nancy's mother's house for Easter dinner.

The children. Jessica Washington is a four-year-old child who, at the time of my observations, is looking forward to the birth of her second sibling, a baby brother. She has big eyes, a big smile, and a full head of medium brown hair. The two of us bond easily and she is comfortable and happy to hold my hand a couple of times as we walk around the playground. She still throws temper tantrums from time to time, which irritates her mother, although Nancy tries not to get too upset about it. Nancy feels that Jessica has inherited some of her own personality traits, which makes her life as a mother more difficult now, but which she also

believes will serve Jessica well in the future. Nancy describes her daughter in the following way:

> She's always been a very high needs child. Um, I see a lot of my personality in her. So I think that when she grows up, the things that really drive me crazy now will be beneficial to her. Like she's very determined. She's very headstrong. She doesn't listen to what other people tell her. You know and that sucks for me as the person telling her, but when she grows up, like nobody will be able…to deter her from what she wants to do. [Interview 1].

Nancy provides another example, saying:

> She wants what she wants when she wants it and she's not easily persuaded otherwise. And she's, she's been like that since she was a baby. You know, the first three months, we had to hold her. Cuz you put her down and she's like, "I said pick me up. Are you listening? I said pick me up!" And she's not gonna stop until you pick her up [Interview 1].

She also describes Jessica as "a very passionate child," and looks forward to Jessica maturing and learning how to exert more control over her passion.

Jessica's younger sister, Julia, appears to be a free spirit. Although she appears to be a fairly happy-go-lucky child, Nancy comments, with amusement, that she does not like to smile in photographs. Although she is two years old, she does not seem to exhibit the same kinds of temper tantrums as her older sister. At times, she likes to do the same things her older sister is doing and at other times, she seems fairly content to play on her own. In any case, the two girls seem to interact as most siblings do, sometimes getting along and sometimes getting into squabbles.

The Setting

The neighborhood. The Washingtons live in the suburbs, in a historically black area of town. I later learn from Nancy that this area is home to the mayor, as well as several councilmen, judges, and lawyers. The houses in this neighborhood are very large and accompanied by grand, open, well-manicured lawns. The streets are also wide and spacious, and

the houses sit far back from the street on expansive properties. It is very quiet on the Saturday morning when I arrive. As opposed to the lively neighborhood where the Masons live, where parents and children can be seen outside at various times of the day, in the Washington's neighborhood, there are no children outside playing or neighbors chatting across their yards. Instead, the neighborhood is filled with wide open spaces that seem to be devoid of human life. As I pull up to the Washington's house, I see a wall of evergreens lining the road and standing about 15-20 feet high, just before the driveway.

Nancy grew up in the area where the family now lives. Their current house is about ten or fifteen minutes away, by car, from Nancy's mother's house, where Nancy herself grew up. However, the side of town where her mother lives is much more modest than the neighborhood in which the Washingtons now live. The houses and the streets are much smaller, and the lawns are less well-manicured. Nancy mentions that where she grew up was an all-black area and the area, although it is appears to be changing due to large commercial developments nearby and gentrification which has changed the racial demographics, still has a reputation as being a largely black part of town.

The home. When I first arrive, there are three cars parked on their property, between the garage and the driveway. One is Randolph's vintage "work-in-progress." The other two are SUVs that are parked at the end of the driveway. One is Randolph's very first car, the other is a Durango. I park next to the older SUV at the end of the driveway and see a plastic playhouse in the backyard, which is only visible to me once I pull all the way in to the end of the driveway.

When I enter the Washington household, the front door feels like it is towering above me, and I am nearly six feet tall. Once I walk in, the doorway gives way to an even higher ceiling in the foyer. Inside, the Washington household is fairly neat and tidy, aside from children's toys

and accessories which are dispersed around the house. Most of those toys, however, seem to be in boxes, shelves, or other types of storage containers. Nancy is sitting on the wrap-around sofa in the sitting/living area twisting and braiding Jessica's hair, while Jessica's eyes are glued to the large flat screen TV on the opposite wall, which is playing an episode of Curious George. Julia is sitting on the other side of the couch playing with her toys.

The house is laid out in an open floor plan. The kitchen gives way to the dining area, where there is a large dining table with six chairs. There is an island with four bar stools that separates the kitchen area from the main sitting room, which holds the light-brown wrap-around sofa where Nancy and the girls are sitting. Behind the sofa, there are a boxes filled with toys, a low bookshelf that comes about to the height of the sofa, a children's easel, and a small plastic children's basketball hoop. In the corner, near the far window and closer to the dining table, there is a chaise lounge along the wall. Between all these pieces of furniture, there is ample room to move around freely.

Local Schools. The Washingtons live just outside the largest school district in the state. The public schools in their district boast slightly higher standardized test scores than the public schools in the nearby district. Overall, the Washingtons seem to be pleased with the preschool they have chosen for their daughter, and the convenience of its location near their jobs and their home. Nancy also appreciates the high level of diversity among the student population at Jessica's school, although there is less diversity among the teaching staff, most of whom are black.

A Snapshot.

Learning self-control and new vocabulary. It is the end of a play date at the park. On this particular play date, Nancy, Jessica, Julia, and I met up with a friend of Nancy's named

Erika, who brings one of her twin sons named Jaden. Before the two families part ways, the Washington girls and I head back to the picnic table where we had eaten lunch and start cleaning up our picnic supplies. However, Jessica doesn't want to go home yet and starts to whine and pout. Nancy warns me that sometimes she gets in these moods, where she throws terrible tantrums and that it takes her a very long time to calm down. She wonders if something is seriously wrong with her daughter. When Jessica starts to whine at the park today, Nancy warns me that a tantrum may be starting. In the meantime, Nancy and I keep packing up our things and tell Jessica that it's time to go. Jessica hangs back by herself, standing by the swings, and then starts wailing loudly. Nancy tells her that we're done swinging for the day and that she's leaving. Eventually, the two of us start walking away. Jessica continues crying, but eventually starts walking back with us, while still crying. It turns out that the "tantrum" actually doesn't last too long, maybe three to five minutes. I tell Nancy that I was expecting much worse, based on what she had been describing. She also comments that it was actually better than she herself expected as well.

As Jessica calms down, we walk past the slides where Jaden and Erika are still playing. Jaden quietly says, "Bye Jessica," but she doesn't hear. Nancy points out that he was saying bye and asks her what she should say in response. Jessica turns around to say bye to him in return. The four of us start walking back to the car, and we say our farewells to Erika and Jaden. Eventually, Jessica holds my hand while Julia holds her mom's hand and the four of us make our way back to the car.

When we get in the car, Jessica says that she'd like to come back to this park again someday. Nancy says that they can do that, it's not too far away from home. Jessica also says that she wishes she could have stayed longer, but then she realized that maybe she can come

back and play more next time. Nancy has been working on this idea of telling yourself, "Maybe next time" when things don't go the way you'd like them to. Nancy says that she's very proud of Jessica for realizing that just because she said no for now, doesn't mean that they can't come back another time, and she's exactly right, that it's good to hope that maybe we can come back another time. This seems to be a mature response for Jessica, and one that Nancy has been trying to work on.

As we roll out of the park's parking lot, I think Jessica sees the word "public" written on a sign and the topic of a public park comes up. Jessica asks what "public" means and Nancy explains that it means that anyone can use it. In other words, it's open to for everyone to use. Nancy and I start to comment on the pollen, because it's everywhere and is coating the world around us in yellow. Jessica hears us and asks what pollen is. Nancy explains that it's yellow powder and that plants outside use it to make more plants. It also kind of looks like yellow snow. Jessica asks if trees have pollen too and Nancy and I actually aren't sure, but Nancy says she thinks that all plants and trees outside have pollen. She explains that she might point it out to Jessica at some point when she's not driving, because it's particularly easy to see it when it settles on cars [Observation Day One].

Literacy Practices in the Washington Family

An Overview

Out of the four families, the Washingtons are the only family in which the words "teach" or "learn" were not among the most frequent words used in interviews and conversations about literacy. Instead, the words "talk, school, book, and play" were used most frequently, which aligns with the view of literacy and learning exemplified in the Washington family (see Appendix H). The Washingtons associate preschool literacy practices with the development of

basic reading and writing skills, but at this age, they place greater emphasis on developing social skills and a strong character. Although Nancy Washington expresses a desire for her children to learn, at this age she prefers for her children to learn through play and everyday experiences. In her view, more structured learning is reserved for when the children are older.

This does not mean that the young Washington children do not engage in early educational activities, but these are embedded within their regular routines in the form of playing, such as reading books at bedtime or with grandma, or playing educational games on the computer. Rather than constructing isolated educational activities, the Washingtons emphasize natural processes of living and growing. In this environment, literacy appears to happen along the way. In this way, the Washingtons exemplify the parenting approach of the accomplishment of natural growth that Lareau (2000) ascribes to working-class, rather than middle class, families. In contrast with the idea of highly structured parenting ideal of concerted cultivation that Lareau argues occurs in middle class families, the accomplishment of natural growth allows children more freedom to learn and develop without extensive parental structuring.

Findings

Literacy Practices

Print Literacy. In the Washington's home, I note several instances of print in the open space that combines the kitchen area and the living room. All around the room are examples of environmental print (Purcell-Gates, 1998; Neuman & Celano, 2001), or print literacy that appears on everyday products in the environment including product labels and advertisements. For instance, there is a container on the kitchen island, displaying the words "coconut oil." On top of the refrigerator, there is a "veggie and herb kit." There are also more traditional examples of print, in the forms of numerous books on the bookshelves. I count about 20 children's books

in plain sight and 30-40 books for adults. The bookshelves along the far wall also contain numerous DVDs and videos and the small bookshelf behind the wrap-around sofa display magazines like "Car and Driver" and "Avion." On the four walls of the room, there are plaques which read, "Love," "God", "Happiness", "Hope" "Joy." Some also have inspirational quotes. I also see an alphabet puzzle. As is characteristic of many families with young children, there are papers, writings, drawings, and pictures which appear to be created by the children displayed on the doors of the refrigerator.

Perhaps the most unique example of print literacy in the Washington household is the plaque displaying some of the family history in the hallway leading to the front door. The plaque has a proclamation from the state governor regarding Randolph Washington Memorial Day, one of Randolph's ancestors. There is also a congressional record from the Senate, in bold letters, and a sign regarding the Randolph Washington Memorial Horse Trail. Finally, there is a photo of Randolph Washington himself.

Oral Language. A definition of literacy informed by New Literacy Studies conceptualizes oral language and written language as highly related skills. This conceptualization echoes a great deal of research in the past 30 years, indicating that oral language skills such as phonological awareness (knowledge of letter and word sounds), vocabulary skills, listening comprehension, and narrative abilities are related to reading abilities (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001, van Kleeck & Schuele, 2012; Washington, 2001). Therefore, I include oral language skills that are precursors to reading and writing skills, including vocabulary, listening and comprehension skills in my observations (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001, van Kleeck & Schuele, 2012; Washington, 2001).

In the current study, I also examine oral language and literacy practices that have been commonly associated with black communities, such the use of word play, call and response, and extensive oral storytelling practices (Heath, 1983; Smitherman, 2000, Vernon-Feagans, 1996). Some of these highly interactive practices support the conceptualization of literacy as social practice.

Nancy often uses language and conversation to capitalize on everyday occurrences as opportunities to educate her children. This education may involve everyday tasks such as learning to put on one's shoes, or social skills, such as learning to comfort someone when they are sad or more academically-oriented activities like defining the meanings of new words, such as the word "public" described above. The example below illustrates how Nancy uses conversational language to teach and accomplish goals.

Julia is struggling to tie her shoes and rather than stopping the folding of laundry that she is currently taking care of, Nancy uses oral language to assist her daughter. While we all get ready to go to grandma's house for Easter dinner, the girls are in charge of getting themselves dressed, putting things they'd like to take with them into their backpacks, and any other tasks they may need to do to get ready. As we get ready, Julia attempts to put her shoes on herself, but has some trouble figuring out which shoe goes on which foot. Her shoes have Velcro straps and Nancy asks her if the straps go to the outside (of her foot) or to the inside. Julia responds correctly by saying, "to the outside." However, she has another problem. Her first shoe is on the wrong foot so that when she pulls the Velcro strap down, it actually goes towards the inside of her foot. After this first unsuccessful attempt, Nancy points out that Julia's shoes must be on the wrong feet. Julia then switches the shoes.

I'm impressed by Julia's ability to follow these instructions, given that she's only two years old. However, it also strikes me that they've gone through this routine before, based on Julia's ability to understand the directions. In this way, Nancy uses oral language to help her daughter with a routine task, but also promotes independence, which is an important principle she wants to promote in her daughters. Rather than manually putting on Julia's shoes, or showing her through actions, Nancy uses words to help her daughter learn to do this task on her own.

I also observe oral literacy incorporated into the bedtime routine at the Washington's house. On the day that I observe the routine, Nancy reads a story to Jessica while Randolph and Julia listen. She sits in the rocking chair in the girls' bedroom to read, while Julia lays in her bed, and Randolph sits in the bed with her. In a later interview, Nancy reports that the girls have trouble settling down at the end of the day, or winding down to go to bed. She has incorporated both storytime and singing time into the bedtime routine as a way to address this challenge. Reading bedtime stories may then serve multiple purposes, in promoting early literacy skills, and also helping the girls to relax. At the same time, it may also build an association in the girls between comfort and reading, which scholars suggest is a positive way to foster an early love of reading, which can in turn benefit children later in school (Baker & Scher, 2002; Bus & vanIjzendoorn, 1995; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Finally, I observe the use of African American English (AAE) in the Washington's oral language and literacy practices. Nancy uses a range of phonological, syntactic, and stylistic features of AAE in our multiple conversations. One phonological feature is the labialization of interdental fricatives. For instance, Nancy uses the African American English pronunciation of "birfday" rather than the standardized whitestream English pronunciation of "birthday." Nancy

also uses regularization of the indefinite pronoun "a" or "an," saying "a incident" where standardized whitestream English construction preceding a vowel would be "an incident." Finally, Nancy at one point says that "people was mean," exemplifying syntactic regularization or leveling also found in AAE, whereas the SAE construction would be "people were mean."

While various aspects of AAE are used in the Washington household, including characteristic phonology, semantics, and syntax, the Washingtons do not appear to be conscious of its use, or mention its use explicitly at any point during my observations. In fact, when asked directly about language use, they do not speak to any differences in dialect or variety that they may use or observe in their everyday lives. Both parents use aspects of AAE and they do not attempt to change or "correct" any stigmatized variations that their children may use. Interestingly enough, although I observe Randolph, Nancy, and Nancy's mother using instances of AAE, I do not observe the children doing the same. Instead, the children's language is highly standardized. I do not offer an explanation here, given my limited observation of the children's larger social networks or the language or dialect use of many people outside of the immediate family and a few other individuals.

Digital Forms of Literacy. In addition to the use of oral language practices, the Washingtons engage with literacy through electronic means. Both girls love to use their "iPads" while they're in the car. I note that the iPads are really just LeapFrogs (electronic educational tools for children) but Nancy whispers to me that the girls don't know that. By using their "iPads," the girls seem to enjoy being their parents, with all of them using their "iPads" together. Whatever the case may be, Jessica and Julia are well-versed at using their "Leap Frog iPads" and are able to occupy themselves independently by using them.

Compared to the other families in this project, I directly observed relatively few instances of literacy in electronic forms amongst the Washingtons, at least limited uses involving the children. Nancy mentions that Jessica uses the computer on a daily basis, either to play games, or to do educational activities, like learning and reviewing math and vocabulary. However, I did not directly observe Jessica using a computer in any of my observations. I do not dispute Nancy's account, but can provide no direct data or details myself concerning the use of computers.

I do, however, observe Jessica watching TV while I am at the Washingtons' house and it seems that this offers another opportunity for her to observe literacy in digital or electronic form. When I first arrive at the house, Jessica is watching TV while her mother does her hair. Nancy mentions that TV time is limited in their household, and one of the few times the girls get to watch TV is when they are getting their hair braided, which Nancy does herself. This allows them to see approximately 30 minutes to an hour of television about once a week.

Literacy Purposes

Literacy in the Washington family is primarily conceptualized as a means of teaching and learning through everyday experiences rather than being a skill acquired through explicitly constructed educational activities. Secondly, literacy serves a broader educational purpose by supporting the goal of raising an independent individual. In essence, literacy weaves seamlessly into the family's daily lives, rather than existing as isolated practices. Literacy in various forms helps children understand the world, not only by learning to read and write, but also by learning to become successful individuals.

Teaching and Learning Through Everyday Experiences. In the Washington family, literacy is used primarily as a means of supporting everyday life. In other words, Nancy uses

oral language as a means of explaining everyday events, like how to tie one's shoes, or explaining what pollen is, or how to keep oneself calm when life doesn't go the way you'd like. In other words, at least in Jessica's case, language and literacy are tools employed in the broader parenting goal of raising an independent and well-rounded individual. For example, Nancy is concerned with making sure that Jessica has good manners (e.g., saying excuse me if she has something to say), is compassionate (e.g., comforting her younger sister when she's sad) and has control over her emotions (e.g., not throwing temper tantrums when things don't go the way she'd like). Her use of literacy with Jessica supports these efforts.

Nancy is also concerned with Jessica's academic progress, but is not overtly or explicitly concerned with developing early literacy skills in her children. Rather than enrolling Jessica in early educational programs outside of her preschool or having her complete early educational worksheets, Nancy often uses life experiences as teachable moments (e.g., tying shoes, explaining the word "public"). One exception may be the educational games that Jessica plays on the computer, although this activity is framed more as playing than working.

Nancy also engages in shared storybook reading with her children at bedtime, which appears to serve multiple purposes. It fosters the development of early literacy skills in her children, such as familiarity with book and word recognition, but Nancy also likes to use it as a time for the children to wind down, relax, and get ready for bed. She and her daughters also sing songs during this time as an additional means of calming down at bedtime. Although the Washingtons may not be aware of it, they are practicing literacy with their children in a way that may develop a love for reading, by being associated with family time, with both parents in the room, time to snuggle with their parents, and time to sing songs they enjoy (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Vernon-Feagans, 1996). Again, literacy in the Washington household functions as

a means of teaching and learning through everyday experiences rather than through explicitly constructed educational activities.

Factors influencing literacy practices.

There are clearly a host of factors that may influence early literacy practices: race, class, access to resources, parental enjoyment of literacy practices, the age and birth order of the child, the child's linguistic skills and temperament, and so forth. Given the specific research questions in the current project, I will deal primarily with factors associated with race and class variables.

Financial access with limits. Due to ample financial resources, the Washingtons have access to a wide variety of educational opportunities and experiences. For instance, they are able to eat out at a range of restaurants, which Nancy uses as an opportunity to expose the children to elements of various cultures. They are also able to purchase books, toys, and other material objects that may foster the children's early learning. Again, their Leapfrogs are one of Jessica and Julia's favorite toys.

Because the Washingtons are members of the middle class according to their educational background, income, and occupational status, they also have access to middle class educational spaces and middle class educational norms. Both Nancy and Randolph have succeeded in higher education and have mastered the academic and social skills necessary to achieve success in that space. They live in a middle class neighborhood and their children attend middle class schools. Thus, they are able to engage in literacy practices with their children that often align with schooling norms, those based primarily on middle class norms. Some of these norms include shared storybook reading at bedtime and playing with educational toys and computer games. They also possess the social capital that aids them in navigating those spaces, such as

understanding the norms of interaction with peers and superiors in educational spaces, and how to acquire information from educational professionals.

However, I am surprised to learn that even with the financial resources at their fingertips, with a joint annual income over $200,000, Nancy laments that she is not always able to provide the materials or objects she wants for her children because money is still tight. She mentions that the mortgage on the house is high and that she and Randolph have student loans to pay back. Nevertheless, Nancy also mentions that she is determined to have enough savings to support the family should anything unexpected happen with her or Randolph's jobs. This is an ideal she has held firmly to since she herself was a teenager and her mother was laid off her job as a flight attendant, which drastically changed the lifestyle of the family and severely limited the family's spending. So it is perhaps with a grain of salt that Nancy's comments should be received, and yet, the availability of money is still a very real concern. While they do not provide unlimited access, the Washington's financial resources provide access to a range of opportunities and material objects.

Choice of living environments. Because of the access provided by their financial resources, the Washingtons also enjoy a number of choices, such as being able to choose between a wide range of houses and neighborhoods in which they can afford to live and a range of schooling options for their children. As previously mentioned, they have chosen to live in a predominantly black area of town, within a ten-minute drive from Nancy's childhood home, on a side of town with expansive houses occupied by prominent business people and city leaders.

Again, although the Washingtons have the financial means to enroll their children in a number of extracurricular activities, given Nancy's frugal spending habits, she typically opts for free activities such as play dates, trips to public playgrounds, and attending friends' birthday

parties. In this way, access to social networks provides the Washingtons with a range of options in which their children may interact with other children their age.

Finally, the Washingtons also choose to expose their children to diverse settings, that include people of various racial and ethnic groups and various linguistic backgrounds. As previously mentioned, Nancy grew up in predominantly black neighborhoods as a child, but she wants her children to grow up and feel comfortable around non-blacks as well. She also wants to expose her children to languages other than English. One particular language that she has introduced to her children is Japanese, given that Nancy's older brother has lived in Japan for ten years, speaks fluent Japanese, and is dating a Japanese woman. Nancy encourages the couple to speak in Japanese to and around the children, so that they have an early appreciation for linguistic diversity. Again, the social networks in which the Washingtons live and operate in part as a result of their financial means allow choices and opportunities such as these.

Language Variety: African American English. In my observations and interviews, the Washingtons make no explicit mention of different dialects of English, either amongst themselves or to their children. They themselves, along with Nancy's mother, who is a regular presence in the children's lives, use features of AAE in their own speech. None of them appear to point out any dialectal differences that exist in US English. Given Nancy's preference to reserve most conversations about discrimination with her children till a later age, it is possible that Nancy and Randolph do not want to highlight this linguistic difference at such as young age. It is possible that highlighting differences in dialect, that often differ along racial lines, may be something that they wish to avoid for the time being. Or it is possible that Nancy and Randolph are not conscious of the distinctive features of AAE that they use in their own speech. I did not observe either of them in predominantly white or mixed racial settings, so I am unable to

comment on whether they adjust their speech based on the racial composition of the audience. Whatever the case may be, they did not comment on any differences in language variety during my interviews or observations.

In short, the Washingtons, as the vast majority of all people do, speak in ways that feel most comfortable and natural to them. In their case, this means using elements of AAE. There is perhaps a subconscious and implicit "choice" in language use, given links between language and identity and the strong associations between black cultural identity and language in the Unites States (Lacy, 2007; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000). At the same time, while the Washington's language use may be interpreted as a choice, they do not appear to devote any conscious thought to using one variety of language or another in their home and community.

Indeed, in black communities, there is often a perceived opposition between mainstream or white cultural identity (assimilation) and black cultural identity (acculturation). Many blacks who grew up in predominantly black communities and now live and/or work in predominantly white settings feel a tension between use of SWE and AAE (Carter, 2006; Lacy, 2007). At the same time, black communities are not universally marked in their use of AAE, such that some blacks do not use it, and class-based variations in use have been observed to differentiate middle class from working-class black communities (Wolfram, 2007). The Washingtons, however, appear to use both SWE and AAE, in essence code-switching between the two varieties. In this way, their use of language may be an indication of their intersectional existence amongst both black and white communities.

Overview of Findings and Concluding Remarks

Nancy and Randolph Washington are concerned with educating their children in terms of teaching academic skills as well as appropriate behavior. Literacy appears to fit into this broader conceptualization of education, rather than being a discrete skill that poses an explicit concern. I describe literacy in this family as primarily an endeavor that occurs through everyday experience because of this integration of literacy into the common and sometimes mundane activities of life. Nancy explains concepts that her daughters encounter at parks, on play dates, on trips to grandma's house. She uses oral language to help her daughters learn how to tie their shoes. The girls have numerous toys that include books, as well as dolls, kitchen play sets, and electronic toys. In sum, literacy occurs as an aspect of natural development and everyday experiences that Nancy finds most appropriate for four-year-old children, rather than as an explicit or isolated instructional practice.

Chapter 4b: The Mason Family

Book-Based Literacy

The Family Members

The parents. The Mason family has four members, mom Belinda, dad Michael, son Prentice, and daughter Melanie. Belinda is a university professor, with a primary appointment in the English Department as well as appointments in African American Studies and Women's Studies, and Michael is currently a doctoral student in the School of Education and a college advisor in the School of Business. They both work at the same university. Belinda and Michael met and started dated while in college and are now both in their early thirties.

Belinda is a tall, brown-skinned woman, who wears her hair in locs. On the first day of data collection, Belinda is wearing a blue dress, that falls about to her knees. Her hair, black at the roots, and blond at the tips, is pulled back tightly on her head in an elaborate ponytail pattern. Among her friends, Belinda is known for always being on top of all the local children's activities and being the one to keep the rest of them informed. She is a tenured university professor as well as serving as director of the Women and Gender Studies program. Michael is a former college football player and has the large stature of a typical lineman. Although a serious demeanor and his size can give off the impression that he is hard and imposing, he is quite friendly and talkative. He describes himself as a no-nonsense man, who does not let his students slide or get away with excuses. During my fieldwork, Michael and I converse about the politics of academia and the need to be diplomatic and "play nice" at times, although he mentions that this is not one of his strengths. Instead, he's pretty blunt and straightforward and doesn't coddle his students and has no problem telling students where they fall short of expectations or if they aren't putting forth enough effort.

Both parents appear to be quite busy, but seem to have developed a consistent system of household and childcare duties. For instance, Belinda often picks the children up from school or daycare on weekdays, while Michael is primarily the one to shuttle them to weekend sports and activities. On the day that I am at the house for dinner, they are both involved with meal preparation, with Michael frying fish while Belinda cooks some vegetables and sets the table. Michael also takes the lead on various "projects" around the house and both parents are involved in the bedtime routine: one parent will help one child to shower and get dressed for bed while another parent helps the other.

The children. Prentice is a confident four-year-old with a big, infectious smile. He easily walks up to adults to engage them in conversation, asking questions or sharing his thoughts and observations. His mother describes him as a pretty curious and observant child who likes to ask questions. Belinda also describes her son as very passionate about his interests, usually having one particularly strong interest at a time. His current passion is Legos, and he is especially enthralled with Lego sets related to Star Wars. He loves to talk about the sets that he currently has and how they can be changed into different configurations.

Prentice's younger sister, Melanie, is 23 months old at the time of my data collection. She talks occasionally, but I find it hard to understand many of the things she says. She seems to be a fairly independent child, with her own interests, particularly listening to music, singing and dancing. However, there are times, such as at the playground, when she wants to follow her older brother's lead and participate in whatever he is doing.

Prentice seems to be rather well-integrated into adult life, in terms of the conversations he has with this parents, the people he interacts with on a regular basis and the shows he watches. For instance, he likes to watch Dr. Phil and the nightly news. In these ways, Prentice gets

exposed to adult life, which his parents feel he is old enough and mature enough to handle. Prentice's involvement in adult life is reminiscent of Heath's (1983) and Ward's (1971) findings among the black families in her study, with children being a part of adult life without parents necessarily changing the environment to cater specifically to them. In Heath's work, black parents were not highly likely to use "infant-directed speech" (Broesch & Bryant, 2015) with their infants and or make extensive efforts to alter their speech to the developmental level of their older children or shield them from "adult" topics. Although Prentice is no longer an infant but still a child, his parents speak to him as if he is a competent conversational partner. They do not appear to significantly alter the content or intonation of their talk to him, unless they are explaining complex ideas. Prentice's parents still monitor what he is exposed to, but allow him to participate in adult-like conversations and topics.

