GENERATIONS: A TAPESTRY OF LITERACY TRADITIONS IN AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILY

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Definitions of literacy conform to a model that views literacy as a set of skills reflected by a child’s scores on large-scale tests, which are favored in public schools (Street, 1995). Children from culturally diverse backgrounds are expected to engage in literacy practices that may be different from those they participate in at home. Unfamiliarity with these practices can lead to such labels as “at risk” or “low achieving” or other untenable beliefs about student achievement due to a lack of cultural competence in schools. Therefore, this research problematized dominant constructions of literacy and erroneous perceptions of literacy practices within African-American families. This study illustrated the variety of literacy experiences and practices used by one African-American family, consisting most immediately of three active generations of family participants. The study considered how the family negotiated and enacted literacy by analyzing the narratives shared about literacy experiences and examining home literacy practices in this African-American family over a period of six months. The study revealed the value these experiences and practices had on the establishment of family literacy traditions. Additionally, it elucidated significant intergenerational connections as well as historical, educational and social themes that figured into family traditions of literacy.
In memory of:

Maternal Grandparents
Johnnie “Sylvester” Thompson       June 12, 1924-October 26, 2000
Lena Marie Thompson                October 27, 1930-May 10, 1996

Paternal Grandparents
Rev. Abraham Byrd                   December 26, 1915-February 3, 2005
Dorothy Mae Byrd                    May 26, 1916-February 24, 2005

You were the most incredible grandparents a girl could ever have. Thank you for all of the love and strength that you have sent from heaven; it covered me throughout this process. I hope that all that I am makes you proud.

Dedicated to:

To my Mother, Della Byrd, God’s blessing to me. If not for your prayers and God’s love for me, I would not have made it through.

To my handsome nephews...Simon, Devon, and Mason. You are my heart.

To Mrs. Georgia Davis (Rest in Paradise). Thank you for teaching me Philippians 4:13. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”
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I am grateful that you never cease to amaze me the way you love me
From the flicker of an eyelash to the furthest star
From the pyramids to the beat of my heart
From a woman in Somalia to a child in Harlem
We’re created from the same things
I’m grateful that you created me from the same grains from the same things
I’m grateful that you never cease to amaze me the way you loved me—India Arie

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Prologue

As you will learn the telling of my personal story all begins with a small green notebook, a notebook that belonged to my great grandfather Arthur “Doc” Byrd. My father tells me that everyone knew him as Dr. Byrd; this idea of their being a “Dr. Byrd” in the family ultimately became a driving force for me.

I started a project during my time at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in which I decided to explore my family’s literacy practices and traditions. I conducted family interviews, made multiple family observations, and collected artifacts as well. One of those artifacts was that small green notebook. At my final family interview I was elated to hear the stories that embodied the rich history of literacy that belonged to my family. My findings after conducting that small research study were that my family had many shared experiences. For example, my oldest brother and his son (my nephew) shared the same favorite childhood story, “Mr. Popper’s Penguins.” However, that occurrence was not known to them until that interview. My siblings and I shared the same love for choose-your-own and adventure books. One of the most significant shared experiences and understandings of literacy was connected to drawing. My father shared stories about his love of drawing horses and writing stories and my brother shared about creating his own comic books.

Another finding during that study was that literacy was closely tied to school. My brothers and my nephews, as well as I recalled participating in the “Book It” club, a program in school in which students log the books and minutes that they read each week to win prizes like pizza coupons. There was a familial pride in the importance of schooling for access to better life...hard work in school meant getting a good job and
thusly having a successful life. Lastly, the finding that drove my dissertation research involved intergenerational connections. That green notebook was given to me by my father; he found that book packed in a box that my grandfather had stored in the basement. The notebook contained writings and articles like Trosper & Mays general store receipts, Greyhound Bus tickets, Fairbanks’ Standard Scale Tickets, letters and farming product notes. The presence of this literacy artifact brought forth stories that carried the voices of two generations that were no longer present. These narratives reached back into my family’s history of literacy. It was really at that moment that I became enthralled with my story, and the story of other families.

I found the passion in finding my own family’s history of literacy and my curiosity began to build about other families. I saw how probing for literacy practices in my family revealed deep, rich, and dynamic traditions that I now conceptualize as a tapestry of literacy traditions.

Another benefit that I see to investigating my own story as well as the story of other families is that these recollections serve as access points in which to archive the history of African-American families. As I conducted research on the Thompson family, I dug deeper into my own family. This kept me invested in my research constantly.

Throughout this dissertation I share stories of my own personal literacy experiences. One in particular led me to write this prologue.

After hours of sorting through my observation notes, I found myself thinking of all the ways that my family story was similar and different from the family in my study. I remembered talking to my Dad about a scrapbook that he and his father (my grandfather) had created together. I asked him if he still had the book and if he knew
where it was located. He directed me to the basement where I had found so many other treasures before. I called my Mom to help me search, as she is much more organized and patient than my father. She stumbled across an old rusty black metal box with a handle and clasp. She said that my grandfather always kept things that were important to him in secure places and that I was sure to find something in the box. I was happy to see that the box was not locked. I opened it and the contents’ age left a distinguished aroma in my nose…but I began to thumb through old pictures, several pieces of paper. I found my father’s graduation program, old assignments, and letters…lots of letters that my grandmother wrote to my father when he was away at school. Then I came across type-written letters that appeared most official as they were addressed: Honorable Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States, The White House, Washington, D.C.; Dear Mr. President. At that moment I could not have imagined what the content of those letters could possibly be, but I was eager to find out.

That afternoon, I found three letters that my great-grandfather wrote to President Eisenhower, proclaiming that he indeed had a cure for TB. He noted how the cure was a combination of two herbs and that he believed that God sent this remedy to him from the heavens above (he was a very religious man…as was my grandfather, Pastor Byrd). As I read further, I saw that my great-grandfather had signed this letters Dr. A. Byrd. I remembered my grandfather telling me about how his father was referred to as Doc Byrd. I decided to ask my Dad, about this title. “Oh yeah, people would come to him for all kinds of ailments and ask for remedies…he would take dirt and stuff out of the garden…he was like an Indian Medicine Man. That’s just what he did…he mixed up medicine and farmed down there in Shreveport, LA and then he moved to Pittsburgh,
Hearing this, I was in awe of a man I had never even met…and somehow I realized we were connected.

This entire dissertation process has for me has come full circle. Like my great-grandfather I too want to share with the world what I believe will help remedy the lack of value placed on the significance of home literacy practices and traditions in the school setting as well as the limited definition of literacy that does not fully appreciate or acknowledge the worth of these practices and traditions in children.

While I examined the multiple letter drafts (handwritten and typed) my great-grandfather had crafted I believed he took great pride and consideration in his word and content choices. In those letters I saw his literacy practices and felt his reverence for education and writing, despite having very little (if any) formal education himself. Even though, my great-grandfather was not an actual doctor his desire and thirst to share his knowledge will be realized when I become Dr. Kelly Marie Byrd. Along with my great-grandfather’s letters and the green notebook, my dissertation will be a thread in the Byrd Family tapestry of literacy traditions. This story will reverberate for many generations to come.
Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Dominant constructions of literacy education in the United States are problematic. They include limited or narrow definitions of literacy and contribute to disadvantaged ways of thinking about African-Americans and literacy and reinforce deficit ideologies in schools.

In countering these narrow definitions, Brian Street (1995) discusses two models of literacy that are in direct opposition to each other. These models are important to understand as they depict literacy in a manner that makes clear why home literacy practices are important. The first model is the *autonomous model*. It views literacy as a set of skills that are reflected by a child’s scores on large-scale tests, like the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or the Missouri Program Assessment (MAP). Ultimately, these skills are conceived as contributing to *essayist literacy*. “Essayist literacy” is regarded as academic writing or decontextualized information. As a result, a child from a culturally or linguistically diverse background, relative to the mainstream, may only encounter this type of literacy in school or be assumed to utilize, understand, and engage in practices associated with “essayist literacy.” These practices may be very different from those in which they participate in their families at home or out of school environments. This limited view of literacy does not include the potential needs of children from diverse backgrounds or reflect the literacy practices, traditions, and values they bring from home.

Unlike the first model that narrowly defines what can be considered literacy, the second model is the *ideological model of literacy*. This view envisions literacy as shaped by the practices within a community or family (Street, 1995). For schools this would be
inclusive of those literacy practices that occur within families and more specifically for those I wish to research in this study.

The narrative produced by dominant and mainstream voices redundantly and erroneously echoes negative commentaries on the conceptions of literacy in the African-American community. The work of Betty Hart and Todd Risely (1995) is a key study that feeds into the deficit thinking about African-American children’s so called “lack” of language skills and “poor” performance in school. The study uses disproportionate numbers of African-American participants to make claims that children from lower SES backgrounds come from impoverished home environments and thus have scanty academic success (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). While 12 of 13 children representing the upper SES level were European American, all of the children in the study from the lowest SES level were African-American, thus equating the linguistic deficiencies they report to only African-American children. Researchers and educators that conform to and support these dominant views incorrectly situate their thinking to include such fallacies as African-American families do not value literacy education in the home. Similarly, African-American children are seen as entering the classroom with diminished literacy skills and thus are low achieving. As a counter narrative to these dominant views, my research problematizes dominant constructions of literacy and illustrates value in the contributions of family traditions and their impact on children.

As I began to frame this study, I considered how my own personal experiences with literacy within my family were so richly profound and reflective of my affection towards literacy. Therefore, for this study I investigated literacy within the family not solely as a disentangled practice free from the constraints and dictates of school, but
rather as a practice developed within the home environment and outside of school. Not only did I focus my research within the frame of family, I also had a focal child from within the family. Special attention was given to the focal child, but I further explored the development of literacy around the child as it related to an expanded family definition of literacy. Further, this study examined home literacy practices in an African-American family, The Thompasons, and considered how this family defined and enacted literacy. Research indicates that narratives can convey legacies of literacy practices that are embedded in some African-American families and further elucidate the value of literacy practices (Gadsden, 1992; Mosley-Howard & Evans, 2000). Therefore, I considered the narrative as a point of concentration for this study. Narratives, or the talk generated around literacy events, were analyzed as personal and historical accounts of literacy that could potentially yield counter narratives to the dominant autonomous model in schools (Harris, 1992; Heath, 1983; Gadsden, 1992). Lastly, the study elucidated generational connections that figured into the development of family histories of literacy. The following research questions were investigated:

1. What do home literacy practices look like?
   a. What are the roles of participants in home literacy practices?
   b. What purposes do home literacy practices serve for the family and the focal child?
   c. What artifacts or cultural resources are used during literacy practices?

2. How do family members discuss and describe their experiences with literacy practices?
   a. What literacy narratives do family members (adults and children) tell?
b. Are there intergenerational links between literacy narratives, literacy events and literacy practices?
   
i. What is the nature of those intergenerational links?

   ii. In what ways do intergenerational links contribute to the development of family histories of literacy?

c. What family ideologies of literacy are constructed through the interplay of literacy practices and literacy narratives?

**Purpose of the Study**

I would like to set this research study as the antagonist to the dominant voice of literacy education of African-American children, by typifying the rich and invaluable knowledge of literacy that can be gained from the home context. Ultimately, the intention of this research is to provide a rationale for curriculum to be “permeable” in allowing for cultural considerations of literacy (Dyson, 1993).

**Equity in Curriculum**

![Figure 1.1](image-url)  
*Figure 1.1.* Depiction of equity in curriculum

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1 Please note this image was adapted from an image used at the Midwest Equity Assistance Center of Kansas State University: Educational Equity Leadership Conference; February 19-20, 2015. Original graphic: [www.thelearningkaleidoscope.wordpress.com](http://www.thelearningkaleidoscope.wordpress.com)
When I look at the figure above, I ask myself…what do I see in these pictures? In the first picture, I see what appear to be children attempting to watch a baseball game over a wall. Only two out of three of the children can actually see the field. All of the children seem to have box to stand on, but only one seems to have the maximum benefit of the box. This figure is often used to look at the inequitable use of resources for students, often students of color in urban communities that have limited access to academic resources, such as updated textbooks, computers, school supplies, tutoring, test prep services, and funding opportunities for outside educational fieldtrips, I would further extend access to resources to include educational capital that merited culturally diversity in the curriculum and additionally legitimized the cultural capital that all children bring to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The idea is that if the ultimate goal is to successfully educate children that there must be equality or sameness in the distribution or allocation of resources, but I would argue that accordingly, we must also have equity and fairness in those resources as well. For example, if we see access to curriculum as a resource, we can create equality by exposing students to the same mainstream, dominant curriculum. However, we do not have equity unless the curriculum includes and values the differentiated and unique experiences of all children. Geneva Gay (2000) considers that when educating African-American children that we should attend to, “The cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective… It teaches to and through strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming.” If we want to pursue equity in education, we cannot continue to leave out from the curriculum the imperative cultural experiences of African-American students. This would include
expanding the definition of literacy and what is considered viable literacy that involves uses of literacy outside of the classroom, the curriculum then lends itself to all children being competent literacy users and not just those that fit into the restricted autonomous model of literacy. Ultimately, I see the classroom as a place that we lose out on the richness of children’s literacy experiences when we close off the space in which those experiences can exist.

I would like to offer another figure that I feel describes the experience in the classroom, when we are dismissive of primary factors that contribute to a child’s literacy learning.

![Figure 1.2](image-url) Depiction of constrictions placed on learning and ways of thinking

In this picture a teacher is restricting the student’s open minds filled with their personal ideologies and all the ways of learning and thinking they bring to the table. Jerome S. Bruner (1996) would describe these ways of thinking as being shaped by a student’s “cultural toolkit.” Here in this figure it appears the teacher is metaphorically

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2 Please note that the above image was taken from blog site: Paging Doctor Me, People helping People. It was shared by Camilla Thoby on her “Open Minds” Facebook page. Original graphic: [wwwpagingdoctorme.com](http://www.pagingdoctorme.com)
throwing out the tools that students bring with them. In this class it is only necessary for students to have a Phillips head screwdriver, so if they have a wrench, hammer, flat head screwdriver, super glue and string there is no need for those items and they are discarded. Ultimately, this idea results in value that is placed specific limited ways of thinking about and mastery of a certain skill set. This is a problem, especially for those African-American children whose senses exist outside of the mainstream dominant conceptions language and literacy that remain in the classrooms. Therefore, I see this research as an access point to the richness of literacy experiences that may exist within African-American children and families.

**Significance of the Study**

Here I would like to share the first of several of my personal life experience stories with literacy. I share these stories to further uncover the ways in which my own literacy experiences are connected to my work.

*My father gave me a small green notebook that was full of yellowed, tattered pages. The book’s pages had faint sketchy handwriting that reminded me of my grandfather’s penmanship. There are several old receipts from a textile store in Louisiana that are almost cataloged in a chronological order and grocery lists. Some of the pages even list the names of individuals and the accumulated salary for their days of labor. The components of this notebook are meticulously kept records of my great-grandfather’s, Arthur Byrd’s, day-to-day interactions. At the time of receiving this artifact I had no idea the significance or impact it would have on my family. It held a tradition of literacy that my family and I would discover.*
The aforementioned words were taken from a small research study I conducted with my very own family. During the family interview this small green notebook became a focal point in which our shared experiences with literacy were centered. My mother shared stories of my grandmother teaching her how to write her name, letters, and numbers before ever entering the classroom. My mother took great pride in the knowledge she acquired from her mother. I could see how much the literacy practices of previous generations aided in carrying out day-to-day interactions, but also represented a passion for being “smart”. Imparting these narratives or particular stories allowed the voices of my great-grandparents’ value and respect for literacy to be echoed through my parents’ recollections. I soon began to see how my family’s experiences with literacy were being keenly woven into a tapestry. The tapestry included those experiences, my family’s literacy practices, my family’s narratives about literacy and the values carried and infused throughout these narratives. Ultimately, the weaving of these threads culminated in a tapestry of literacy traditions as a part of the Byrd family history. I had no idea that this experience with my own family as well as my personal accounts of literacy as a child would become the foundation of my current research. My research inquiry was driven by desire to reveal the patterns within the tapestries of other African-American families, therefore, unveiling their family literacy traditions, family literacy histories, and family values for literacy. Additionally, I was interested in the impact and influence of literacy within families on children.