The Setting

The neighborhood. The Masons live in a suburb of a major metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. According to the 2010 census, its population at that time was just over 11,500. Although census data reports a White population of over 90%, the neighborhood where the Masons live seems to be much more diverse. Belinda Mason reports that just about every other house seems to be occupied by a Black family. I observe similar diversity in the neighborhood during my observations, seeing what appear to be black, white, and Latino residents of the neighborhood comfortably walking the sidewalks and playing outside. Belinda describes the neighborhood as middle class with "good public schools." In her words, "We were already living in Marshall and we knew that Marshall County schools were pretty good, and you know, I'm not trying to pay for school if there were good enough [public] schools" [Interview 1]. Although I did not probe further to find out what she specifically believes would

make a school "good," Belinda makes multiple references to the high quality of schools in the area.

The subdivision where the Masons live looks fairly new. The streets are wide and the houses have large front and back yards. I sense a suburban feeling of open space. There is a good amount of greenery and wooded areas, but many of the trees lining the streets and the sidewalks are still fairly small, suggesting that they haven't been around too long. Belinda mentions that there is a pool and a playground in the subdivision, where she likes to take her two children. She notes that it's not as quiet here as some neighboring areas; she likes the fact that people are out and about and young kids are playing during the day. She notes that "there are a lot of new neighborhoods, but I just happened to be riding through this neighborhood and they had a lot of kids and that was one thing that was important." As opposed to other neighborhoods where "there's nobody in the streets," Belinda says that where they live now "has worked out really well. We have a lot of kids on our street." [Interview 1] The presence of people that I observed in the streets stands in stark contrast to quiet streets devoid of people where the Washingtons live.

The home. When I first walk into the Mason's home, I notice an abundance of "stuff." Belinda mentions that the front room is Michael's work space for the moment; he seems to be in the middle of some construction or other do-it-yourself repair projects. The Masons have a double stroller that they use to transport the kids around and it is parked near the front entryway. The front sitting area looks like it's a general storage area for extra dishes, power tools, and projects that are underway. Around the corner and in the middle of the kitchen, there is a large commercial-size trash can, filled to the brim. Several of the cupboards, including the pantry, are open and overflowing with food and dishes. The kitchen counter is covered and the sink is full of

dishes. While we're sitting at the mall, Belinda mentions that a friend of hers is in the middle of a custody battle and that she herself was called to be a character witness. Apparently social workers came out to the home to observe and inspect. Belinda mentions that if social workers make judgements about parenting depending on the level of cleanliness in the home that she would probably lose her own kids!

Despite the clutter, or maybe because of it, the house has a very cozy and lived-in feeling. The cushions on the couch are soft and sunken in certain spots from use. When any of the family members wants to sit down, whether on the couch or at the dining table, they simply clear a space by moving whatever toys or food containers were there and make themselves comfortable. Toys around the rooms show evidence that children live and play here. The house is also filled with hundreds of books, for both adults and children. On my first day in the home, I glance around and estimate that there are about 200 books on the bookshelves. Eventually, I lose count only to be told that there are many more books in storage or otherwise not displayed.

Local Schools. Belinda reports that the public schools in this county are "good." We do not talk in detail about her definition of a good school and I neglect to further probe her on it, but she does mention that the good schools were part of the reason that she and Michael chose where they currently live. Although Belinda likes the fact that the district where they live is known for its good schools, she is not happy with the limited number of black teachers in the neighborhood school, counting only one in the entire school. This is not acceptable to Belinda and Michael who make a conscious effort for their kids to see "black children and black people in positions of power." The state-produced School Report Card mirrors Belinda's statements on school quality, citing positive statistics on the local schools. Compared to district and state averages, the local

elementary school has teachers with more experience, more national certifications, and more advanced degrees.

According to Belinda, many of the schools in the area have programs with extra enrichment, such as a STEM-focused school or the dual language or immersion program. However, these schools, clearly highly sought-after, have a lottery system and attendance is not guaranteed. Belinda tells me a little bit about the decision-making process involving where to put Prentice, and also Melanie, in childcare and preschool. Belinda and Michael wanted him to be in a STEM program, but entrance was determined by lottery and he was 11th on the waiting list. They also wanted to give him exposure to languages other than English. Belinda was disappointed that the schools didn't seem to consolidate some of these programs (e.g., STEM-focus and language-focused) and instead parents had to choose one focus area or another. As it turns out, Prentice will be attending a dual language school (Spanish and English) for kindergarten in the fall.

A Snapshot

Encounters with Reading in Everyday Life. It is a Thursday in June and Belinda, Prentice, and I take a trip to the outlet mall while Melanie is still at daycare. The three of us head to the mall in the family minivan after picking Prentice up from preschool. Belinda likes to spend this time one-on-one with Prentice, giving him her full attention. The mall has a steady stream of foot traffic but it is not particularly crowded. Belinda also tells me that come tomorrow, Friday, the mall will be so much more crowded, especially because schools will be letting out for the academic year. The three of us make stops at several different places, including the children's play area, a women's clothing store, the food court, and the Lego store, one of Prentice's favorites. On our way out, we walk past a store called Books A Million.

Prentice happily and easily reads the store's name above its entrance, telling me that he likes this store. He then asks me if I know why he likes that store. When I reply that I don't know, he tells me it's because they have a million books.

We decide to go in and mosey our way around the store, not looking for anything in particular. We stop at a few displays, with toys that are conveniently located at just about his eye level. He reads the words on some of the displays and the titles on some of the books. Most of the items that draw his attention have something to do with the Avengers or Star Wars. Prentice asks me and his mother what some of the more difficult words say. I start to help him sound out some of the words, but stop when Belinda tells Prentice to try to read them himself. He struggles his way through some words like Hydra Henchman, Avenger, and Hawkeye but is eventually successful at reading them with a little bit of assistance from Belinda or myself.

As we make our way around the store, we find a comic book that includes Lego pieces and instructions on how to build different sets. Prentice exclaims that, "It's a reader and an instruction booklet!" He struggles to read the title; it's a long one, with words like Showdown, Brickmaster, and Stolen Crystals. Prentice sounds out the words he doesn't know and is eventually able to read the entire title. After struggling through the words individually, Prentice re-reads the entire title together fluently, confirming what he has read, saying "ok, so it says…" He seems to enjoy the challenge presented by trying to read new words as well as a sense of pride in successfully reading them.

Literacy Practices in the Mason Household

An Overview

The Mason family engages in literacy primarily in the form of reading, because they enjoy doing it. But literacy is not only viewed as something tied to leisure or entertainment. It is

also understood to be an educational endeavor. Belinda Mason, an English professor, professes to enjoying books and reading as a child, more so than playing with dolls. She also mentions that Prentice displayed an early desire to want to learn to read, which she encouraged and continues to foster through frequent trips to bookstores. I would describe the Masons as a generally "bookish" family. The bookstore, Books A Million, serves as a fitting descriptor for this family, in which books abound. They have a home filled with books and encounter books regularly in the workplace and on frequent trips to bookstores. Both parents express a love of reading, both for enjoyment purposes as well as a means of staying informed. Their love of learning seems to transfer to the children. In short, Michael and Belinda Mason view literacy, not necessarily as something they *have* to do, but something they *want* to and *enjoy* doing. This same attitude is seen in Prentice, who loves to read, to write, and soak up information.

Findings

Literacy Practices

Print Literacy. Print is evident in the Mason home in the forms of hundreds of books that fill the house. Many of the books, a combination of children's books and adult books, line the main bookshelf in the living area. Some of the books are sticking out of their spots on the bookshelf, suggesting that they may have recently been used. Prentice and Melanie also make frequent trips to the local library or bookstores with their parents. As stated earlier, one of Prentice's favorite places is the bookstore Books-A-Million. He likes to practice reading seemingly every chance he gets, reading print in his everyday environment, such as labels on toys and names of stores. According to Belinda, Prentice expressed an early interest in learning to read, which she wanted to encourage once it was expressed. It is possible that his current advanced linguistic and literacy skills could be influenced by his own initial language skills, in a

reciprocal process of influence between the frequency of literacy activities and children's language skills, a process supported by other research (Addy, Vernon-Feagans, & Family Life Key Investigators, 2013; Raikes, 2006).

Prentice gets plenty of opportunities to practice his emerging literacy skills throughout his day, from print in the environment. This includes reading toy labels, advertisements, signs on buildings and so forth. For instance, on the first day of observation, Belinda, Prentice, and I make a trip to a nearby mall. In the first store, Belinda asks Prentice if he knows where we are. He looks around and I initially think he's going to say that we're in the children's section, because we are surrounded by lots of infant and toddlers clothes. But I soon notice that he's looking for some signs and he slowly reads "The Children's Place" written on the wall behind a cash register to our right.

We also make a stop at the Lego store where Prentice further displays his reading skills, with both words and numbers. He reads several names listed on various sets, such as Luke Skywalker and Treadwell Droid. Prentice, Belinda and I also see a Star Wars set with 3,296 pieces that costs about $400. Prentice has little trouble reading off the numbers: "three thousand two hundred and ninety six pieces." Incidentally, Prentice correctly remembered the number all day and reported it to his dad and to the neighbors when we arrived back at the house.

In addition to demonstrating his reading abilities, Prentice also displays some of his spelling sets during a stop at the mall's food court. I had just gotten out a small notebook to jot down some fieldnotes at a nearby table while I'm waiting for Belinda and Prentice, who are ordering some food. While I write, Prentice walks over to me and I ask him what he plans to do for the rest of the day. Rather than telling me orally, he tries to spell it out for me, using his finger to make invisible letters on the table where we're now both seated. Although I can clearly

see that he's forming letters, I tell him that I can't figure out what he is spelling. I ask him if he wants to write it for me and offer him my pen and notebook. He nods his head and proceeds to write it out for me. By the time he writes the first two letters, I realize that he is spelling L-E-G-O. No surprise, this child clearly loves his Legos and has not forgotten about the new set that he has just purchased at the mall. He successfully writes the word using all uppercase letters, except for a lower-case "g," which he writes backwards.

Oral Language. Literacy with the Masons also transfers to forms that are not necessarily tied to the printed word. On the way home from preschool, Prentice mentions that he wants some water, so that he doesn't get "hydrated." He proceeds to pull out and drink from a big bottle of blue Gatorade that is in the car. Belinda and Prentice have a short back and forth about being hydrated and dehydrated and Prentice figures out that he has confused the meanings of the two words. Belinda mentions that sometimes it can be a challenge getting Prentice to use words correctly, because he is convinced that he is saying it right, even when he sometimes isn't. In this way, there is a sort of oral dictionary at use in the Mason household. This manner of defining of words mirrors similar practice in the Washington family.

It is not uncommon for Prentice to ask the meaning of new words that he encounters. When he learns those new words, he sometimes practices using them throughout his day and tests out his newfound knowledge. For instance, in addition to his use of the word "hydrated", he successfully reads the word "surrender" in a little book that accompanies his latest Star Wars Lego set and asks his mom what it means. I note throughout my observations with the Masons, that Prentice uses words that are not common for a child of his age. This occurrence mirrors Hart and Risley's (1995) observation that middle class parents use many rare words in the home with their preschool-aged children, effectively supporting their early vocabularies and overall

literacy development. Some of these words that are already included in Prentice's working vocabulary are: hydrated, octagon, instruction manual, accessory, and spring-loaded missile.

While I observe these and other instances of oral literacy in the Mason family, I do not find extensive use of oral storytelling practices, which other scholars have noted to be significant in many black families (Heath, 1983; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Vernon-Feagans, 1996). There could be a number of reasons for this relative absence: 1) those observations were primarily based in working-class families with more limited education, 2) my observational period was too short to capture substantial use of oral storytelling, 3) oral storytelling may be less common today, with recent emphases on print literacy in schools and the preponderance of reading materials electronically, or 4) literacy in the Mason household may be more tied to print-based, rather than oral, literacy practices and primarily to print as it appears in books. Whatever the case may be, literacy in printed form does indeed appear to have primacy over literacy in oral forms in the Mason household.

In fact, the Masons most frequently use the words, "school, read, teach or teacher, and learn" when discussing literacy (see Appendix H). While these words are fairly common across all four families in this sample, the Masons do not mention "talking" as frequently as some of the other families, in relation to literacy. This may indicate that they primarily conceive of literacy as a print-based practice. It may also indicate their lack of concern about particular ways of talking. Unlike two of the mothers who participated in this project, Belinda Mason did not express any concerns about whether to use AAE and/or SW. Instead, like Nancy Washington, she uses various features of AAE herself, such as zero copula (e.g., "You funny" and "You not putting your feet on the table" - Interview 1), existential use of "it" (e.g., "It wasn't that many kids in the neighborhood" – Interview 1), and unstressed syllable absence (e.g., "then we moved,

literally, like down the street and 'round the corner" – (Interview 1). Belinda does not appear to mind if Prentice talks any one particular way over another. For Belinda, literacy does not appear to be tied to one's particular manner of speech or language. Again, this lack of concern over ways of talking may not only reflect the Mason's beliefs about language use, but may also highlight a more print- versus orally-based conceptualization of literacy in the Mason household.

Literacy in Digital Forms. Again, I use this broad category to encompass language and literacy in "electronically printed" form. There are a number of electronic devices in use throughout the Mason household. A large flat-screen television sits in the living room and both parents have cell phones, which the children use from time to time to play games, listen to music, or watch videos. The children also appear to be accustomed to their parents talking on their cell phones in their presence. A couple of times while I am around, Belinda's phone rings, and she sometimes answers to talk to Michael or others. The kids do not skip a beat when this happens, but proceed with whatever they are doing at the time, suggesting that this is an ordinary occurrence. A few times, Belinda's phone beeps, indicating that she has received a text message. These occurrences also get a similar non-response from the kids.

At the time of observation, Michael and Belinda are considering putting a laptop computer in Prentice's room. But before doing so, they want to be sure they can limit his online access. In general, Prentice is familiar with using technology and sometimes uses literacy in electronic forms. He tells me that he particularly likes watching online videos of a young boy who teaches other children how to construct different Lego sets. Prentice often uses a tablet to watch these videos and is able to find and watch these videos his own. Melanie, not even two years old, is also highly familiar with these electronics too. Based on my observations, she

seems to particularly enjoy listening to music on these devices and dancing along to what she hears.

Literacy Purposes

Literacy in the Mason household is primarily conceptualized as a form of entertainment as well as preparation for academic excellence. Whether in print, oral, or electronic forms, literacy practices in the Mason family serve multiple purposes. Prior research names various literacy purposes (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1996) such as literacy for leisure or entertainment, to communicate, acquire information, for educational or academic purposes, or as a means of supporting everyday life. However, while these may appear to be distinct categories, they are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the following practices serve an informational purpose, but also as entertainment: Prentice reading to learn more about his current passion of Star Wars and Legos, Michael reading to or listening to the news to learn about current events and trends in business, or Belinda finding and distributing information about local children's activities to her friends. Furthermore, when Prentice practices his reading and writing skills and when he reads or hears bedtime stories, multiple purposes are served as well. These activities serve as a form of entertainment or leisure, but are also academic in nature, in preparing him for success in school, both in kindergarten and beyond. In the Mason family, literacy is practiced in ways that serves all of the purposes just mentioned. However, the primary purposes appear to be literacy for leisure and literacy for educational or academic purposes.

Literacy as Entertainment. Once again, the Masons live in a house filled with books. Two of Prentice Mason's favorite activities are playing with Legos and reading books. Sometimes, the two overlap, if he is able to find a book that comes with Lego pieces or if he is able to read the instruction manual that comes with his new Lego sets. Prentice also seems to

love to learn new words that he can learn to spell and to use in his everyday speech. As mentioned, some of the words he tries out while I am around are, "hydrated" and "surrender," the meanings of which he is still ironing out.

Furthermore, literacy simply serves as a way to have fun. Trips to bookstores serve as an enjoyable family outing. Learning to read new words is exciting for Prentice. Buying new books and taking them home to read is seen as something fun to do. As with the other families in this study, bedtime stories are a part of the day that the children look forward to. The children look forward to being able to choose a story to read with a parent after they bathe and get ready for bed.

Literacy for educational purposes. Although literacy is overwhelmingly viewed by the Masons as an enjoyable activity that serves as entertainment, it is also seen as a means of preparing for academic success, though to a lesser extent. It may be that literacy's role in preparing for academic excellence is not stressed because literacy is woven into the fabric of the Mason's lives so intimately, lives in which academic excellence appears to come naturally. Again, both parents either possess or are pursuing a doctoral degree. Similarly, Prentice's reading ability exceeds grade level to such an extent that a summer camp counselor wanted to take him under her wing and provide additional instruction. In this way, literacy is not strongly or explicitly associated with preparing for school, because the two are already connected. In other words, literacy serves as preparation for academic excellence fostered through an intrinsic enjoyment of reading that Prentice already possesses.

Nevertheless, Belinda Mason engages in discussions with Prentice, using oral language to convey his need to learn behaviors that will help him succeed in school. She reprimands him for not waiting for his turn to speak or following verbal instructions, reminding him that he will need

to do so once he gets to kindergarten. Similarly, Belinda helps Prentice to expand his vocabulary, another aspect of literacy that will help prepare him for school, although the activity is not explicitly constructed as educational preparation. Instead, the teaching of vocabulary, while related to school preparation, seems to fit seamlessly into the Mason's daily lives, in a way that also reflects using literacy to support everyday life.

Influences on Literacy Practices

Access: Opportunities and Limitations. Ample financial resources provide ample access to educational opportunities. For instance, the Masons have a sizeable income and are able to afford particular houses or extracurricular activities. They also have a fair amount of social capital (Bourdieu, 1987-88), which has likely helped them to succeed in their own educational and career success as well as helped them to maneuver early educational environments for their children. Bourdieu (1983) defines social capital as "the actual or potential resources which are linked to membership in a group, which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit." (p. 248-249). In other words, certain social resources, such as the knowledge, behaviors, and language practices, and personal connections valued by those in power provides the individuals who possess them with symbolic as well as material gain. In the end, it allows them to profit in the economic marketplace.

For instance, there appears to be an understanding among these families that early extracurricular activities can provide their children with an edge once they enter the formal educational landscape, which is increasingly competitive in nature. While this knowledge does not relate to academic content, Belinda in particular is adept at seeking out nearby children's activities and is part of a social network of black mothers who are able to share these

opportunities with one another. She was able to enroll Prentice in an educational summer camp. She sought out bilingual preschool programs. She also wanted to enroll her son in a bilingual early education program if possible. In these ways, the Mason's financial resources allow them to purchase material objects, provide varied educational opportunities, and structure their children's lives in ways that mirror Lareau's (2000) concept of concerted cultivation. At the same time, there are limits in access, often in the form of parents' limited access to emotional or physical resources. Bluntly stated, Belinda and Michael sometimes get tired. Their limited physical and emotional capacity sometimes limits engagement in the opportunities available to them. As Belinda says, sometimes she's just exhausted. So while the Masons have certain ideals regarding their children's early educational environments, related to language and literacy or not, sometimes they do not achieve their ideals due to limits on their own physical ability to do all the things they'd like to or that their children would like to.

Neighborhoods, schools, churches, and communities. Because of the level of access afforded by their middle class standing, the Masons are able to choose between a wide range of neighborhoods, schools, churches, and communities in which to live and interact. They are able to choose from a range of churches, preferring to attend a predominantly black church, but one that they explicitly state is not homophobic. They also have access to a wide range of school choices, although some of these options are limited due to high interest and acceptance based on a lottery system. Because of their income, they are also able to choose between a range of communities in which to live and participate in a number of children's activities, including sports teams, trips to museums, and summer camps. These choices are likely made available to the Masons based on multiple factors associated with their middle class standing, primarily related to the availability of resources.

Overview of Findings and Concluding Remarks

The Mason household and their lives in general are characterized by numerous books and by ample amounts of reading. Furthermore, Belinda and Michael approach literacy, as do all the parents in this project, as related to parenting practices in general. The literacy practices they engage in support exploration and the development of independence in their children. For instance, they take them to children's museums like Discovery Place and Discovery Place Kids, allowing their children to learn and explore. They make trips to local bookstores and allow the children to browse for books on their own. Belinda and Michael also support Prentice's own interests, encouraging him to pursue activities and subject areas that he finds interesting. They are happy to support his early love of reading and writing. They also oblige his requests for Legos and for toys having to do with Star Wars. These parental behaviors support Bialystok's (2004) contention that middle class literacy practices reflect a firm belief in fostering independence and autonomy as part of child-rearing.

Chapter 4c: The Ambrose Family

Literacy as Part of Becoming an Educated and Successful Individual

The Family Members

The Parents. Nikki Ambrose is a brown-skinned woman in her mid-thirties. When I first meet her, she has her hair straightened and pulled back in a high bun. It looks like she is growing out her hair color; her roots are black and the ends are a reddish blond. Nikki currently works as a healthcare consultant and is raising her daughter, Necie, as a single parent, having divorced Necie's father not long after Necie was born. Nikki's parents also live in the area and she and Necie see them on a regular basis. Nikki comes across as a friendly, self-assured, and independent woman. She also expresses a desire for her four-year-old daughter to be independent as well and do as much as possible on her own. Additionally, she tries to foster her daughter's individuality rather than "forcing her down a particular path."

The Children. Necie is a bubbly four year old who loves to sing and dance. When I first meet her, she is covered in pink. She is wearing a pink shirt and pink leggings, covered by a black sparkly tutu-style skirt made of tulle. She is an only child and according to her mother, she is able to entertain herself for hours at a time. I observe small doses of her ability to keep herself entertained during my observations. She may talk or sing to herself, watch her favorite TV shows (like Doc McStuffins, Peppa Pig, and Charmers), dance along to "Just Dance, Kids" on the Wii, or play with her many, mostly pink, toys.

Necie befriends me easily and seems to enjoy talking to me over the course of my time with the family. When I comment to Nikki that Necie seems to like talking and singing to herself, Nikki confirms my assessment by saying that "she's loud." Necie is also an assertive child, who likes to share her mind and take charge. During a play date between Necie and a friend who is about one year older than her, I notice that Necie is most often the one deciding

what games the two of them will play and giving directions about what to do. In a later interview, Nikki notes that it is common for Necie to be in charge in this way.

The setting

The neighborhood. Nikki and Necie live in a major city on the east coast with a metropolitan area of nearly three million people. Nikki describes the particular neighborhood where she lives with Necie as "a stable community." She shares that she bought her home from "an older Jewish couple," in this part of town that was "traditionally very Jewish." In her words, the neighborhood is "still very Jewish, very Black." She elaborates by saying that the area is home to different groups of Jews, from the "very traditional Hassidic Jews to the more Americanized Jews." Based on publicly-available statistics and Nikki's assessment of the neighborhood, I would classify their neighborhood as a relatively well-educated, middle class neighborhood of mixed racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, compared to the rest of the state.

In describing where she lives, Nikki mentions that there are a lot of residential group homes within the state and that there is one right across the street that is home to some developmentally disabled adults. She has the following reaction to the group home:

> An elderly group home or a boarding care home is one thing. It's another thing when it's developmentally disabled. The group that's over there now is developmentally disabled and that's…that's okay with me. But the group that was over there before, they were classified as developmentally disabled, but they were criminal type. You know? When I was pregnant with [Necie], her dad and I were still married, and I was probably about 8 months pregnant. So, *obviously* pregnant. And this guy's across the street and he's like cat-calling me. And I was really, really uncomfortable. And I could see, like if we got home late, I would see girls from another group home maybe three or four blocks away, girls from that group home coming home and like coming and going from this group home and I'm like 'ehhh.' And then, kind of the last straw was the dude spray painted on the front, on a bedroom window, 1-8-7 nigga *on the window.* (The numbers 187, based on the police code for murder, are also used as a reference to murder in popular culture, (Scarcella, 2005) [Interview 1].

Although the presence of the group home did not actually cause Nikki to leave the neighborhood with her child, it does prompt her to start considering other housing options. In the end, she is pleased that the house is now predominantly inhabited by adults with developmental disabilities who are less outwardly disruptive. This characterization of the neighborhood perhaps belies its largely suburban feel. In fact, the presence of the group home, particularly with its former inhabitants, seems particularly disturbing to Nikki because it does not align with overall atmosphere of the neighborhood, which is otherwise primarily inhabited by working professionals. She finds the kind of behavior she observed to be inappropriate, given the professional nature of the neighborhood. "It's not, I wouldn't consider it lower middle class. It's not upper middle class. It's very middle-middle class." She elaborates by listing some of the residents in the area.

> My neighbors - he's a retired cop; she's a retired teacher. You know, stuff like that. You know, the Jewish couple across the street, he's a consultant now, a business consultant…Professional folks. You know, I'm a consultant, a healthcare consultant. Um, you know, so we're talking about people that are educated, professional people. We may not make two hundred thousand dollars a year but we're not working at McDonald's either…So that [187 nigga] on a window across the street from your house that you pay the mortgage for and you're… you know send your kids to school [Interview 1].

The home. Nikki lives in a split-level duplex, saying that she has always lived "within a 15 mile radius of this house" except when she was in college. Nikki ventured farther away for undergraduate and graduate school, though still attending schools in-state. When I first walk into the house, I quickly see that the house is split-level. Upon entering, I see a big circular mirror opposite the front door, across a small foyer. Down a few steps to my right is the den, a large carpeted room with a faux Christmas tree in the far corner. Although it is early February, Nikki hasn't yet taken it down from the Christmas holiday season. Slightly to the left, Nikki and

Necie's boots line the wall. There is a coat closet in the hallway and at the end of the hallway, I can see part of the sitting room/family room. A few steps to the left is the entry to the kitchen. And a few steps up to the right are a bathroom and the bedrooms.

Nikki bought this house about ten years ago, before Necie was born, saying, "I bought it because I thought that if I ever got married or had kids, that the house would be able to grow. Because it's three bedrooms, two and a half bath." Nikki mentions that the house was built in 1966, proudly stating that it still has the original oven from when it was first built.

The presence of a small child is evident throughout the home. In the kitchen, there are rainbow-colored alphabet magnets all over the bottom of the fridge, at a height that Necie can comfortably reach. There is a picture drawn by a child on the fridge. It has Necie's name on it, which looks like it was written by an adult, and there is a Bible verse at the top and Necie's drawing underneath. At the top of the fridge are Christmas cards with holiday wishes, pictures of families, and several babies and young children. There is a shelf which holds a microwave and that also contains lots of papers and cookbooks. The kitchen table has a few pieces of mail and letters on it.

In contrast to the kitchen where Necie's things share space with many other things, the den is dominated by children's toys; most of them are lined against the wall but there are also many strewn about the room. They are mostly pink in color. There are baby dolls, a plastic shelf unit with several children's books, a stack of puzzles, some toys and board games (such as Operation). There's also a large Dora the Explorer tent in the middle of the room, with a toy stroller parked inside the tent, and little pieces of toys sets (e.g., diapers for her dolls) around the room. There are a couple of partially finished puzzles in the room.

Local Schools. In the county in which Nikki and Necie live, white and black students make up the majority of the student population, at about 40 percent each. On a statewide level, students as a whole perform at the national average on standardized tests. Nikki has been very happy with the preschool where Necie is now enrolled. She mentions that there are teachers who have been there for thirty years and who remind her of her own mother, who is also an elementary educator. More specifically, she likes the directness of the teachers and their firm tone of voice. This directness in language has been reported in the literature to be more familiar to black students than indirect language that is more typically used in white, middle class schools (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983). She has this to say about the teachers:

> Some of them were very blunt and motherlike…It said a lot to me and I've heard the teachers talk to the kids and it sounds like my mother at times. "I don't like your behavior right now and if you don't do 'buh duh duh duh duh,' then you're just gonna sit over there by yourself. Because we're just not gon' do that today." And I *liked* it! And I *like* that! And I was like, "*Yes! Yes!*" [Interview 2].

Nikki also likes the level of multiculturalism she has observed at Necie's preschool. In Necie's class of 14 students, Nikki explains that there is a range of races, ethnicities, and nationalities represented. Interestingly enough, Nikki reports that all the teachers are white women, who she believes to be in their sixties. Despite this relative homogeneity among the teachers, Nikki appreciates the fact that many of them have been teaching for decades. This extensive teaching experience stands in contrast to another school that Nikki toured in which the teachers reportedly had taught for an average of three years. Nikki relayed to me an incident that occurred during her tour of the school that signaled to her inexperience and lack of attention on the part of the teachers. A child was reportedly injured and bleeding on the playground and did not get any attention from any teachers for a matter of minutes. Based on the information she gathered, Nikki did not feel that these teachers had the adequate experience necessary to provide

the level of instruction and care to which she was accustomed. In contrast, Nikki mentions that she is happy with the overall environment at Necie's current preschool and would like to find an elementary school that mirrors the same level of multiculturalism, care and attention.

A Snapshot

Play Dates with Peers. On my first day of observations with Nikki and Necie, they have scheduled a play date with one of Nikki's friends, Tina, who has two children, one named Yvette who is about a year older than Necie and a baby girl, Mimi, who is about 3 months old at the time of data collection. When Tina and her two daughters arrive at the house, we three ladies (Nikki, Tina, and I) fairly quickly start chatting like old friends. Of course, Tina and Nikki truly are friends, but I feel quite at home talking with them and the feeling appears to be mutual. They talk freely and openly about recent events in their lives, including highlights, challenges, and frustration. Soon after they enter, Nikki takes the baby and walks around the house with her.

While the adults occupy themselves, Necie and Yvette get settled in the den. Yvette is about a year older than Necie and a little taller. Out of the two, Yvette is the quieter one. Around 4:00pm, after we have all eaten lunch, the girls really get into the heart of their play date. The two girls play together for a while, using Necie's many toys to aid in their pretend play, such as cooking and taking care of her doll babies. I alternate between talking with the mothers and observing and playing with the daughters. At one point, Nikki and Tina apologize for taking advantage of my presence by making me act like a babysitter, free of charge. I reassure them that I have come to participate in whatever happens to be going on and do not mind serving in the capacity of a babysitter to some extent. By being with the two young girls, I have a chance to further observe Necie's literacy practices.

Eventually, all the adults and children gather in the den. All of us, except for the baby, are up in front of the TV dancing along to Just Dance Kids on the Wii, a game in which various children dance along to songs whose lyrics are displayed at the bottom of the screen. Tina mentions that they have this game at their own house on the computer, but not on Wii Nintendo game system. The three grown women take turns holding the baby while the others dance. There are several times when Necie and Yvette argue over who gets to "be the girl". This means that they want to stand and imitate the dance by standing in front of the girl, as opposed to the boy, who is dancing on the TV. Although both mothers try to reassure them that they can do whatever dance they want to regardless of where they are standing, neither of the girls find this to be an acceptable solution. We have to move them to different spots several times so that everyone has room to dance, and so that they aren't too close to the television screen or standing front and center in ways that block everyone else's view.

Nikki mentions that Necie can do this (i.e., dance to Just Dance) for a couple of hours at a time by herself. She certainly seems to know all the songs and most of the dances; she sings along as she dances. She mirrors the moves pretty closely, more closely than Yvette. The words to all the songs are written at the bottom of the screen and it helps us follow along with songs, particularly when we don't know the words by memory. All three of us women seem to be enjoying dancing just as much as the kids and we encourage each other while we dance with comments like, "I see you, girl," "Go 'head," "Oh, you're getting fancy with it." Tina notices that many of the "new" dances moves are simply minor variations of older dances, from generations past. Tina makes comments along these lines several times as she demonstrates the original dance move.

Eventually Yvette seems to get bored with Just Dance and goes back to playing with the toys. Slowly, we all become disengaged from dancing, but the television remains on in the background. The girls enjoy playing throughout the day, but they also argue quite often. They frequently argue over who gets to do what. At some point, Necie comes to me pouting and saying that Yvette doesn't want to play with her. I try to reassure her otherwise and eventually she seems to forget about it. Over the course of the day, I notice that Necie is the more assertive of the two girls. Yvette is more laid-back and will acquiesce more often than Necie, despite that she is the older of the two.

Nikki confirms this pattern of arguing between the two girls. On two different occasions during my observation, she says that the girls are always asking to play together, but they always argue when they get together. But they sometimes quickly apologize or do things for each other – like giving each other particular toys. There are several times when I intervene, or their parents intervene to tell them to share, or play nice, or take turns. Several times Yvette asks for my help putting together a princess playhouse or castle or something. Sometimes Necie jumps in and says that she'll do it. Sometimes it's more to the effect of "let me do it" other times, "I'll help you, Yvette."

Literacy Practices in the Ambrose Household

Findings

Literacy Practices

Print Literacy. There are several instances of environmental print throughout the Ambrose household. This includes the materials posted on the refrigerator: a picture drawn by Necie, with the Bible verse and her name printed on it, multi-colored alphabet magnets, and Christmas cards. The kitchen also contains cookbooks on a small shelf and assorted pieces of

mail. There are also several examples of print in the den where Necie's toys are located. I note a plastic shelf full of children's books, words on the many board games, the Dora tent with words printed on it in both English and Spanish, and a "Build-A-Bear" box with the phrase "where best friends are made."

At times, Nikki and Necie are directly engaged with printed language. One example that stands out in particular is Necie's homework assignment for school, in which she is instructed to complete a number of activities dealing with the number four. The instructions call for Necie to color the four turtles on the page, then trace the number four, then trace the word four, connecting the dots, and then draw four happy faces. Nikki and I help her to read the instructions because she is not yet able to decode all the words. Another notable example of direct engagement with print literacy is Nikki and her friend Yvette reading, or at the very least observing, the lyrics to songs that appear on the screen as part of the Wii Just Dance game.

I also note several instances of print literacy when we go to church on Sunday. Many of them are simply present in the environment, although Nikki and Necie are not directly engaged with them. For instance, there are many banners, signs, and labels posted around the church building. There are Bible verses written in large letters on the walls. Interpretive dancers wave flags with the words, "Jesus" and "Jehovah." Projector screens around the room display lyrics to the songs being sung. With all the print displayed around the church, there are also multiple instances in which people are reading text. At times, the congregation reads aloud together, either from their own Bibles or from projectors screens displayed around the room. A woman also reads some announcements aloud from a sheet of paper at the front of the room. Necie is surrounded by different forms of print literacy in this church setting that she visits regularly with Nikki.

Oral Literacy. As throughout the entire project, I include oral language and literacy practices tied to print literacy as well as traditions of oral literacy traditionally associated with black communities. I note a great deal of spoken language during my observations with the Ambrose family. Much of this occurs in the form of conversation between Nikki and Necie. They talk about a range of topics, such as discussing how to say "excuse me" when you have something to say, or reviewing how to spell particular words, or talking through the instructions on Necie's homework assignment. Other times, the two of them are engaged in saying prayers at bedtime. In other instances, Necie is also exposed to a range of language in which she is not directly involved. Sometimes Nikki talks on her cell phone throughout the day, in earshot of me and Necie. The television is also often on, simply playing in the background even though no one is watching it. There are also times that Necie uses language on her own, or talks to herself, without a conversational partner.

In our conversations, Nikki also mentions that she makes a point to speak openly and frankly with and in front of Necie. She tries to explain things in a way that makes sense to her four-year-old child, but she does not make a concerted effort to shield her from difficult topics. For instance, Necie asks a question about Jesus and how he rose from the dead. Nikki and Necie talk back and forth about the topic for about ten minutes, till they both seem to be sufficiently on the same page. I observe another instance of this open talk when Necie mentions that her vagina hurts. Nikki does not attempt to sugar-coat the term or give a "kid-friendly" version of that body part. Instead, Necie talks about her vagina plainly, as she talks about her hair or any other part of her body. Finally, Nikki talks openly about her relationship with Necie's father, who regularly visits, but does not live at the house. In all these instances, Nikki treats Necie as a competent and more or less equal linguistic partner, much in the same way Heath (1983) observed with black

families over thirty years ago. This style of interaction is also similar to how Prentice and his parents talk with one another.

Finally, Nikki mentions that Necie likes to make up and tell stories. She reports that Necie likes to tell stories that "start of in reality" then drift more into fantasy, "as she creates more" [Interview 2]. They may be recollections of events that Necie has experienced, with additional creative elements. Nikki mentions that she also tells stories to Nikki, some that include fantasy, but that tend to be more based in reality. I observe one of Necie's stories directly, on the way home from a joint trip to church.

Literacy in Digital Forms.

The TV remains on for most of the time that I am in the Ambrose household. The channel is often set to Nick Jr. which includes several children's television shows. Many of these shows incorporate basics of early literacy. For example, an episode of Peppa Pig, which comes on multiple times on my first day of observations, chronicles a trip to the grocery store in which someone uses a shopping list as a memory aid. Most of the letters on the list are illegible scribbles, although the first letters are recognizable and the length of the scribbles corresponds to the length of the actual words. To be more specific, the word spaghetti appears with a recognizable 'S' followed by a long string of scribbles, and the words chocolate cake appears as two strings, one longer and one shorter, preceded by clearly written 'C's.

As previously mentioned there are also instances of literacy in digital form at church, particularly on the projector screens that are used to display words to hymns, announcements, and other pertinent information. Necie also interacts with literacy in digital forms as a part of the Just Dance game on the Wii.

Literacy Purposes

Literacy in the Ambrose family is primarily conceptualized as preparation for academic success and part of raising an independent individual and teaching good manners. As with each participating family, language and literacy practices in the Ambrose household serve a variety of purposes. However, literacy primarily serves as a form of academic preparation and a means of supporting daily life through the transmission of broader parenting goals. Specifically, I identify the following primarily language and literacy purposes in the Ambrose household as 1) educational preparation through the use of explicit language and literacy instructions, 2) fostering independence and individuality, and 3) instilling good manners.

Educational preparation through explicit instruction. There are certain expectations that Nikki has for Necie, at nearly five years old, concerning language and literacy skills. For instance, she expects Necie to know the letters of the alphabet and the sounds the letters make, as well as being able to spell her own name and some basic words. Some of this Nikki has accomplished through explicit instruction. For instance, she prefers to teach Necie using phonics and sounding out new words, because that method is familiar to her. She also mentions that her own mother, a veteran elementary teacher, has been instrumental in Necie's language and literacy development. At times, Nikki's mother has recommended activities, based on what she believes Necie is ready for. For instance, she encouraged Nikki to practice reading sight words with Necie, that do not follow the typical phonetic rules of English, but which young children can learn by sight through repeated exposure. In an effort to help Necie with these words, Nikki's mom offered to make flashcards as well as reading stories that include these words. In this way, Nikki and her own mom have been explicitly preparing Necie for success in school and life in general.

In addition to stressing print literacy, Nikki also expects Necie to be able to use oral language to verbalize her needs and communicate effectively with others.

> She needs to be able to express herself in a clear way, in a polite way. I expect her to be polite. And respectful. But to express herself. So I don't expect whining and crying. If we want something or we're disappointed with something, to understand that sometimes things aren't exactly what we want, but you know we can express it. Communicate um fairly well. I expect her to be respectful and polite to everyone…not just adults, not just her parents, but to her classmate [Interview 2].

In addition to these concerns, Nikki pays particular attention to "correctness." By this I mean that Nikki makes explicit efforts to "correct" Necie's speech, instructing her to use standardized English constructions in place of African American English. At various points throughout my observations, I hear Necie using regularization, such as "She don't know what to do" and double negation, "It doesn't make no sound," which are characteristic features of AAE that distinguish it from standardized English, in which the constructions would be "She doesn't know what to do" and "It doesn't may any sound." This concern over correctness also applies to writing. For instance, when Necie works on her homework assignment by writing the number "4", although the shape of the number is recognizable as the number four, Nikki corrects her process, wanting her to start and end at a certain point in the number.

Fostering independence and individuality. Through oral language, Nikki fosters a growing sense of independence in her daughter. One strategy is to continually provide Necie with options and allow her to choose between them. Some of the specific options that I observe Nikki providing to Necie are: allowing her to choose between Qdoba or Chipotle for lunch, asking Necie whether she'd like to feed the pet fish now or later, asking Necie what she would like to wear for the day, and giving her the choice to "take a longer bath and relax in the tub or get out sooner and read a longer story or two stories at night" [Interview 1]. Other evidence is

Nikki allowing Necie to pick out her own clothes in the morning, to get herself dressed, and brush her own teeth. Even when Necie changes her mind, her mother respects her wishes. Nikki wants her daughter to do as much as possible on her own, saying that she wants Necie, " to have some, some autonomy. And to be able to do, and solve some things on her own. And if she needs help to be able to verbalize that she needs help. But to try. Give things a try on her own first" [Interview 1].

These strategies may partially be designed to save Nikki time and energy, but they certainly foster independence in her daughter as well. In fact, during Yvette and Necie's play date, Necie clearly emerges as the more independent and assertive of the two. Yvette asks for my help assembling various toys on several occasions, while Necie prefers that I let her do things herself and sometimes offers to help Yvette.

Individuality. Nikki also uses language and literacy practices as a means to support the broader parenting ideal of supporting individuality in her child. When asked how she thinks children learn, Nikki stresses that it's not so much about how children learn but about how her daughter learns. For example, Necie has a keen interest in puzzles and according to her mother, she's very good at them, especially for her age. Nikki has gotten a 300 piece puzzle that she's "saving for when she does something really good," because she knows her daughter will really like it and be challenged by it. The main idea that Nikki promotes is that each child is different and she wants to foster the unique qualities and interests in her own child.

Nikki also promotes the idea of letting her child become her own person. Rather than forcing her to live out her own personal dreams, Nikki encourages Necie to be her own person and do things her own way (within reason), even if that is not what she herself would do. There

seems to be a sense of following the child's lead, which is often associated with middle class parents (Bialysok, 2014).

Instilling good manners. Finally, oral language serves to reinforce the teaching of appropriate or "good" manners. Nikki encourages Necie to "be nice," asking her "Are you being nice right now?" She also admonishes her daughter not to be too loud in church, yell at friends or elders, or run around the house. Nikki encourages Necie to share toys with her friend Yvette, not hog the space in front of the TV while they dance, and not to interrupt others who are speakers. Instead, Nikki explicitly encourages Necie to say, "Excuse me, then wait" for her turn to speak.

Based on these combined primary purposes, I characterize language and literacy practices in the Ambrose household as a means through which to raise an educated, successful, well-mannered, and independent individual.

Influences on Literacy Practices

Choice of communities. Wanting to raise Necie in a multicultural environment, which Nikki herself did not encounter till late in life Nikki says:

> I want her in a multicultural environment. The school that she's in right now is very multicultural. There's, um, an Asian girl, there's a Nigerian girl, there's a little White girl, there's some Black boys, a boy from the Philippines I believe, there're little White boys, There's fourteen of them and there's…all different. All the teachers are White and they're all older. They're all like older like sixty. Like older ladies. Um they're all older. One of them speaks Spanish so she teaches stuff in Spanish. So it's just very um…I like the environment. Hopefully we can maintain something like that for elementary school [Interview ##].

She has the options of purchasing a home in a variety of neighborhoods, because she has the financial means to afford it. This ability to choose between neighborhoods, also allows her to choose, to a certain extent, the amount of multicultural diversity in which her child will grow.

Language Use and African American English. Out of all the families participating in this project, Nikki is the most explicitly invested in raising a child who uses standardized

English. As previously mentioned, she is quick to "correct" her daughter's use of AAE. It is possible that these corrections are intended to prepare Necie for academic success or for greater acceptance in the workplace and in diverse settings or may simply be a part of Nikki's overall sense of correctness. However, this desire to raise her child to speak standardized is, in some ways, a forced choice, because she does not have control over all the people that Necie interacts with. She does not profess to use AAE herself, but she is aware that other people around Necie use these forms that subsequently appear in Necie's own speech.

Although Nikki prefers for her child to only use SWE, she cannot fully control the environment or the language varieties to which Necie is exposed. She makes the choice to raise her child as an SWE speaker. However, because Necie is also exposed to AAE, the choice that Nikki has made also means that she is sometimes "forced" to intervene, in a sense, in an attempt to change the language that her daughter is learning from those around her. Due to the language varieties to which her daughter is exposed, which are influenced by the patterns of racial segregation, Nikki is in a sense forced to make a deliberate choice. Nikki and Necie live at the intersection of two language varieties that are strongly associated with racial background in this country. She can either choose to allow her child to speak both varieties or choose to train her child to speak one or the other. Because of her awareness of how AAE is often perceived in the wider, dominant culture, she prefers her daughter to speak the dominant form. Here, Nikki wants to provide her daughter with a form of linguistic social capital that may afford her the greatest potential gain in the social and economic marketplace. She makes a choice about language use, that may have implications for how others read her racial or class-based identification. Although AAE crosses class lines in the black community, and even crosses racial line, it is often associated with working-class blacks, rather than other racial or class-based

communities. Therefore, the way the Ambroses speak is not simply a matter of speaking in whatever manner comes most naturally, but it is a matter of choosing between the language varieties spoken in their immediate communities.

An Overview of Findings and Concluding Remarks

When it comes to teaching and learning, Nikki makes accommodations based on her daughter's own idiosyncrasies. For instance, when asked how she believes children learn best, Nikki states that it's not really a matter of how children learn best, but how Necie learns best. She recognizes that children learn in different ways and what works well for Necie may not work as well with other children. Nikki reports that Necie is on track, if not ahead, academically. Therefore, Nikki's main focus is not necessarily to provide generalized basic skills but to build on existing skills by individualizing her daughter's early care and education and by "following her lead," using her daughter's own interests as a guide. For instance, Nikki chooses to continue to develop Necie's enjoyment of puzzles, by purchasing those recommended for older children that will challenge her. She allows her daughter to watch television shows that she enjoys, many of which are educational in nature. She allows her daughter to choose the storybooks she would like them to read at night. And although she seems to be exasperated at times by her daughter's penchant towards "talking a lot", she still encourages her daughter's enjoyment of telling elaborate stories.

In some ways, Nikki exemplifies traditions of literacy and child-rearing that have been noted among both white middle class families *and* among black working-class families. Because Nikki's mother is a lifelong childhood educator, she often makes recommendations regarding literacy. Because this knowledge represents trends in educational research and practices, Nikki in some ways relies on educational "experts" to guide her approach to literacy with her daughter.

At the same time, because this knowledge comes from her mother, it also exemplifies the traditional oral and generational transmission of parenting knowledge, that is passed from parents to children and among members of the same community, rather than through books and educational professionals.

Chapter 4d: The Peters Family

Literacy for Academic Success

The Family Members

The parents. The Peters family includes mom Feliciana, dad Nate, and sons Ray and Ronnie. Both parents are in their early thirties. Feliciana is a former college basketball player, recruiter, and coach, and is just shy of six feet tall. She is light skinned and has a big smile. She is currently an adjunct professor in History and American studies at a nearby university. Nate is a former college football player and is also quite tall, standing at 6'3" or 6'4". He is dark skinned and quick to smile. He currently works as a real estate agent and real estate investor, owning and operating a few investment properties around town with his wife, and he is currently pursuing a law degree.

Both parents seem to be fairly social by nature and engage in conversation easily with friends they encounter at church as well as easily engaging in conversation with me. Both parents are engaged with childcare and household duties, taking turns to buy groceries and both attending parent-teacher meetings at Ray's preschool. Feliciana appears to be the more structured parent, while Nate is more laid-back. She is primarily the one to make decisions regarding the educational needs of the boys. Nate is most often the one to play with the boys outside. He also takes the lead role in cooking and preparing meals. He enjoys cooking and states that he is the better cook out of him and Feliciana. As parents, they appear to follow a system of splitting responsibilities that aligns with their natural inclinations and strengths and generally works well for them both.

The Peters family are actually good friends with the Mason family and the two families will be taking a vacation to California together later that summer. The families connected through Belinda and Feliciana, who both teach together at the same university and whose sons

were born in the same hospital within days of one another. The boys, Ray and Prentice, have been close friends ever since they were born. Moreover, their younger siblings, Melanie and Ronnie have also become fast friends.

The children. Ray is four years old and tall for his age, taking after both his parents. He is a brown-skinned child who looks a lot like his dad. He is a very friendly child, easily making friends at school and quickly befriending me as well. Feliciana states that Ray has expressed an early interest in sports, which is likely shaped by both his parents' interest in sports. Feliciana bemoans the fact that he does not seem to be particularly interested in academics (although he is quite young) or does not come across as intellectually advanced like his good friend Prentice Mason. However, when it comes to recalling sports knowledge and information, he excels. He can remember the names of professional athletes and sports statistics with ease and accuracy. Feliciana reports with a mixture of amazement, amusement, and dismay at this, saying:

> He notices everything and he actually can remember. It's amazing what he can remember. Like even a year ago, he can remember stuff. But he won't remember his sight words [Interview 2].

In addition to his grasp of sports information, according to his parents, he is also quite athletically skilled for his age.

In describing Ray and his current preschool setting, Feliciana says, "I know with Ray, he needs that individualized attention. He is all over the place. Hard to sit still" [Interview 1]. Feliciana acknowledges that Ray is an active child who "sometimes acts out because he's bored" but who also "knows how to sit still [though] you might have to tell him a couple times" [Interview 1]. However, one of Ray's teachers interprets his level of activity as a negative sign, and according to Feliciana, warns her that she doesn't want him to become a bully. Feliciana disagrees with this statement, instead labeling his actions as highly active, but not aggressive.

Ronnie, at nineteen months is nearly inseparable from his older brother. Everything that Ray does and everywhere that Ray goes, Ronnie wants to do and go too. When we make a trip to a local ice cream shop, he is inconsolable until he is able to sit in the same chair as his brother while they both eat their ice cream. He will not even settle for sitting in a chair placed directly next to Ray's. Ronnie is a light-skinned boy with big brown curls, who looks more like his mom than his dad. Like his older brother, he is also tall for his age. However, in contrast to his brother, he appears a bit more reserved, taking a bit longer to warm up to me.

The setting

The neighborhood. The Peters live in the suburbs in a large metropolitan city in the southeast. Their neighborhood is part of an expansive subdivision that looks as if was recently built. I make a number of turns onto side streets before arriving at the Peters household, driving over several speed bumps on the way. The streets to the Peters house are clean and free of trash and look as if they have not seen much wear and tear. The trees that have been planted in the small yards in front of the modest houses are still fairly small, which yields little shade in the neighborhood. Overall, there is not much greenery amidst the concrete and other building materials.

The home. The Peters live in a two-story townhome that has the feeling of being lived in and of being in transition at the same time. Feliciana tells me that they moved into the house in the past several months, but have never fully unpacked all their belongings. The first day I enter the house, it is dimly lit and there are kids' toys and other items all around the house indicating the presence of children. There is a life-size builder's set that I assume belongs to Ray, some balls of various sizes lying around the room, children's shoes on the stairwell landing, with children's hoodies hanging on the rails, and a kitchen with a kiddie table and two small chairs

clearly designed for children, based on their small size. In the corner of the living room, there are several half-unpacked storage boxes, evidence of them not fully unpacking after they moved in last year. The dining table in the kitchen area is covered with magazines and children's books, as well as notebooks for Ray's homework, bills, and other mail.

Upstairs in Ray and Ronnie's shared bedroom there are two beds on opposite corners of their bedroom. Ray sleeps on the bed by the far wall and Ronnie sleeps in the crib closer to the doorway. In the center of the room is a tabletop playset with building blocks on it. Against one wall are two bookshelves filled primarily with children's books. Although these books do not comprise all the books in the household, I estimate the number of books on the bookshelves alone to be in the range of 40 to 50.

Local schools. In the most recent school year[1], the school district in which the Peters' live was ranked the highest in their local metropolitan area, based on data from the US Department of Education. Numerous news reports list the district as one of the best in the metro area and across the state. Students in local schools reportedly perform well above the national average.

Ray attends an expensive private preschool. This particular school is part of a nationwide franchise, that is known for providing a solid, albeit pricey, preschool education. Feliciana describes it as "one of the top preschools in the area… and we're paying an arm and a leg for it" [Interview 1]. Feliciana also mentions that she did lots of research on schools in the area before making the choice to send Ray to his current preschool. I am able to visit the preschool on two occasions and interact with some of the teachers and students. The school building itself looks like a fairly recent construction. On my first day at the school, I observe Ray and his classmates reciting the pledge of allegiance. The class is predominantly white and Ray is the only black

[1] Information gathered after my data was collected

student. His classroom teachers, however, are two women of color. Interestingly enough, although the student population is largely white, I see a fair number of black women on staff at the school. On my second day at the preschool, I attend a parent-teacher meeting with Feliciana and Nate, who discuss the results of Ray's recent and rather extensive assessments with his lead teacher. Interestingly enough, Ray's performance on the end-of year assessment has dropped, compared to his start of the year assessment. I did not record the specific results, but recall his teacher not being overly concerned with the apparent change. In fact, research suggests that at least linguistically, black boys tend to enter formal schooling with linguistic skills that surpass their peers, but with additional schooling, they fall behind (Vernon-Feagans, 1996). This decline suggests that school has a negative, or subtractive effect on their academic performance (Valenzuela, 1999).

A snapshot

Homework. It is a Monday and my second day of observations with the Peters family. Today runs more or less according to the regular schedule of events. According to Feliciana, the regular schedule generally goes like this:

> He's in daycare usually from nine till about four thirty. And then around four thirty, we [Feliciana or Nate] will probably get him. He comes home. He may have a snack and then we always do his homework, which he doesn't really have at school, so I make up homework for him {laughing}. So that's pretty much what we do every day. Uh, either ABC Mouse or writing. Try to do writing every day and then he'll go out and play with his dad. And then bedtime is 7. [Interview 3]

On this particular day, I have just returned to the house with Feliciana, Ray, and his younger brother Ronnie after we all had a visit at Ray's preschool, along with Nate and Ray's teacher. Feliciana tells Ray that it is time to do his homework and that I will be joining him today. Ray and I walk upstairs to the office so that he can do his homework while I observe and/or assist.

The house still bears evidence of a move from several months prior, with moving boxes lining the corners of rooms and some of the contents spilling out of the boxes. The office is no exception: it is somewhat cluttered, with moving boxes stacked around the room and furniture that looks like it still needs a permanent location. There is a big desk where Feliciana positions Ray and it looks like it dwarfs him as a small child. I sit in a large desk chair to his left, to observe him while he works. The room is constructed as a sort of loft, with an open space that looks out onto the living room below. Ray is seated at the desk, facing a window opposite the desk, with his back to the balcony and living room below.