It is not my presumption that ALL African-American families and children will employ literacy practices that diverge from the mainstream school notions of literacy, focused around district and state assessments or standardized grade level expectations.
Both language and literacy practices that children develop are those they gain through socialization within their communities of practice (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, as this idea relates to language use, children that are socialized within communities that utilize Mainstream American English (MAE), will likely speak this variety of English, regardless of race. However, Geneva Smitherman (2006) points out that, while race does not dictate what language a child may speak, in the United States communities are often divided by race. She states that most often an African-American child will grow up and be socialized in an African-American community and speak African-American Language (AAL). This being said African-American communities are quite diverse and its members have different socio-economic statuses, have varied educational levels; they emerge from all walks of life, and ethnic backgrounds. Accordingly, literacy practices used by African-Americans will be diverse as well. Just like the variety and uniqueness that is present in the images of tapestries, each thread of color will interlock contrastively creating an assortment of patterns. This metaphor parallels the diversity apparent within African-Americans. However, Smitherman (2006) reminds us that “African-American diversity notwithstanding, there is an underlying commonality among all those with the blood of a slave running in they veins (as Hip-Hop artist Nas would say). Culture, history, experience, not just skin color and race, continue to define Africa America” (pp. 19). Therefore, I studied the literacy practices, traditions expressed through narratives, and values of a selected African-American family, while discussing herein how such ideas may be reflective of the shared experiences of African-Americans.
Contributions of the Study

As literacy practices can take on social, educational, and historical references within families, I hope to inform educators of how advantageous it is to consider the impact of literacy histories that are cultivated and woven together by families and exist apart from school. Revealing the potential for richer descriptions of a child’s literacy experiences and repertoire will add to culturally responsive and sensitive practices in the classroom. In addition, this research seeks to expand definitions of literacy and literacy development for African-American children. Thusly, I align this study with those who continue to combat the dominant ideologies of literacy education.

Overview of Chapters

In this chapter I introduced the problem, the purpose, and the significance of this study. I discussed the overall contributions of the work. Additionally, I offered visuals to further ascertain classroom challenges that exist with the use of inflexible definitions of literacy in the schools.

Chapter Two provides key terms and the theoretical frame that guided this research and offers an overview of the pertinent literature including the following topics: 1) Developing Practices and Traditions within a Cultural Community, 2) Narrative as Cultural Resource, 3) Expanded Definitions of Literacy, and 4) African-American Oral Traditions. Chapter Three then focuses on the design of the research. I discuss participant recruitment, and further give a concise description of the family participants, my role as a researcher, data sources, and a chart that describes what sources of data were used to respond to each research question.
Chapter Four is divided into two main sections. The first offers a more in-depth description of family participants. The second half of this chapter provides the analysis of my interview and observation data collected through the duration of this study. I have organized this data into three main thematic categories: Historical, Educational and Social. Here I will discuss the Thompson family literacy practices and literacy narratives and how they configure to the history and legacy of literacy in the family. I will end this chapter with a summary of my findings and describe what I call the *interlacing effect* apparent in the data by complicating and challenging my findings and the interconnection between the three thematic categories proposed in Chapter Four.

Lastly, in Chapter Five I discuss how my findings are situated in current research and align with socio-cultural theory. Next, I make suggestions for recommendations that move forward the conversation about the value in expanded definitions of literacy as well as valuing the rich experiences that children bring with them to the classroom. I discuss the challenges and perceived weakness of the study. Finally, I state the direction my future research and future endeavors.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Tic-tock, tic-tock...my heart filled with frustration. Tic-tock, tick-tock...this just isn’t fair. Tic-tock, tic-tock...I really don’t understand. Tic-tock, tic-tock...all I could do was close my eyes and listen to the teacher utter these words, “Ok, kids it’s time for you to go, everyone else take out your books for reading.” I dreaded this time; I wanted to be in the room with my other classmates. Why did all of the white kids get to stay for reading? As I walked down the long corridor and entered the small room, I felt as though I was “suffocating”. It was like being crammed into the closet in the house that all of the extras, the forgettables and the unmentionables get tossed into when company comes to the house. I would take my place at the round table and think “yeah, yeah Mrs. Patterson just give me the stupid worksheets so that I can finish them.” This is baby’s work; my three-year-old brother could do this stuff. I hurriedly turned in my worksheets and transitioned over to the listening station, which was a small desk in the corner of the room that always had one leg shorter than the other. On the desk sat an old record player and headphones that seemed to swallow up my head; they were so big. I followed along in the book as I listened to the monotone male voice feed words into my ears. Please free me from this torture. “Mrs. Patterson can I just read the book and answer the questions?” She would reply, “Just put the headphones back on dear.” When I thought I could not take another minute, Mrs. Patterson would give us permission to go back to the room. I would speed walk down the hall in an effort to get back to class and at least catch the end of reading. As I approach the door, I would hear the teacher say, “It’s time for science.” Urgh! I hate science.
These were my sentiments as I was asked to leave the classroom and journey to what I would now say was an incubator for meaningless decontextualized learning or the “resource room”—how ironic. An educated guess would tell me that my placement in the resource room was because of my skin color. I draw this conclusion, as the four African-American children in my fifth grade classroom were all excused at that time. I do not recall ever being tested and when I reference this occurrence my parents reply that they had no idea that this ever took place. As I reflected over that time in my life I wondered, did my arbitrary placement in the resource room stem from my teacher’s beliefs that my brown skin predisposed me to diminished literacy skills? Did she subscribe to dominant constructions of literacy and learning for African-American students and presume that all of the black children in her class would have academic difficulties? No matter her thinking, she had indeed identified my skill level as sub par. I had previously never been assigned to receive the services of the resource teacher nor did I after completing the fifth grade. This sadly, but fortunately was only an isolated incident for me. However, I pose these questions:

~ How often do these limited views about literacy learning of African-American children restrict a child’s potential in the classroom?

~ Do teachers tend to value the home literacy practices and literacy experiences that occur in the home environment?

~ Are schools concerned with, aware of, or appreciative of the invaluable contributions that culturally significant traditions in literacy may make toward African-American children’s education?
As I ponder those questions and think about my own experiences, I find it very interesting that at the time I attended sessions in the resource room at home, literacy was all around me. I would read books to my dolls and peruse the pages of every Ebony Magazine that came into the house. I was not really reading the magazines, but I was digesting the headlines and historical events of the time. My mother and I would go through recipes together, as she would let me read the ingredients. As a child I believed that my grandfather, who was a minister, had a biblical library that would rival the Library of Congress, housed in the very meager square footage of his enclosed back porch. I would watch my grandfather craft his sermons and ask him questions about all of the old books he owned. He would tell me the most incredible family stories as he reflected upon the contents of his next sermon. Since I had such rich experiences with literacy at home, it was discouraging to participate in the infantile practices in the resource room and even more frustrating that my high level of literacy at home amounted to very little in my classroom.

In this chapter, I briefly review the theoretical framework I used to undergird my research. Additionally, I discuss the development of practices as it relates to literacy learning, narrative associated with literacy practices, more inclusive definitions of literacy, oral and written traditions within a community, and the significance of literacy traditions within families.

“Culture” defined and Theoretical Framework

In this section, I define the term “culture” for this study, as I see having an understanding of the use of the word culture is germane to this study. Additionally, that
definition helps situate ideas about literacy and the essence of its use for the Thompson family.

Interpretations of meaning reflect not only the idiosyncratic histories of individuals, but also the culture’s canonical ways of constructing reality. Nothing is culture-free, but neither are individuals simply mirrors of their culture. It is the interaction between them that both gives a communal cast to individual thought and imposes a certain unpredictable richness on any culture’s way of life, thought or feeling (Bruner, 1996, p. 14).

I am using this selection as starting point for this discussion. Here the implication is that “culture” is multi-layered, dynamic and reciprocal as it relates to those who are a part of culture or cultures for that matter. For this study I see “culture” through a socio-cultural lens, in that it involves several processes that figure into how a people interact within the world around them. It is often contextualized with a rich history for its foundation, but can change, be repurposed, and reverberate through and across generations throughout time. According to the aforementioned quote above by Jerome S. Bruner (1996), “culture” helps individuals to construct their lived reality and nothing and no one is void of culture. Clifford Geertz (1973) would describe “culture” as a meaning making process. Barbara Rogoff (2003) would pose that culture is not to be confused with race and ethnicity because culture is much more dynamic and expansive. Culture is infused with values, feelings, conventions, and practices or individuals ways of living and learning. It is for this reason that it is not advantageous to ignore or devalue one’s expression of culture. Later in this chapter, my understanding and use of this term becomes more apparent. However, this definition represents my intentions as I explore
the ways in which individual members come together on a journey in the creation of literacy and literacy traditions within a family.

In using the narrative as a resource to develop family ideologies of literacy including values of literacy, I must first define how I utilized literacy within my study. I want to explore the idea of literacy outside of school; as Brian Street (1995) contends, established definitions of literacy are centered around schooling, teaching and learning. For this study I define literacy as a means of participating in an event involving reading, writing or a connection to text. In this case, the interaction with text is not limited to books, magazines or other written works, but could expand to other signs or symbols mediated by a graphic (i.e. billboard, drawing, picture, movie). In the coming text, I offer a definition of narrative in which I align my thinking. However for this study, literacy narratives are recollections of one’s past experiences with literacy from reading, writing, drawing (visual), storytelling (oracy), or schooling (organized, systematic exposure to print). The content of these recollections are not limited to these constraints, but serve as possible points of reference for thematic coding. These narratives also include conversation that would occur during literacy practices. The topics may diverge from experiences with literacy; however the talk that takes place around or during or outside of literacy is used to further explore family beliefs and use of literacy.

To better understand this journey, I subscribe to a socio-cultural theoretical frame to undergird my conceptualization of how traditions of literacy develop within a family. Central to that conceptualization I focus my attention on the narrative as an essential component to understanding literacy traditions in my research study. Later in this chapter, I explain why socio-cultural theory necessitates expansive definitions of literacy that are
more apt to account for cultural differences in literacy practices and traditions. I offer background information to situate culturally and historically significant factors related to the conceptualization of African-American literacy traditions and associated ideologies. As I stated previously, in my discussion literacy traditions are associated with practices utilized by African-Americans; I understand that within these diverse communities, African-Americans cannot be captured by a single snap shot or be defined by a limited set of characteristics. African-American people, families, practices, traditions and language styles are multifaceted and wide-ranging. Observable attributes and underlying values that exist within one’s ethnic/racial culture are dynamic and may vary by subgroups. Therefore, I do not wish to provide a uni-dimensional viewpoint of literacy within African-American people and families, but discuss how and in what ways these concepts can change and are not homogeneous. Additionally, I discuss how literacy traditions are influenced by culturally and historically significant factors, but in no way express the full spectrum of possibilities of literacy use in African-Americans.

**Developing Practices and Traditions within a Cultural Community**

Rogoff (2003) describes cultural communities as groups of people who have common organization of values, understanding, history, and practices. This can include child rearing practices, socialization practices, and language and literacy practices. For instance, due to the high regard for silence in some Native American communities, children are taught that one learns more by listening and observing than by speaking (Westby & Vining, 2002). Similarly, in conversation between communication partners, the time between asking and answering questions may be prolonged, as it is appropriate to fully consider your response before offering a reply. It would be considered rude or
disrespectful to answer quickly as the time needed for a thoughtful response was not taken. Therefore, a Native American child raised within a speech community that values these communication styles would acquire these ways of speaking (Rosenberry-McKibben, 2002). A child participates in these practices within their families and communities; additionally, in a dialogic manner they contribute to the development of these practices. In this way practices for developing and using language and literacy become embedded in the child’s ways of making sense and participating in daily events.

These practices are the routine systems in which one interacts on the day-to-day basis. Families, neighborhoods, and the community all, therefore, play vital roles in the cultivation of a child. Rogoff (2003) discusses what she calls guided participation, another way in which children learn, more specifically learn language, rules of communication and/or practices, such as literacy practices. Children learn the skills that are desired and necessary to function within their communities by participation in and guidance of value-laden practices of their cultural community. This participation could include conversations, problem solving, or recalling narratives. Since children develop by their participation in socio-cultural activities, a child’s interactions with other participants within that community are fundamental components of learning. Learning is socially based when looking through a socio-cultural lens (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). This social learning, mediated by language, connects to how I learned to tell stories; my social interactions with my grandfather were the foundation for not only learning narrative skills, but also practices and traditions that were significant to my family.

As mentioned previously, children and all members of a community create the cultural practices that facilitate their development and are ultimately valued and
leveraged by the community (Rogoff, 2003). These practices are developed out of the experiences that become the traditions of families as a part of cultural community or community of practice (CoP). Therefore, individual and shared experiences with literacy ultimately contribute to the creation of literacy practices and traditions within a family. Accordingly, if one has literacy experiences in church at Sunday School or reads the grocery list to their mother at the grocery store, these events can feed into future literacy traditions.

Practices involve actions or events that are meaningful and situated in a context that can be both social and cultural. In this way, I frame the development of traditions as values, practices, meaningful experiences and stories that are shared, passed down, contextualized and recontextualized over time. These practices become routine and are packaged with values that can be sustained, changed or challenged (Goodnow, Miller & Kessel, 1995). Accordingly, the formation of literacy traditions lends itself to flexibility in the development of and use of literacy within the family. Practices that are ultimately conceptualized as narrative traditions are such because they are nested and rooted in the everyday experiences that are additionally reflections of the community of practice (CoP) and/or family (Rogoff, 2003). These practices and traditions can be sustained throughout childhood but often get recontextualized throughout a lifetime or across generations.

When we further conceptualize the development of literacy in cultural communities and more specifically families, we can look towards an idea that Deborah Brandt (2001, 2003, 2009) refers to as “sponsors of literacy.” Brandt discusses in an article in the Teacher’s College Record, the changing landscape of literacy in terms of school standards, the creation of new technologies and furthermore literacy in the scheme
economic commodities. She describes sponsors of literacy as “those agents, local or distant, abstract on concrete, who enable, support, teach, model, recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy, and gain advantage in it in some way.” I take this to mean that essentially any agent that contributes to the experience of literacy in one’s life could be included in this definition. A sponsor could be a person, a story, an experience, an article or object. Therefore, when Brandt reviews the accounts of those she asked how did they learn to read and write, the sponsors of literacy in their life experiences was expansive. It is to this point that when we look at traditions of family literacy they are multi-layered experiences that can involve values, historical references, social interactions, stories, relatives, community members, and it is the interplay of all of these sources that contributes to the family definition of literacy.

For example, my personal literacy or narrative practices are those that I can pass down to my own children as literacy and narrative traditions, they can be modified and shared with future generations and thusly contribute to my family’s definition of literacy, literacy traditions and ultimately a history or legacy of literacy.

The students were perched at their assigned seats. First there was Ann, with her red ponytails and freckled round face. Next, there was Strawberry Shortcake who smelled so yummy. Then, Teddy, his snow white fur seemed to stand on end with the excitement of learning. Lastly, my favorite Cabbage Patch student, Maria, her full curly hair, chocolate skin, rosy cheeks and dimples, she was a reflection of me. She was my smartest student, but I wouldn’t dare tell the others. I stood in front of the chalkboard (which was actually the wall in the upstairs hallway). My students greeted me, “Hi Miss Byrd.” Their eyes sparkled as they were eager to get to today’s lesson and I was eager to teach them. I
picked up a beautiful indigo blue crayon and began to write all over the sprawling beige wall before me. “Student’s today I am going to teach you all about horses!”

In this personal literacy narrative I describe an experience that I remember like yesterday. This is one of many stories that I connect with my early voracity or inclinations towards language, literacy and education. In this story, my dolls and stuffed animals served as my “sponsors of literacy” in the enactment of my role as teacher. The wall, the crayon, my knowledge of horses, even my punishment after my parents saw what my assertive imagination left all over the wall were all necessary pieces of the formation of this literacy experience, and thusly family literacy traditions. I have illustrated my conceptualization of how these literacy experiences are embedded with all the elements that work into the configuration of a family’s literacy traditions.

**Figure 2.1.** Tapestry of family literacy traditions

Figure 2.1 characterizes the metaphorical tapestry of family literacy traditions. Each thread represents a component in the configuration of the literacy experiences that make up this tapestry. To be noted, this figure is only a snippet of a more expansive
fabric and tapestry. While the figure is only a small part of greater whole, Figure 2.1 is a surface representation of this weaving process of family literacy traditions; it does not include all of the detailed intricacies, but the more broad aspects of family literacy traditions, that ultimately become contextualized by each family. It does however, embody the stories that are shared and passed on (oral traditions/storytelling); family values such as belief in education or reliance on spiritual strength; interactions with elders, siblings, friends; family histories; physical location or familial ties to other parts of the world, access to resources within a community, cultural tools or devices used in the carrying of day-to-day activities that may or may not hold significant value within a community and family literacy practices like reading the bible or drawing for my family all play a role in fostering family literacy traditions. Next, I will take this previous figure as it represents a literacy experience that I shared with my family, the Byrd’s prior to the start of this research.

Figure 2.2. Tapestry of the Byrd family literacy traditions
This figure is reflective of an event that I previously shared in Chapter One. It is a family interview that took place, in which several stories of literacy experiences were shared. This moment is identified as a family literacy experience because it involves storytelling of family recollections of personal encounters with reading, and writing. This was used as a starting point of the conversation to capture the dynamic ways that family literacy can be multifaceted.

In this interview my family, moments in time, locations, cultural tools etc. are all represented. The involve family members from past generations, but their lives, stories and values are shared with those in the present. Those lives and experiences are carried on these threads of this tapestry, narratives that move through time are brought out and recontextualized by the present generations. One story lends itself to another, commonalities and shared experiences are weaved seamlessly in patterns and hues that ultimately make up this tapestry of family traditions in literacy.

It is this framing of family literacy traditions that I used to capture the essence of literacy in the Thompson Family.

Next I discuss a cultural tool/resource that is of great importance in the African-American community and furthermore in this study.

**Narrative as Cultural Resource**

In considering the narrative as a part of literacy practices through a socio-cultural lens, we must discuss how a community defines and utilizes narrative within a community or family. The socio-cultural theoretical frame allows for definitions of narrative that can be broad and flexible. I thus put forth an amenable definition of
narrative as a cultural resource that is employed in a variety of ways within African-American culture.

In discussing narrative I focus my attention on the work of Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (2001) as I feel as though they offer a comprehensive viewpoint on the function and use of narrative. They note that there are many types of narrative including: conversational, family, and personal. Narrative imbues life events in an attempt to make connections across past, present, and future events. Narrative is a cultural resource that can be used to reflect on events and their place and significance in life. In this manner a narrative could take the form of a simple conversation that sorts out or brings understanding to one’s daily activities. “Everyday conversational narratives of personal experience might be regarded as the country cousins of more well-wrought narratives” (Ochs & Capps, 2001, pp. 2). Therefore, narrative can be both undemanding and complex. Given these dimensions of the narrative, for the purpose of this paper, narrative is a cultural resource (oral and/or written) that contributes to the way people make sense of the world, understand cultural traditions in family history, and voice/share one’s life struggles and successes. Narrative is the recollection and sharing of actual or created stories that embody ways of life, culture, and history. In this way, narrative can take on many different forms.

Ochs and Capps (2001) note that narratives are in such abundance they have diverse structures such as: gossip, prayers, instigating stories, jokes, and testimonies. These various forms are of great importance to the narrative traditions of African-American culture and families. Accordingly, Ochs and Capps (2001) explain that the guidelines for telling stories or narratives are set by the community; children and adults
will be competent speakers. These different narratives will be reflective of the values and traditions that represent cultural communities (Miller, Cho & Bracey, 2005).

While Ochs and Capps (2001) point out the importance of children developing “everyday” narratives as a necessity; it is undisputed that all children do develop narrative ability. Ochs and Capps (2001) indicate that development of narrative practices is a manner of socialization that uses the idea of apprenticeship. Rogoff (1990, 2003) proposes that as a child is a part of community, their interactions with the members of this community facilitate the child’s competence in the significant cultural practices of the community; these practices would include narrative practices. Apprenticeship is fundamental to cultural continuity (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Therefore dialogic sharing of cultural practices between the members of cultural community is an essential piece of the sustaining of the community.

**Expanded Definitions of Literacy**

As previously mentioned, dominant constructions of literacy education in the United States are problematic. Restricted definitions and views of literacy contribute to an abundance of deficit ideology in schools and give only modest acknowledgment of sociocultural factors outside of school, beyond idealized mainstream families that impact literacy development. Street (1995) states that dominant conceptions of literacy take on the role of the “pedagogization” of literacy. Essentially, literacy had become so associated with “educational notions” that there is little room for constructions of literacy outside of school. In my own personal literacy experience shared at the onset of this chapter, I identified with several uses of literacy in my home that made the stack of stark white sheets covered in faded lilac words, dittos sheets, or “baby’s work” as I referred to
it as essentially unchallenging and immaterial. In this instance not only was my competency at home invalidated, but the teacher’s assumptions of my overall ability to engage literacy in a proficient manner.

The contemporary framing of literacy around school performance contributes to the “pedagogization” of literacy. Street (1995) uses this term, pedagogy, in the broad sense that ways of teaching in the classroom have poured into the home environment. School-oriented materials, such as curricular supplemental texts available to parents or dominant school interactional patterns (Mehan, 1979) such as Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) patterns utilized by parents when working with their children are evident in home practices. This phenomenon is the reason that I am interested in looking at home literacy extricated from school practices. However, some view the idea of literacy in a more collaborative manner.

Deborah Brandt (2009) suggests that there is a need for models of literacy that are inclusive of various contexts in which histories of literacy are present (i.e. communities, schools and families); essentially the idea must be flexible. She looks at entities that can stand as “sponsors of literacy”; they “enable and hinder literacy activity, often forcing the formation of new literacy requirements while decertifying older ones” (pp. 40). By that definition these sponsors of literacy could be the teachers, the school and the curriculum; these are just a few sponsors that are associated with school. In a podcast by The University of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center, Deborah Brandt was interviewed about her book *Literacy in American Lives* (May 28, 2008). When asked about sponsors of literacy that were not linked to school, she replied that such sponsors included religion, social media, toys, and peers, as they all stimulate literacy. I believe that this speaks to
the fact that literacy is everywhere in everything that we do. It is precisely for this reason
that teachers should tap into all sources of a child’s literacy experiences and as “sponsors
of literacy” for children themselves need to foster all areas of language and literacy. The
literacy practices people participate in become embedded parts of one’s own self, nature,
and identity. Just as we have various literacy experiences we also draw on our own
experiences to develop literacy in other contexts. Given that children come from very
diverse backgrounds and experience, “young children may accumulate idiosyncratic and
varied bits of knowledge” (Dyson, 2003, p. 181). When children respond to literacy tasks
within the classroom they will rely on what it is that they understand as appropriate for
that given situation (possibly according to their community of practice,), they will modify
experiences from their repertoire of resources (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). Naturally, if
children draw upon a variety of experiences to gain understanding, it is counterproductive
to limit the areas from which they extract knowledge.

**African-American Oral and Written Literacy Traditions**

As discussed previously narrative takes on many different forms. In this section I
present a number of these narrative traditions that are of great magnitude in the African-
American culture; these traditions mark the trials of slavery and the significance of
storytelling as reflections of cultural customs. Just as important as the narratives are the
culturally representative ways they are expressed. These rhetorical devices symbolize and
characterize African-American speech patterns. More recent movements, such as “hip-
hop” are a part of the prevalent ways narrative is expressed presently. Additionally, the
African-American connection to the “black church” is another context for the narrative
tradition of the sermon. Lastly, I come back to the profound connection of narrative in the
African-American family as it binds generations with the practices, traditions, and morals present within families.

John P. Gee (1989) notes that there is something to be gained by having an understanding of how people from diverse backgrounds make sense of the world. He argues that one of the primary ways humans understand the world and life experiences is in the narrative form. An example of this could be the extraordinary collections of Slave Narratives. As ex-slaves recalled their lives prior to and during the emancipation, the African-Americans can gain a sense of connection to the ancestry from which they come. A sense of the immediate context of slavery and the world during that time is captured in these narratives.

James Olney (1984) argues that the Slave Narratives contribute to the wealth of autobiographical writings, to the history of American literature and the creating of an Afro-American literacy tradition. One of the most if not the most substantial example of the written narrative in the African-American culture are the Slave Narratives. Norman R. Yetman (1967) describes the autobiographical accounts of slaves as a reflection of the institution of slavery and the psyche of the enslaved. The narratives are the archival recollections of ex-slaves about their lives from the ages of a year to over fifty years. I believe that there is no way to encapsulate the value of such a tremendous contribution to the African-American culture. However, I do not believe that it is fallacious to say that a huge gap in the history of African-Americans in the United States would be lost if it were not for the remarkable accounts of the Slave Narratives.

Olney (1984) contends that Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, An American Slave, Written by Himself surpasses the slave narrative mode of writing as it
not only explains the perils of slavery, but his recollections of the institution of slavery is one of the most recognized and profound accounts, as they included his growth as an intellect, as well as his emotional and moral growth in his life. Just as these narratives help to preserve the history of Africans and African-Americans during slavery, storytelling has been used in a similar manner in the maintenance and perpetuation of history.

In tracing African-American roots in West Africa, storytelling was the social practice that helped to educate and comfort members of the community. It preserved the history of self, family, and cultural groups (Champion, 2003). Joanne Banks-Wallace (2002) suggests that central to storytelling or sharing of narratives is their status as touchstones or those ideas that conjure feelings of a shared heritage between those who tell stories and those that listen to stories. Stories like the creation story of the Yoruba community in Nigeria illustrated the cultural belief in spirituality and being connected to the earth (Champion, 2003). Stories such as this were brought to the United States during slave trade and shared or passed down through generations of blacks in America.

“Despite the horrors of slavery, Africans (now African-Americans) still told stories to comfort, teach and record history in their new home” (Champion, 2003, p. 3). African-Americans could use storytelling to build faith and hope during a time of oppression, but also pass on remarkable histories.

While the autocracy of slavery and Eurocentric ways of life made it difficult to fully maintain African traditions; within oral traditions remnants of, or “the residue of African world views persists” in various aspects of oral traditions (Smitherman, 1986, p. 74). Given this notion, we cannot assume that all expressions of oral traditions by
African-Americans will bear an African imprint, so to speak. However, we should note that unanimity or some congruence in oral traditions can be linked to the influence of African ideals and exist to provide some facets of a shared African-American experiences in the United-States. Banks-Wallace (2002) points out that storytelling is influential and significant in the African-American community as it is reflective of “dominant mores, customs, themes, and language of everyday life contexts in which they are created and shared” (p. 412). She further discusses how storytelling historically functioned as a way to unite and maintain contact with families, create kinships, communicate across plantations and refine language skills. These experiences in storytelling give way to family experiences with storytelling that can evoke feelings of connectedness to generations of family members and play a vital role in the conservation of traditions.

Maisha Fisher (2009) takes a very comprehensive look at the history of literacy within the African-American community. She combats the ways African-Americans have been pigeonholed into having non-existnet histories of literacy and decreased inclinations towards education. She aligns herself with those that expose the influences of literacy practices that render confirmations of the strength and resilience of African-American people (Champion, 2003; Gadsden, 1992; Smitherman, 1997). A unique contribution of the work of Fisher is that she identifies and illuminates another platform for narrative traditions in African-American community. She explores the cultural phenomenon of spoken word poetry in “black institutions,” in this case black-owned and operated bookstores. Fisher (2009) validates the strength in spoken word poetry as a narrative in which writers “don’t just speak it, they live it; they don’t just live it, they be it” (p. 99)!

These verbal expressions of contemporary narrative tradition in the African-American
community are a cultural resource that gives a voice to anyone who desires to use it.

Another prominent platform for narrative tradition is the black church.

A factor that is of great significance in the African American community related to literacy practices and narrative tradition is the church (Au, 2006; Haight, 2002, Smitherman, 1986). In the church, oral traditions like the sermon are utilized by the preacher. These various techniques, that Geneva Smitherman (2006) calls linguistic inventiveness and verbal creativity (rhetorics), are exercised by preachers in the “black church.” Preachers spend a considerable amount of time honing and becoming masters of the skills used to draw people into messages filled with spiritual and emotional notions that speak to the conditions of the listeners or “worshippers” (Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2006). One technique employed is call-response. It is defined as an oral or gestural interaction between a speaker and the listener. This act is characterized when the preacher begins to have the church become engrossed in his words by responding to him verbally. Hence the speaker, in this instance, the preacher will, “call” while the listener or the congregation offers the “response.” This communicative practice also bears it roots in Africa, specifically West African culture. However, there will be variations within the idea of the “black church.”

While Smitherman (2006) leans towards the heavy use of African-American Language (AAL) by preachers in the black church, John R. Rickford and Russell J. Rickford (2000) acknowledge that the tendency is often more towards the rhetorical devices (e.g. alliteration, repetition, prosodic quality, gesture, and pace). There are many preachers that use Standard English (SE) in their sermons, most notably Reverend Jesse Jackson and Minister Louis Farrakhan (Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Just as previously
mentioned we cannot form restrictive characterizations of what the “black church” looks like or how all African-American preachers display their craft. There is diversity within African-American religious denominations such as: National Baptists, Southern Baptists, African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) and Pentecostal Assemblies. However, in the institution of the black church the sermon is a recognized, narrative tradition for the African-American community. The preacher is a sort of storyteller as weaves together biblical concepts or morality into the everyday life experiences of the congregation. Everything that we call a narrative can: “…instill cultural knowledge, grapple with a problem, rethink the status quo, soothe, empathize, inspire, speculate, justify a position, dispute, tattle, evaluate one’s own and others’ identities, shame, tease, laud and entertain, among other ends” (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 60) and can be accomplished in the words of a well organized sermon. Through the preacher’s words he challenges us to be better people, lead devoted lives, and display unbridled faith. Historically, from slavery to the present, the church has been a social and religious unit for the African-American community (Smitherman, 1986). It is clear that the sermon has a permanent mark on the narrative traditions of African-Americans, but the narratives serves other purposes.

Catherine Compton-Lilly (2009) describes narratives that convey “legacies of literacy practices” that are embedded in the African-American families. In her study she looks at literacy practices that are focused around learning to read. Additionally, the narratives that were collected during this study seemed to provide family pedagogies for literacy. The stories contributed the knowledge of literacy practices of the students’ parents and grandparents as readers. These contributions were not uni-directional; the practices of the children could impact the parents and grandparents, just as the adult
literacy practices could impact the children. This is another example of how narratives that are shared within families operate as the vehicles for unearthing family institutions and providing a background and history of traditions and practices in families.

Susan G. Mosley-Howard and Carl B. Evans (2000) conducted an ethnographic study with four African-American families that lived in or around a Mid-western city; the participants were interviewed and shared family stories. A primary goal of the study was to further describe and illustrate relationships within African-American families as well as shed light upon the breadth and depth of the African-American family experience. This in turn revealed ideals that are of utmost importance in the African-American family. A prominent theme that was consistent with all of the families involved was the notion of connecting family traditions with the raising of the children. This occurrence takes place when families are able to disseminate these family traditions through stories. A family participant remarked, “Being connected to a family and a community beyond my family is important…I now recognize the importance of knowing family history and communicating that to my children” (p. 442). This participant acknowledges that the oral presentation of the family history and strong connection to their community is imperative in the raising of his/her children.

Mosley-Howard and Evans (2000) go on to discuss foundational themes that held intergenerational consistency in the family stories they collected. Themes such as self-identity, valuing kinship bonds to foster relationships with extended family and the community, pride in cultural heritage, negotiating between minority and dominant cultures, value in education, and the role of spirituality are prominent in the stories of African-American families. These lessons for life and how to live are taken from
previous generations shaped and reshaped by present generations, and are passed down to future generations.