Today Feliciana has Ray doing some writing practice in his notebook. One goal for today is for Ray to write his name. I sit back and primarily watch as Ray does his homework. I note his resistance to the activity; this is not something that he seems to find enjoyable. In fact, his homework today takes much longer than I expected because Ray keeps getting off task or simply stopping in the middle of his assignment. The task does not actively hold his attention for very long. After a while, Feliciana comes in to check on Ray's progress and to encourage him to keep working. Nate comes home while we're still up in the office and I overhear Feliciana explaining to him that Ray is doing his homework. In a later interview, Feliciana tells me that she is the one to stay on Ray about his homework and that Nate does not find it to be as important as she does. Rather than doing homework with the boys, Nate prefers to play sports and do other activities with them outside. He also is less vigilant about researching the best schools and making sure his kids are academically prepared, which is of utmost importance to Feliciana.

Literacy Practices in the Peters Family

An overview

When discussing literacy, two of the most frequent words that appeared in interviews with Feliciana Peters were "school" and "teach or teacher." These words align with the conceptualization of literacy observed in the Peters family as something that is academic in nature, highly imperative for school success, and also something achieved through explicit teaching and learning. Feliciana laments the fact that Ray does not seem to have a natural inclination towards academics and expects that she'll have to stay on top of him and his schoolwork for many years to come.

Feliciana not only believes that reading and writing skills are essential for success, but that strong speaking skills are also imperative in school and in life. This includes being able to communicate effectively, but also using standardized whitestream English (SWE) which she simply calls "being able to speak proper English."

In addition to literacy practices being closely tied to school success, comparison and competition are recurring themes in observation and interview data. Feliciana Peters and Belinda Mason are close friends and their children have become close as well. Consequently the two families spend considerable amounts of time together. In discussing literacy practices, Feliciana often comments on Ray's literacy skills, frequently comparing his progress to that of his classmates and most often to Prentice Mason. Feliciana tells me that I will be very impressed when I meet Prentice, because his speaking and reading skills are very advanced for his age and far exceed those of Ray. She also compares Ray to extended family members, saying that he "speaks better" than one of his cousins who is a year or two older than him. However, she ranks his overall academic performance as "average."

Feliciana's goal is for Ray to not only achieve academic success, but academic excellence. She implies that she would like him to be at the top of his class. This desire may

stem from her own upbringing. Her educational approach has been influenced by her parents, who stressed academic success. The level of competition and comparison that the Feliciana displays may also be shaped by her involvement in sports at a very high level. In fact, both Peters parents played sports in college, in which fierce competition was necessary to achieve success. So perhaps Feliciana's approach to literacy practices is a natural extension from sports to other areas of her life.

Literacy Practices

Print Literacy. A fair amount of the literacy practices I observed and discussed with the Peters family related to paper-based printed or written words. For instance, Feliciana's homework assignments most often involve pencil and paper writing assignments for Ray (e.g., write his own name and all the letters of the alphabet) or reading assignments (e.g., reading storybooks during the day with his mother in which is he primarily responsible for reading as opposed to shared reading at bedtime). In addition to these direct interactions with the printed word, there are also multiple instances of environmental print that may not be directly engaged with.

For instance, at church, similar to at the Ambroses' church, I observed numerous examples of environmental print, both paper-based and electronic in form. During the service on Sunday, there are several flat screen monitors positioned around the room displaying words to the songs, Bible verses, and the main points of the pastor's sermon. There are fans throughout the church that read "Susan G. Komen" and have some facts about breast cancer along with a pink ribbon and images of Black women.

I also observe multiple instances of people engaging directly in literacy by reading print, in digital form and on paper. Before reading a particular Bible verse, the pastor calls on

members of the congregation to find the passage in their paper-based Bibles or electronic tablets and smartphones. The passage is simultaneously displayed on the monitors around the room. The pastor also occasionally reads from printed notes throughout his sermon.

I also observe numerous examples of environmental print around the house, at the stores and restaurants we visit, and at Ray's preschool. In some cases, Ray directly interacts with the words and images he sees. For instance, on a trip to the grocery store, Ray enjoys pointing out items and saying the names of items that he recognizes though it's unclear whether he recognizes them by their images or by the printed words. Some of the items he mentions aloud are: Lunchables, donuts, and Hot Wheels.

At bedtime, Ray and his brother engage with print literacy directly through the storybooks they choose to read. On one day that I am present, I read a Star Wars book with Ray that he seems to have read many times before, predicting what will appear on subsequent pages before I get to them. Storybook reading is touted in early educational circles as one of the best ways for families to promote early literacy development in their young children. Indeed, it is encouraged by Ray's preschool teacher. During a parent-teacher meeting that I observe, Ray's teacher stresses that Feliciana and Nate should spend time reading books with him at home.

Oral Language. Oral literacy practices among the Peters family occur primarily in the form of conversations in which they engage throughout the day. Additionally, as part of the bedtime routine, Feliciana leads her two sons in saying prayers. I note the following at bedtime on my third day of observations:

> Ray and Ronnie struggle to lead the prayers on their own, so Feliciana feeds them a prayer line by line, which they repeat after her. She leads boys through giving thanks to God for their parents and for their brother and asks God to continue to provide protection [Observation Day Three].

There are notable instances of oral language and literacy as well as several hallmark features of AAE used at church. For instance, the oral language practice of call and response (Lee, 2006; Smitherman, 1997) is used throughout the service I attend. Using this tradition of call and response that is common in the black church (Lee, 2006), the pastor often begins a phrase or makes a statement and the church members respond, sometimes by completing the phrase. One example from my observations with the Peters involves the pastor calling out, "God is good all the time," to which the congregation replies in unison, "All the time, God is good." At other times, this oral tradition may involve church members affirming the pastor's words through verbal responses (Lee, 2006), which I also observe when church members utter "Preach!," "Hmm," and "Yes" throughout the church service.

This call and response tradition is clearly one that is learned and while Ray sometimes participates, he clearly has not yet learned what counts as an appropriate versus an inappropriate response. For instance, at one point, the pastor asks a question and ends by asking the church "Amen?" to which the congregation responds in unison with, "Amen." Ray, however, responds late, so that he is the only one saying "Amen" by himself. This gets a stern look from dad and a couple of chuckles from the youth around us. Shortly after this, the pastor asks a rhetorical question, beginning with "Why did you…?" No one responds except for Ray, who says "Because," with a hint of an attitude. His response gets a firm "hush" from his dad. Although church members are encouraged by be vocal in church, there is still an order and a set of rules to the call and response routine. Ray, by his responses, has not yet learned the difference between appropriate and inappropriate ways of responding.

I note that children in this church setting are indeed learning what is appropriate through modeling and demonstration. Literacy here is very much a vibrant oral practice and one that is

conversational (Boykin, 1994). Aware of this need for modeling and demonstration, the pastor speaks to the parents present in the crowd who he encourages to model appropriate practice for their children. He states that, "when you rejoice, they should too," "When you raise your hands, they should too." And they do indeed do this. The kids sitting together in the front are just as involved as the adults, singing, dancing, raising hands, and crying.

Another notable feature of language used in church is the specific dialect or variation used, namely African American English (AAE). For example, AAE is demonstrated in the syntactic and phonological features of language used by various people in the service. The pastor alone uses multiple features of AAE throughout his Sunday sermon. Various syntactic features are evident in the language that he uses. For instance, he says, "The Holy Spirit *sound* like you!" and repeats himself a few moments later, saying, "The Holy Spirit *sounds* like you!" Here he actually displays two features of AAE: first, the absence of the 3rd person singular present tense "s" that appears in SWE, as well as variable use of the 3rd person singular "s." Multiple negation also appears in the pastor's language, when he makes statements such as "they *don'*t pay *no* bills." Other times, he demonstrates zero copula, in which a conjugated form of the verb "to be" is not required as it is in SWE. Specifically, he says, "they not comin' to visit" and "Why you runnin' like crazy?" where SWE construction would be "they *are* not coming" and "why *are* you running." These last two examples also demonstrate a phonological feature of AAE that has been referred to to as g-dropping or nasalization, in which SWE's unstressed word final "ing" is often produced in AAE as "in."

The use of AAE in predominantly black churches has been noted by linguistics and other social scientists as a notable arena in which this linguistic variety thrives (Lee, 2006; Smitherman, 1977). In fact, language varieties are often maintained through isolation and

churches in the US are marked by high levels of racial segregation. This racial segregation not only applies to churches, but is maintained in residential patterns throughout the United States. Thus, the spatial or physical separation between blacks and non-blacks maintained in black communities, including in church, provides a prime opportunity for historically black forms of language to endure. Although the members of Peters family do not use (many, if any of) these notable features of AAE in their home, Ray Peters routinely hears this form of language around him on his at least weekly visits to church, and it forms a part of the community in which he lives and operates.

Literacy in Digital Forms. In addition to using literacy practices in oral forms, the Peters engage in literacy practices that appear in digital or electronic form. As I have noted, I observe many examples of this digitally-based print literacy while at church with the Peters family. To reiterate, these include the display of Bible verses on flat screen monitors and church members reading Bible passages on tablets and cell phones.

Nate Peters also uses a cell phone to consult the grocery list that his wife has given him for the day. However, in the Peters family, there are fairly limited instances of literacy in digital forms that I observe outside of church, at least compared to the other families in this study. Although I observe Feliciana using a cell phone and Nate working on a laptop computer during my time with the family, I do not observe the boys directly engaged with these electronic devices. Thus, digitally-based print literacy appears to be used quite infrequently, compared to paper-based print and oral literacy practices.

Literacy Purposes

Literacy in the Peters family is primarily conceptualized as preparation for academic excellence achieved through explicit instruction and external motivation, as well as through

comparison and competition. In the Peters family, literacy is used primarily as a means of preparing for school but is also conceptualized in terms of comparison and competition.

Preparation for Academic Success. Literacy practices, and the overall literacy environment, in the Peters household, are largely shaped by Feliciana's concerns about Ray succeeding in school. Therefore, the literacy practices in which they engage are shaped not only by parental beliefs, but are also highly influenced by educational professionals in their lives, such as the teachers at Ray's preschool. Feliciana, by her own accounts, is the parent who makes the majority of school-related decisions. Her husband, Nate, is less concerned with academic concerns, at least at Ray's current age. But she began to be concerned with her son Ray's preschool prospects when he was fairly young, saying, "The school thing has probably been on my mind at least since he was probably two and a half." When Ray was three years old, the family moved to a new house in an area of town. The decision was at least partially motivated by a desire to be in an area with a strong school system.

To reiterate, Ray currently attends a reputable private preschool known for its strong educational preparation. During a parent-teacher meeting, I directly observe his teacher not only encouraging book-reading at home, but also emphasizing that Ray will need to learn to stay focused, because that is something that will be expected of him in kindergarten. Thus, literacy practices may be useful in teaching the requisite cognitive skills necessarily to read and write well, but may also be useful in teaching behavioral aspects expected in school, such as being able to sit still and focus during reading and writing activities. Indeed, Ray has a hard time staying focused and engaged in the homework assignments that Feliciana prepares for him

Feliciana's parents have already expressed their belief that Ray needs to be a straight A student. Feliciana does not necessarily share this belief, implying that she would like her son to

be happy. However, she spends a considerable amount of energy attempting to set him up for educational distinction. However, because Ray does not appear to have an early inclination towards academics, she believes that in order for him to achieve at a high academic level, she will really need to stay on top of him and continually push him to engage in educational activities.

> Academically I mean, like I said, he's just "Eh, free for all." It's, it's just not something that he's into right now…I mean, he's gonna be a lover of life and that, that is, I'm ok with that, you know My parents are like, "he's gotta be an A student," you gotta do this, dah dah dah dah dah…I don't know if, if, we're gonna…we're gonna have to keep our thumb on him. Like I know that. Like to keep him disciplined, to keep him focused." [Interview 2]

Nevertheless, Feliciana, and to some extent Nate, primarily engage in literacy activities with Ray as means of promoting later schooling success.

Comparison and competition. Feliciana often discusses Ray's abilities in terms of how he compares with other children. When discussing his language abilities, Feliciana says, "he has a cousin that's a month older. He can speak better than he can." But comparison does not only apply to language and literacy skills, but also to other skills as well. For example, in Feliciana's words, "I think that athletically, he's above average." She is also proud of his strong interpersonal skills and his ability to get along well with nearly everyone, whether child or adult. So while he may not be all that interested in his own academic success, "he's probably gonna be the most popular kid in, in his school, which would be…that's great." [Interview 2]. However, in Feliciana's estimation, Ray is not as intellectually gifted as his friend Prentice Mason, saying that Prentice's "IQ is probably off the charts."

Literacy practices fit into this larger sense of comparison in the Peters household, but also in Ray's preschool classroom. Certainly, a good deal of schooling in the US is based on comparison with peers and ranking of students, rather than simply being a matter of individual

mastery of knowledge and skills. The same kind of comparison is apparent in how Ray's preschool teacher describes his performance. She conducts extensive assessment measures with all her students and shares the results with parents. Much of the content deals with children's early literacy and math skills; other content pertains to behavioral aspects of their classroom experiences. This information is sometimes described in terms of whether children are below or above grade level (prekindergarten and kindergarten) and is sometimes described in terms of how children directly compare with their peers.

In Ray's parent-teacher meeting, his teacher goes through Ray's performance on these assessments. The results are displayed on several pages, front and back, that she discusses with Nate and Feliciana. The teacher notes that it's a little strange that he took a preschool assessment which placed him as slightly behind grade level, but when he took the kindergarten assessment he was slightly ahead of grade level. Perhaps to make better sense of this difference, Feliciana asks how other children did on their assessments. As a point of comparison, Ray's preschool teacher shares the scores of another student who did very well. There is mention of a girl in class who routinely performs very well and scores at the top of the class. In drawing these comparisons, there is an air of competition, both between individual students, but also competition for that top spot in class.

Thus, literacy practices are intended to prepare Ray to be competitive in his future classrooms. This is part of the drive behind the homework assignments that Feliciana creates for him.

> Some people are like, "Ok, he's just four so why are you pushing him to do all this stuff? He's just four." He's not even five and you know he's doing more than what most kindergartners will do. Um (unintelligible) my friends, like, "Yeah we do, you know thirty minutes of homework every night." And they're like "Every night?" I'm like "Well, you know, he doesn't really have homework. Some preschools do have homework. I was like, well I don't want him to get into

> that mode. And then you have others who are like so far ahead, you know, doin' stuff or they're doing tutoring now, at four [Interview 2].

Thus, Ray's parents, feel a need to give their children a competitive edge. Feliciana does not necessarily adhere to all the recommendations from the school, such as having Ray learn one hundred sight words by the time he enters kindergarten. However, she still pushes him to engage in daily reading and writing lessons as a means of preparing him for school, the success of which is measured through comparison and competition.

Feliciana's statement above also reveals an aspect of Lareau's (2000) concept of middle class concerted cultivation. Parents, even when their children have not yet entered formal schooling, are invested in providing as many educational opportunities as possible for their children, in order to give them an edge in the future. It also mirrors what Lewis-McCoy (2014) observes among families with extensive resources at their disposal. The Peters' indeed appear to take advantage of as many opportunities as possible.

Literacy for enjoyment. While literacy practices in the Peters family are primarily conceptualized as being competitive and academic in nature, there is also an element of enjoyment involved. This is particularly evident at bedtime when both Ray and his brother Ronnie read storybooks with their parents. They are allowed to choose a book to read each night before going to bed. The typical routine involves bathtime, followed by getting dressed for bed, and choosing a book to read in bed while snuggled up with a parent. On the evening that I am present, Ray chooses to read a Star Wars book with me before going to bed while Feliciana reads a book with Ronnie. Both boys are all smiles during this time, with Ray often excitedly telling me what will appear on the next page. He points to various elements of the book that he particularly enjoys. As Feliciana has mentioned, Ray doesn't seem to enjoy reading books alone, but he loves to read books together at night. It is possible that he enjoys the more social or

interpersonal aspects of the bedtime storybook reading routine more than the act of learning how to read himself. Whatever the reason, reading stories at bedtime provides a source of pleasure or enjoyment for both of the Peters children.

Factors Shaping Literacy Practices

Communities and Schools. Due to both the financial resources and social capital at their disposal, Feliciana and Nate Peters have access to a wide range of schooling options for their children. Feliciana conducts extensive research on the relative success of schools in the area and neighborhoods that feed into those schools. She is knowledgeable about educational backgrounds and certification levels of the teachers at Ray's preschool and has chosen to send her son there because of its good reputation even though it is costing them "an arm and a leg" for him to attend. Feliciana's ability to find these resources is likely shaped by a variety of factors, such as her parents' own backgrounds in the field of education, and her and her husband's own levels of success in the schooling system, which have become a part of the social capital she now possesses.

The fact that the Peters family moved to a new house in a particular part of town in order to access its strong schools also speaks to the level of access afforded by their financial resources. Because of their financial resources, they are able to move to a new home, in an area of their choosing. Once again, this is evidence of decision-making that is driven by a desire to provide the best possible educational environment for her children. This early educational exposure is in turn intended to prepare them for academic success. The decision was available to them because of the availability of financial resources to begin with.

Shaping the early educational environment. Again, financial resources provide access to a range of spaces. The increased access provides increased options. The range of spaces from

which families may choose include options about where to live and send their children to school. Because these choices determine the social and particularly, the educational spaces that children inhabit, they also influence the literacy practices to which they become accustomed.

Feliciana, a member of the middle class and also second-generation middle class, by her account, is careful to adhere to educational recommendations that are also based on middle class norms. She follows the preschool's recommendations to read stories to her sons at bedtime, accesses online research and resources about local educational opportunities, and relies on school-based reading and writing assessments. These assessments help her to determine if her son is performing adequately for his age, and more importantly, on grade level or above. Much of the homework she assigns Ray focuses on early reading and writing skills. In sum, Feliciana makes deliberate choices which are designed to foster the development of strong early language and literacy skills. These choices are not necessarily conceptualized by Feliciana as being driven by middle class norms, or being tied to any class-based or race-based norms. They are merely viewed as the ideal means to educational success.

The Peters are also able to create an educational environment in the home filled with literacy materials. They are able to purchases children's books to stock a bookshelf in the boys' room. These books provide materials for the books that Feliciana assigns her son to read. Ray also enjoys playing with Legos and trucks, which occupy space in the front room of the house. I note plenty of toys in the home, even though some are still packed away in moving boxes. Some are explicitly related to literacy skills, some less so. Nevertheless, the Peters are not only able to place Ray in competitive educational environments outside the home, but they are also able to construct a rich educational environment in the home to support his literacy practices.

Race, Gender, and Language. As I have noted, Ray has already been labeled as a potential bully by teachers at his preschool which may be related to his race, gender, and size. Studies report that black boys are often perceived as more aggressive than their white male or female peers, even when engaging in similar behaviors (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Feliciana is aware of how race, gender, and language intersect in ways that place her son at a disadvantage in school. The intersection of these variables forces Feliciana to consider how these factors may affect her son and makes parenting decisions based on what she believes will serve him best. Again, all parents must negotiate how to raise their children, but not all parents must navigate spaces in the way that Feliciana must do with Ray. Feliciana is able to afford sending Ray to an 'affluent' preschool, but this also comes with an educational setting in which is he is the only black male in his class. As a black male who is big for his size, prevailing racial and gender-based stereotypes mean that he is likely to be read in a negative light, either as threatening, or as less capable than his peers (Bireda, 2010; Carter et al., 2017; Casella, 2003; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba et al., 2002). Feliciana feels that using SWE is a means of mitigating these stereotypical images, but also providing him with an advantage in navigating educational spaces. Her lengthy explanation below speaks to her perception or understanding of these issues.

> **Researcher:**Yes. Somethin that you mentioned about like speaking proper..Is that something that you're consciously wanna…
> **Feliciana**: Absolutely…Um, and my parents did for me. Nate's parents did for him. And it goes a long way. Like even just saying yes, ma'am or no ma'am. Just that respect…value, you know, factor. *And* being African-American male. You know, you're gonna have to be looked at, it's gonna be… I mean, I've seen the looks. Just working with kids or being in schools where kids use Ebonics, you know, or slang or something like that and the teacher is like ignoring them. That doesn't mean that they don't know what they're doing. Uh, another day care…we've had many day care experiences. Um, we dropped Ray off. Teachers were fine, you know, talkin and we, Nate and I picked them up and they were speaking slang, but as soon as they saw him, they changed. And I'm like, well is

> that what he's hearing all day… So and that's a different, like that's gonna take him a long way! Like just knowing how to properly use the English language. It has nothing to do with race. I mean it does have something to do with race, yeah. Yeah but it's, it's, it goes a long way when you can speak proper English. I mean, it just does. So we are very cognizant of that. And neither one of us use slang so it's…
> **Researcher**: It's not natural. It's, you just talk how you talk[2].
> **Feliciana**: We just talk how we talk, yeah. But we try to…whenever he says…I'm, I'm quick to correct him. If he tries, if he says something that doesn't, like "ain't." You know, "isn't." You know, or something like that. And we can't change what he hears, you know.

Feliciana is aware that she cannot control all the language that Ray hears outside of her presence. So while the Peters parents do not use AAE, Ray encounters other people who regularly use it. She chooses to steer him away from use of AAE. This deliberate effort to control his language is a choice that is forced upon her, based on the intersectional space that the family occupies based on race and class. Other scholars suggest that this type of linguistic negotiation is particularly salient for middle class blacks, who move between predominantly black and predominantly white settings. Although many of these individuals may use AAE in home settings, they are pressured to assimilate to the predominantly white educational and career environments in which SWE is the language variety used (Jackson, 2010; Lacy, 2007). Part of these decisions relate to a sense of identity and affiliation and racial and class-based views of self-identification may be at odds with one another. In the case of the Peters family, SWE is the language used in the home, but AAE is commonly used within their closest social networks, such as at church or with extended family members.

Finally, the use of SWE in the Peters household relates back to their ideas of comparison and competition. Although Feliciana and Nate use SWE primarily because that's what they grew up speaking and it comes naturally to them, they also find it important for their children to also speak in ways they consider "correct." The ability to speak correctly then equates to better

[2] Unfortunately, here I did not allow the participant to put these ideas in her own words before offering my own.

linguistic abilities and educational advantages. When speculating about why Ray speaks "better" than his cousin, Feliciana says,

> I think that just happens to be because, I mean, my sister's spending thirty hours a week in ICU[as a nurse], you know so she doesn't spend that much, as much time as I do with Ray. Um, I think he's had, I mean we try to expose him to a lot of different stuff. So even like other cousins, some of them that are five or six years old, he speaks better because Nate and I, we talk proper. We're tryin to, we try to get him to speak correctly, you know [Interview 2].

Literacy, as language, is then regarded as a form of skill, existing along a continuum in which school-based forms are viewed as most appropriate or correct.

Overview of Findings and Concluding Remarks

To summarize, literacy practices in the Peters family are primarily based on preparation for later schooling, based on comparison and competition with other families and children. Although there is evidence of using literacy for entertainment purposes, this aspect of literacy is eclipsed by its overwhelming characterization as an important element of educational preparation. Out of both parents, Feliciana clearly sees her role as one of her son's primary literacy teachers. In this sense, she fits the model of many middle class parents, who feel it is their responsibility to be teachers of literacy for their children (Ward, 1971; Weigel, Martin, & Bennet, 2006). Although much of this educational preparation occurs through print-based forms of literacy, Ray Peters also regularly encounters literacy in digital forms, particularly at church.

The church setting is also important in framing the literacy environment in the Peters family, by immersing Ray in forms of literacy, primarily oral in nature, that are not necessarily based on school-based conceptualizations of literacy. At church, where black oral traditions like call and response are prominent, Ray also encounters AAE. Both the school and the church that Ray attends are part of middle class communities. However, they are differentiated in their racial make-up, where his school is predominantly white and his church is predominantly black.

Thus, literacy in the Peters family is characterized by different forms of literacy, incorporating both church-based and school-based traditions that are differentiated along racial lines.

CHAPTER 5: CROSS-CASE ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

The primary aims of this study were to establish a preliminary understanding of language and literacy as they are practiced in black middle class US families with preschool-aged children. Such an understanding contributes to the research literature regarding early literacy practices that have been largely based on white middle class families and black working class families. I also aim to demonstrate how various factors shape literacy practices in black middle class families, first by examining how material and social contexts are involved and second, by investigating the extent to which race and class factors play a role. The primary research questions driving my inquiry are:

1. What types of early literacy practices do middle class black families engage in with their four-year-old children prior to school entry and what purposes do these practices serve?
2. How are the material and social conditions in which these families live related to the language and literacy practices in which they engage with their four-year-old children?
3. How do race and class factor into (or impact) the language and literacy practices and purposes in which these families engage?

Once again, I addressed these questions by using a variety of methods, namely questionnaire, interview, and observational methods. By combining these methods, I am able to triangulate findings and patterns that emerge across the data. Finally, I designed my study as a

multiple case study, allowing in depth examination of these questions with a small set of participants.

As detailed in Chapter Two, I draw on a definition of literacy rooted in New Literacy Studies (Gee, 2008; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Street, 1997), in which print and oral literacies are conceptualized as inter-related social practices, rather than distinct categories defined by individual cognitive skills. Therefore, this study includes an examination of written or printed text, engagement with those texts, as in reading and writing, as well as oral language and communication practices, including conversation between speakers and use of dialectal variations in speech. My analyses include examination of a broad range of oral and print literacy practices.

As previously mentioned, the four families described here do not necessarily represent all middle class black families. Certainly, there were meaningful differences in the ways that literacy was practiced across each of the four families. Nevertheless, the patterns that emerged across all four, or across the majority of the four, can help educational scholars and practitioners to understand how literacy operates more broadly across black middle class families in the US today and the potential role that race and class play in shaping these practices.

Research Question One

What types of early literacy practices do middle class black families engage in with their four-year-old children prior to school entry? What purposes do these practices serve?

Types of Literacy Practices

In no particular order, the most commonly occurring literacy practices that I observed in these four middle class black families were 1) electronic or digitally-based print literacy, 2) environmental print-based literacy practices 3) print-based book-reading practices, and 4)

conversational oral literacy practices. There are a few important distinctions in the practices that I have identified. Three of the four involve print-based forms of literacy, indicating that print-based practices are more predominant than oral practices. There are also slight differences in the level of engagement with literacy within these categories. For instance, environmentally based-print literacy may refer to the mere existence of print literacy in the environment, as on street signs and household products. In other words, families may only indirectly engage with literacy in these cases. On the other hand, families may actively read words as they appear on objects in the environment, more directly interacting with print in the environment. Finally, different practices involve differing levels of interpersonal interaction. Some practices may involve multiple partners, as in parents and children reading books together, while others may simply involve children independently engaging with literacy, as in using a computer by him or herself.

Digital or electronic-based print. Given the proliferation of technological advances within the past one to two decades, it is perhaps no surprise that a considerable amount of preschool-aged children's interactions with literacy occurs in digital or electronic format. I include interactions with print on television, cell phones, tablets, electronic toys, projector screens, and the like in this category. The children who participated in this project encountered and engaged with digital print on a daily basis. Although there are digital-based versions of children's storybooks, I found little evidence of their use among these families.