Vivian Gadsden (1992) also discusses the intergenerational beliefs and perspectives on literacy in African-American adults. Her work was based on narratives that she collected from four African-American families originating from small, rural communities in South Carolina. Families represented four generations within their families. Participants varied in educational level, SES, gender, number children, and marital status. Also represented were diverse family structures (i.e. some children in families were cousins, nieces and nephews whom could not be cared for by immediate family or parents/grandparents). I use this study as Gadsden (1992) indicates that her work demonstrates how literacy practices (that can include the narrative and narrative practices) become traditions; they are established within cultural communities and can expose the value of literacy and access to education. The narratives in her study served as tools for not only passing on the value and reverence towards literacy in African-American families, but they also conveyed the struggle that was connected to the access of literacy.

Gadsden (1992) accentuates narratives from her informants that express feelings of liberation and power that could be ensured through literacy. Some of the stories collected came from participants that were the first freed slaves in their family. Their stories were charged with the unfettered sense of control over one’s life that literacy could offer, but equally burdened with the existing barriers that blocked access to education for African-Americans. The narratives that Gadsden (1992) collected articulated the beliefs that one should value literacy and education. Additionally, those who have benefited from or had
access to education due to the emotional contributions, financial sacrifices, and support of the community should in return give back to their culture and community. For example, a student who received a scholarship and/or spiritual support from their church may be inclined to teach Sunday School classes as a thank you for the continued support of the church. However, here the narrative traditions were seen across generations of families and serve as a driving force for communicating and establishing value in literacy and education, they demonstrated pride in culture, and buffered the hardships in obtaining access to education. These narratives brought forth a rich history of literacy within the families in her study.

My study considers the way that narrative can be reflective of, and help to instill, solid beliefs and values of literacy in an African-American family, as well as intergenerational connections that may afford family histories of literacy. I explore the roles family members play in the development of literacy in a family. Accordingly as families develop ideologies of literacy, I want to consider how these constructions of literacy contribute to the practices and traditions within a family. Lastly, I look at how frameworks of literacy develop around the focal child within the family.

Summary

In this chapter, I share a story of personal experience as a child that was sent to the resource room to receive language arts services. This story opens up the problematic and erroneous views of literacy and literacy learning that often plague mainstream classrooms, especially those that impact African-American children. In this chapter, I build upon the socio-cultural view that literacy for children is developed out of communities of practice (CoP) and describe foundational aspects of literacy traditions in
the African-American community. This development of literacy for a child necessitates not only broadened ideologies of literacy, but also classrooms that value a variety of culturally infused ways of children appropriating literacy. In this way, educators avoid the trap of boxing children in with deficit ways of thinking.
Chapter 3
Methodology

It’s a beautiful Sunday afternoon…the sun is out and shining and warm temperatures are making a surprise cameo appearance on what should be a chilly fall day. Three young gentlemen standing on the corner greeted me into a small, quaint neighborhood. Their slender bodies and faces posturing to display the immense humor in their conversation, as they are riddled with laughter. I’m almost to there and I am a little anxious, but even more excited about meeting the family. I pull up to the house, collect all of my materials, and I walk up to a very inviting home which feels welcoming to me as a gentle breeze sends the delightful smells of a Sunday dinner through the front screen door. I knock and small, gentle soul appears. Her skin is like a Brach’s caramel, her eyes are shiny behind her little black spectacles and her natural curly, salt and pepper hair frames her face perfectly. A quiet voice emerges, “You must be….” I respond, “Kelly…and you must be Grandma.” The quiet voice chuckles and says, “I’m G-ma.” G-ma offers me a seat while she finishes the Sunday meal. I sit back in a comfortable chair covered in velour and begin to watch the small flat screen television. This comfort feels familiar to me and I begin to recall a childhood moment…

“Over $150,000 in prizes, waiting to be won on Wheeeeeeel of Fortune!”

The bright mustard yellow letters around the Technicolor spinning wheel signaled the beginning of the competition.

“And now here’s your host Pat Sajack!”
We all took our proper positions. Papa leaned back in his leather recliner. Granny was relaxed on the floral print sofa, with her little yellow legs crossed and rocking side to side like the pendulum on clock...she was in thinking mode now. I had the best spot of all; right in the middle of the floor closest to the television. I stretched my thin, chocolate frame across the carpet, placed my head in my hands, fixed my eyes on the screen and waited for the first puzzle.

“That Vanna sure is pretty thang,” Papa said slyly.

“Johnnie Thompson!” Granny exclaimed.

Papa smiled as his round belly bounced with laughter, “Oh Bunny.” (My grandfather’s pet name for my grandmother)

These two were not going to mess with my concentration...ding, ding, ding. Ok, Pat says it’s a phrase. The ticking of the spinning wheel going round and round mirrored the wheels turning in my head. Hmmm, they should ask for an ‘r’, there’s always an ‘r’ in the puzzle.

“Buy a vowel!” Granny shouted.

“Oh no, she landed on bankrupt already” Papa announced. We continued to guess letters one after another...

“I got it, I got it...THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!” That’s from the Wizard of OZ.

“That’s my smart girl!” Papa replied proudly.

This rhetorical play and conversation with the contestants, Pat, Vanna, Granny, Papa and me was an occasion I looked forward to every time I visited my grandparents. Watching “Wheel of Fortune” and working out the puzzles with my grandparents became a ritual, one that belonged to my family and me. My grandparents created this literacy
event with me, however beyond that, I realize that this experience is reflective of the ways in which family members offer up their contributions to these experiences that become meaningful and purposeful and embody rich traditions to be utilized, re-invented and passed along.

In this study I sought to gather and understand the contributions of each member of the Thompson Family and explore how their experiences with literacy interlock to make a tapestry of a history of literacy traditions in their family that can be captured and passed down for years to come.

I explored the Thompson family in a socio-historical context, meaning I looked at social interaction within the family with their family “generational” history as the backdrop. This was evidenced in the interaction between parents and kids; grandparents and kids; grandparents and parents; between siblings; between kids and school; and family and school. I wanted to further investigate how literacy would be defined, what literacy looked like and how literacy was discussed with the Thompson family as the center of a range of dynamics.

This project was a single case family research study of one African-American family. The study employed ethnographic techniques such as interviews, participant observations, a family journal, literacy artifacts, and detailed researcher field notes of observations. The case study design permitted my focus to be maintained on the Thompson family. I examined their interactions, events and experiences with literacy that contributed to the framing of literacy within the family. In addition, the ethnographic techniques utilized provided several sources of data to illustrate these home literacy practices, the ways in which families talk about them, and intergenerational connections
with literacy and literacy traditions. For example, this allowed for a better understanding of how these practices influenced and developed around Luke, the focal child.

The observations around literacy that were analyzed were enacted through what Dell Hymes (1982) would refer to as communicative “events.” Each event’s purpose, setting, participants, and interactions are all significant and vital to the carrying out of a practice. My research questions were developed to identify each participant and their place in the family and then gather pertinent historical information. Additionally, they sought to evoke recollections of experiences and narratives around literacy, value in education, schooling and family and how they inform both individual and family definitions of literacy.

**Site Selection and Participant Recruitment**

The site for participant recruitment was in Saint Louis, Missouri. The Saint Louis area provided personal familiarity and convenient sampling. Initially, recruitment strategies involved recruitment from a Baptist Church, located in a west suburb of St. Louis. The population of this west suburb according to the 2010 Census was just over 30,404. Of those residents, 2.5% are Black (African descendants). The household median income of this suburb is approximately 1.75 times higher than the household median income of the state of Missouri as of 2007. The recruitment was initiated via inquiries at this church in which I am a member. Additionally, the members of the church are predominantly African-American. During a service, prior to data collection I offered a brief and informal description of the study as well as criteria for inclusion (see Appendix A). Members were encouraged to share this information with other families within the community. The study was also shared with personal friends, families, and colleagues to
extend participant recruitment beyond the church. My contact information was given during this presentation. Any families that were interested were able to contact me via telephone, or through face-to-face interactions at church services. This recruitment yielded one family, outside of the church congregation, that was selected for the study based on criteria for participation in the study. The Thompson family was interested, volunteered and was available throughout the duration of the study.

The recruitment for the study involved purposeful sampling. Participants included those who are black (African descendent) and self-identify as African-American and as either working or middle class. The family needed to include members that represented a multi/tri-generational unit, however it was not required that the family fit into the traditional nuclear family dynamic. As a result, caregivers did not have to be limited to the mother and father dyad. Family participants must include family members from the first generation (grandparent[s] or great aunt and/or great uncle), the second generation (mother, father, aunt or uncle), and the third generation (children). As sibling relations related to literacy was of particular interest, the family that participated in this study must have multiple children present, at least one sibling beyond the focal child of the study.3 Since I explored sibling dynamics related to the focal child, it was only necessary that one other sibling be present; however any additional siblings offered a more differentiated look at how sibling relations can vary within a family. The purpose of expanding the dominant definition of family was to include any partners the focal child interacted with during literacy practices as well as to allow access to intergenerational constructions of literacy.

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3 The criteria for the focal child will follow later in this chapter.
The Thompson family. While recruitment began in a Baptist Church in the west suburb of Saint Louis, MO; The Thompson Family resided in a northwestern suburb of Saint Louis, MO. The population of this suburb according to the 2010 Census was just over 25,000 residents, almost 11,000 households with 6,600 of those households being families. Of those residents, 64.1% White, 30.5% African American, 0.3% Native American, 1.4% Asian, 1.2% from other races, and 2.5% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 3.0% of the population. Of the 10,933 households 31.2% had children under the age of 18 living with them and 38.3% were married couples living together. Additionally, the average household sized was 2.34, while the average family size was 3.01. The 2000 Census reports that the median income for a family was just over $52,000.

To further situate the Thompson Family in the study, I note that Ray and Carol are both college graduates. Ray worked as an electrician for the primary electric company in the city and county of Saint Louis and was also the youth pastor at their family church. Carol was a director, of a division within a non-profit organization and a freelance photographer. The Thompson’s would be considered a middle class family with a typical nuclear family structure. Claire the grandmother was retired and lived in a working class community in North Saint Louis. I do want to point out that this study is an intergenerational study and the Thompson Family is also representative of generations that are not reflected in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age/Grade</th>
<th>Ethnic identity</th>
<th>Family Relation (to Luke)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>8 years/3\textsuperscript{rd} grade</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>youngest sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan (focal child)</td>
<td>10 years/4\textsuperscript{th} grade</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>self (middle sibling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>12 years/7\textsuperscript{th} grade</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>oldest sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tosha</td>
<td>23 years/College Senior</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>cousin (maternal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>44 years</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>47 years</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire (G. Ma)</td>
<td>76 years</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Grandmother (maternal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1. The Thompson Family

Upon selection I met with the Thompson Family to explain the letters of consent. It was required that each participating family member be present for the meeting that took place during the initial interview. The parents were given a parent/guardian letter of consent (see Appendix B) for their children, including the focal child, to participate in the study. Each adult over the age of 18 was given a participant letter of consent (see Appendix C) for their participation in the study. Nathan, Luke and Darren whom were under the age of 18 were read the letter of assent for minors (see Appendix D) by myself and signed for their participation in the study. I collected all signed documents at the initial family interview and gave participants a copy of the consent/assent form for their records at the our next meeting, the first family observation. During the initial interview the family members could ask questions and get clarification on any research or study concerns (e.g. confidentiality, risks, and/or benefits). In addition, the family members were given broad explanations of literacy and literacy practices, as well as general information on data collection sources. This was done so that the family could have
some basis for considering events or stories that are associated with literacy or would be significant to the study. At this time, I discussed the family journals and the possibilities for recording events or narratives in the journal (subsequently this article was not collected in the study due to temporary loss of contact and is thusly a perceived weakness of the study). Additionally, I conveyed to the family that I would be interested in cultural tools and literacy artifacts or those items that the family may have deemed important or useful for literacy events or associated with individual recollections of literacy experiences or the products of literacy activities. Lastly, I communicated to the families that at the end of the study the family journals and artifacts would be returned, so that they would have representation of their family’s literacy traditions.

In this study, home literacy practices were observed. Home included environments that would be outside of the school context. Therefore, these home practices took place in various settings, including the homes of the family participants, and various places in the community including a local cake decorating class and a popular farmers market located in the city of Saint Louis, Missouri. Offering a broader variety of settings was necessary to capture the range of ways in which home literacy practices can take place. The Thompsons determined when and where all family literacy observations would take place. The family journal would have allowed the Thompson’s to report activities and stories that could not be captured in observations. While the family journal was given to the family, it was not collected.

**Focal child.** In this study I selected Luke as the focal child so that I could explore how literacy developed around that child within the family. Through informal conversation the parents provided information about the focal child's school performance
related to literacy and their perceptions of the focal child's inclination towards literacy in the home environment. Carol and Ray described Luke as a child that enjoys reading, but is very sociable and in school this can be a distraction for him at times. It was determined that Luke was not receiving any Special Education services and had no established diagnosis of Learning Disabled and/or Speech and Language Impaired on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This was determined per parent report. This purposeful selection can inform educators about the ways in which children engage in and actively participate in literacy practices at home and may reveal the variety of literacy practices these children draw upon outside of school.

**Role of the Researcher**

The point of ethnographic work is to describe a culture, typically one that exists outside of the researcher’s “experience” or “sphere of influence” or “life”, but not necessarily one that the researcher does not identify with, either partially or fully. The researcher in this instance is a participant-observer, whose task is to observe and describe the interactions of people in an effort to gain understanding of and make meaning of interactions or events within a African-American family. Accordingly, ethnographic research seeks to uncover the social structures, roles, values, institutions and traditions etc. of a culture. Geertz (1973) would say that this could be achieved by offering a thick description of the people, environment, interactions, signs and events.

A researcher must establish him/herself and gain access into a culture; this includes learning or understanding the language and becoming aware of the daily activities and traditions of this group. Typically, this begins by developing cultural competence through lengthy and sustained contact with the culture and its members.
(Becker, 1996). A researcher must constantly strive for observations (and additional data collection methods) that are valid; therefore they should be depicted with a clear lens and not be tainted with the opinions and biases of the researcher. One must be cautious to clearly and accurately describe a member’s participation in events and interactions in developing the meanings that contribute to the production of one’s culture. Additionally, the researcher must acknowledge the ways in which culture can be shaped by gender, age, and other cultural identities. This was very important for my study, as I explored intergenerational links in the conceptualization of literacy within a family, as well as, links in literacy experiences and literacy traditions.

Clearly the role of the researcher is one that must be constantly negotiated. In this study I was somewhat of an insider. While I did not have any previous contact with Thompsons, I did ethnically identify with the family. Knowing that some cultural values or traditions could be familiar to me, the nuances of family dynamics that make families within a specific cultural group uniquely different would be new to me. Therefore, I had to remember in order to do the work of ethnographic research, one must develop competence of the culture through sustained contact; as one that identifies with the participants of the study as an African-American member of this cultural community my contact was sustained since birth. While, this may have aided in my access to the families and make my interactions less intrusive, I still entered the context of their family and home environment as a researcher. I believed that for some participants this label would be off putting, intimidating, or even offensive due to prior notions of the job of a researcher. But I did not find that was the case. The use of the term was limited and I soon became, “Miss Kelly.” The family did not say Miss Kelly is coming to do research,
but Miss Kelly is coming over, just as if I was a friend visiting the home in subsequent observations. This was later confirmed with participants in their acknowledgement of the ease of my presence in their home as well as their observation of the bond I developed with the children. They often requested that I stay longer and wanted very little time to pass between observations. This allowed for a well maintained, more natural or informal relationship with the participants. Carol and I would swap recipes and the boys often asked for me to stay longer. I felt this level of comfort with my participants offered a limited inclination for altered behaviors and naturalistic observations could take place.

With the design of the study, I used the initial interview with the Thompsons to build rapport with the family and gain background information on all of the participants. The welcoming nature of the family opened up a space to build a genuine relationship with them. As Bogdan and Biklen (2002) state, researchers must present themselves authentically. Although I had to transact being a family friend, I was still a researcher attempting to gather information. Therefore, I cautioned against becoming too attached to participants and gauged a professional distance to each family participant. This negotiation was constant as I began to feel like I was a part of the Thompson family.

I wanted to gain an understanding the family culture and dynamic, therefore I took copious field notes during observations while being a participant within the interactions. This stance as a participant-observer and my understanding of ethnographic work helped me to better examine and analyze the family culture without bias and speculation.
Data Sources

The data for this study were collected over a six-month period from November 2010 through April 2011. Initially, data were to be collected during the summer to maintain focus on family home literacy practices without the influence of school regulated activities and practices. However, once the Thompson family was identified the school year had begun. Data were collected from several sources including interviews, participant observations, cultural tools utilized during literacy events, literacy artifacts and researcher field notes. All interviews and observations were audio/video recorded with the consent of the participants.

Additionally, during the course of the study I made the methodological decision to conduct an interview with Luke’s fourth grade homeroom and reading and writing teacher. This interview took place after the end of the initial data collection, however it was necessary to have some insight on his teacher’s teaching philosophy, her ideas and beliefs around literacy in the schools, her personal experiences with literacy, as well as her perceptions of Luke as a student. Once I contacted Mrs. Meyers’ she was very willing to participate in the study. The interview was informal and semi-structured (see Appendix E) and lasted approximately 60 minutes. She was given and signed the participation consent letter at this interview.

Focal child initial and final interview. Semi-structured initial and final interviews were conducted with the focal child. These interviews lasted approximately 20-40 minutes and occurred in the home environment. The initial interview with Luke, took place at the beginning of the first home observation. The initial interview served as an opportunity to continue to establish rapport and to give Luke a chance to discuss his
inclinations towards literacy, general interests, and reveal day-to-day activities he designated as events that utilized reading and writing outside of school (See Appendix F). The final focal child interview subsequently was embedded within the final family interview. The focal child final interview questions were elicited during the last interview. The questions focused on gathering Luke’s impressions of his participation in the study, to determine his inclinations towards specific literacy events or practices, and to have him generate a literacy narrative about something he remembered about the study. Furthermore, information from the interviews informed the study about Luke’s self-perception.

**Initial and final interviews.** A semi-structured initial or background interview (see Appendix G) and final interview (see Appendix H) were conducted with the Thompsons. The interviews were approximately one to two hours in length. Participants included the maternal grandmother, parents, and children (three male siblings). Mr. and Mrs. Thompson’s niece was present for the initial family interview, but was not available for the final interview. The purpose of the initial interview was to obtain information on how the family participants utilized reading and writing in their daily activities, the family’s beliefs and attitudes about literacy, and terms and expressions the family would use to describe or discuss literacy. This interview was also used to gain more information about each family member, their inclinations towards literacy, elicit the initial narratives about literacy and build rapport with the family. The final interview followed a similar pattern as the background interview. However, questions addressed feelings and attitudes towards the study. The initial and final interviews were conducted during the first and last weeks of data collection respectively.
**Home observations.** The study included home observations that were conducted when the family identified dates and times that worked with their schedule or when they identified an event that involved literacy in their lives. This resulted in seven observations over the course of the study, not including the initial and final family interviews. Each observation was approximately 45-90 minutes. These observations always included the focal child and any combination of family participants. One observation included an additional family member, the maternal cousin of the sibling participants who attended the same school and was in the same grade as Darren engaged in the activity. Observations incorporated an event that was selected by the family. However, some observations were of interest to me and it was requested that the family have some observations around mealtime. These pre-selected observations were identified prior to the study as sites for conversation or interaction between adults and children. I selected mealtime as the event I wanted to observe with the family as several researchers, such as Ochs and Shohet (2006), have looked at “mealtime as cultural sites for the socialization of persons into competent and appropriate members of society (p. 35)”. Mealtime conversation has also been identified as a site for narrative to take place (Ochs & Capps, 2001). In taking up a sociocultural approach to this study as exploring the use of narrative, it was appropriate to observe mealtime conversations.

Events that utilized literacy (e.g. Sunday School) were reflective of the family’s literacy practices or places where narratives about literacy could occur were identified by the family. There were two mealtime observations that took place in Clair’s (G-Ma) home and were coincidentally the initial and final family interview, one mealtime observation took place at the Thompson home, one observation took place at a local cake
decorating in the community in which the Thompson family lived, one observation took place at a local farmers market in the city of Saint Louis, and the remaining observations took place at the Thompson home. These observations included pre-selected and spontaneous family selected events that centered around literacy or events that elicited literacy narratives.

**Stimulated elicitation interviews.** Discussions that included semi-structured stimulated elicitation interviews were conducted. They were approximately 10 minutes long. The purpose of the interviews was to gather thoughts and impressions about the recently observed activity and to discuss key elements in any previously recorded observations. Given that the purpose of this interview was to obtain brief clarifications, the time allotted was sufficient. However, I found that these were also opportunities that forged closer relationship building with the family.

**Literacy artifacts.** Miller et al. (2003) recommend collecting artifacts that may be pertinent to any practices. Therefore, literacy artifacts were collected, with the family’s permission at the time of the home observations. Artifacts included: written texts, sketches from the siblings and father, and books and objects that were specifically related to an observed literacy event. The artifacts were copied and/or photographed and returned to the family the following week or at the next observation.

**Researcher log.** Detailed field notes were kept as a part of the researcher log. Field notes were composed on the basis of scratch notes taken during and immediately following all observations; they were composed as soon as possible after observations to ensure the most precise recall. Field notes were both descriptive and reflective. The descriptive portion included “initial impressions” that detailed the events, physical
setting, participants’ appearance and “feeling tone” (Emerson et. al, 1995). The reflective portion of the field notes included my interpretations, reactions, feelings towards observations and any methodological concerns.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Prior to the data collection period all consent forms were signed and initial questions and concerns about the study were addressed. The initial family interview, focal child initial interview and first observation took place in November 2010. Due to the upcoming holiday season, the next six observation took place from January 2011 to April 2011. The final family interview and final focal child interview was in April of 2011.

This initial interview took place at G-Ma’s house during a Sunday family dinner after church. The interview was video-taped and audio-taped for the purposes of accurate transcription due to the number of family participants involved. The interview lasted approximately 120 minutes. The interview provided initial impressions about home literacy practices, spaces in which literacy events took place within the family, and family narratives about literacy (literacy narratives).

The first home observation took place three weeks later. This home observation included the initial focal child interview. Given that the initial family interview and observation was over two hours, it seemed appropriate to reserve this interview for that home observation. Here are a few of the questions asked to Luke:

1. Are you a good reader or writer?
2. Do you like to tell stories or create stories? If so, what are your stories about?
3. Do you like school?
All home observations included the Luke. This first observation was approximately 60 minutes and was followed by a 10 minute stimulated elicitation interview. The focus of the observation was to look at: how literacy events unfolded, who the participants were and the roles of those participants, the purpose of the literacy event, the nature of Luke’s participation in the literacy event, and the kind of talk associated with the literacy event. The stimulated elicitation interview included clarifications on fieldnote data as well as a discussion on arrangements for the next possible observation.

Between January and April six more observations took place. After the initial family interview and first observation the Christmas holiday was approaching. To be flexible and respectful of the Thompson family the subsequent observations took place after the new year. Each of the six observations were dedicated to the observations of literacy events and to capturing literacy narratives. Each observation was 45-60 minutes and included various combinations of family participants. Additionally, each was followed-up with a stimulated elicitation interview (10-20 minutes). Outside of pre-selected home observations events, the Thompsons identified additional events in which literacy practices took place or literacy narratives occurred. All home observations and stimulated elicitation interviews were audio-taped for accuracy of data and to ensure that all statements were included during the observations. The location of the home observations varied as aforementioned, depending on family identified events or practices. Therefore, there was flexibility as to where and when and thusly contributed to nuances of the study. The final family interview was the day after the last observation in April 2011. A family journal was given to the oldest sibling, Darren, at the first meeting.
but was not collected. This would be a weakness of the study. Journal entries were to include: the date, location, participants, activity and a brief description of the interaction. And would have been eventually returned to the family as an archive of the experience.

The last family interview was in April 2011; it included the final focal child interview. This day I interviewed the family (See Appendix B for the Family Interview Protocol.) This interview involved questions about Luke and the family’s general experiences with the project, and it gave them the opportunities to share stories or narratives that did not come out in the study, as well as to discuss any further concerns about the study or study results, what literacy events or practices they remembered and what stories they could tell about the project experience. The final interview included all family participants, except Tosha the maternal cousin of the siblings (she is not a participant in any other observations). The interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and was also video-taped and audio-taped for the accuracy of transcription due to the number of participants.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

All interviews and observations were video/audio taped and submitted to a full transcription. Transcripts, accompanying field notes, artifacts were examined through inductive data analysis. As I began to sort through the interviews, observations, collected narratives, and additional data sources, I focused on “developing categories that account for the diversity and breadth” of my data (Miller et. al, 2003). All data collected from the family was maintained in a confidential manner. With my initial review of the data I broadly considered information about literacy events including key participants, type/time/location of the activities, and the function of the literacy event and any other
pertinent information. Additionally, I looked for themes or categories, which were recurrent (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Upon reviewing data for the family I looked for connections between themes and the narratives they share as well as observations that took place.

In an effort to analyze the data systematically and accurately, I created a chart that referenced the date of the observation, the participants, as well as events that were memorable or triggered my recollection of the home observation. This provided ease in identifying what transcripts need to be referenced during data analysis.

All narratives were reviewed to determine similar events around the narrative, participants, views, attitudes or descriptions that informed possible definitions of family literacy. Here it was important that I made each studied phenomena authentic and based on the viewpoints of the participants. This was a crucial element for the focal child and family as I explored how Luke was situated in the phenomena. It was during this time that I discovered that the study was truly a family study. However, in observations involving Luke, I made note of the literacy events in which he engaged or participated, whom he interacted with, what purpose the interaction served for him and the overall trends of his home literacy practices.

Additionally, I took the transcribed interviews and observations and reviewed them alongside my fieldnotes/observation notes. With a more critical eye, I reviewed the transcripts multiple times hi-lighting and isolating narratives, events, and words that were key to my research questions and were connected to identified themes, categories or trends. If I made note of a particular occurrence in my fieldnotes, I often went back to the appropriate transcript to better reference my surroundings during that observation. To
remain attached to the data, I would at times just listen to and watch previous audio and video taped observations and interviews.

After reviewing the data more critically, as Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen (2003) suggest, transcribed data including literacy events were coded into the categories and themes that emerged. Narratives were also coded for thematic content. Narrative codes were used to identify who were telling the narrative, who and what the narrative were regarding and the functions of those narratives. Narratives within in literacy events or about literacy events were important to investigate stories as they offered the best depictions of traditions of literacy within the family. These narratives were explored as family literacy narratives that can offer historical, educational, and broader social dynamics to the literacy practices exhibited.

The family was encouraged to share items they associated with literacy, which included their own personal sketches, books and several artifacts. These items and pictures of items were analyzed as pictorial representations of stories offered by the family or cultural tools used in the configuration of literacy in the family. Given that the data came from several sources and was utilized to offer a description of the home literacy practices analysis and interpretation of the data collectively functioned as a way to further elucidate trajectories exhibited in home literacy practices within the family.

Again, during this process I wanted to keep my research questions central to my analysis, but also appraise my questions and remain open to any nuances that were uncovered. I was attentive to my analysis procedures even as I began data collection and reviewed materials until a scheme for reporting findings was clear.
To further demonstrate how my research questions related to the data collection sources and methods of analysis, I offer the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do home literacy practices look like?</td>
<td>- home observations</td>
<td>- analyze commonalities and dissections of: setting, participants, function of events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- family interviews</td>
<td>- develop a taxonomy of practices based on above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- stimulated elicitation interviews</td>
<td>- look at reoccurring events that support practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What are the roles of participants who participate in home literacy practices</td>
<td>- home observations</td>
<td>- code participant roles such as: facilitator, supporter, initiator, respondent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- family interviews</td>
<td>- code for participants who create, tell, partake in or listen to narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- stimulated elicitation interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What purposes do home literacy practices serve for the family and the focal child?</td>
<td>- home observations</td>
<td>- analyze the functions of literacy events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- family interviews</td>
<td>- determine if narratives carry significant themes associated with exhibited family values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- stimulated elicitation interviews</td>
<td>- examine focal child responses to literacy events and family participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- focal child interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. What artifacts or cultural resources are used during literacy practices?</td>
<td>- literacy artifacts</td>
<td>- analyze artifacts used, for what events, how often, when introduced, who utilizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- home observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- family interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- focal child interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.2. Research questions, data collection sources, and methods of analysis*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2. How do family members discuss and describe their experiences with literacy practices? | - home observations  
- family interviews  
- stimulated elicitation interviews | - code themes that emerge from narratives as well as the events in which stories originate |
| a. What literacy narratives do family members (adults and children) tell?          | - home observations  
- family interviews | - analyze central themes or topics of narratives  
- determine if narratives are differentiated based on the individual or purpose |
| b. Are there intergenerational links between literacy narratives, literacy events and literacy practices? | - home observations  
- family interviews | - look for recurrent themes in narratives across generations  
- look for recurrent literacy events across generations, |
| i. What is the nature of those intergenerational links?                            | - home observations  
- family interviews  
- stimulated elicitation interviews | - determine common themes within each generation |
| ii. In what ways do intergenerational links contribute to the development of family histories of literacy? | - home observations  
- family interviews  
- stimulated elicitation interviews | - determine common themes within each generation  
- determine what themes appear to be passed down |

Table 3.2. continued
Triangulation of Data

Bogdan & Biklen (2003) describe triangulation as the use of two or more data sources to provide accuracy, credibility and better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. To ensure that the voices, stories, and intentions of the participants are clearly portrayed I utilized several sources of data including: interviews, observations, and artifacts. The utilization of these data sources provided for triangulation in this study. While my interview data and observations were the primary sources of data, with each observation I ended the time with the family with a stimulated elicitation interview, which at the end of each observation allowed me to gain clarity and further insight into the family participants words and actions. The collection of artifacts further helped to elucidate and support my understanding of the Thompson family’s experiences with literacy.

Summary

In this chapter, I invite the reader into the first home observations, setting the stage for this study. I describe the type of study I completed, as well as the site selection and recruitment of family participants. I introduce the family participants and situate the Thompson family within the study. I discuss my complete role as researcher and list all data sources I collected. I explain data collection and data analysis procedures, which I further support with a table to bring clarity to the course of the study.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis/Findings
Weaving the Threads: A History of Family Literacy Traditions

Why is Papa putting the bags under the hood, I thought? How odd. His small chocolate frame, walked from in front of the 1967 light blue Volkswagon Beetle a.k.a the Blue Bug. As he approached the door, I slid back onto the bumpy black leather seats, grabbed the seatbelt with that heavy buckle and settled in for my adventure. As Papa leaned into his seat he handed me a well-organized little booklet.

“Papa, what is this?” I postured.

“It’s a trip-tic.” Confused, I told my grandfather that it just looked like a map to me. He laughed and replied, “It is.” I wondered what we needed a map for…my Papa knew how to get anywhere in the world!

“That’s for you…you are riding shotgun today!” He exclaimed.

Surely my grandfather was not going to hand me a firearm. “What’s shogun?” I questioned.

My grandfather explained to me that I was responsible for getting us to our destination and this was a very important job. He would do the driving and I would do the navigating. I was a bit concerned that I might get us lost, but if Papa thought I could do it…he could not be wrong.

“Ok, let’s go!” I exclaimed.

My bubbling excitement of the trip ahead was momentarily halted by my initial bewilderment.

“Now Papa, why did you put the bags under the hood?”
My Papa explained to me that by putting the engine in the back of the car, gas consumption would be more economical than if it were in the front. At the time I didn’t understand everything that he said. But as I reflect now, I realize that my grandfather had imparted knowledge to me about the value of a dollar, a strong work ethic, and not making more out of material items than necessary. Like on this trip and many others I took with my grandfather, my exposure to literacy came through his teachings and his stories. These experiences, which ultimately were woven into my family tapestry, are reflective of three key components that I discuss in this chapter. Here my grandfather and I partake in a practice that has historical significance, that is exposed through the intergenerational connection between grandfather and granddaughter, this connection does not have to be facilitated by a middle man, but occurs organically without any disruption in shared experiences. It also holds educational significance, as previously mentioned the transference of knowledge for day-to-day occurrences and ways of living. I am not speaking of education in the traditional sense, but at its simplest form of knowledge exchange, an exchange that takes place where we are all first students…at home. Lastly, this involves social significance in that during these trips in which literacy was present, my grandfather and I developed an incredible bond and a relationship that could never be broken.