Instead, children used and were familiar with electronic devices such as iPads, cell phones, computers and other internet resources. More specifically, I observed children watching YouTube videos on computer and hand-held mobile devices, playing games (educational or otherwise) on cell phones and observing digital print displayed on projector screens. Prentice Mason was able to search for his favorite YouTube videos by searching on the internet and then

using the words and images associated with those videos to find what he was looking for. Necie Ambrose occupied herself during a portion of a Sunday church service by playing an alphabet game on her mother's cell phone. While riding in the car, Jessica Washington played on her Leapfrog, an electronic educational device. Ray Peters also encountered digital literacy at church, in which electronic screens positioned throughout the church building displayed announcements. In these ways, the children were accustomed to the presence of print in electronic forms, whether they have directly engaged with it or were indirectly influenced by its presence around them.

Environmentally-based print (non-electronic). In addition to the digital or electronic instances of print that these children regularly encounter in their daily lives, they are also frequently engaged with non-electronic environmental print. Again, environmental print refers to print that occurs "naturally" in home and community environments, such as product labels, advertisements, and street signs (Neuman & Celano, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 1996).

One of the hallmarks of most environmental print, as has been identified by various literacy scholars, is that it tends to be much less complex than other forms of print literacy that children may encounter, such as that contained in children's storybooks (Bus, vanIjzendorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). For instance, consider the print that appears in the form of food labels, in advertisement, on street signs, or even on household objects. These forms of literacy tend to be rather short, perhaps containing only a single word. They also tend to be highly concrete, in that they can easily be associated with material objects. As such, they do not demand the same type of cognitive skills that may be involved in making connections between words and abstract concepts, or in connecting elements in, or even in understanding a lengthy oral narrative.

I observed several instances of environmental print in all four families. For instance, I noted several instances of print in the kitchen and living area of the Washington household. I count several magazines on a bookshelf in the living area, approximately 20 children's books and 30-40 adult books in plain sight on bookshelves around the room, and multiple plaques with single inspirational words like "love, happiness, hope, and joy" or inspirational quotes on the walls. Similarly, on a trip to the playground with the Masons, I observe several instances of print that appear in the surrounding environment. On one wall of a playground structure, the alphabet is written, along with the hand signs for each letter in American Sign Language. On another wall, there are a few words written, such as "super", "good," and "lucky." At other times, Prentice Mason actively interacts with print in the environment. While on a trip to a bookstore, he walks around reading words on books and other objects at his sight level. Environmental print also appears in Necie Ambrose's surroundings. At home, several of her toys list their names or simple phrases. A couple of examples include a Dora the Explorer tent that displays words in English and Spanish and a "Build-A-Bear" box with the phrase "where best friends are made" written on in. She is also able to recognize signs and symbols on various stores and restaurants, such as Starbucks, and Chick-fil-A, either by the words displayed or by the images accompanying those words. Clearly, these children are privy to a lot of environmental print in their homes and communities. At times, they actively interact with the print around them and other times, the print merely appears to form a sort of backdrop for their lives.

Book-based print literacy practices. This category primarily refers to shared storybook reading practices between parents and children. However, mirroring prior research (Purcell-Gates, 1996), I discuss both the presence of books, as well as the act of actively reading those books. In each of the families that participated in this study, I observed the presence of books,

both those designed for children and those geared towards adults. Several children's books were laid out on the kitchen table in the Peters' home. Additionally, the boys' bedroom contained a bookshelf lined with storybooks, from which Ray and Ronnie were allowed to pick books to read at night. The Washington household had multiple bookshelves in the living area that displayed children's and adult's books, as well as magazines for adults. The girls were also allowed to take books with them on a trip to their grandmother's house. In the Ambrose household, storybooks were also available in Necie's bedroom, for her to read with her mother at bedtime. Finally, the Masons also had bookshelves, lined with books for children and adults that were readily available in the living area.

In addition to housing books in their homes, all four of these black middle class parents were also actively engaged in book-reading with their four-year-old children. As previously mentioned, these book-reading practices were primarily, if not entirely, paper-based rather than electronically-based. In other words, parents rarely read stories to or with their children on the computer or on mobile devices. I did not find evidence of the use of technological devices designed specifically for book-reading, such as Nooks or Kindles. For that reason, when discussing book-reading practices, I refer to paper-based print that appears in storybook form.

All children who participated in this study engaged in storybook reading practices on a frequent, if not daily, basis. In fact, it was one of the most frequent literacy activities in which these families engaged. The high frequency of this practice contrasts with findings from previous research among black families, who were primarily working-class (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1998; Ward 1971). However, it aligns with prior research with middle class families, although those families were primarily white (Raikes et al., 2012). Quite often, the practice of storybook reading was a joint or shared venture between parents and children.

Parents sometimes read the words that appeared on the page, adding additional elements such as various voices for different characters, or adding motions, or asking children questions as they read. Children sometimes read portions of the story or the words that they could read independently and often were allowed to turn the pages themselves.

Also mirroring prior research regarding storybook reading, I noted that shared storybook reading often occurred at bedtime. In the Peters, Mason, Ambrose, and Washington household, the bedtime routine is similar. The children are bathed, choose a storybook for one or both parents to read to them, typically while they sit in bed, and then they are expected to go to sleep. There are slight variations from house to house, although the same basic routine holds from one family to the next. In the Peters home, nightly prayers follow the storybook reading activity. The Washington's bedtime routine also frequently includes singing songs.

Book reading, particularly the reading of children's storybooks, has held a special status in early literacy theory and research. Particularly in the 1980's and 90s, storybook reading was touted as one of the best way to promote strong literacy skills among young children (Bus, Van Izendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; van Kleeck 2003; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Still today, storybook reading is touted by early childhood educators and even championed by physicians as one of the most effective means of promoting literacy skills among early educators and even among physicians (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014; Klass, 2009; Korat & Shamir, 2006; Senechal & LeFevre, 2014, Zuckerman, 2009). Moreover, studies suggest that middle class families read storybooks to and with their children more frequently than lower-income families (Bradley et al, 2001; Raikes et al., 2012). Research also indicates that white families read to their children more than families of color (Bradley et al., 2001; Raikes et al, 2012; Yarosz & Barnett 2001). Among the black families in this project, who are also middle class, storybook

reading plays a prominent part in the early literacy activities in which they engage. In each family, reading storybooks typically occurs on a daily basis.

Conversationally-based oral literacy. I also observed a number of oral literacy practices occurring in the families I observed. These practices include reciting nursery rhymes, singing songs together, the telling of oral narratives, or simply engaging in conversation with a communicative partner. In the current study, conversational language dominated the oral literacy practices that I observed. This type of practice assumes that family members are directly engaged in some form of talk or oral conversation with one another. Educational scholars note that middle class parents often hold discussions with their young children, considering them more or less equal conversational partners (Gee, 2008; Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2011). There is a give-and-take during these conversations in which children are viewed as experts and authorities who may question adults and speak to them as equals. Lareau (2011) also noted a similar type of conversational talk among middle class families in her research, in which elementary-aged children are taught to assert their opinion and even challenge the authority or knowledge of adults.

A variety of conversational types occurred in these black middle class families. To begin, I observed them frequently engaged in rather open conversation with one another. The Masons mention that they do not often attempt to shield their son from topics that may be considered more appropriate for adults. For instance, they engage in conversation about current events in the news, which may involve discussion of crimes committed. Nikki Ambrose discusses difficult religious or spiritual topics with her daughter. For example, they discuss the resurrection of Jesus, going back and forth in order for Necie to make some sense of it. In other instances, families simply engage in conversation about events that occur in their lives or words

or language they encounter in their daily lives. In a sense, parents serve as oral dictionaries for their children when they encounter words they do not know. For example, Belinda Mason provides a definition of the word "conquer" that Prentice sees in a small booklet accompanying his newest Lego set. Later in the day, Prentice attempts to use this word in conversation. Nancy Washington provides a simplified definition of caffeine and its effects when Jessica wants to drink caffeinated tea.

Sometimes conversational practices involve the telling of stories. Belinda Mason reports that Prentice,

> "when he's trying to make sense of something…he uses stories, I think to put thing together. And, we tell him stories about like why things happen. Or why, you know, really why things happen, why things are the way they…or things that have happened in the past" [The Masons, Interview 2].

Similarly, Necie Ambrose reportedly enjoys making up and telling stories. In this way, the oral practice of storytelling is often used as a means of explaining and making sense of the world.

In this category of conversational literacy, I also include the practice of call and response, as it involves back and forth between communicative partners. As previously mentioned, oral literacy practices have enjoyed a prominent position in black communities in the US for many generations (dating back to oral traditions on the African continent and continuing during the slave trade, when written reading and writing was prohibited). The black church is often noted as one of the institutions that has preserved and transmitted oral literacy practices in the U.S. black community place that has maintained many oral traditions over the years (Lee, 2006; Smitherman, 1977, 2000). In fact, church served as the only setting in which I observed call and response occurring. While attending a service with the Peters and Ambrose families, the pastor would often say certain phrases (the call) and the church members would respond in unison with another phrase (the response). This practice of call and response incorporates the back and forth

nature of conversation, although it is more structured or scripted than typical conversational interchanges. While this practice occurred among the four participating families. I only directly observed its occurrence in two of the four families and limited to church settings.

Purposes of literacy practices

Next, I discuss how these families employ these identified literacy practices in efforts to achieve particular purposes. While some studies of literacy practices conflate the practices with their purposes, I draw primarily on categorizations used by Purcell-Gates (1996), but also those by Heath (1983) and Vernon-Feagans (1996). I found the following types of literacy purposes to be most common across all four participating families: 1) literacy for formal school preparation 2) literacy for entertainment or enjoyment, and 3) literacy to assist with daily life.

Once again, isolating the purposes serves an analytic purpose, in helping to clearly identify the multiple purposes or functions of literacy. However, it also obscures the often overlapping nature of the practices themselves. As these practices are actually enacted in families in real time, multiple functions or purposes may be served by a single practice. For instance, storybook reading may provide enjoyment for parents and children but it is also often intended to prepare young children with the types of literacy skills that will be necessary in kindergarten classrooms and beyond. Similarly, when parents explain new concepts or vocabulary to their children, they may do so in an effort to assist with daily living. Once again, however, this type of vocabulary building may also function as a means of supporting literacy development as a part of school preparation.

Literacy as preparation for school. Both observational and interview data revealed that preparation for school is a main concern and high priority for these parents. Many of the literacy practices in which they were involved were specifically designed to help prepare their children

for school. For these families, using literacy to prepare for later schooling was often achieved through explicit teaching and learning. Feliciana displayed the most explicit instance of literacy as school preparation through her creation of reading and writing homework for her son Ray. She was not satisfied that he was not assigned homework at school and therefore constructed her own assignments for him to complete. These homework assignments included tasks like practicing to write his name or other letters of the alphabet. He was also required to read books or magazines at various points throughout the day. Although Ray demonstrated resistance to this activity, both in my presence and by Feliciana's account, she maintained that it was an important activity for him to participate in, in order to prepare him for kindergarten. Nikki Ambrose relies on her own mother, a veteran elementary educator, to advise her on the skills that Necie will need to master in order to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. Based on her mother's recommendations, Nikki supplements the phonics instruction she provides to Necie with the learning of sight words that cannot readily be decoded through the use of phonics.

All these activities are reported to increase children's early literacy skills (Clay, 1996, other citations). In addition, the practice of shared reading of storybooks has been noted to increase early literacy skills as well as foster a love of learning that can later benefit children in school, in which much learning occurs through the reading of books, whether fiction or non-fiction. It helps children to acquire what are often referred to as emergent literacy skills (Clay, 1996), which includes becoming familiar with print and books themselves as well as developing an understanding that printed words are associated with sounds of spoken language.

Literacy for personal enjoyment. In addition to using literacy as a preparation for later school, these families saw and used literacy to provide entertainment or personal enjoyment. In many instances, shared storybook reading is an enjoyable activity for these children and their

parents. I directly observed children's enthusiasm for shared storybook reading in three of the four participating families and found evidence of its enjoyment in all four. For instance, both Ray and Ronnie Peters were impatient to choose their bedtime stories at bedtime, and rushed through their bedtime routine in order to get to story time. Belinda Mason shared that Prentice expressed an early desire to learn to read and he himself shared with me that one of his favorite places to go was a bookstore named Books A Million. In the Mason household, trips to the bookstore were fairly common. The Washington girls asked if they could take some books with them on a trip to grandma's house. And Necie Washington was offered the prize of reading an extra storybook at night if she shortened her bathtime.

The preschool children were not the only ones who used literacy for personal enjoyment in these households. To varying degrees, parents or other individuals in the children's lives displayed an enjoyment of literacy through reading, which may have in turn fueled children's own interest in reading, as has been suggested in the literature (Vernon-Feagans, 1996; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). Of all the parents who participated in this project, the Masons were the most vocal about their own love of reading. Belinda Mason not only expressed her love of reading as an adult, but stated that as a child, she preferred reading over playing with dolls, which was an activity Prentice's younger sister enjoyed, but which she felt she didn't entirely relate to.

Literacy to assist with daily life. Literacy practices associated with daily living were also common to all families. In many instances, families relied on literacy to assist with aspects of daily life. This often occurred through interactions with environmental print. For example, families encountered and used literacy when finding and purchasing items at stores, when following directions, or when making phone calls. On a trip to Wal-Mart with his two sons, Nate

Peters consults a shopping list on his cell phone that Feliciana has given to him. Nancy Washington also incorporates literacy learning into everyday experiences with her daughters. As she and her daughter go about their day, they may count or name particular objects that they come across. Nancy also uses conversation as an opportunity to teach new vocabulary or concepts to her daughters. If they see or hear a word that they do not know, she will do her best to explain it in the moment. Remember that she used a series of oral instructions, rather than demonstration, to help her daughter Julia tie her shoes. Throughout the day, Nancy Washington is not explicitly teaching new vocabulary, as may be a common goal with school preparation practices, but is merely using oral language to accomplish common, everyday tasks.

In some of the instances listed here, it is the adults present who rely on oral or written language. In other cases, literacy is used more collaboratively between adults and children. In both cases, however, children are either interacting with literacy directly or observing it being used around them. I include both types of practices because they are examples of literacy practices that occur within families, both in their homes and in the spaces that these families regularly occupy. Both serve to demonstrate the types of practices these children experience prior to formal school entry.

Literacy to support character-building

Because literacy practices fall under the umbrella of parenting practices, some of the purposes are not simply related to the act of reading, writing, and speaking, but to parental efforts to instill particular characteristics or practices in their children. In other words, literacy practices may be used to support character development in children. The primary character traits evidenced in these black middle class parents' literacy practices were the development or promotion of independence, individuality and "good manners." The same character-building

goals did not necessary occur similarly in all four of the participating families. However, all parents attempted to instill independence, individuality, and good manners in their children, partially through the literacy practices they engaged in. Attempts to promote these characteristics influenced the ways in which parents structure literacy practices with their children.

Independence and individuality. This goal of promoting independence has been traditionally and strongly associated with middle class parenting (Bialystok, 2004; Gee, 20808; Lareau, 2000). Based on interviews with 15 middle class families with children about to enter kindergarten, Bialystok argues that middle class parents tend to engage in literacy practices that reinforce and are reinforced by an ideology of independence. Reading allows a child to follow their own path in terms of reading when and what they want to (as an independent reader). At the same time, reading also increases future career options and the potential for social mobility that are tied to reading ability and overall academic performance. In essence, reading is framed as an activity that will provide independence. It is tied to freedom, choice, and the autonomy to determine one's own path.

Independence and autonomy, according to Bialystok, are highly stressed among the middle class due to a fierce belief in the need to be well placed in a competitive capitalist marketplace. As a result, Feliciana finds it necessary to measure her son's reading abilities against that of his classmates. This commitment to comparison and competition is most evident in Feliciana Peters' approach to literacy with her son.

Girded by their relative freedom and autonomy, middle class children are able to assert their individuality. Bialytok's themes of independence and individuality, that also emerge in my data, also support Lareau's account of middle class parents and the way in which they raise their

children with a sense of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau, 2013). Lareau argues that middle class parents attempt to explicitly support their children's sense of autonomy, authority, and expertise, which Gee (2008) also asserts.

I observed various instances of parents attempting to practice literacy in ways that follow their children's lead, exemplifying concerted cultivation. For example, most of the parents allow their children to choose the books they read together at bedtime. Belinda Mason, in particular, begins to incorporate more reading and writing instruction with her son once he expressed an interest in learning those skills. Nikki Ambrose asserts that they attempt to support her daughter's literacy learning in whatever manner is most appropriate for her as an individual, rather than simply assuming that there is one way in which all children learn best. She offers Necie several choices in general and lets her daughter do as much as possible on her own. Belinda Mason allows her son to browse the internet on his own in search for videos that he likes. The exception to this approach that stresses following one's desires may be that of Feliciana Peters who imparts more control in structuring Ray's early learning. But otherwise, these black middle class families allow their children to be independent actors in their lives, controlling aspects of their lives, and engaging in activities, including literacy activities, based on their own individual interests.

Teaching manners. Teaching children to say "excuse me" and waiting for permission to speak was something that appeared across cases. Parents stressed to their children how and when to appropriately enter existing conversations, particularly with adults. Interrupting a conversation is not deemed an acceptable behavior. Instead, oral language and literacy practices helped children learn when to speak and when to remain silent. Along similar lines, Nate Peters expressed frustration with Ray when he did not speak or remain silent at appropriate times when

others around him were engaged in call and response practices at church. Both Peters parents also encourage their sons to use "ma'am" and "sir" when addressing adults, following up with his preschool teacher to make sure he is continuing that tradition in the classroom and not just in their presence.

While apparent across cases, teaching appropriate manners was perhaps most concerning to Feliciana Peters, as the parent of a black male. In our second interview, Feliciana expresses an awareness that her son, who is black, big for his age, and likes to play rough, will be read by others as being aggressive. In fact, he has already been identified by his daycare and preschool teachers as a potential bully. My time with the Peters family occurs in the midst of highly publicized cases around the nation of unarmed black males being targeted, shot, and killed by police officers and other community members. In this climate, Feliciana has developed her awareness about the importance of manners. Those sentiments are also influenced by prior interactions with Ray's school teachers and also from interactions with her husband, whom she states has learned to smile in order to offset his big size, which other people appear to find threatening. All these influences further reinforce her belief that her son needs to develop strong linguistic skills based on standardized white English in order to succeed in mixed-race settings.

Structured literacy environments vs. free play. Parents differed in the amount of structure they desired for their children. Nancy Washington was the most vocal about wanting her children to be able to play and enjoy being children, rather than spending considerable amounts of time explicitly teaching literacy skills. At the same time, she was perhaps the most intentional about using play time and everyday experiences to teach literacy concepts, such as vocabulary. Belinda Mason also used daily experiences as teachable moments, to teach vocabulary, rather than creating structured times for literacy learning. Feliciana Peters, on the

other hand, created more structured learning environments for her son, although she encouraged him to play outside with his dad in more of a free play context. In this family, there was perhaps greater distinction between parental roles, based on parent's natural inclinations. The desire for structure versus free play relates back to the goal of promoting independence, in terms of allowing children to structure their own environments.

To summarize, the theoretical perspectives of New Literacy Studies stress that literacies are social in nature. Therefore, the literacy practices that I observed are necessarily connected to beliefs, attitudes, and worldviews among the communities in which they are used. Parents' literacy practices, then, are best understood in terms of the purposes they serve in the communities in which families live. This type of analysis illuminates why parents engaged in particular practices. In the current study with black middle class families, preparing for success in school is a primary concern. Therefore, literacy practices are enacted partially to serve that goal. Literacy also serves as a means of communication through which children learn appropriate manners. Literacy also simply serves a form of entertainment for families.

Examination of literacy purposes is also impacted by the immediate communities and contexts in which families live. My second research question attempts to directly investigate how the contexts in which these families live impact how they practice literacy.

Research Question Two

How do the material and social contexts in which these families live impact the language and literacy practices in which they engage with their four-year-old children?

I define material contexts as those that encompass the concrete structures surrounding families (e.g., houses and other buildings, physical distance between buildings) as well the physical resources available to them. The social conditions or contexts involve more relations

and interactions between people and their attitudes, behaviors and so forth that are more abstract in nature. The two are related in that social conditions are often shaped by the surrounding material conditions. This perspective incorporates a sociocultural lens towards literacy, as well as reflecting an ecological approach that acknowledges the embeddedness of literacy in nested systems of influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Neuman & Celano, 2001).

Observational and interview data reveal a number of material and social conditions that impact the practice of literacy for these families. The primary situational factors I identify are: financial access and constraints, the social capital to navigate educational spaces, racial integration versus segregation, and competitive environmental pressure. Again, I note that these material and social conditions impact literacy, not for literacy's sake alone, but for its connections to preparing for school, or more precisely for academic success.

Financial resources and access

Being middle class, these families have a fair amount of financial resources at their disposal. By virtue of parents' income and relative wealth, these families have ready access to a wide range of literacy and other educational materials, literally at their fingertips. They are able to purchase electronic devices and a large number of books geared specifically for young children. In other words, they live in print-literacy rich environments (Harris & Shroeder, 2012; Raikes et la., 2006; Sénéchal & Lefevre, 2002). Research indicates that increasing the number of books and other learning materials in the home increases book-sharing practices between parents and children (Pace, et al., 2017). These families all participate in bedtime routines that include storybook reading, which may be facilitated by the abundance of children's books in their homes. The children also use smartphones, computers, and Leap Frogs, which they use to practice their literacy skills and play games.

Financial resources also provide access to numerous educational opportunities. Prentice Mason is able to make visits to bookstores and libraries with his mother, whose schedule as a university professor allows a fair amount of flexibility. He is able to participate in sports-related and educationally-focused summer camps. At one camp, one of the teachers is so impressed with his initial reading and writing skills that she offers to take him under her wing with individualized tutoring. Jessica Washington is also able to go on frequent play dates with her mother, exposing her to a number of different environments. On these trips, she often comes across new words and concepts, opportunities that her mother uses to teach new words, like "public" and "pollen." In this sense, Nancy Washington serves as a type of live dictionary for her daughters. Feliciana Peters also ensures that her son enrolls in an elite preschool, where he can polish his early literacy and behavioral skills for kindergarten. She even mentions that the availability of excellent schools was one of the reasons driving her family's recent move. In the case of the Ambroses, Nikki is able to stock the house full of books and toys, including a Wii, some of which are specifically educational in nature.

And yet, even though these parents have substantial incomes (with combined annual salaries over $100,000), they still feel that money is tight: Nancy Washington explicitly expressed concern over being able to provide for her children, cover the mortgage on the house, pay off student loans, particularly with another baby on the way. Although she would like to provide a wealth of learning opportunities for her children, she admits that she is not able to provide as much as she would like based on family finances. Feliciana Peters, although she can afford to place her son in a rather expensive private preschool, is concerned about future educational expenses as both her children progress through school and ideally through college. This does not appear to constrain the current literacy practices in which she currently participates

with her son, but has the potential to limit practices in the future. Regardless of parents' individual financial standing, these middle class families are able to provide literacy-rich environments for their children that allow for frequent literacy activities.

Choice of environments

The financial capital associated with the middle class status of these families also allows these families to live and operate in a range of residential, educational, and occupational settings. In other words, for the most part, they can afford to live where they choose, send their children to the schools they choose, and have a certain degree of flexibility in choosing their work environments.

Experiencing racial and ethnic diversity is important for all of the families who participated. For these parents, black and white communities were the most commonly referenced racial groups. They generally do not want their kids in all-white *or* all-black settings and they seek out situations in which their children will interact closely with people of other nationalities, language groups, religious backgrounds and so forth. Consequently, seeking out racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity factored into decisions about where to live and send children to school.

However, the desired level of racial diversity varies from one family to the next. The two parents, Nikki Ambrose and Nancy Washington, who explicitly mentioned growing up in predominantly black communities were also the two who explicitly sought to place their children in mixed-race environments at an early age. Both women expressed having difficulty transitioning into more mixed or predominantly white spaces as teenagers or young adults. As a result, they conveyed a desire for their children to be comfortable in mixed-race settings at a

young age. In this way, lack of racial diversity in their own childhoods is inversely related to the desire for diversity in their children's lives.

Because of the racial and cultural diversity in which children in these black middle class families live, they are also privy to a range of language and literacy practices. Some have encountered other languages, like Spanish and Japanese. All of them have encountered different language varieties, primarily AAE and SWE. They are familiar with print-literacy traditions like shared storybook reading as well as oral traditions such as call and response. Due to their financial resources, these families also have some flexibility in choosing the communities in which they live, which shapes the language and literacy environments in which their children develop.

Social Networks: Integrated spaces, segregated networks

These middle class black families appear to occupy some spaces that are racially mixed. Although I do not have data on the specific racial make-up of their preschool and day-care settings, parents in all four families suggest that their children at the very least interact with other children who are black and white. Some mention children who are Latino as well. Parents also appear to work in spaces with other black and white families. These families also live in racially-mixed neighborhoods. And yet, the racial integration of these families' school and work environments contrasts with the racial segregation apparent in their closest social networks. In some sense, they live at the intersection of two cultural worlds, namely white US culture and black US culture.

The four families that I observed lived in mixed-race neighborhoods. However, they tend to move about in predominantly black spaces, including black churches, and friend and family units. Parents' friends and their children's friends, along with family members (through blood or

marriage) were predominantly black. Thus the core social networks of these families tended to be black in nature, although their work and school environments were much more diverse racially and class-wise. For instance, all four families attended predominantly black churches, although most of the parents attended predominantly white institutions (PWIs) for undergraduate or graduate education and currently held jobs in predominantly white settings (with predominantly white co-workers). Similarly, the children in this study attended primarily white day cares and preschools.

These dual social networks shape children's exposure to language practices. Their early educational experiences may include multiple cultural and linguistic traditions. As stated before, AAE tends to be the most common form of communication in predominantly black settings. On the other hand, SWE is most commonly used in predominantly white settings. Therefore, in one sense, some of the children in this study are learning, albeit subconsciously, to become bidialectal. In fact, many of their parents appear to have done the same. Belinda Mason and Nancy Washington have navigated black and white cultural spaces and appear to have mastered both SWE and AAE and move seamlessly between the two. Their children are likely to do the same. Certainly, not all families used AAE at home. However, all of the children were exposed to it either from their own parents, other family members, or from peers in their closest social networks. All children appear to also hear SWE in their larger social settings, whether at home, at school, or in their neighborhoods. Thus, families' oral language practices are impacted by their existence at the intersection of these two dialects or language varieties.

Social capital to navigate educational settings

Because these parents have succeeded within the mainstream US educational system, they are familiar with the types of literacy practices that are most highly valued within that

system. For instance, they are aware of the need to master print-based literacy based in standardized English in order to achieve academic success. They are also aware of the emphasis placed on bedtime story routines. This emphasis is relayed through early educational experts with whom parents interact, as well as being communicated in the "expert" resources that they consult (e.g., internet resources). Because they have the financial means to participate in a wide variety of educational opportunities, such as trips to the library, children's museums, summer enrichment camps, and elite private preschools, they are privy to the resources and recommendations touted within those circles. Belinda Mason seeks out activities and opportunities for her children. Feliciana Peters listens intently to the recommendations at her child's preschool, particularly because many of the teachers are former first and second grade teachers. Nikki Ambrose dutifully follows the advice of her mother, a seasoned educational professional. Their relationships with early educational professionals allow access to knowledge about early school-based literacy learning.