This story of my own literacy experiences represents the ways in which family members come together and co-create histories of literacy learning. They are embedded with stories, ideas, words, experiences, practices and beliefs that lead to a rich, contextualized history of literacy for a family. Each member has a unique role they play in the development of the history. The socialized learning that takes place in these
moments is not uni-directional, but reciprocal. These moments give families the opportunity to recall, share, teach, learn, understand, pass down family values, and develop deeper more substantial relationships. In this experience, I learned what *riding shotgun* actually meant and that I had nothing to worry about when this sentiment was expressed to me. I learned how to read and understand a map, road signs, and mile markers. As a little girl, I took many trips with my grandfather, and each time I rode shotgun; my grandfather offered me an experience in having agency and being proficient. I understood our roles and was honored to participate in our many excursions. I often share these travel stories with my nephews and each time one of them gets in the passenger’s seat, I am reminded of those times.

I utilize this story to parallel the ways in which the Thompson Family members each served unique and meaningful roles in creating, re-creating and co-creating their history of literacy traditions. Their contributions feed into a family history in which intergenerational connections, family values and understandings of literacy, learning, and more broadly, education are embedded. The Thompson Family is the center of a range of dynamics and a set of contingencies that include institutional components such as family, history, church, school, and work.

I begin the chapter by offering brief descriptive profiles of each family member. To further expound on the overall family dynamic that exists and set the stage for the ways in which each family member’s role was shaped by their personal connections with, understanding of, and uses of literacy, I describe the family’s literacy practices, discuss the literacy narratives they told and how their practices and narratives contributed to the foundation of literacy in the Thompson family.
Part One: Family Profiles

We Are a Family: Setting a Solid Foundation for a Tapestry

They say the key to weaving a tapestry is starting with a strong foundation; I see the presence of the family unit as that foundation. The Thompson family’s experiences with literacy were multifaceted, in that literacy could take place in various environments, with various family members, and in multiple forms. As the tapestry begins to take shape, each member of the family seemed to play a unique role in the carrying out of literacy within the family. As I observed the Thompsons in their out of school or home environments, each member’s role in the family and identities within this foundation began to emerge.

Nathan the “Entertainer”. He most often had a little joke to share and was very determined to get laughs. In the first family interview, while giving introductions, he felt it most appropriate to introduce the family dog Fifi as the “sister” sibling to the boys. All of the boys shared an affinity for music, but in one observation Nathan was most excited about performing, *Dynamite* by Taio Cruz (2011) in the school talent show. He did not appear to be the least bit nervous and it was imperative that he had all of his dance moves correct. This perfectionist characteristic as an entertainer was a part of his personality that seemed to carry over into other areas as well. He often wanted to announce how good his grades were and how he was smarter than his brothers. Nathan’s entertaining spirit will show up again, later in this chapter.

Luke the “Innovator”. He seemed to be a bright light bulb. Luke shared a story with me about an inventive game he created for him and his friends to communicate in class. This was a perfect example of his innovative spirit. During the time of the study
social media outlets such as: *Yahoo Chat*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* were gaining widespread popularity. Luke came up with a way to communicate with his closest friends in class throughout the school day. He admitted sometimes he had the permission of his teacher to use these lines of communication, but sometimes he did not. However, his friends would whisper to each other or pass notes, but each communicative exchange had to be preceded with an indication of what social media outlet they were pretending to utilize. For example, if Luke was going to use *Facebook*, he would get the attention of his friend by holding a book up near his face and smiling to indicate it was a “face” plus “book” message. Similarly, if a Twitter message was being sent, the person initiating the communication would tweet like a bird. Luke created a physical representation of computer media outlets that were rarely permitted in school. When speaking to Luke’s teacher she referred to him as a bright, but talkative student. That description seemed fitting.

**Darren the “Renaissance Kid”**. Darren was certainly reminiscent of what we consider to be a renaissance man. He was not constrained by traditional ways of functioning. For example, Darren did not hide the fact that he was not that “in to” reading. However, it was most peculiar and fascinating to me that he very much enjoyed reading *Naruto* books. As a series written in *manga*, a Japanese form of writing that employs comic book tiles that are read from bottom to the top and right to left within each tile. This reading was far more complex and is in opposition with American constructions of reading. This suggested to me that Darren’s ways of thinking were out of

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4 *Naruto* is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Masashi Kishimoto. It tells the story of Naruto Uzumaki, an adolescent ninja who constantly searches for recognition.
the box and progressive. While all of the boys enjoyed drawing, Darren was also known as the artist of the family. Certainly he was a kid with many talents.

**Tosha the “Example”**. Tosha was the older female cousin to the boys who, at the time of the study, was attending college at local State University, while living with the Thomsons. Tosha was in school to earn her Bachelor of Arts, in Communications, and aspired to do event planning with her degree. She served as an educational example for the boys in the family. As it will be revealed later, Carol and Ray felt it was important for their boys to attain higher education and Tosha was a live in example of this pursuit. While her participation in this study was limited due to her busy school and work schedule, another aspect of her role in the family availed itself. However, Tosha made significant contributions during the initial family interview. She was able to bridge together abstract ideas for the boys that were brought forth by their parents and grandmother. One example, Carol and Claire recalled writing chain letters many years ago, an experience they shared together. Tosha inserted that chain letters (then) were like mass text messages (now) and that no one would take the time to write multiple letters. Nathan, Luke and Darren were very familiar with texting and were connected to this practice through their frequent use of tech devices. They used their mother’s cell phone and their Nintendo DS (a hand held gaming system) to carry out similar practices. However, Tosha was there to give the boys a point of reference for a practice that Carol and her mother shared.

**Carol the “Phenomenal Woman”**. Carol worked as a freelance photographer. Her presence in the family was salient throughout most of her interactions, especially with her children. As a mother, Carol was very invested in her kids and her family. I
remember being so impressed with her knowledge of the book contents that were of interest to her boys. She seemed to know all of the books and the storylines and characters in the books. Carol could engage in conversation with her boys about their interests and had a precise point of reference for doing so. She often indicated that she wanted to make literacy fun for her boys, so that their enjoyment of it would be in their souls. This was evidenced through her active participation in the practice of reading with the boys, described later in this text. She talked about instilling family pride in her boys and pride in their work, which was clear in their home. The walls were adorned with multiple family pictures, Ray’s artwork, her pictures and many drawings from Nathan, Luke and Darren. Her investment in her children and family was apparent and for that she was a “phenomenal woman, phenomenally”- Maya Angelou (1994)

Ray the “Chief”. Ray worked as an electrician for a big electrical company in the city of Saint Louis. In the Thompson home, Ray set the tone of order and rules for the boys. He expressed that it was important for him to lead his boys by example. As the “Chief” he was able to bring order to situations that had the potential of ‘getting wild’ with the boys. This was evidenced in several observations. However, in the initial family interview, he at one point opted to step back from the camera frame so that he could “keep the boys in check.” Carol had this to say about Ray, “Oh, Ray is very good about keeping order…and making sure the boys stay in line.” As mentioned previously, Ray additionally led the boys by example. He discussed the desire for his boys to become positive, strong individuals. As a reminder of this, he posted an article that hung in the kitchen that was written in the local newspaper about his work as an electrician for the metropolitan electric company as a supervisor and one of the first respondents to supply
electricity back to families that lost power during a big storm and tornadoes that had come through Saint Louis. This article was hung, for the boys to see the impact of their Father’s profession everyday.

**Claire the “Griot”**. Like the Griot of a village, as the oldest family member of the study, she was the historian that provided a point of reference for stories and experiences of those generations that were no longer present, thus offering access to an oral history of the family. When asked where the family’s roots were, she responded that several generations of their family were from Ripley, Mississippi (maternal side-Carol’s family). The southern roots were apparent in Claire’s preparation of Sunday dinners. Claire was also a nurturer and caregiver in the Thompson family. Her home provided a comfortable and welcoming environment for the family to gather for those dinners. Additionally, Carol talked about how Claire often interacted with the boys, as she would come to the Thompson’s house to receive the boys each day when they returned home from school. Her connection to the boys was often seen as she would correct their manners and give them gentle reminders to be respectful of each other by listening and paying attention when someone was speaking to them. As the “Griot” Claire was a historical reference, but also a caregiver to the Thompsons and thusly a valued member of the family.

**Part Two: Prominent Themes**

In part two, I discuss the three major themes that I identified in my findings. As I continued to listen to my audio-recordings along with my transcripts and fieldnotes these themes emerged and resonated throughout the study. It appeared that the Thompson Family’s literacy practices and traditions were often charged with ideals centered around
or were reflective of these three contextualized themes: Historical, Educational and Social.

The following three sections are organized as such: I offer a brief description on the configuration of each the three main themes. I next share a family literacy personal story to further illustrate each of the three themes, therefore weaving my own personal story along side of the Thompson Family. Then, I uncover the Thompson Family’s experiences that feed into or conceptualize these themes. In my analysis of these experiences I examine the ways in which they are more tightly connected to each theme and, then, how they are broadly connected to notions around historical, educational, and social dynamics. A focus of this research study was to examine the ways that literacy developed around a focal child within the family. Therefore, each thematic explanation will end with a discussion of how Luke’s, as a family participant, experiences are woven into the fabric of his family’s tapestry. However, I note that because the family as a unit was a constant contributor to the weaving process, this was truly a family study.

At the close of the chapter, I consider the ways in which I viewed literacy practices and traditions at the intersections of history, education, and social interaction weave together within a family. Additionally, I look at how concepts such as bonding, identity, and agency are enacted on a more individual level. I contend that the phenomenon of weaving a tapestry is an accurate depiction of what I consider to be an ‘interlacing effect’ in that people, narratives, and events that share a literacy origin within a family are vastly dynamic. In processing my understanding of this phenomenon I understand that I am really only presenting a small portion of the Thompson Family tapestry.
Historical Significance

As I analyzed data that emerged as historically significant I identified moments in the data in which intergenerational connections were brought forth in specific events or in narratives that were shared. In this section, I identify events in time in which the family reached back into their own family history or into cultural history and brought those ideals to the present day. Those moments in time and these ideals were often facilitated by the use of cultural tools within this family, both explicit and implicit. Those tools included tangible significant items like the bible, but were also implicit, like a moral on a message carried in a story.

I share a thread. I share this finding from the previous work on my own family: how influential drawing became to the configuration of literacy in my family. My father talks about how much he enjoyed drawing horses as a child, and I recalled the times that I have watched my father sit and draw horses with my youngest nephew. My father and nephew took pride in displaying their artwork on the refrigerator. My own connections to this thread, include the recollection of my favorite childhood book, “All the Pretty Little Horses: A Traditional Lullaby,” illustrated by Linda Sapport (2005). The story is a traditional African-American lullaby and it fostered my own affinity towards horses as well as my attraction to the beautiful watercolor illustrations. For me, the book was reflective of my family’s value in drawing and art that are woven into our literacy tapestry.

An excerpt taken from the study, Home Literacy Practices in the Byrd Family; Oh yeah I remember that! (Byrd, 2009) is:
One last similarity was noted between three of the male family participants. The grandfather (Eddie) and the father (Brian) have an affinity to drawing. However, Simon (my oldest nephew) says that he will read “sometimes” but when he gets bored that he will draw pictures. He expresses, “I just really like to draw.” Eddie follows up, “I was like Simon, I liked to draw. I’d draw pictures of horses and cars. I used to do that for entertainment. ” I liked to make pictures, I just drew pictures that I liked, I always liked horses.” This attraction to drawing was seen in the father as well. He recalls taking pleasure in reading comic books and going through how to draw books. Eddie and Brian both are illustrators by profession. Therefore, a part of their literacy practices are connected to drawing. Drawing is rarely associated with literate practices about reading and writing, except in younger children (Dyson, 1997). However, these stories of drawing fit perfectly into the many varied recollections of literacy practices. Finally, Simon articulated he was much more into drawing than reading and he expressed his plans to “make a picture book, like a comic book, with squares and bubbles when they talk.”

In sharing this excerpt, I am directed to the aforementioned “scrapbook” that my father created with his father, noted in the prologue of this dissertation. That scrapbook had a dark red cover with black pages. Its intended use was a photo album. On those pages were old newspaper and magazine clippings. My grandfather knew how much my father enjoyed horses as he often rode them on their many trips to Texas. Together they created a book that was reflective of items about which my father was fond as well as times that my father and grandfather shared. Those literacy events (creating the scrapbook is considered a literacy event due to my father’s association of literacy with drawing) gave way to experiences with literacy in drawing and horses that would not
occur for many years later. This connection spans four generations in my family and it thusly constitutes an intergenerational connectedness that is the primary drive for the historical significance in family literacy traditions. This too is prevalent for the Thompson Family

**Echoes in the tapestry.** The Thompson shared many intergenerational connections, as exhibited in the multiple times the influence of one’s actions seemed to present themselves in the actions of others. Carol and Claire share this literacy experience in the initial family interview, their voices seeming to echo each other.

*G-Ma (Claire):* Me, I love reading…and running across words that I haven’t heard and never seen before. I say, I can’t believe that I don’t know what this is and never seen it before.

*Carol:* I love to read. I pretty much have a book that I’m reading all of the time, whether it’s something fiction, something non-fiction…I love history. I am a huge history buff and I love to read historical fiction as well…and I like instructional stuff too, I’m a research geek.

Here Claire and Carol share a common thirst for knowledge, both wanting a little more out of their reading experiences. At one point I could see an even deeper parallel between Carol and Claire in relation to their childhoods.

*Carol:* …because for me, when I was a kid, I...my mother would beg me to go outside and play. She would say, “please go outside, it’s nice outside.” I went, “I’m reading. I’m reading.” Yeah, so…I was outside reading in my mind.
Claire: *All I had to do was read. We didn’t even have a radio. We didn’t have a telephone, television, so I did read a lot. Like I said, that is all we had to do was read, but I enjoyed it.*

Again, it is as if G-Ma passed on her enjoyment of reading in childhood to her daughter. Additionally, Claire remembered how her mother (great-grandmother to Nathan, Luke and Darren) did lots of reading. She recalled how her mother would read anything related to church and that the bible was used to calm the fears of her and her five siblings when there were thunderstorms outside.

*Claire: Mom would bring all us kids together and sit us down and just read the bible.*

As Claire tells this literacy narrative, Darren automatically connects this story to Nathan and how he always had to go sleep with their parents when there was a thunderstorm. Here we can see how these topic related recollections and stories are generationally linked and woven together.

Another similarity to Claire’s mother reading the bible to her and her siblings was evident when Carol talked about how she used to read stories to her boys all of the time. This event is discussed later in this chapter. But the literacy practice of reading with children was apparent in generations that were no longer living and imparted into present generations. These recollections of intergenerational experiences were evidenced in these responses to questions about the ways literacy factored into their lives.

An affinity towards writing in various forms was another generationally observed literacy practice in the Thompson Family. Nathan, Luke and Darren all disclosed a preference or inclination towards writing, typically for enjoyment of activities outside of
school. It appeared at one point that Nathan conflated writing and drawing. He saw
drawing and writing as concepts that go hand in hand. This was a unique aspect of the
family’s understanding of literacy.

Nathan: *Is writing, drawing? I draw Bakaguns*. I like to draw them in real action
mode, not in the ball. I read about them and then I write down facts about them.

Luke: I like to write about TV shows that I watch. I don’t know how many times,
but I like to write anytime I finish a book. Like I finished, *The Guardians of the
Ga’hoole*, book one.

This pairing of writing and drawing was important for the boys as evidenced in
their story writing and character description practices. When Darren was asked about his
experiences with reading and writing he seemed a bit shy at first with his response, but
Carol quickly chimed in to remind Darren about literacy interactions with writing and
drawing.

Darren: *I read a little bit, but I just really like writing more.*

With her encouragement Darren revealed he enjoyed writing about animals and
Pokemon. He preferred drawing pictures and text in the comic book style. Carol made
sure to express that her son was a very talented artist.