Both Lareau (2011) and Lewis-McCoy (2014) speak to the social capital among middle class black families and how it contributes to ease of educational navigation compared to other families with less capital. As Lareau writes, "social class dynamics are woven into the texture and rhythm of children and parents' daily lives. Class position influences critical aspects of family life: time use, language use, and kin ties" (p. 236). The same broad educational advantages based on class standing also apply specifically to advantages regarding early literacy practices. Consciously or not, these black middle class parents align literacy practices with their children to school-based literacy norms. Again, Lareau notes the similarity between the cultural practices and behaviors in the homes of middle class families and those standards adopted by institutions.

Competitive environments.

These black middle class families also live in competitive educational environments. Parents fight to give their children the greatest early educational advantages. For instance, Feliciana reports that parents must place their children on waiting lists for local preschool placement many years before their children are even old enough to attend. Belinda shares that public schools in her district are also competitive and that open spots are often given according to lottery. In response to these competitive environments, perhaps, parents attempt to give their own children a competitive edge. Belinda Mason enrolls her son in educational opportunities, such as summer camp. Feliciana also responds to this competitive pressure by crafting reading and writing homework for her son and continually tracking her son's performance in comparison to other children his age. The competitive environment in which the family lives pushes her to do more skill and drill types of literacy practices at home. She carefully listens to the advice of teachers at her son's preschool, many of whom are former elementary teachers. These teachers stress the importance of storybook reading at home, which the Peters are sure to do. These competitive parenting practices reflect the concepts of concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2011) and opportunity hoarding (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). Lareau's concerted cultivation refers to how middle class parents carefully attend to and structure their children's educational activities and experiences in order to promote their children's maximum potential. Similarly, Lewis-McCoy's concept of opportunity hoarding captures middle class black parents' attempts to provide their children with as many educational opportunities and resources as possible.

Whereas both concepts argue that middle class parents strive to provide their own children with as many advantages as possible, Lewis-McCoy stresses the interactional effects of such parenting. While I do not compare families within a single community, I observe attempts

to maximize educational opportunities among the black middle class families in my own study, as I have described above. The Washington family appears to be the only family *not* currently concerned with maintaining a competitive edge in terms of literacy practices with their children. Instead, Nancy Washington expresses a desire for her daughter to enjoy being a child while she still can, before the pressured learning environment begins. Although she structures Jessica's activities at this age, they are most often social in nature, such as play dates, birthday parties, and accompanying her parents to weddings.

To reiterate, *how do the material and social conditions in which these families live impact the language and literacy practices in which they engage with their four-year-old children?* As I have outlined, these black middle class families' immediate contexts impact the ways in which they engage with literacy with their four-year-old children in a number of ways. The availability of literacy materials, such as books and electronic learning devices, in their homes and schools allows regular opportunities to read and interact with print. Furthermore, easy access to additional material resources through bookstores and preschools increases the likelihood of literacy engagement. Additionally, these families have the freedom to choose their environments, although the educational environments in which they live tend to be highly competitive, even at the preschool age. This competition also increases the amount of engagement with literacy, in efforts to provide their children with a competitive edge.

But it is not only material contexts that matter. The social environment also shapes literacy. Living in integrated spaces, but moving among segregated spheres exposes children to both the dominant language and literacy practices common to whites as well as language and literacy commonly practiced in black communities. Finally, the social capital middle class black parents have at their disposal allows them access to the competitive school settings in which they

have placed their children. In these competitive settings, black middle class children are again privy to a variety of language and literacy practices, including the dominant forms of literacy commonly practiced in US schools. Importantly, these material and social contexts are shaped by factors associated with both class and race, which I detail in response to my final research question.

Research Question Three

How do class and race impact the language and literacy practices and purposes in which these families engage?

Class-based influences

Across the participating families, parents made deliberate choices about how to engage in literacy. Although the choices they made were not identical, they leveraged their material and social resources to position their children for academic and career success, in the ways they believed were best. Literacy practices, above all else, function as a means of preparing for school. Because of their class standing and racial background, access and choice provide these families with unique opportunities to connect literacy with school preparation. In the following section, I outline how both class- and race-based factors impact their abilities to position their children for academic success.

These black middle class families participate in a number of early literacy practices that align with practices in white middle class families. These similar practices that cross race suggest that shared class holds a unifying power leading to similarities in literacy practices. Specifically, these families engage in daily shared book reading routines and other activities aligned with the expectations of elementary educators that are designed to provide their children with the greatest educational advantages possible. Again, the attention to structuring children's

activities and maximization of educational opportunities mirrors what Lareau (2003) and Lewis-McCoy (2014) observe in black and white middle class families. Some of these practices include explicit literacy instruction during the preschool years and conversational exchanges that support the building of vocabulary and academic language and behavioral skills expected in formal schooling (Gee, 2008; Harris & Schroeder, 2012). These practices are possible, in part, due to the ample financial and social capital available to these families that enable them to maneuver the competitive educational terrain in which they live.

Shared storybook reading. These four black middle class families engage in literacy practices that have been characterized as predominantly and recognizably middle class in nature. One of the most notable of those practices is reading storybooks together as part of the bedtime routine. At bedtime, children are encouraged to choose a book to read and parents and children read the stories together, often commenting on various aspects of the books while they read. This dialogic or interactional style of reading has also been associated with middle class literacy practices (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Thus, it is not merely the practice of reading stories at bedtime that marks middle class early literacy practices, but it is also *how* parents and children of different class backgrounds read those books that differentiates them. Nancy Washington and Feliciana Peters exemplified the typically middle class style of reading, asking their children questions about the books and encouraging them to participate in the process as they read together, rather than merely reading the words on the page themselves. Children were interactive partners, commenting on their favorite pats and discussing what would come next in the stories.

Regular and frequent storybook reading was also facilitated by the availability of books in their homes. Research demonstrates that middle class families own a greater number of books than working class or poor families. Therefore, these families have numerous books at their

disposal, which they may read whenever they choose. These families did not make frequent trips to public libraries, a practice that has been tracked in prior research (Heath, 1983; Ward, 1971). Whereas trips to the public library have often been interpreted as a sign that parents frequently engage with storybooks, it may not necessarily be indicative of frequency of interaction with books among these middle class families. Rather than going to public libraries to find storybooks, these parents often purchased books at local bookstores and online. Because of ample financial resources at their disposal, they are able to purchase, rather than borrow, books. Rather than visiting public libraries, they take advantage of their own in-home libraries.

Preparing for Educational Success. All of these families conceptualized early literacy skills as being related to, if not foundational, for later school success. In line with what is predicted by their class status, these middle class black families engage in literacy practices that largely mirror the expectations and recommendations of teachers and educational institutions. The specific practices of shared storybook reading can be included as one of the primary ways to prepare for school literacy, but families also used literacy in other ways to prepare for school. In all four families, parents expressed a desire for children to have at least basic reading and writing skills prior to entering school.

Feliciana Peters was most concerned with explicitly tailoring her son's early literacy experience to fit schooling norms. In addition to the homework she assigned, she spent a considerable amount of time and effort researching kindergarten expectations and ranking of school systems in the area. She was highly invested in finding a highly rated preschool setting for her son Ray. Feliciana, however, was not alone in her concerns.

Learning to behave in ways that would be expected in school was also a concern for these parents. They would like their children to use language in appropriate ways, from using kind

words, to talking at an appropriate volume, to respecting turn-taking expectations. Belinda Mason, for instance, tried to ensure that her son used language in appropriate ways that displayed good manners, as would be expected in kindergarten. During our first interview, she reprimanded Prentice for talking out of turn by saying, "Are you gonna be quiet? Ok. We'll see. You gotta practice for kindergarten. You have to sit in your seat and listen." Feliciana is also wants to ensure that her son Ray is "listening and that he's able to follow directions."

Nancy Washington stands apart from the other families in that she was more concerned with opportunities for free play than activities that were explicitly constructed to be educational in nature. Out of all the parents, Nancy was the most vocal about wanting her children to play and be children, saying, "we don't sit down and do like math worksheets or science worksheets or anything like that during the weekend. Like we just let 'em kinda play and have fun." Nancy continues by saying, "I think it's really important for kids to like be kids and enjoy their free time." This is not to say that Nancy does not teach her children, however she prefers to incorporate learning into regular routines and activities. This includes counting objects throughout the day, explaining the meaning of new words, reading books for enjoyment during free time, or playing with balls, playsets, blocks, and other toys. Nancy is less concerned with structuring explicit learning activities than the other parents, but was perhaps the most committed to teaching and learning through natural, everyday experiences.

It is perhaps no surprise that these families stressed the importance of education, given their own high levels of education. In each family, at least one parent held a postgraduate degree (MA, JD, PhD). More specifically, in all four families, mothers held master's degrees or higher, and in two families fathers were currently enrolled in terminal degree programs (JD and EdD).

As previously mentioned, middle class families tend to alter and adapt their practices based on current research and "expert" recommendations more so than lower income families (Gee, 2008; van Kleeck & Scheule, 2010; Ward, 1971). This tendency suggests that literacy practices in middle class families and in schools shift in tandem, to a degree. Changing educational recommendations are often reflected in changes in educational practices in middle class homes, in efforts to optimally prepare these children for future academic and career success.

Access. I have outlined the primary practices that are shaped by class status in these black middle class families standing. However, class does not necessarily have a *direct* impact on these practices. Rather, the financial resources, high educational attainment, and occupational prestige associated with middle class standing impacts literacy practices by providing access to educational opportunities and entrée into desired educational spaces. This access allows these families to both observe and adopt literacy practices that will give their children the greatest advantages in school. As Bennet, Lutz, & Jayaram (2013) contend, nearly all parents want the best for their children, including the best in educational opportunities. However, parent's access to resources affects the provision of those opportunities for their children. In my own study, I also find the financial resources at the disposal of these black middle class families allows the provision of early educational opportunities.

For instance, in the current study, parents are able to engage in shared storybook reading because they have the financial resources to be able to purchase desired amounts of books for their children. They have access to these practices also because their work schedules allow them to spend time with their children during the evenings, weekends, and sometimes during weekdays. As Feliciana Peters points out, she is able to spend more mother-son time with Ray

than her sister does with her own son. She is then able to spend more time talking with her son, which improves his verbal abilities, in her opinion.

Parents are also able to provide activities that align with schooling expectations based on their own experiences and success in U.S. schools. They have educational access, because they can afford to send their children to competitive private preschools and elementary schools or move to a district known for having strong school systems. In these competitive educational environments, they also have access school-based literacy experts, who are able to help then navigate the early literacy terrain.

Here, access is the key mediating factor between class and literacy practices. Parents have access to literacy learning tools, by being able to purchase material objects that facilitate literacy learning. Furthermore, having more literacy materials in the home supports more frequent engagement with those materials (Rodriguez et al., 2009). Parents also have access to educational spaces through the social capital that allows them to successfully maneuver the U.S. educational system. They are able to place their children in middle class schools, specifically ones perceived externally as "good" schools (e.g. School Report Card data). They have access to the latest research findings. Their social networks allow them to interact with others who may provide information on local activities (e.g., the Masons) or recommended educational practices (e.g., the Ambroses). In other words, class factors shape the material and social contexts in which families live. Subsequently, these material and social contexts directly shape the practices in which families engage, as outlined in response to my second research question.

Choice. With greater access comes more freedom of choice. Parents may choose to send their children to private or public schools and they have a variety of neighborhoods they may choose to live in. Because of the access that black middle class parents have to dominant

educational spaces, which have historically been restricted to white people in the US, they also have access to the literacy practices that may assist their children in succeeding in those spaces. Furthermore, they may choose to incorporate elements of those literacy practices into their own lives and may also choose to incorporate literacy practices that have historically been associated with black communities in the US. Essentially, they have flexibility in how they choose to spend their financial resources, how to leverage their social capital, and to what extent they wish to integrate literacy practices of the white and black communities they interact with.

In these four families specifically, choice is most apparent primarily in relation to communities and schools. More specifically, it appears in where these families choose to live, work, and send their children to school. Feliciana Peters and Belinda Mason, in particular, highlight their desire to live in communities with strong school systems and their specific choice to move their families into those communities. They are able to do so due to the financial resources associated with their middle class status. Nikki Ambrose and Nancy Washington make the explicit choice to expose their young daughters to racially-mixed rather than predominantly black settings. They are also able to do so, given the flexibility of options and the maneuverability afforded by their financial and social capital.

Summarizing class-based influences. Class appears to have an impact on literacy practices for a variety of reasons. Class status is most often defined by income, parental education and occupation. These elements may be tied to practices in unique ways because of their differential associations with the material and social contexts in which families live. With additional income, parents are able to purchase more educational materials for their children. They also have more schooling options that may expose their children to differential literacy practices. With higher education, parents are more likely to endorse views of literacy aligned

with schooling norms. They may also participate in practices more highly aligned with schooling norms based on their own extensive experience and success in the US educational system. Holt and Smith (2005) come to this same conclusion, arguing, "the different kinds of social and material resources available to individuals across different social contexts may have significant impact upon their literacy skills and the kinds of literacy practices in which they participate" (p. 2-3). This finding replicates other research on maternal education and joint literacy practices (Raikes et al., 2006, Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Teale, 1986). Therefore, differences in literacy practices by class standing are likely caused by the different social and material contexts that are created by families' differing levels of income and education. In other words, social and material contexts act as a sort of mediating factor.

Racial influences

Literacy practices in these black middle class families, in many ways, operate similarly as they do in the white middle class families to which they are often compared. Again, they engage in literacy practices that similarly prepare their children for school, such as storybook reading. However, their literacy practices show evidence of racial influences as well. While the class-related influences on literacy practices are fairly easy to identify independently of race, racial influences are less easily extricable from class-based ones. While middle class status affords more choices, race complicates the choices afforded black middle class families by creating certain choices that they are forced to negotiate. In other words, being middle class increases access and choice but being black and middle class means that families must contend with aspects of middle class literacy practices most often associated with white middle class culture that may be at odds with, or at the very least, not take into account, their black racial identities. As I detail below, patterns of neighborhood and school segregation, links between language,

race, and identity, and experiences with racial discrimination affect choices that families are forced to make regarding literacy practices.

Racial Segregation. Race, or more specifically, racial segregation affects the lives of these families, affecting the physical spaces they inhabit as well as shaping their closest and more proximal social networks. As previously mentioned, these physical and social spaces largely determine the literacy practices in which these families participate. Therefore, through patterns of racial segregation, race indirectly impacts literacy practices. While Lareau, in her own study, does not believe that "attending predominantly black churches, living in predominantly black neighborhoods, or even experiencing of racial insults had substantial impact on how black middle class parents" **(**Lareau, 2003, pg. XX) raise their children, I argue that it has a noticeable impact on parenting practices, and particularly on the language practices in which black middle class parents engage.

These families live at the intersection of two racially segregated domains, one being white and the other black. Although these four black middle class families occupy spaces that are predominantly white, their families and closest friends are predominantly black. Their family networks are black. The churches they attend are black. However, they work, attend schools, and own houses in settings where they comprise far less of the racial majority. Instead, these settings are predominantly white, although some are more racially and ethnically integrated than others. Feliciana Peters and Belinda Mason both teach at the same predominantly white institution. Ray Peters is the only black male in his preschool class. Necie Ambrose, however, attends a preschool with children from a variety of racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Yet even in these somewhat integrated spaces, these black middle class families maintain the closest friendships with fellow blacks. For instance, their communication and contact with white

coworkers outside the workplace is fairly limited. In essence, although these families occupy physical spaces that are predominantly white, their closest social networks remain predominantly black.

Living at the intersection of these worlds exposes families and children to differing literate traditions and practices that have been historically differentiated by race. These black middle class children inhabit educational spaces dominated with white middle class literacy traditions and inhabit spaces also dominated by black U.S. traditions of literacy. White communities have traditionally placed a heavy emphasis on print literacy practices, from a young age. Shared storybook reading represents one aspect of this emphasis. Still, parents also engage in conversational practices that encourage young children to demonstrate their knowledge and to identify as both conversational equals and experts. Black communities have historically placed emphasis, not only on print literacy, but also on oral literacy practices. Children's ability to construct oral narratives is highly valued, often more so than their ability to read or repeat stories verbatim. Instead, verbal play, elaboration, and the ability to connect different, but thematically related stories, are emphasized. Nevertheless, this does not negate black parents' desire for their young children to become proficient readers and writers.

Indeed, providing their children with as many educational advantages as possible is a high priority for these four black middle class families. Belinda Mason enrolls her son in summer camps and provides him with a wealth of books. This practice however likely serves multiple purposes, and seems to be primarily driven by his enjoyment of these activities but also to help prepare him for school success. The Ambroses and Peters also engage in reading and writing activities that are intended to meet their children's literacy development and challenge them to grow.

Placing their children in racially-mixed settings is also a priority for these parents. Multiple parents in this study specifically express a desire to avoid "all black" or "all white" schools. From their comments, this desire appears to stem from an understanding that children will need to function in racially mixed settings in the future and providing their children with experiences in a variety of settings represents another educational advantage for their children. The belief is that if they are able to effortlessly maneuver in spaces with people of different races and whites in particular, they will be better poised to succeed. Thus the desires for diversity and for educational excellence frequently present parents with a dilemma because those two environments may be at odds with one another rather than existing in a single location. Many of the top-rated schools are predominantly white and yet, parents want to avoid having their children be the token black child in the classroom. This tokenism is precisely what Nikki Ambrose wanting to avoid with her daughter.

> I don't want her to be what I call a only chocolate chip. I do not want that for her, I would rather her be in an all-black environment than an all-white environment where she's the only one black kid. Um I don't want her to have to be, feel like she's the only one, or everybody to wonder what's going on with her hair, or why doesn't she tan **[Ambrose Family, Interview 1].**

Again, it is not merely that parents want to avoid all-white schools. And to be sure, particularly in certain enclaves of the southeastern United States, there are strong schools that are predominantly black. Nevertheless, it seems these black middle class parents are indeed seeking high levels of diversity in their children's early schooling environments. Ideally, they would not place their children in either all-white or all-black environments. And yet, these high levels of diversity are difficult to find in top-rated preschools and school systems.

Thus, class affords these middle class black families a range of school choices and yet because of the intersection of their race and class, they experience constraints in those choices.

Because of their desire for racial diversity, shaped by the fact that they are black people living in predominantly white spaces, they are often faced with choosing either all-black or all-white educational settings rather than the racial integration they desire for their children. And still, this constrained choice does not apply to all black middle class families or even to all the families in this project. Instead, the level of racial diversity the parents themselves experienced as children shapes the desire for diversity in the lives of their own children. Findings here suggest that high racial segregation in parents' pasts leads to an increased desire for racial integration for their children.

Language Practices and Language Varieties. As Patillo (2013) and Jackson (2010) note, black middle class families tend to live in mixed-class neighborhoods, whereas white middle class families tend to live in solidly middle class ones. As previously mentioned, this type of segregation also impacts the language varieties to which middle class black versus middle class white children are exposed.

There are a number of oral language practices common in black communities, as detailed in my review of the literature. Not all of them were evident in this project. However, I noted the use of call and response, a practice commonly used in the black church tradition (Lee, 2006, Smitherman, 1977). Although oral storytelling practices, for instance those that incorporate verbal play, inventiveness, or organization around thematically-related episodes have also been noted in black communities (Cazden, 2001; Lee, 2006; Michaels, 1981; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000), I did not find extensive evidence of their use in these four families, outside of Necie's storytelling.

Oral language and literacy practices not only refer to specific activities, but also to the medium or the larger linguistic system in which those activities occur. In the current sample,

families used two distinctive language varieties, particularly African American English and standardized whitestream English. Due the racially integrated spaces in other arenas of their lives, these black middle class children and adults hear both AAE and SWE. Thus parents, and ultimately their children, are left with decisions or choices regarding how to negotiate these two language varieties, the communities in which they are used, and literacy practices that accompany them. This decision-making process differentiates these black families from middle class white families who most often do not grapple with similar racially related considerations (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; McIntosh, 2004).

Once again, this type of choice is an inevitable one, based on the ways these families are situated vis-à-vis other white and black families. In other words, the choice is forced upon them in ways that differentiate them from white middle class families. White individuals rarely have to consider their race, whereas people of color are forced to grapple with it and its meaning (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; McIntosh, 2004). Similarly, these families are forced to make a decision regarding how they will represent themselves through language, whereas white people, likely do not. Again, because language acts as a marker of identity, the use of SWE or AAE is interpreted as signaling affiliation with particular raced and classed identity. In short, perceived links between race, language, and identity force middle class black families to grapple with decisions regarding language and literacy practices that are imposed upon them. Although two of the four families in this project (i.e., Washingtons and Masons) make no conscious or deliberate effort to "choose" one language variety or another, each of them encountered both varieties in their everyday lives.

Another reason that race continues to exert its influence on literacy is through continued racism in the United States. However, not all blacks have been affected by racism in equivalent

ways. Class distinctions within the black community are often linked to differential experiences of racism. Those in the middle class may experience more frequent, however less severe forms of blatant racial discrimination, due in part to their ascription to behaviors associated with the middle class like use of SWE (Jackson, 2001; Lacy, 2007). Black individuals who ascribe to these particular types of middle class markers, such as use of SWE have been received differently from those who more consistently use AAE. As Nikki Ambrose's statements below demonstrate, use of AAE is often equated with a certain level of ignorance. In essence, language practices, including the particular language variety used by black individuals, and the perceptions connected to their use, illustrates one of the differential effects of racial discrimination.

Consider Smitherman's (2000) work in an all-black school named King. Many of the students living in the nearby housing projects came from poor and working class families, whereas others came from middle class, professional families. Smitherman notes that the middle class children were skilled at code-switching between AAE and SWE. Similar abilities have been observed among black adults in the middle class who have successfully negotiated the educational system. Smitherman suggests that in a sense, "a black speaker's ability to code-switch is a behavioral manifestation of the interaction of race and class" (Smitherman, 2000; p. 143).

As previously mentioned, scholars have noted that middle class blacks who have found success in formal education and traditional labor markets attribute some of their educational and career success to proficiency in the dominant language, namely standardized English (Jackson, 2001; Lacy, 2007). Thus, middle class blacks may also urge their children to become proficient only or primarily in SWE as a means of upward mobility. Lewis-McCoy (2014) also notes reliance by some middle class blacks on behaviors that are deemed acceptable in mixed

company. In other words, they may rely on the "politics of respectability" (Higginbotham, 1993) to identify "appropriate" cultural behaviors that they perceive will allow for more successful negotiation of racially unequal environments (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). Such cultural behaviors may include use of SWE over AAE (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). Lacy (2007) also argues that middle class black adults in racially mixed environments may change their language practices through code-switching in order to single their class standing and ease their entry and acceptance in predominantly white settings. Furthermore, she argues that middle class blacks may downplay their racial identities in public spaces, or switch from black scripts to white ones (p. 89).

Thus, race does indeed impact the language practices of middle class black families, particularly by impacting the adults as it did in this study, and the ways in which they want to raise their children to use language. But once again, middle class black families do not operate along a uniform or homogeneous set of practices. Even in the small sample size of the current project, there were discrepancies in the use of AAE and in its perceived appropriateness from one family to the next. In other words, although black middle class parents are forced to negotiate imposed options regarding the AAE or SWE, they all do not make the same choice. Two of the families (i.e., the Ambrose and Peters families) made explicit efforts to ensure that their children grew up speaking SWE proficiently.

Nikki Ambrose shares,

> Some of it is the "ain't" the "got." You know, that kind of thing that, that has to be worked on too. You know, part of that is um, because she's not just around me. There are other people that she's around that will use that, use those terms and either don't correct themselves or don't correct her. [Ambrose Family, Interview 2].

Later in the conversation, she says,

> Um, some people use it [AAE] just to be funny, You know. You know that just is using it in jest. That don't even think that, you know that's something that she'll

> pick and up and use like it's…that's the way she's supposed to say it. Um and then some people use those things and don't even think about the fact that it's not…correct. It's not in jest, it's not…that's just what they're using. [Ambrose Family, Interview 2].

Thus, in Nikki's mind, the use of AAE either reflects ignorance or a deliberately humorous choice on the part of those who use it. But in neither case does she believe that AAE represents "correct" or "serious" speech. This particular quote aptly reflects at least a portion of her desire for Necie to use SWE, based on her own perceptions and how she believes others may perceive Necie's use of AAE.

Thus, Nikki Ambrose, like Feliciana Peters, does not use AAE herself (at least by her own accounts) and actively discourages her child from using it. In the other two families, (i.e., the Washingtons and the Masons), parents themselves used AAE themselves and neither focused on its use nor made efforts to discourage its use in their children. In fact, their children did not appear to use AAE themselves, most likely due to being around age-matched peers who do not use it.

These families often move between spaces where AAE is the norm and others where SWE is the norm. They often navigate between the two by learning how to code-switch between the two language varieties. For Belinda Mason and Nancy Washington, AAE appears to be their mother tongue. Still, similar to other native speakers of AAE, they must also master SWE to succeed in school and in most workplace settings. For others, like the Peters, SWE is their native tongue, although they also frequent spaces where AAE is spoken, such as at church. Although they themselves may not actively speak both varieties, they understand and are able to effectively and appropriately communicate using both.

Even if parents themselves only use SWE the home, all four children appear to hear AAE spoken around them on a regular basis. Parents must then decide if they want to alter the way

their children are learning to speak or not. For other parents who use AAE or who code switch, they must also make a choice about whether or not they will explicitly teach their children standardized English or whether they will highlight the existence of multiple dialects at all.

Racial Discrimination and Socialization. These decisions surrounding the use of AAE represent one of the many choices black parents were forced to make, indicating the enduring influence of race, at the very least on literacy practices in black middle class families. Although I am primarily concerned with literacy practices, the implications extend to larger socialization practices. Race differentiates the literacy practices of white and black middle class families because experiences of racial discrimination also do not apply evenly to white and black middle class families (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). In contrast to Lareau's hypothesis, that race does not substantially differentiate the parenting logics of middle class parents, I argue that the "forced" choice of how to address race and discrimination necessarily differentiates black parents from white ones (see Lewis-Mcoy, 2014).

The experience of discrimination also differentiates middle class black families from families of working class or poor backgrounds (Jackson, 2001; Lacy, 2007). Because middle class blacks tend to operate in mixed race settings more often than other blacks, they may also experience racial discrimination on a more frequent basis. In this sense, discrimination positions middle class families in distinct ways based on both race and class. The awareness of this discrimination affects how middle class blacks approach literacy practices, primarily in regards to language use.

Even though the focal children in my study were only four years old at the time of data collection, at least two of them had experienced what their parents believed to be racial discrimination either from peers or from teachers. Parents were then forced with a choice of

whether to address the issue or not discuss it. As members of a racially marginalized population in the US, parents were forced to reckon with its effects in their lives and the lives of their children. Nancy Washington, for one, did not want to address racial discrimination when her child was so young, but found it necessary to address through her conversational practices.

> I try to avoid the racial tension between blacks and whites. Um, she had a {sic} incident a year ago, at her school where some of the older white girls told her she couldn't play in the playhouse because they didn't let people with brown skin in the playhouse. And the other little girls were like four year olds. And they were like you can't play in here, you've got brown skin. And so one of the teachers heard, overheard her say that and…like paused and you know, just… "Did you just say what I think I heard?" And went over there and asked the little girl to repeat herself. And she repeated herself, like she didn't see anything wrong with, with sayin it. So they like pulled them out of the play house and had a discussion and so that's the first time I ever like talked about skin color.