Carol: *He’s an exceptional artist!*

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5 A Japanese-Canadian action adventure anime television series. It involves battle
brawls between characters that are also sold in stores as kid friendly action figures.
6 The Guardians of Ga’Hoole: The Capture by Kathryn Lasky is one in a book series
considered a classic hero mythology about the fight between good and evil.
7 Franchise centered fictional creatures called "Pokémon", which humans capture and
train to fight each other for sport. It includes toys, trading cards, movies and animated
series.
Both parents, Randy and Carol, had a love for writing that included and went beyond the day-to-day uses of writing as well (e.g. bills, grocery lists):

Ray: *I have to do an exceptional amount of reading* (for work as a minister). *As far as writing is concerned, I DEFINITELY like to write.*

Carol interjected that Ray often wrote for functionality and enjoyment as he wrote sermons and lots of other writing.

Ray: *Yeah and songs and stuff like that.*

Ray wrote songs for church as a minister. This use of writing as an art was evidenced in his children as well.

As yet another example of intergenerational writing, Carol and Claire shared their memories of writing chain letters together. Carol recalled watching her mother write letters home to their family in Mississippi and letters to family members that were in the military. Claire even recognized that she was drawn to writing because she remembered the beauty in her mother’s (great-grandmother to Nathan, Luke, and Darren) handwriting.

Writing for enjoyment, as a literacy practice, in a manner that was reflectively artful was experienced by Claire, Carol and all of the boys. Additionally, song writing as literacy practice in which Ray participated, also seemed to filter down to the boys. Like the other generational practices shared in this section, they were anchored in the family and were thusly part of their tapestry.

**Connecting a history of literacy: Artifacts.** Next I discuss a cultural tool belonging to the Thompson Family that I affectionately refer to as *The Shrine* as seen in the following:
On one of my first observations in the home of the Thompson’s I remember being greeted by Carol who was looking for a granola recipe when I arrived. We chatted about how we both enjoyed cooking and trying new recipes (a story that also resonated with Claire). I sat down on the sofa and across from where I was seated, my eyes were drawn to a glass bookcase filled with pictures, awards, books, trinkets, cars and dolls. I rose from the sofa to take a closer look. I asked Nathan, Luke, and Darren, who had now emerged from their bedroom to tell me about the contents of the case.

Ray returned home from a church meeting, and I told him that I was admiring all of the wonderful things that I saw in the bookcase. He replied, “The boys can tell you all about the contents.” This implied to me that these were artifacts to which the boys were familiar and connected.
Carol walked by and said, “Oh show Miss Kelly your book!” Nathan and Luke both in excitement said, “Oh yeah,” and took the book out of the case. The boys began to laugh hysterically and I wanted to know the inside joke. I give a more detailed account of this story later in the chapter. However, what I observed that day was a family that was proud to communicate the history of the contents of The Shrine to me.

Nathan and Luke volunteered to take me through the contents of the cabinet.

*Nathan: It has Michael Jordan cards, and a Barack Obama book! I will read it to you.*

I saw a book that had the profile of a younger version of Darren and a bright blue robin’s egg on the cover. Taking ownership of this incredible creation, the boys offered to share their book and literacy artifact with me.

*Nathan: It’s An EGG-VENTURE.*

*Figure 4.2. An EGG-VENTURE*

*Luke: Yeah EGG-VENTURE, like ADVENTURE.*
Nathan: “Written an photographed by [Carol Thompson]. She totally made this book.”

Nathan and Luke were so proud of the book that their mother made for them. Carol, a photographer, had ceased a moment to pictorially capture this experience for her children to remember and pass on for years to come. Not only did the book represent a more recent history of events for the family, *The Shrine* was a physical symbol of the Thompson Family’s history. Also enclosed in the bookcase were the family’s accolades in school and in sports, awards the children earned in preschool and kindergarten, and the boy’s baby booties. It included souvenirs of trips the family had taken. It housed a book about President Obama and a porcelain plate adorned with his picture. These items seem to represent history making moments that were important to the family, as these literacy artifacts sat along side the family artifacts. *The Shrine* and it contents were closely tied to literacy and history within the family because the contents evoked multiple literacy narratives or storytelling as a literacy practice that seem to make a statement about acknowledging and appreciating the past in the present moment. Additionally, it was identified to me as significant to literacy as the family shared experiences and components of their lives that were representative of literacy or literacy practices in the home.

The bookcase also included another literacy artifact that I found to be very interesting--an old book with the words, *Simple Addition: And Nursery Jingles* (McLoughlin Bros., 1870) caught my eye. The cover reminded me of the set of nursery rhyme books that I had as a little girl. However its significance to the Thompson Family was not as simple and seemingly innocent as childhood nursery rhymes.
Figure 4.3. Cover and first page entitled, Simple Addition by a Little Nigger

In this literacy narrative, Carol shared with Luke and I, the significance of this book.

Carol: *Ah an old gem of the family. It’s very delicate. It is very, very, very, old. I showed it to them (the boys) to help them understand how folks used to view us.*

Luke: *What’s special about this book again?*

Carol: *The fact that they used what they call...it’s African-Americans...blacks, because they refer to us as the N word, to teach math to their children.*

It was important to Carol for Nathan, Luke, and Darren to understand that historically teaching practices in America included derogatory words and stereotypical images of African-Americans. Like the individual contents in the bookcase, this piece of history laid amongst all of the family artifacts. Each item along with the stories connected to those items, become threads blended into the Thompson Family tapestry of literacy traditions.

**Instilling a history of literacy: Morals.** Lastly, for the Thompson Family it could not be denied that literacy was often tied to reading. I became aware that this literacy practice was historically significant to the family when a literacy narrative around the importance and value is shared. It was apparent the mother and father desired to have
reading as a literacy practice to part of their family’s legacy to be passed down and internalized by their children. Ray and Carol echoed these sentiments and each other by making the following statements and relaying its prominence to their sons.

Ray: Well, you know, my role in this whole deal is pretty much the same as Carol’s and G-Ma’s (Claire). Make sure that these children become fluent readers. I would like for these guys to pick up her (Carol’s) habits or traits or whatever as far as, you know, becoming more educated, well rounded. You know, just more...give them a better vocabulary instead of using the same words to describe stuff over and over again or to articulate something. Perhaps, maybe, you know, they get a whole lot of different ways to express themselves through that.

Carol: ...I really want them to love it (literacy). I want them to just...I want it to be part of their souls and so I keep trying to find ways and time to cut through all of the stuff that’s going on to still say, okay, well tonight we’re going to try to do this kind of night or just to do different things to make it fun and interesting and something that they will cherish....I’m not really good at always getting them to stick to different habits and things like that, but I want them to see, you know, I’m sitting down reading. I want them to see me reading and I want them to see if there’s something I want to learn how to do on a camera, I’m not going to a class necessarily, but I’m either picking up a book or looking at a video or trying to find some resource. I want them to learn to be resourceful.

After, Ray and Carol made these statements they seemed to resonate with Luke. He interjects by pointing out that he has read more than both of his brothers, and that he
will go off and read to himself without being told to read. He also made Carol aware that he watches her on the computer when she edits her photos. This acknowledgment by Luke ultimately creates a bond between him and his mother that I discuss towards later in this section.

Claire conveyed that she wanted to lead her grandsons by example as well. By doing so she is teaching them perseverance, more specifically perseverance in reading:

Claire: *I try to impress to the kids, you know, sometimes in life some things are good like reading, you don’t really have to say you like it, but you just do it. You know, you say, I’m going to take 30 minutes, I’m going to take an hour and do this, you know, and try to remember what they’re reading about. So it seems like maybe when I am getting up out of the bed every morning, I don’t really want to get up, but I do. You know, once you get up, you can do it. So it could be the same way with reading.*

It can be seen that there is a historical context that figures into way the Thompson family weaves together literacy practices and traditions. They share intergenerational connections towards literacy; they display their family history within their home and have an agenda for contributing to the lives of Nathan, Luke, and Darren by imparting a value in literacy that should stay with them for a lifetime.

*An additional thought:* As I close out this section of the themes, I am drawn to another event that I previously described with the older cousin Tosha. I stated earlier, that Tosha served as bridge for the boys and an experience shared by Carol and Claire, the two older generations. However, her ability to *bridge* literacy experiences, I see as a phenomenon
that factors in to what I describe as historical significance. By bridging together events and practices, Tosha ties together what could be considered a ‘snag’ in the thread or the weaving process or moment when a disconnect could occur. I offer two more examples of this phenomenon. In sharing another Mother and Daughter story, Carol talked about her first memories of going to the library with her Mother to get books. She even recalled the librarian’s name, Mrs. Monroe. She said that often her teachers did not assign research papers, so she would come up with topics to research and ask the librarian to help her find books. The librarian would take her back to the stacks. The boys looked puzzled as their mother mentioned the concept. Tosha’s response was, “oh that is like the original Google.” She explained you could find all the information that you needed in the stacks because that was where a lot of the books were stored. They seemed to immediately understand that connection.

There is one last incident where Tosha seamless bridges together multiple generations in the family. She recalled one of her literacy experiences as a child, when her mother gave her a chalkboard. She remembered writing on it all of the time. When asked what she wrote, she said, “just words.” Tosha expressed how she remembered that her family always had dictionaries around the house and that she would get the dictionary and just write words down even if she didn’t know what they meant, she would write them on her little chalkboard. She said that a practice in her home that she often saw her Uncle Ray do with her cousins (the boys) was that if you didn’t know a word, you just had to go look it up. Nathan, Luke and Donavan rolled their eyes almost in unison.

Again, Tosha took a practice that was shared between two generations, not just in the
Thompson house, but in her home as well. These moments of bridging only help to further imagine the weaving of literacy traditions that takes place within a family.

**Luke’s thread.** I mentioned earlier in this section, how Luke wanted to make sure that I knew he often watched his Mother do her work on the computer, especially when she edited her photos. On one occasion when I was doing an observation at the Thompson home, I remembered walking in and seeing Luke participating in a literacy event. He was nestled up on the big sofa with his feet tucked under his body and working with his Nintendo DS (literacy artifact). I came in and sat next to him and asked, “What are you doing?” He had used his DS to take pictures of his friend playing basketball outside of his house. With an app that he downloaded he manipulated the pictures and features on the pictures and then later shared them with his friend. As I watched him re-design these photos into masterpieces, he said, “this is what my Mom does.” I included this experience as a literacy event because of Luke’s, along with his other brothers’, connection to drawing and literacy. There was an intergenerational connection here between mother and son that took place without both parties being present, and yet the experience was still shared as Luke saw his actions as reflective of his mother’s actions and literacy practices as a photographer. This literacy event implicitly experienced by Carol and Luke became another thread in the tapestry.

**Educational Significance**

Another theme that was evident in the Thompson Family tapestry was the importance of education and schooling to literacy. Initially with this study I sought to limit the influence of school on this project by attempting to collect data during the summer, when school was not in session. My point was to exclusively focus on home
practices, but as it turned out my data collection occurred during the school year. However, I realized that I could not tease out what was clearly valued by the Thompson family, nor did I want to. At a time when the dominant narrative declares that African-American families do not value education and schooling, this notion could not be further from the truth in my study. In my analysis of the data, I looked for narratives, events, cultural tools that were being told, enacted, and utilized by the family that had a direct connection to their education or understanding of schooling and education.

I share a thread. In my family there was no denying how important education was to the concept of literacy. While interviewing my family in a previous study I remember my Mother sharing these sentiments:

An excerpt from Home Literacy Practices in the Byrd Family; Let’s Go To the School House (Byrd, 2009) is:

Well before I started school, I knew my ABC’s and knew my numbers up to 10. Yeah, yeah, Granny taught Aunt Phyllis and I. She took time and taught us. I ask my Mother if her grandparents knew how to read and write and she replied, yeah to a certain age, to a certain grade level. Then they taught...they taught themselves pretty well, considering they didn’t go far in school. They knew how to read pretty good and they didn’t go up or high in school, in grade. But they got along well, they could do the day-to-day things. You know enough that they wanted their kids, well Papa and Aunt Aggie and Uncle Preniss to be smart. You know to them you were considered smart if you could read, write, and do arithmetic.
Here my Mother expressed a familial importance in school and being competent in reading and writing. For my mother, it was important for my siblings and I to go to school and continue to reflect that drive for education instilled in her by her grandparents. Neither of my parents finished college, but they had very strict rules about schooling and always pushed us to do what they had not done. As a first-generation college graduate and beyond, the limited formal education of previous generations in my family did not discount the existence of value in schooling and education. This too was evident in the Thompson family, as schooling and education appear in their literacy tapestry in a variety of ways.

**School colors: Weaving patterns of education.** During an observation I noticed a *buzz book* (student/staff phone list) on the floor. Nathan must have noticed my eyes drawn to the book or literacy artifact. He grabbed it and said it was the *buzz book* from his and Luke’s school. It had a very detailed drawing on the front and Nathan asked if it looked like he or Luke had drawn the picture. Of course I didn’t want to make a choice and I didn’t have to, Nathan hurriedly said that he was the artist that had drawn the picture. I asked him to tell me all about his drawing. He was so proud as he went through and described every detail of the picture, all the way down to the spokes on the school bus tires. I was impressed by his attention to detail and noted that he drew straight lines in front of the bus lights to indicate that they were on. Nathan reveled in his explanation of the *buzz book*. Previously Nathan discussed how interrelated drawing and literacy were in his conceptions of the two words. Therefore, his sharing of this artifact was situated around literacy for him and also included space for him to display his pride and agency in his work. This artifact was reflective of his experiences in school, as he drew teachers
and friends and details of the school such as the flag that sits on top of the school. There were often times when school artifacts such as books and projects were inserted into the home environment.

Over Spring Break Darren had to re-do a project in school that his teacher had given him an opportunity to correct. It appeared that his teacher felt as though he did not follow the instructions of the project and his Mother agreed.

Carol: Darren turned in work that was unacceptable. I am trying teach him to put more thought in and take pride in his work in school.

In this literacy event, Carol sat next to Darren at the dining room table, along with his cousin who was working on the same project. She carefully went through aspects of the book, *The Watson’s Go To Birmingham*, by Christopher Paul Harris. I observed her explain to Darren his options for completing the project and her suggestions for those options. One option was to complete a comic strip to reflect a story line in the book, which Carol encouraged Darren to do. This appealed to Darren, who had previously stated that he liked writing in comic book style. I had to recognize that the school had opened up an opportunity for Darren to connect with a personal home literacy practice in this instance.

Carol seemed to give Darren direction in similar teacher-student style, but what she had working to her advantage was a true understanding of her child’s strengths, weaknesses and inclinations. In this space, Ray kept a very close watch on Darren and gave him stern reminders to stay on task until he completed his work, hence his role as ‘Chief’. Carol and Ray’s responses to Darren during this literacy event reflected their
views of how important school and education were for their children. This is elucidated further in the next section.

The educational context of literacy was also evident in this literacy narrative and the lessons that Carol, Ray, Claire and Tosha (cousin) shared with the boys.

Carol: We talk about education every day and sometimes we’re positive and proactive about it, you know, how wonderful education is and how important it is. And then sometimes we probably sound desperate talking about it. Like you have to do this because if you don’t, then blah, blah, blah. We talk about different options. We try to get them (the boys) to describe how they see themselves, what they enjoy doing. We said early on that we really wanted to find out what these guys love to do so that we can really help to steer them in the right direction so that they won’t lose a lot of time trying to figure it out. But, you know, they’re still going to have their things they have to figure out on their own. But that is probably number one. We just say, even if you don’t feel like this is important, even if you don’t feel like doing X, Y, Z, you just have to. You’re going to be so happy that you did. So it’s good to kind of have that education associated with some type of career or occupation now.

Carol expressed that not only was it important to have an education, but for that education to be associated with career options that the boys anticipate enjoying. Claire recalled a conversation that she had with Darren around the topic of career choice.

Claire: You know, it’s strange at how just last night we were driving home and I can’t tell you how many jobs I asked him what he wanted to do when he grows up. You know, policeman I asked…I don’t know how many and he said no on every
one. Then I said what about a minister? That’s the only one he hesitated on...said maybe.

Ray seemed to smile at that response, since he worked as a minister at the family church. He firmly re-iterated Carol’s sentiments around education and added a description that provided examples of family members or friends that the boys were familiar with to propel their boys thinking about what it looks like to not have an education.