Although Nancy Washington would have liked to avoid discussions of "skin color" and "racial tensions," racial discrimination directed towards her daughter forced her to negotiate how to handle its presence in her daughter's life. Again, this is something that white families who are part of the dominant cultural group have to negotiate less frequently than marginalized groups or people of color (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; McIntosh, 2004).

Nancy, however, was careful in trying to help her daughter see that black people are neither worse than white people nor better than them. She sometimes used her daughter's love of princesses and princess stories to teach these ideas, by explaining what she describes as the qualities of a "true princess," like kindness. Literacy practices, and stories in particular, bolstered Nancy's lessons in racial acceptance and equality. In regards to the incident above, in which her daughter's skin color was used against her, Nancy has the following response.

> Yeah like you know, I, so… so I don't want to have the opposite effect which is her feeling like she's extra special because she has brown skin. And now treats people who don't have brown skin worse. You know what I mean? Like I want her to be proud but also not um, discriminatory to other people. So I, I try not to mention it too tough. I know they talked about Dr. King in school and so I didn't

> want to get into the whole white people was {sic} mean and mistreated black people thing with her. But at school, like they talked about it. They talked about discrimination…I was kinda surprised too because um, when I went to her class the next day, we were talking about the "I Have a Dream" speech and I was like, yeah well you know I tried to talk to her about it. I let her see Dr. King's picture and I let her hear some of his speech but I didn't really get into the whole segregation thing too tough. And the teacher was like, well we, we talked about it. We didn't, I think she said they use like, people with the pink skin were not being nice to people with the brown skin. Like they tried to keep it as simplistic as they could. And I was like, oh, um, well ok! [The Washingtons, Interview 1].

This statement reflects Nancy's overall desire to let her daughter enjoy the fun and play of childhood while she can. In the same way, she would like to keep her "sheltered" from overly academic training, she would like to keep her daughter shielded from what she considers more difficult and mature topics. Furthermore, she feels compelled, not only to support her daughter's sense of racial pride, but to discourage any sense of racial superiority. In this particular instance, Nancy uses both conversation and storytelling, aided by pictures and a recording of Martin Luther King, Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech, to address the racial discrimination that others introduced into her daughter's life.

All four of these middle class parents made ongoing decisions about the use of individual literacy practices based on dynamic circumstances in their lives. Some of these circumstances involve experiences with racial discrimination and inequality, as was the case with Nancy and Jessica Washington. In other cases, associations between race, language, and assumed knowledge or intelligence shaped decisions. For Nikki Ambrose, these associations led her to steer her daughter away from use of AAE. Each of these families decided, whether consciously or not, whether to approach literacy with their children according to middle class models that have been primarily based on white cultural norms or whether to adopt literacy practices more closely associated with black cultural norms.

Certainly, not all literacy practices, whether white or black, middle class or working class, are always or necessarily in conflict with one another. Therefore, there are times when parents' decisions may actually align with multiple cultural traditions. Nevertheless, the awareness of discrimination shapes, in sometimes subtle ways, how parents approach language and literacy with their children. It is most evident among these families in the ways they approach the use of AAE: whether they encourage it, discourage it, or do not directly acknowledge its presence. In the four families who participated in this study, there was not a single unified way of approaching dialect use. Some parents, such as Feliciana Peters, expressly promote use of SWE alone, based on an understanding that her son, as a black boy, will already be perceived to be at a disadvantage academically (Henfield, 2011). Already perceived as a physical threat due to his race and size, it is doubly important for him to demonstrate his intellectual or academic abilities. Therefore, in addition to stressing his reading and writing abilities, she stresses that he must know how to "speak correctly." Each family responds to this awareness of racial discrimination in different ways. The variation between families in regards to discrimination and literacy suggests that individual parents' backgrounds, viewpoints, and the immediate historical, social and material context shape their responses. Their approaches to literacy cannot be predicted by their racial background or class standing alone.

Interestingly enough, though not surprisingly, even naming practices demonstrate the significance of race and how it is perceived. More specifically, when I ask Nancy and Randolph what they would like their pseudonyms to be for this project, Nancy says that she wants to have names that are "race neutral." However, I question whether the names she chooses really are neutral, and Randolph outright disagrees with his wife, referring to the names she initially chooses as, not neutral, but "Caucasian." He says that he wants more distinctively "black

names" like Denzel, Barack, or Darius. In response, Nancy jokingly suggests the name Shaquan for herself, but quickly recants by telling me that she does *not* want me to use the names Darius and Shaquan. She prefers the name Johnny for her husband and Nancy for herself. Eventually, they settle on Nancy and Randolph.

So why do names matter? On some level, it is about perception. Nancy wants to avoid names that signal alignment with any particular racial background. Perhaps this relates to a desire to gain acceptance in white-dominated spaces. Perhaps the Washingtons understand the racial and class based connotations of particular names. Research certainly demonstrates that individuals with names that sound stereotypically black are at a disadvantage on the job market (Bertrand & Mullanaithan, 2004). In any case, the awareness of racial discrimination, even based on names alone, appears to affect not only fictional names, but also the actual names the Washingtons have chosen for their children. Their children's true names are fairly common throughout the United States and, in my own opinion, do not sound recognizably black.

In sum, race was a topic that appeared at various times in conversation with these families. That race was a recurring topic suggests that racial identity is a conscious consideration in how parents raise their children, contradicting Lareau's conclusion that race plays an insignificant role in black middle class parents parenting practices. An awareness of race and racial discrimination was manifested in how these families approach language varieties (i.e., Ambrose and Peters) and in the stories they tell their children (i.e., Washington). Although race did not necessarily affect families' language and literacy practices in a uniform manner, it certainly exerted a shaping force, contradicting Lareau's conclusions about the relative insignificance of race in middle class black parents parenting practices.

Once, again, both race and class impact literacy practices. By way of the increased financial resources and access that accompany middle class status, these families are able to purchase books, spend time reading those books, and enroll in competitive early learning environments. Race plays a role in the oral traditions that have been transmitted within black communities, such as the use of call and response practices in black churches and the use of AAE among black speakers. Racial influence exerts an influence in the form of forced choices that parents must make, particularly in instances when racial or class-based cultural traditions are in conflict with one another. In a sense, middle class black families occupy a space between middle class white families and working class black families. Because of the inter-related aspects of race and class in the United States, whiteness has been overwhelmingly associated with being middle class while blackness has most often meant being working class and poor. In the current project, I find evidence that black middle class families align with the research on both the white middle class and the black poor and working class and their literacy practices.

The current findings suggest that literacy practices among the black middle class are not identical to literacy practices among the white middle class, neither are they identical to practices among the black working class. Patillo (2013/1999) argues that language, along with other aspects of life such as education, occupations, housing patterns, among the black middle class life demonstrate how the black middle class are indeed different from the white middle class. Although middle class blacks enjoy some of the middle class privilege, both blatant and subtle forms of racism and continued racial inequalities and racism differentiate the two groups.

Jackson (2010/2001) and Lacy (2007) observe that the black middle class often find themselves negotiating between various practices and behaviors as they travel back and forth between worlds that are black and white, middle class and poor. In essence, speakers make

choices, based on given settings and interactions, based on the race of those around them. Such usage reflects what Benor (2010) terms the ethnolinguistic repertoire, which speakers use to construct social groupings and to signal identification with a particular community, whether consciously or not. For example, speakers may use features that differentiate AAE and SWE in order to signal particular identification in particular contexts. As does Benor, Lacy (2007) asserts that black people do not make decisions uniformly. There is diversity among the black middle class in terms of how and when they define their identity based on race, class, or any other social marker. In my own study, I found that the four middle class families did not uniformly engage in literacy practices or make identical decisions regarding those practices. In sum, language and literacy, as social practices, are not free from influence of race and class. Similarly, constructions of race and class are not free from the influence of language and literacy, and other social practices.

Conceptual Model and Concluding Statements

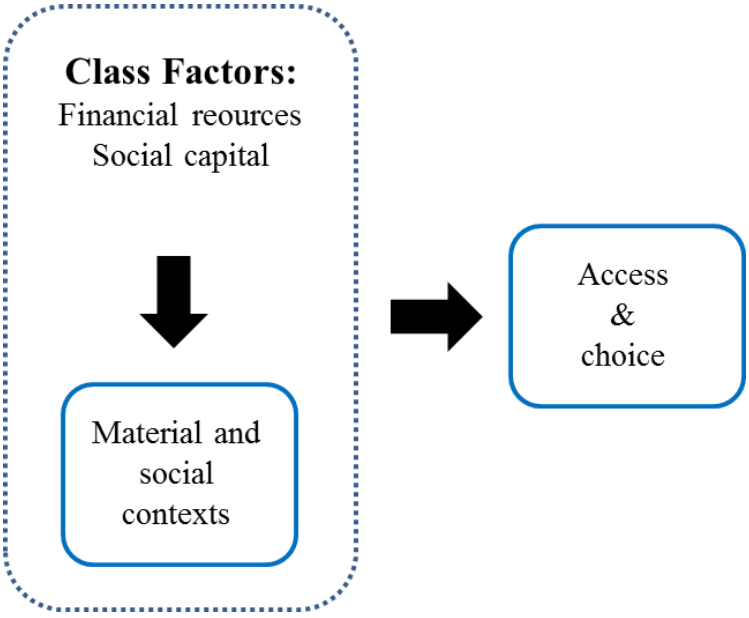
When it comes to literacy practices and broader parenting practices, the impact of class is perhaps more easily apparent than race. Middle class status, partially defined by income, provides access to a variety of resources. Many of these resources are material in nature, leading to concrete differences which are readily observable and quantifiable. Most notably in regards to literacy, middle class families typically have more books in their homes than working class ones. Findings from the current project suggest that these black middle class families also engage in literacy practices similarly to other middle class, and predominantly white, middle class families. They read the numerous storybooks they possess with their children at bedtime. They use a variety of rare words with their children, some of which their preschool-aged children are already using. They expose their children to a variety of educational activities and settings.

They have access to resources through social networks and through their ability to find resources on their own, such as through the internet. In these ways, Lareau's assertion that class unifies families of various racial backgrounds holds true.

However, Lareau's theory fails to explain the lasting impact of race on parenting practices, and in this case, preschool literacy practices. The impact of race is most readily apparent in the oral literacy practices in these families. Although these families occupy the middle class, the spaces they occupy do not necessarily use the same linguistic systems as many white middle class families. In other words, although these families enjoy the benefits of middle class status (financial resources, access to opportunities, a variety of choices pertaining to housing, etc.), they still live in predominantly black spaces and attend predominantly black churches. Although they may live in racial and ethnically diverse neighborhoods and their children may attend diverse or predominantly white preschools, their closest social networks of family and friends are still predominantly black. In these black spaces, AAE thrives. Although SAE also exists in these spaces, findings indicate that AAE remains the norm.

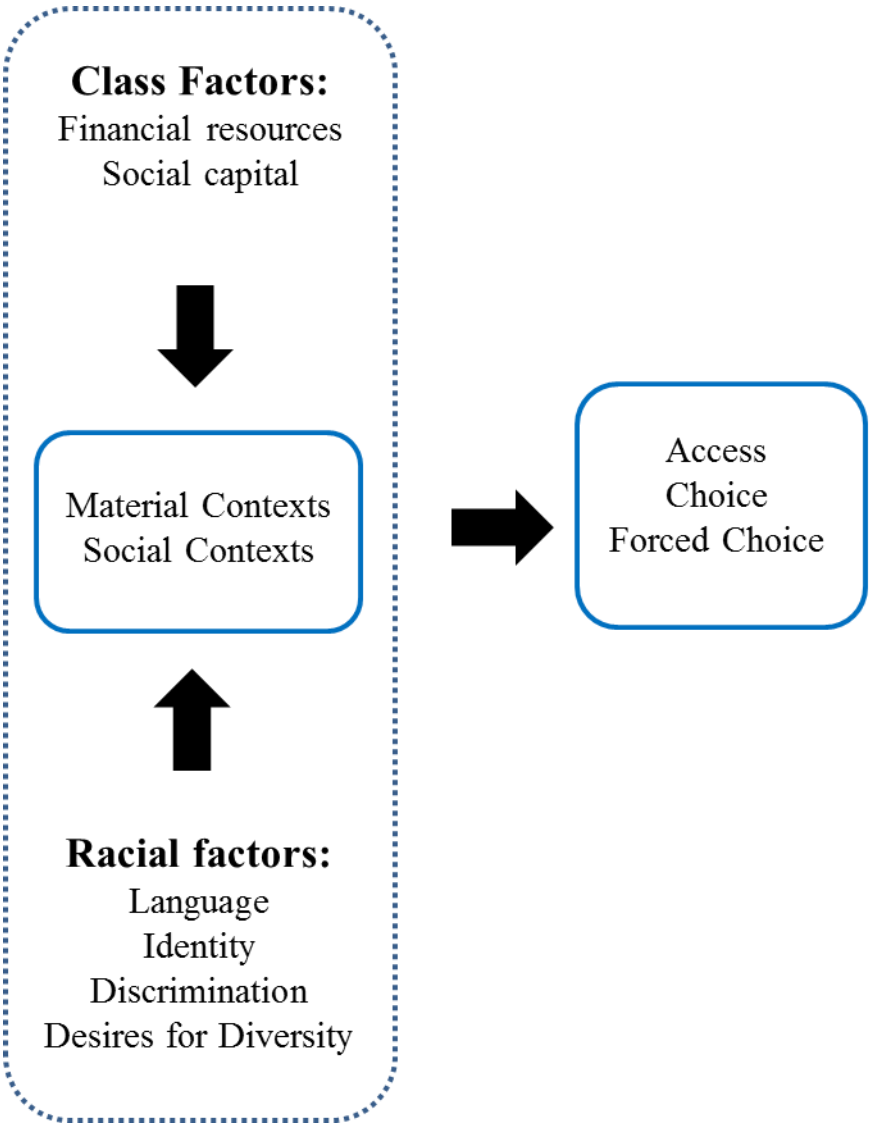
The figure below demonstrates the path of influence that both class and race have upon literacy practices. In essence, literacy practices are directly shaped by the material and social conditions, which are themselves shaped by racial and class factors.

Figure 1: A limited model of social influences on literacy practices



The figure above demonstrates how class independently influences material and social contexts. Scholars, such as Lareau, accurately demonstrate this piece of the larger puzzle. However, this is a limited view that overlooks the impact of race. When race is incorporated into the model, a slightly altered pattern of influence is revealed that is more appropriated captured by the following model.

Figure 2: A more comprehensive model of the influences of race and class on literacy practices



To reiterate, race and class impact the early literacy practices in which black middle class families engage by shaping the material and social contexts in which these families live. In this way, they impart an indirect, rather than direct, influence on literacy practices. Class operates more or less independently by providing access and choice. Race does not operate independently, but complicates the aspect of choice and leading to choices that are forced or imposed upon families. These are "inextricably connections" Jackson (2010) refers to in his own work (p. 162). In contrast to Lareau and in line with Lewis-McCoy, I find compelling evidence

that race has a lasting effect on middle class parenting, particularly when it comes to language and literacy practices.

CHAPTER 6: EXPANSION OF THEMES AND DISCUSSION

I have argued here that the immediate material and social contexts in which black middle class families live are shaped by both race and class which contributes to unique constructions of access, choice and forced choice. Whereas other scholars suggest that race has a minimal impact on shaping parenting practices relating to education, current political changes in the US have brought longstanding issues of race and racism once again to the forefront of the national consciousness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). In 2015 when I conducted this project, racial tensions were still on the rise. Numerous highly-publicized cases of police officers and laypersons killing unarmed young black males with little consequence heightened racial tensions that were highly salient during my fieldwork period.

These heightened racial tensions may have impacted the practice of literacy in these black middle class families. An awareness of racial and gendered prejudices was particularly evident in Feliciana's approach to oral literacy practices with her sons. She remains determined to teach them proficiency in SWE. For other parents, race appears to change the *content* of their literacy practices more so than the *form* of those literacy practices. Nancy Washington, for instance, initiated conversations with her daughter about racial discrimination after a discriminatory incident occurred at her daughter's day care. However, she did not alter her practice of shared bedtime stories and songs with her daughters.

Literacy in electronic forms. Rapid technological advances in the past decade also appear to have contributed to parents' engagements with literacy that differ from those in the past. Children's early interactions with print literacy are no longer limited to paper and pencil.

Today's children also regularly engage with literacy in electronic forms. The internet has become a prominent part of the lives of many families in the US and the availability of handheld devices like cellular phones and tablets has increased rapidly in recent years. In this environment, young children are becoming proficient in use of these devices at increasingly younger ages, sometimes outpacing the skills of their parents. The proliferation of these electronic devices also means that children are interacting with literacy and with other people in new and different ways than children in the past. They are able to connect with people in far-away places and have an increased number of resources at their fingertips. All the children in this project demonstrated frequent interactions with digitally-based literacy in some form. Therefore, these technological changes necessitate greater attention in future studies of early literacy.

Intersections between race and class. While some scholars attempt to determine whether the effects of race or class exert more of an influence on the lives of middle class blacks in the U.S., I argue that attempting to tease them apart or weigh their relative effects against one another is misleading and will undoubtedly fall short. Instead, both factors must be examined simultaneously because they operate in concert with one another to produce unique effects on the black middle class. These unique effects are obscured or invisible when the two factors are separated.

An overarching portrait of literacy practices in middle class black families that incorporates the combined effects of race and class, reveals that they are distinct from other middle class families and from other black families. This distinctiveness of literacy practices among the black middle class is perhaps most evident in language practices. These black middle class families are placed in a situation in which they must negotiate choices that are forced upon

them, particularly in regards to language and identity. These choices affect the language-learning environment of their preschool-aged children. However, the black middle class parents of preschoolers in this project do not make identical choices. Instead, they appear to base their decisions on a host of factors, including their own childhood experiences with racial diversity, their own native language varieties, their individual views on child development and optimal pathways to school success, and the language and literacy skills of their child.

Studying the impact of race and class on middle class black literacy practices is certainly interesting and important in its own right. However, this line of inquiry forms an essential research base to educational efforts aimed at increasing the literacy performance of black students in the United States. While middle class black children outperform their working class and poor black peers, they still do not attain equal levels as their white middle class peers on standardized measures of language and literacy (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). To be sure, standardized measures of literacy bring their own host of shortcomings and critiques and yet so much of future academic and career success is based on these measures. Therefore, efforts to increase educational equity must necessarily take these class- and race-based discrepancies into account.

Indeed, a wealth of research suggests that the greater the alignment between home literacy practices and school literacy practices, the greater the likelihood of success for the child (Gee, 2008; Heath, 1983). However, language scholars are also aware that language and literacy practices are intimately tied to children's senses of identity and cultural affiliation. Therefore, imposing school-based literacy norms in all cultural communities is not advisable. Furthermore, these types of interventional efforts are likely to be unsuccessful to begin with, if they do not consider the ways that literacy functions in the lives of students outside of school. The current

project builds on existing research to demonstrate that literacy practices are tied to a number of many purposes, which may extend beyond mere preparation for school. Depending on the individual families, these purposes may include providing entertainment, helping to support the development of character traits that parents wish to instill in their children, and reinforcing a sense of membership in the black community.

Therefore, studies of literacy practices must also attend to the purposes or beliefs that are tied to those practices. Lareau's work is particularly influential here in its attempt to uncover the systems of logic that drive parenting practices. In a similar fashion, research on literacy practices must attend to the belief systems that are intimately tied to the practice of literacy.

Finally, the intersectional influences of race and class variables in this project help to illuminate why increased access alone, or increased resources alone are unlikely to close gaps between both literacy practices and performances of black and white middle class students. Although these black middle class families have ample financial resources which allow them increased choices similar to their white counterparts, the inclusion of race, and particularly racism, in the equation creates unique and imposed choices that their white counterparts likely do not have to grapple with. These racialized class-based influences must not be underestimated.

Methodological Considerations and Limitations

Although I draw on the work of scholars like Lareau, Bennett and colleagues, and Lewis-McCoy, my own project differs from their work in important methodological ways. First, I am interested in how parents shape their children's learning environments in homes and communities before their children enter formal schooling. Therefore, I had limited contact with children's preschools or the elementary school systems that they have now entered. Whereas

prior previous sociological studies focused on relationships between families and school systems, I primarily examined relationships within families, between parents and children.

Furthermore, I am primarily interested in associations between parenting and language and literacy specifically rather than parenting and education broadly speaking. Therefore, my project is also narrower in its focus than prior work. By focusing on literacy practices specifically, I am able to provide a richer description and analysis of how literacy operates in the lives of these preschool children and their families. The ethnographic case study approach allows for examination of how these practices fit into families' daily lives. However, the narrowed focus may lead to a minimization of how these practices fit into extended areas of children's lives, such as at their day care and preschool settings. Moreover, I did not examine in great detail how literacy plays out in interactions with other families or close friends.

Comparison. Secondly, I did not employ comparative samples in my study. The four families I observed and interviewed all identify as black, middle class families. I did not have comparative samples of black working-class families or white middle class families. As a result, I cannot make any direct comparisons and am limited in my ability to make comparative claims about similarities or differences between these families and other families. Instead, I draw my conclusions based on patterns that emerged across these four families and through indirect or loose comparison to existing research with other black families and other middle class families. Therefore, any comparative conclusions from this study should be read with caution concerning the comparative nature of these families to other middle class families or to other black families.

Race *versus* class. Because I did not include any comparative samples in my study (either middle class whites or working-class or poor blacks), it can be argued that I am unable to make any conclusions regarding the impact of race relative to class. It may indeed be the case

that the literacy practices of middle class black families are more similar to middle class white families than to working-class or poor black families. However, regardless of the relatively small distance between black middle class families and other middle class families in terms of literacy practices, race clearly still plays a role in creating differences between white and black middle class literacy practices in ways that should not be minimized. Moreover, regardless of this distance, findings from this study suggest that the impact of race is difficult to isolate from the impact of class precisely because race does not operate independently from class in the lives of black middle class families.

Generalizability. As a case study, my findings are based on a small sample size. The small number of participants represents both a potential limitation and a potential strength. By focusing on a small number of families, I increase the possibility of examining each family, in great depth. However, the case study design is inherently limited in its ability to generalize to all middle class black families. I am unable to capture or comment on the entirety of literacy practices in all black families or even black middle class families. Indeed, caution must be used in extending findings beyond the particular contexts and lives of these families.

Restrictions in time. My sample is restricted to families whose oldest child is four years old in an attempt to study those whose children are not yet enrolled in formal preschool. This necessarily truncates the period of time that parents spend with their children before their children begin formal schooling. Because I do not examine practices with children at other ages, I am unable to ascertain how practices change over time and across the development of young children from birth to school entry, with each subsequent child, or how they may shift once older children start school.

Reflexivity

As I conducted interviews, I found myself often agreeing with parents in terms of their sentiments towards literacy, schooling, and race. Given this predisposition and my commitment to strengths-based accounts of black culture in the United States, it is possible that I overlooked particular themes in the data in favor of other themes more in line with my own biases. Prior to beginning this study, I found Lareau's conclusions concerning race, class, and parenting were lacking. I based this a priori understanding of her work on findings from other research, such as that of Lewis-McCoy, as well as my own lived experiences as a black middle class woman. As some theorists have suggested it is possible that cultural outsiders may miss subtleties in the ways of knowing or being with a community. Therefore, as a more proximal researcher, or one with a degree of insider status, I intentionally sought to examine closely how race may have been operating in subtle ways among my participants, in addition to how class may have played a role.

Therefore, my research was not only guided by attempts to replicate prior research but also to refute prior research findings as well. Although I attempted to let my data speak for itself, and guide my conclusions, I came to conclusions that were already in line with some of my pre-existing ideas regarding the strengths of black middle class families and the wealth of literacy practices in which they engage. Indeed, concluding that access and choice are central themes aligns with my views that black middle class are alike, but not identical, to white middle class families and that race still plays an important role in defining their experiences. It is possible that my own biases led me to these conclusions out of a desire to confirm my existing biases.

In addition, I also maintain a theoretical commitment to strengths-based accounts of black culture as opposed to deficit perspectives. I am also committed to attempts to de-center

white middle class culture while affirming the ways of knowing and being in black, and other marginalized communities. Therefore, I began this research with a desire to seek out positive findings, or strengths in these families, while perhaps blinding myself to any negative findings, or inadvertently or semi-consciously overlooking any weaknesses that may exist.

Nevertheless, by explaining my coding processes and methods of analyses in detail, I hope readers will agree on the validity of my claims. Should another individual undertake a similar study, I believe that similar patterns of data and themes would emerge. However, I leave it up to the reader to make his or her own conclusions based on the data provided.

Implications and Recommendations

Considering existing educational scholarship, the current study fills a gap in the literature regarding the range of literacy practices in US families. The majority of research in this area is still centered around white middle class families. Although black families have factored into this literature, they have still been predominantly working class and poor. Therefore, the current findings may enhance both educational theory and practice in regards to the variability that exists among middle class families as well as among black families. Even among these four black middle class families, different practices were evident, particularly in regards to AAE use.

A better understanding of how literacy operates in the lives of black middle class children has the potential to contribute to better educational experiences and outcomes for these children. This study also contributes to increased knowledge in educational scholarship regarding the diversity that exists among black families. Again, the goal is not to generalize to all black parents and children but to gain a better understanding of how and why particular black middle class families approach language and literacy practices the way they do. Essentially, this project

attempts to uncover the processes involved in the practice of literacy that are intimately tied to the immediate contexts in which families live.

For practitioners

The current project is intended to inform educational practice, particularly among preschool and early childhood educators. Indeed, educators today are charged with providing culturally relevant and responsive education that incorporates knowledge about the cultural backgrounds of students from diverse backgrounds into classroom instruction. According to many states' professional standards, teachers are expected to examine how students' diverse cultural backgrounds may impact teaching and learning and build their teaching from these understandings (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). Van Kleeck (2006) writes that early childhood educators and interventionists "need to carefully heed information that is available about cultural differences in values, beliefs, and practices" (p. 179). Often times, black children are assumed to represent a single monolith, in which similar literacy practices are shared by them all. The current project may assist educational professionals to support black children who have historically been underserved in the United States educational system.

Findings from this project indicate that there are intersections between race and class that educators must recognize when attempting to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogies in their classrooms. Black middle class students cannot merely be defined and understood by their racial background. Similarly, one cannot assume that they experience literacy no differentially than their white middle class peers. And still, the heterogeneity within this group must also be recognized, as not all black middle class families operate in similar ways. It is imperative to recognize the local contexts in which families live, to better understand how they contribute to the shaping of literacy practices outside classrooms.

These local contexts most likely include some combination of AAE and SWE. As they enter school, middle class black children, regardless of how they themselves speak, may still be learning to differentiate between these two language varieties and how to navigate their usage. Language scholars have often assumed that AAE usage tends to be more prevalent and more divergent from SAE in low-income black communities (Horton-Ikard & Miller, 2004; Wolfram, 2007). However, other research demonstrates that AAE is used among various classes of black communities rather than being confined to those of lower socioeconomic status (Horton-Ikard, 2004; Wolfram, 2007). Finally, ethnographic and observational accounts suggest that middle class adults often grapple with the use of SWE that is primarily used in workplace and predominantly white settings versus the use of AAE in some familial and other predominantly black settings. The differences in language varieties based on setting necessitates an appreciation for how and when to codeswitch between the two varieties.

Middle class black children, even as preschoolers, also exist at the intersection of these two varieties. Data from the current project reflect this same trend. All the children were exposed to AAE, whether in their homes, neighborhoods, or churches and all the children were also exposed to SWE, also in homes or preschool settings. Necie Ambrose, whose speech includes elements of both language varieties, has not yet recognized that her use of AAE is not deemed acceptable within the home. While these middle class black children are negotiating two different racially-based language varieties, they are also engaging in many of the same bedtime storybook reading routines and conversational practices as their white middle class peers. Their homes are filled with many children's books. Their parents often read storybooks with them before bed on a daily basis. They are exposed to a high volume of words that also includes a number of rare words to increase their vocabularies.

Because I examine the early literacy practices of preschool-aged children and their families prior to school entry, this project's findings are relevant to educational practitioners who work with children during this transitional period from home to school. Consequently, these findings fit within the larger framework of school readiness. Some theories of school readiness situate the bulk of preparatory responsibilities on parents and families (Robinson, Larsen, & Haupt, 1995) while others place this responsibility primarily on teachers and other early educators (Purcell- Gates et al., 2014; Ward, 197). On the other hand, some models of school readiness most appropriately assign the responsibilities of preparation to both parents and school professionals (Arndt & McGuire-Shwartz, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Purcell-Gates et al., 2014).

UNICEF (2012) promotes a model of school readiness outlining a tri-part readiness of children, families, and schools. I position my findings within this conception of school readiness that divides the responsibilities of school preparation diffusely in communities. It is not just families or children who must prepare for school, nor teachers and other school staff that must prepare for the children who will occupy their classrooms. Instead, communities must work together to best serve children and meet their needs.

But what does is mean for children, families, and schools to be "school-ready"? For children and their families, being ready involves having the skills and behaviors that form the basis for the types of learning that will be taught in schools and those that will ease the transition from home to school. These skills and behaviors are taught through the types of literacy practices in which preschool-aged children participate. This study suggests that black middle class parents already engage in some practices that align well with school-based literacy expectations, such as shared storybook reading. On the other hand, some of the practices in black middle class homes are intended to help children become proficient in literacy practices in

their home communities, such as call and response that may not as closely align with school-based practices. Thus these children are essentially engaged in at least two sometimes conflicting literacies, even prior to school entry.

For educators and other educational professionals and practitioners, being ready means understanding the varied environments in which students live prior to school entry. A greater understanding of literacy practices in homes is useful for both parents and educators in providing the most supportive transitional experiences from home to school. At the most basic level, recognizing that their black middle class children may be engaged in the challenge of negotiating more than one form of literacy is an important first step. And yet, even amongst a group such as black middle class families, educators must recognize the heterogeneity that exists within that group classification. This kind of knowledge can be cultivated through participation in professional development activities and most importantly by building relationships with individual families. Any form of knowledge will be enhanced by spending time with students and their families in the worlds that they inhabit. By examining a child's particular family history, educators can better know how to best educate that child. The goal is not rely on stereotypes, but to provide educators with as much information as possible that they can access in order to decide what is most relevant to their own students.

As Yarosz and Bennett (2001) advocate, "Understanding more about why ethnic groups' differences in reading to children exist could help programs work more effectively with children and parents…program might all be made more effective if they could be based on a better understanding of the underlying causes of differences in literacy activities among families" (p. 78). Unveiling some of these underlying causes is one of the aims of the current project and one of the of the reasons it is so timely. By going beyond the generalizing terms of class and race,

this project unearths how and why those factors shape and are shaped by literacy practices. Some of the more specific factors that have an impact on literacy practices are the racial make-up of settings that families frequent, including church and preschool, the racial makeup in which parents themselves were raised, and the purposes served by literacy practices in individual families.

In the same way that class and race may lead to overgeneralized predictions, "family income is not a good basis" for understanding how literacy practices operate in individual families (Yarosz & Barnett, 2001, p. 78). Family literacy is shaped most directly by the specific contexts in which families live, though these contexts are indeed shaped by labels of social address such as those defining race, class, and so forth. Learning about individual family contexts is certainly not an easy undertaking, but can be aided by informal observations during school or conversations with families (Compton-Lilly, 2009). As Compton-Lilly (2009) stresses, "recognizing the cultural and racial background of students is not about memorizing lists of characteristics associated with children from particular backgrounds. Respecting differences is a nuanced, subtle, and personal process of getting to know individual children, monitoring our interactions, and crafting those interactions in ways that allow children to build upon their strengths and be themselves" (p. 89).

Furthermore, educators must also broaden conceptualizations of literacy beyond cognitive-based models alone to include social and interactive aspects of literacy practices. Literacy must be understood and skills must be developed in ways that support children in becoming proficient users of language and literacy in the multiple communities they inhabit. As Vogt and Mastin (2013) state, "literacy practices are designed to help children develop culturally appropriate communication styles and verbal competence in the communities in which they live"

(pp.XX). Again, this may mean becoming proficient at call and response practices while also being able to read storybooks independently. Early literacy instruction must then be tailored to help children not only master individual, isolated cognitive principles, but also to communicate effectively with those around them using oral, paper-based print, or digitally-based print practices.

In many ways, school-based literacy practices are intended to foster literacy development in a manner that will support continued development of literacy through the early grades and beyond. Early literacy ideally lays the foundation for academic success, which is primarily dependent on print literacy skills in SWE. However, literacy practices may also be intended to support social interactions, both in and outside of school. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how and why literacy is practiced in the homes of black middle class children and their families so as to support multiple literacy development.

For researchers

In addition to practical implications, the information gained from this study also has theoretical implications. In order to be useful, theories of early education and parenting must adequately and accurately explain or predict observed patterns of behaviors. However, building robust theories requires attention not only to observed practices among parents and children, but also to the motivating factors that shape those practices. In regards to black middle class families, these practices are influenced by the immediate material and social contexts in which families live that are themselves shaped by intersections of race and class factors. Incorporating these contributing factors into educational theory will lead to more accurate representations of how parents engage in literacy with their young children.

Findings from this project again reinforce definitions of literacy that move beyond purely cognitive, individual skills. Literacy is practiced in social communities, in ways that are meaningful and appropriate for those communities. In black middle class families, literacy is practiced in ways that align with other middle class families, with other black families, and in ways that may be unique to black middle class families due to their intersectional positioning. In short, it is imperative to examine race and class not as isolated variables, but as intersecting and inter-related factors that impact the early educational environments of black middle class children. Educational theorists must account for intersecting social influences in predictive and explanatory models of literacy and broader parenting practices in black families. Models of literacy that do not address this race-class intersection and its role in shaping language and literacy, as social practices, will necessarily be limited.

In other words, these models must closely examine the subtle ways in which class and race continue to operate in the lives of black, and all families, in the United States. In this study, race was found to have an enduring influence on language practices in particular, fueled by patterns of racial segregation and likely influenced by a notions of racial identity that may be heightened when living at the intersection of predominantly white and predominantly black segregated spaces. Literacy practices appear to be fueled in part by the middle class standing of these black parents, who have become accustomed to negotiating middle class settings in the United States that continue to be dominated by white individuals.

Still, the resources available to these black middle class families also allow leveraging of those resources to provide a number of early educational experiences and opportunities that other middle class families are typically privy to. This study suggests that Lareau's theory of concerted cultivation also applies to the literacy practices of black middle class parents.

However, Lareau's account falls short in failing to address the ways in which race and class interact to exert unique influences on the parenting practices of black middle class families. Lewis-McCoy's (2014) model, that attends to the subtle workings of both class and race *simultaneously*, paints a more accurate or well-defined model of black middle class parenting. My own findings most closely align with the model put forth by Lewis-McCoy, by demonstrating that the impact of race and class cannot be extracted from one another. Furthermore, these intersecting variables lead to unique literacy practices among black middle class families that in many ways align them with the heavily print-based literacy practices of white middle class families but do not completely detach them from the more orally-based literacy practices common among working class black communities. Finally, this project demonstrates the need to allow for exceptions like the Washingtons who ascribe to literacy practices more common to working class families despite their high levels of income and education. Heterogeneity amongst families cannot be forgotten.

Future Directions

Comparative studies could provide additional information regarding which aspects of early literacy practices in black middle class families may be a result of race- or class-based influences, or whether the two may in fact be so highly intertwined as to be inseparable. Two forms of comparative studies could be constructed: one examining middle class families of various racial backgrounds and another study comparing black families of various class backgrounds. Certainly, continued focus on black and white families renders invisible the experiences of families of Latino, Native American, Asian, and multiracial backgrounds. Future work with families of other racial and ethnic backgrounds will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the early literacy experiences of all children in the US.

Another logical extension of this project would be a longitudinal study that follows black middle class children from preschool and into early formal schooling to examine whether there are any links between early literacy practices and early literacy outcomes. Longitudinal studies such as this would provide additional information regarding what types of language and literacy practices are most closely linked to academic success. This project suggests that black middle class families engage in early literacy practices in much the same way as white middle class families. And yet, "middle class African Americans do not perform as well as middle class whites on standardized tests" (p. 3, Patillo, 2013), and in literacy measures in particular (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). It is possible, as Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005) suggest, that the same predictive models (linking home literacy practices and preschool literacy skills) used in white middle class families may not apply in the same way to black families. Additional research investigating possible associations that may link literacy practices and outcomes will help to inform current literacy theories and instruction.

Patillo (2013) argues that "it is essential to continuously refer back to the ways in which the black middle class is *not equal* to the white middle class" (p. 3). For instance, although middle class blacks may enjoy incomes that are comparable to middle class whites, large disparities in wealth persist in this country, based on the generational amassing and passing of financial resources from one generation to the next (Patillo, 2013). Although white and black families may be classified as middle class, differences in wealth obscure some of the ways in which they continue to be different from one another. Quantitative analyses could also be added to investigate possible associations between demographic variables, structural factors, and literacy practices. Existing studies have examined these associations (Raikes et al., 2012) but few have focused specifically on black middle class families.

The use of AAE in black middle class families also warrants further examination. Its linguistic features have been identified in great detail and there is also a good deal of information regarding the language and literacy practices that often accompany the use of AAE in black communities (Craig & Washington, 1999; Green 2002; Horton-Ikard & Miller, 2004; Lee, 2012). However, documentation of its use among middle class blacks is still relatively limited. Furthermore, there is still little consensus regarding the use of AAE and its relation to early literacy skills (Charity, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004; Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig et al, 2009; Craig & Washington, 1999; 2004; Thompson, Craig, & Washington, 2004). The current study indicates varied beliefs and approaches to the use of AAE in black middle class families. Closer examination may point to particular constellations of social factors that help to explain families' orientations towards its use.

Many of the future studies I have proposed involve examination of home and family environments. In line with UNICEF's model of school readiness, further work must also incorporate examining the roles and perspectives of early education practitioners. This may include investigating how literacy is conceptualized in early educational settings along with an exploration of recommendations made to black middle class parents.

In closing, literacy research with black middle class families is admittedly still in its infancy. The current project serves as a starting point for continued research with this often overlooked demographic. Far from providing all the answers, this project raises important questions. Do these findings extend to the majority of black middle class families in the United States? How are early literacy practices related to literacy performance of black middle class students in school? How does African American English factor into the literacy practices of black middle class children? At the same time, this study provides valuable information

regarding preschool literacy practices in black middle class families. It is notable that although middle class status unites families across race, race still accounts for unique configurations of literacy. Furthermore, findings illustrate the imperative to consider race and class as inter-related, rather than isolated, variables. Similarly, literacy must be understood, not as an isolated skill, but as a social practice embedded within communities. As such, children must learn to be proficient users of literacy both in homes, communities and in schools. Keeping these findings in mind has the potential to lead to more comprehensive educational theories in regards to black families as well as improved instructional methods.

APPENDIX A: PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.
You may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.
Your Name: _____ Today's Date _____
Your Date of Birth_____ Sex: M / F
Your Ethnicity or Race(s): -

_____

Occupation:

_____

Do you have a child who is 3 years old? Y / N
Does your 3-year-old receive any early intervention services? Y / N
If so, please explain: -

_____

Child's Name _____ Child's Date of Birth -

_____

Child's Ethnicity or Race(s): _____
Sex: M / F
Your relationship to the Child:

_____

(for example: mother, father, grandparent, legal guardian, etc.)
Primary Caretaker's Relationship to Child:

_____

Secondary Caretaker's Relationship to Child:

_____

Do both caretakers live in the home with the child? Y / N
Approximately how much time does the child spend with each caregiver?

_____

_____

Number of adults (≥ 21 yrs.) living in the home: _____
Number of children (<21 yrs.) living in the home: _____
Please list other children in the home:

Name	Sex	Date of Birth
_____		
_____		
_____		
_____		

Primary Caretaker's Highest Level of Education Completed:

____ Some High School ____ Bachelor's Degree
____ High School Diploma ____ Master's Degree

____ Associate's Degree ____ Doctoral Degree

Secondary Caretaker's Highest Level of Education Completed:

____ Some High School ____ Bachelor's Degree
____ High School Diploma ____ Master's Degree
____ Associate's Degree ____ Doctoral Degree

Household Income:

____ Less than $25,000/yr. ____ $100,000 < $129,999/yr.
____ $25,000 < $49,999/yr. ____ $ 125,000 < $149,999/yr.
____ $50,000 < $74,999/yr. ____ $ 150,000 < $199,999/yr.
____ $75,000 < $100,000/yr. ____ > $200,000/yr.

Marital Status: Single / Married / In-home Partner / Separated / Divorced

In what country was the primary caretaker born?

_____

In what country were the primary caretaker's parents born?

_____

In what country were the primary caretaker's grandparents born?

_____

In what country was the secondary caretaker born?

_____

In what country were the secondary caretaker's parents born?

_____

In what country were the secondary caretaker's grandparents born?

_____

Have any caretakers or parents of caretakers spent significant amounts of time living outside the United States? Y / N

If so, please describe (relationship to child, country, length of time):

_____

Languages spoken in the home:

_____

Does your child attend preschool? Y / N

If not, does your child attend daycare? Y / N

If yes, what type (Please describe)?

_____

How old was your child when he/she first started preschool, daycare, etc?

_____

Please estimate how often your three-year-old child does these activities (within the past year):

Activity	**Every day**	A few times a week	**Once a week**	A few times a month	**Once a month**	Rarely/ Never
Play Sports Please list the specific sports:						
Attend cultural activities (dance, music, boy/girl scouts, etc.) Please list the specific activities:						
Attend Religious Services or Activities						
Go to a public playground or park						
Tell stories						
Recite Nursery Rhymes						
Go to a public library						
Go to a museum						
Watch television						
Read storybooks with a caregiver						
Read from a holy book with a caregiver						
Play outside in the yard or neighborhood						
Attend sporting events						
Activity	**Every day**	A few times a week	**Once a week**	A few times a month	**Once a month**	Rarely/ Never
Listen to music What types of music?						
Sing songs						
Practice saying or writing ABCs						
Practice writing numbers						
Use a computer? For what purposes?						
Play music or attend music classes						
Attend a school event (could be for a sibling)						
Draw pictures						

Scribble or Pretend to write						
Look at books or magazines alone						
Go to the supermarket with family						
Assist cooking/preparing meals						

Other regular activities not listed?

APPENDIX B: INITIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

This guide serves as a general guide to elicit conversation regarding beliefs about learning and preparation for school. Initial questions are followed by probing questions, designed to elicit more detailed information if necessary.

To Participant:
I would like to talk about your child's activities and how children learn in general. You are welcome to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

1. What kind of activities do you do regularly with your child at home (TV, games, sports, cultural activities, visit the park or library, the store, art projects, etc.)?
    a. How often do you do those things?

2. How do you pick the activities your child does? Are decisions based on:
    a. Child's interest?
    b. Desire for diverse experiences?
    c. What you did when you grew up?
    d. What you didn't get to do as a child?
    e. What other children are doing?
    f. To pass the time?

3. What do you think are some of your child's favorite things to do?

4. Describe a typical day like for you and your child, if such a thing exists.
    a. Does your child follow a particular schedule or routine?
    b. Who would you say determines the course of the day: you, your child, or both? How so?

5. What do you think is important for children to know and be able to do at four years of age?

6. How important is it for four-year-old children play and have fun?

7. How important is it for four-year-olds to start learning and get ready for school?

8. What would you say "preparing/readying your child for school" means?

9. How do you think children learn new things?

10. At what age do you think literacy teaching and learning should start?
    a. Why? Based on what?

11. How do you think most children learn to read and write?
    a. Role of parents (mothers vs. fathers)? Role of preschool teachers? Role of elementary school teachers?

12. What are your thoughts about learning standardized English?

13. Is your child enrolled in preschool?
    a. If so, at what age did you first enroll your child?
    b. If not, do you intend to enroll your child in preschool?

14. What influenced your decision to enroll or not enroll in preschool?
    a. Work schedule?
    b. Opportunities for your child to learn?
    c. Opportunities for your child to have fun?
    d. Your own experiences as a child?
    e. Recommendations for family or friends?
    f. Recommendations from professionals (educators or pediatricians)?
    g. Cost of preschool?
    h. Other?

15. How easy or difficult was the decision to enroll or not enroll?
    a. What made it easy or difficult?

16. If your child is in preschool, how or why did you decide to enroll your child at this particular preschool? What did you know about the preschool before you decided to enroll your child there?
    a. How important was:
        i. Reputation of the school?
        ii. Distance from home or work?
        iii. Cost of attendance?
        iv. Academics?
        v. Having fun?
        vi. Others at the school?
    b. How easy or difficult was the decision? What made it easy or difficult?

17. Describe the preschool (hours, location, size, teachers, philosophy).

18. Did you consider other options for child care? If so, what where they?

19. What kinds of information or advice have you gotten about preschool?
    a. Where and from whom did you find or get this information?

20. Where do you get parenting advice in general?
    a. Friends?
    b. Your parents? Other parents?
    c. Magazines and books?
    d. TV?
    e. Teachers and school staff?
    f. Pediatrician?

g. Pastors, ministers, other religious sources

APPENDIX C: CLOSING INTERVIEW GUIDE

This guide serves as a general guide to elicit conversation regarding beliefs about learning and preparation for school. Initial questions are followed by probing questions, designed to elicit more detailed information if necessary.

To Participant:
In this interview, I would like to follow-up on your answers to earlier questions, comments, or ask about things I may have observed in the past month. You are welcome to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

1. Would you say that I have gotten to see or experience a typical day in you and your child's life?
    a. If so, how so?
    b. If not, how is it different?

2. Have your ideas about how children learn to read and write changed over the course of the past month?
    a. If yes, how so?

3. In what ways do you think your child is like other children his/her age, in terms of the way he/she talks?

4. In way ways do you think your child is unlike other children his/her age, in terms of the way he/she talks?

5. In what ways do you think your child is like other children his or her age, in terms of learning to read and write?

6. In what ways do you think your child is different from other children his or her age, in terms of learning to read and write?

7. In the past month, have you received information or advice about preparing your child for school?
    a. If yes, what are some examples of that advice or information?
    b. Where or from whom did you receive that information?

8. Have you noticed any major changes in your child's language or literacy skills in the past month?

9. Do you and your child's other caretakers usually agree or disagree on how best to prepare your child for school? In what ways do you agree or disagree?

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your child's language and literacy skills?

APPENDIX D: TABLE OF IN VIVO WORD FREQUENCIES

In the table below, interview counts (Int.) indicate how many times the interviewee said the word, but not always in direct reference to literacy.

Term	Ambrose				Washington					Peters					Mason			
	Int.		Obs.		Int.			Obs.		Int.		Obs.			Int.		Obs.	
Book	0	6	8	3	1	1	5	11	8	2	2	2	1	12	0	0	22	30
Read	0	13	4	22	0	6	6	2	0	0	4	14	1	9	9	14	30	6
Write	0	0	1	1	0	3	2	3	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	7	3
Spell	0	3	3	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	3
Word	1	12	9	14	1	7	0	7	0	2	4	18	1	0	0	7	18	9
Name	0	10	4	2	3	1	5	6	0	0	4	4	0	2	0	2	11	5
Story	6	1	2	9	1	1	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0
Oral	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Print	0	0	5	6	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	1
Computer[4]	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
School[1,2,5]	19	27	1	2	14	0	14	5	2	52	30	10	9	16	26	28	23	3
Independence/ Independent	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Talk	12	12	13	14	16	5	8	20	3	8	8	27	3	4	4	7	39	10
Speak	1	0	0	2	3	2	0	0	1	0	5	9	0	0	1	0	0	0
Language	1	0	4	3	1	0	0	0	2	0	3	6	0	1	0	5	4	1
English	0	0	1	3	1	1	0	0	0		2	1	0	0	0	1	4	0
Text	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	1	3	0	0	7	1	0	2	0	1	0
Number	0	0	0	4	0	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	1	1	6	0
Letter	0	7	3	7	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	4	2
Sound	0	15	6	4	2	1	8	2	0	1	0	8	0	1	9	2	3	2
Phonics	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teach/ Teacher	5	31	0	4	9	7	0	2	1	21	11	4	1	25	10	13	11	1
Learn	0	14	0	1	4	5	3	9	2	2	3	6	0	5	8	17	4	1
Practice	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	3	0	0

Pencil	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pen	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Paper	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	6	0	2	0	1	10	1
Correct	0	3	2	2	3	0	0	0	2	0	2	5	0	0	1	1	8	2
Proper	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Sentence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0
Grammar	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Alphabet	0	2	2	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Education (& educate?)	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	3	0	1	0	0	4	1
Sing[3]	0	1	5	7	0	0	4	1	3	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	4	0
Sign	1	6	0	6	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	8	2	0	2	0	6	5
Label	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0
TV/Television[3]	2	0	15	0	3	0	1	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	11	0
Magazine	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Newspaper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Words in bold indicate the most frequently used words.

Terms taken from:
[1]Heath (1983)
[2]Purcell-Gates (1996)
[3]Vernon-Feagans et al. (2004)
[4]Addy (2012)
[5]Teale & Sulzby (1986)

APPENDIX E: INITIAL CODES FROM OPEN CODING

1. access to resources - emotional and physical capacity
2. access to resources - finances
3. access to resources - opportunities
4. access to resources - time
5. adult peers
6. authority
7. authority with teachers
8. being outdoors
9. birth order
10. child peers
11. choice of community
12. choice of language
13. church
14. comparison and competition
15. counting & numbers
16. daily life
17. diversity
18. environmental print
19. expert opinion
20. exposure to diversity
21. exposure to people
22. generational influence
23. grandparents and other family
24. homework
25. improvement
26. inequity - class
27. inequity - gender
28. inequity - race
29. litprac - oral dictionary
30. Material Objects
31. natural environment
32. oral dictionary
33. oral literacy
34. parent-child interaction
35. parental employment environment
36. parental literacy practices
37. planned activities
38. reading
39. region
40. religious materials
41. research
42. schedules
43. school
44. school choice
45. school preparation
46. siblings
47. singing
48. technology/electronics
49. toys
50. written communication

APPENDIX F: SECOND PASS CODING

Codes that were cut or subsumed in a second pass:

1. Authority → research, expert opinion
2. Authority with teachers → research, expert opinion
3. Being outdoors → natural environment or planned activities
4. Birth order → siblings
5. Diversity → exposure to diversity
6. Improvement → comparison and competition
7. Literacy practices: oral literacy → oral literacy
8. Region → discarded as a code
9. Written communication → environmental print

Remaining 41 codes

1. access to resources - opportunities
2. access to resources - time
3. adult peers
4. authority
5. authority with teachers
6. child peers
7. choice of community
8. choice of language
9. church
10. comparison and competition
11. counting & numbers
12. daily life
13. environmental print
14. expert opinion
15. exposure to diversity
16. exposure to people
17. generational influence
18. grandparents and other family
19. homework
20. inequity - class
21. inequity - gender
22. inequity - race
23. Material Objects
24. natural environment
25. oral dictionary
26. oral literacy
27. parent-child interaction
28. parental employment environment
29. parental literacy practices
30. planned activities
31. reading
32. religious materials
33. research
34. schedules
35. school
36. school choice
37. school preparation
38. siblings
39. singing
40. technology/electronics
41. toys

APPENDIX G: CODE FAMILIES AND ASSOCIATED INDIVIDUAL CODES

1. Access to Resources
    a. Access to emotional resources and physical capacity
    b. Financial resources
    c. Access to opportunities
    d. Access to time
    e. Educational Materials
2. Material Objects
    a. Educational Materials
    b. Financial resources
    c. Environmental print
    d. Homework
    e. Technology/Electronics
    f. Toys
    g. Religious materials
    h. Written communication
3. Choice
    a. Choice of community
    b. Choice of language
    c. School Choice
4. Interpersonal Interactions
    a. Adults
    b. Child peers
    c. Church
    d. Exposure to diversity
    e. Exposure to people
    f. Generational Influence (primarily indirect, through parental influence)
    g. Grandparents and other family (direct interactions)
    h. Parent-child interactions
    i. School
    j. Siblings
5. School Preparation
    a. Comparison and competition
    b. Counting and numbers
    c. Environmental Print
    d. Homework
    e. Oral Dictionary
    f. Oral Literacy
    g. Planned Activities
    h. Reading
    i. Technology/Electronics
    j. Toys
    k. Written Communication

APPENDIX H: INDIVIDUAL FAMILY DESCRIPTORS

	Ambrose	**Washington**	**Peters**	**Mason**
Family Description	follow the child's lead, but guide the path as well	teachable moments in everyday life	success through hard work	
	literacy as preparation for schooling and living in the world	literacy as an opportunity for learning	literacy as competition and comparison	literacy for enjoyment and the love of learning
	literacy as part of raising an independent, responsible individual	literacy as part of raising a well-rounded individual	literacy as preparation for academic excellence achieved by/through external motivation & explicit instruction	literacy as preparation for academic excellence achieved through an instrinsic love of words and learning
	Ambrose	**Washington**	**Peters**	**Mason**
Most common codes	**school**	talk*	**school***	**school**
* most frequent	teach/teacher	book	teach/teacher*	read
	talk	**school**	talk	teach/teacher
	read	play	word	learn
	word		read	
NOTES:		the only family in which teach or learn was not a most common word; only family with play as top keyword		"talk" not a top keyword, family not explicitly concerned with ways of "talking"
	Ambrose	**Washington**	**Peters**	**Mason**
Daily Activities	Tell Stories			
	Watch TV		Watch TV	Watch TV
	Read storybooks with a caregive	Read storybooks with a caregiver	Read storybooks with a caregiver	Read storybooks with a caregiver
	Play outside		Play outside	Play outside
	Listen to music	Listen to music	Listen to music	Listen to music
	Sing Songs	Sing Songs	Sing songs	Sing songs
	Practice ABCs	Practice ABCs	Practice ABCs	Practice ABCs
	Practice numbers	Practice numbers	practice numbers	practice numbers
	Use a computer (educ games, m	Use a computer (fun, vocab, math	Use a computer (reading, games)	Use a computer (academic games)
		Draw Pictures	Draw pictures	
	Scribble/Pretend to Write	Scribble/Pretend to Write	Scribble/Pretend to Write	
	Looks at books or magazines alo	Looks at books or magazines alone	Looks at books or magazines alone	
		Read from a holy book (4.5)		

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