Ray: And as Carol alluded to it earlier about using examples. We use specific people, you know, as far as the importance of education, those who are successful and those who aren’t and tell them if they don’t do their homework, if they don’t complete their assignments or whatever, then they could possibly end up like those who are, you know, less fortunate or whatever.

I asked Tosha if she felt like a role model, she acknowledged in some way because the boys did get to see her as a student in college and that they had exposure to her books that get mixed with all of her cousin’s books. However, she believed that Carol and Ray were great role models to the boys, and to her.

Tosha: But they have their mother too. I mean, she’s not in school now, but she’s completed and she’s had a very successful career. Their father who has gone through his education, has a great career. They have great role models all around. I am trying to get there.

Carol discussed in the following literacy narrative what she believed were differences between the views of black and white students in the school and this too was important to communicate to her boys.
**Carol:** Yeah, there's a value in education and we were not excited to have to bring this up with them so early, but we made an association between race and education and, you know, even in the classroom and, you know, if you decide that you want to be a silly person in the classroom that you may be looked at different as an African American silly person as opposed to a white silly person and then people are making decisions about you and you're making decisions about how you're going to be perceived.

So we try to, you know, play it straight with them as far as the good the bad and the ugly, but then we also do try to paint the picture that, you know, you're setting yourself up for good things by really taking it seriously and we’re like, you’re not going to feel like taking it seriously every day. That’s human. We’re all like that, but it’s nothing to downplay.

These family values of education were carried on the threads of their tapestry. There were clear patterns seen that displayed a reverence for education as well as some more harsh realities of education. As the boys processed these values that lead to choices they would make in the future, those decisions and experiences moving forward overlapped these threads and patterns the older generations were setting for them.

**Luke’s thread.** While in the previous section I discussed the ways that education and schooling figured into the home context of the Thompsons. However, Luke had an experience in which drawing and character development, which the boys identified as a literacy practice, was carried from home into the classroom. Yet, this event was still a thread in the tapestry. Luke noted that one day when he looked at his father’s picture (self portrait) in the Shrine, it made him think about avatars (personal icon). I walked over to
see what he was working on, that day all of the boys were relaxing and looking at movies and participating in one of their favorite past time activities or literacy practices…drawing and writing. I walked over to Luke and he was working on his avatar or self-portrait (literacy artifact) like the one his father had drawn. Luke said that he had asked his teacher, Mrs. Meyers, if the whole class could make avatars and she responded that it would be a good idea. Luke took a literacy practice that he connected with in the home environment and also connected with his father and inserted the practice and himself into the class. He ultimately shared this thread that was significant to his family with his whole class.

Figure 4.4. Luke’s avatar

**Social Significance**

One last theme I wish to discuss centers around social interactions and social family bonds that were situated by literacy experiences and practices in the home context. Here I looked to isolate apparent bonds or connections between family members. It was clear that while the Thompson Family engaged in literacy practices they facilitated close
family ties and relationships. In these instances we see literacy as socially constructed practice that results in family bonds being created.

**I share a thread.** Brian and I claimed our hugs from Mamaw and Papa and ran outside to hop into my Dad’s red 65’ Chevy Impala with the grey hood. My Dad stood waiting for my brother and I to climb into the back seat, which seemed huge to our small thin bodies. As we drove home, the hum of the motor, the wind blowing on my face and thoughts of the peach pie sitting on my stomach sent me to a sort of sweet heavy. Suddenly the smooth sailing was interrupted by shuddering and sputtering. “Awe man! Not now!” my Dad exclaimed.

“What’s wrong Dad?”, my brother asked.

“Son I think we are going to run out of gas.”

I could feel the labored motion of the car until it came to a stop. My Dad seemed to ponder what he would do next. He asked that my brother and I wait in the car; he was going to see if he could get to a pay phone to have our Mom bring us some gas in the old gas can. My brother I sat in the over sized back seat and wondered what we would do. I asked my brother if wanted to play a hand game, like Miss Mary Mack., He surprisingly said, “Yeah sure!”

Then he proposed that we made up our own words. As we sat and waited for my Dad and tried to figure out what we could possibly use as our muse, he said, “Mamaw’s peach pie sure was good.”

I declared, “let’s do one about the peach pie!”

This is what we came up with that day: Peaches and cream and peaches and pie. I love Mamaw’s and I don’t know why.
We clapped our hands and uttered those few words until before we knew it our Dad was back and our Mom came to save the day. Thank goodness for peach pie!

In this literacy event of making up a childhood hand game with my brother, brought us closer together in that moment. This particular story was “co-recreated” by my brother and me, as it combined our recollections of the event. Retelling this story continues to maintain a bond that we made so many years ago.

**Blending the bonds of the tapestry.** As previously mentioned, on a visit to the Thompson home, Nathan and Luke shared a book with me that was created by their mom, Carol. When the boys shared this story with me, they began to co-narrate the story. They played off each other’s recollections of that day, chiming in when necessary. Luke made interjections and helped his brother to read words. All of this activity occurred in between their laughs and giggles.

Nathan selected himself to be the reader, and we all went sit on the sofa to listen to him read. Luke said, “The book was really about him and how Darren broke his egg.” Nathan opened the book and Luke sat very close to his little brother and peered over his shoulder as he began to read. Nathan went through and pointed out each one of his brothers, and added that he was the cutest. I laughed out loud and realized I was smiling in delight about the literacy narrative being shared and the interaction that was taking place.

*Nathan: (reading) “This book is dedicated to the memory of my Dad, Lance L. Forrester whose love for nature still inspires me to be awestruck by God’s creations on the daily basis and to seek ways to celebrate it at all times. This is*
based on a true story about my three sons, Darren, Luke, and Nathan and an egg that Luke found a few days earlier.”

Luke and I both attentively waited for Nathan to read the story. Luke added his commentary as Nathan read.

Nathan: (reading) “I've seen a Robin fly to and from that nest, the egg must have fallen out of the nest. I'll put the egg back in the nest. Donovan to the rescue. I'll just pick this egg up and place it back in the nest. Whoo! Oh no, I dropped it, I dropped Luther's egg. This is awful. That's an egg yolk.”

Luke: Ew, look at that!

Luke also assisted his brother when he was stuck on words:

Luke: This is the best part of the story.

Nathan: (reading) “It's ruined and it's all my fault. I feel awful. You should feel awful Darren, scold Nathan.”


Nathan: (reading) “Scolded Nathan, you should have been more careful. Thanks to me said Darren that bird will never be born and fly high in the sky.”

The boys recalled the story even when they were not reading the pages. I asked Luke to tell me how he found the egg. He smiled just as Nathan shouted, “the neighbors’ yard!” Luke agreed, but added “our evil neighbor’s Chad’s yard.” He made sure that we knew he actually found the egg with his Dad. No one was left out from this family story.

Luke thought the best part of the story was Darren breaking the egg and feeling horrible about doing so. They seemed to be making fun of their older brother Darren. Their eyes teared up with laughter as they told the rest of the story. These two brothers
were bonding in this moment. As they shared this story, they were bonded by their interaction together. Carol stood and watched as the boys read the story to me, she later said that she was so happy that she gave her boys that story to cherish and have as shared experience with the family.

Another literacy practice that was evidenced as a social bond between Carol and her sons, was her alter ego…Mrs. Peabody.

*Carol*: I like to write stories. I like to tell stories. I don’t do it much anymore, but I used to when I would do stories with the kids. I like to do voices all and all that stuff and we had different people come in to read to us all of the time. I would play different characters.

When Carol first described this literacy practice to me, I was confused. I asked her if she meant that she would actually ask different people to read to the boys. She clarified that she herself would become different people.

*Carol*: I would, you know, well there was Mrs. Peabody and she was the British Lady.

*Darren* (Luke and Nathan nod in acknowledgement): “Oh, yes Mrs. Peabody!

I asked Carol if Mrs. Peabody was character from a story that she had created or the boys had created, but Carol had just made her up.

*Carol*: She was the counterpart to my really tired, worn out, housewife self. Mrs. Peabody was always chipper, always up and, you know, she was always loveable. Mrs. Peabody would read when the tired housewife didn’t feel like it.
Carol created a character that she used to bond with her boys through the literacy practice of reading. When the boys acknowledged Mrs. Peabody as someone they remembered, that bond was confirmed.

One of the last observations I had with the Thompsons was at a popular local farmer’s market. I met the whole family, including G-Ma (Claire) there, they wanted to enjoy all the experiences the market had to offer, but also Carol wanted to purchase food items because she had planned on making gumbo that night. This trip to the farmers market or literacy experience seemed to be infused with several social interactions and bonding moments for the Thompson family and myself. That day we walked past vendors that sold every kind of fruit and vegetable imaginable. We all walked to the section of the market known as the hub, where the butcher and the spice shop were located. The ladies including myself all went in to purchase spices. We talked and compared notes about spices we had used and spices we could use in recipes. We responded to each other like long time girlfriends. I knew that I had indeed bonded with Carol and Claire. On our way out from the spice shop Carol insisted that I take a picture with the entire family. I was honored and knew that they had accepted my presence in their family.

As we continued to walk through the market, the boys approached a man that sold baby chickens, geese and ducks. The boys were so excited to play with them. Then a tall, dark haired man said, “You should take one home.” After much begging and pleading the boys went home with one, very cute little yellow chick.

The very next day, a Sunday, was the final family interview with the Thompsons. I was fortunate enough to get another invitation to Sunday dinner. Claire was a great cook. When the family and I had arrived, we all sat in the living room patiently waiting
for G-Ma (Claire) to call us to the table. Carol mentioned that she had something that she wanted to share an article that she had pulled from the Sunday paper that morning. She found an article (literacy artifact) about another family who also had an interesting experience with a baby chick. The boys sat close to their Mom while she read and Ray’s ears perked up as well.

Carol: Now listen, let me get to this part. Okay. (reading) “My nieces were a little confused when we brought their new pet home, but they were excited. They weren't expecting a farm animal, she said. The chick turned out to be a lot more work than expected, by making sure it had enough food and water all day long to cleaning out the cage and protecting it from other stray animals that did want to eat it. We started putting it in the garage at night, my sister said. But her daughter had taken this pet to heart, training it to eat out of her hand, and remarking recently, “It’s pecking just like a grown woman now.” The chick was sold as a female, but it was actually a male, which has creating some lingering gender confusion and two sets of names. The poor girl had no idea that her father has other plans for the fowl, which is growing rapidly in size.” Somebody else had the same situation.

The Thompson family had identified the market as a place that literacy events would be present; it is for this reason that I can connect this family social experience with the Thompsons’ configuration of literacy. The experience at the market ultimately gave way to a family bonding moment around the purchase of their new family pet. It involved moments of bonding for myself as the researcher and the family. Bonding through social interaction had extended beyond the Thompsons.
Luke’s thread. Here I want to speak to the social bonds that Luke developed. These bonds seemed to be apparent throughout this study, from the way Luke bonded with his Mother through his actions of editing pictures that were reflective of her practices as a photographer, to the way that Luke inherently bonded with his father by creating a self-portrait like the one he had seen everyday by his father, to the way that he bonded with Nathan during the reading of An Egg-adventure book. I believe that as the Thompson Family tapestry was woven by all of the family members, that Luke’s interactions as well as his participation in the weaving process inevitably resulted in the development of social bonds with his family. I think that this speaks to the incredible range of dynamics that were experienced in weaving family traditions of literacy.

Summary: The Interlacing Effect

In my analysis of the data I found there were themes that emerged and became contextualized by the Thompsons. One clear finding was that literacy is a complex and multi-dimensional notion within the family. I refer back to the figure that I initially presented in Chapter 2. This figure represents a portion of all of the many threads that can be woven into a tapestry. The threads can be woven into different patterns; they can be every shade and hues in the rainbow, one flowing into another, overlapping, blending, knotting, passing through from side-to-side, over and under. The intricacies that exist in a tapestry are endless and so are literacy practices and traditions within a family. No story, moment time, location, resource, value, etc. belongs to one person, they belong to the entire family.
Figure 4.5. Tapestry of family literacy traditions as seen in chapter two.

As I began to breakdown events and practices that were associated with either a historical, educational or social context, they often seemed to take up space in multiple themes, no event or practice was isolated to one thematic category. Instead they were dynamic. In this study I observed active participation through three generations of the Thompson family; this active component to the study helped to capture the fluidity that exists in the weaving of the tapestry. Generations present and past can have their voice carried on these threads, therefore the family unit is not restricted by time.

These shared experiences of literacy within the family allowed for a mutually reciprocating relationship between the metaphorical threads of the tapestry. This is what I put forward as the “interlacing effect” that takes place within a family’s configuration of literacy. I believe that this weaving becomes embedded in the heart and actions of the individuals evident in the tapestry. This weaving process takes place whether or not families are aware, but having an opportunity to tap into the existence of this tapestry is a beautiful experience that I believe all families can benefit from. There can be no denying the richness in literacy practices and traditions in the Thompson family.
Chapter 5

Discussion, Recommendations, Future Research and Endeavors

In this chapter, I first share an interview that I had with Luke’s (focal child) fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Meyers. Her story helps to situate a dominant notion in schools about literacy and further give purpose to this research. I will then discuss how my research aligned with existing research. Next, I consider how my findings are situated within the theoretical frame used to analyze the data. Then, I consider what nuances my study brings to this area of research.

In addition, I make three recommendations from the findings of my research study and consider the ways that the curriculum can open up more expansive ways of thinking about literacy that value the traditions of literacy that culturally diverse children bring to the classroom. Then, I consider the limitations of the study. Finally, I state future directions of research I wish to pursue, as well as, share my future endeavors prompted by this research.

The Discussion: “Home Literacy? It’s Different…It’s Not as Good

In a conversation, with an elementary school teacher at Big Hill Elementary….

As I waited at the table for Mrs. Myers to arrive, I was excited to have an opportunity to speak with Luke’s former teacher. I pulled out my notebook, pens, topics I wanted to highlight in this interaction and my iPad to record our conversation. In walked a tall woman, with blushed cheeks, glasses, hair styled in a bob with neat bangs. She was dressed comfortably in a Big Hill Field Day t-shirt and jeans. This was an indication that she had most likely experienced a day full of overly energetic competitive grade school children. However, her face was inviting and she shared an interest and excitement for
my research. We discussed her own personal literacy practices as a child and her face seemed to become very expressive as she described her experiences and her love for reading. We laughed as she told me how her mother asked her to take a break from reading and to please go outside and play. She would sneak her books outside and bury her nose between the pages, just around the corner from the house, out of her mother’s site.

As we continued to talk it was clear that she had appropriated her love for reading in her own teaching style. Mrs. Myers was a firm believer that children should have multiple opportunities throughout the school week to engage in reading for enjoyment. Mrs. Myers recalled her feelings about reading instruction as a child, as she felt “school zapped the fun out of reading.” She remembered that reading in school seemed “boring” and that she dreaded writing book reports. When I asked her about her overall views about what literacy experiences should look like for children in school, she recalled a book that for her was life changing. *Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It* by Kelly Gallagher. Gallagher (2009) coins the term *readicide*, which is described as the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools. She pointed out that the children who took the most time to read (as “struggling” readers) have the least amount of time to actually engage in reading. Her response to this phenomenon that she believed existed among her students was to condense and complete reading fundamentals (i.e., basal reading) on Monday and use the remaining days of the week for reading instruction that allowed her students to have sustained free reading time for the duration of English Language Arts time. The children were able to self-select their free reading
material and just read. She was very proud to report that of her current 79 fifth graders, to whom she teaches reading, only 4 students had “some difficulty” with this task.

I could see that Mrs. Myers’ love of reading came from her childhood in her home environment. As a practice, she remembered being influenced by seeing her mother read for enjoyment daily. As we continued to converse, I was curious to know, because she had such fond recollections of her own home literacy practices and experiences, what her overall views were about home literacy, to which she replied “It’s different…it’s not as good.” The use of the word “good” was a problematic for me. With this response the rigid dichotomized view that dominant school literacy practices that are standard across the board are superior to home practices became audible. Unless home literacy practices fit into the school mold, then their value and impact on the student in the classroom are diminished. While I do not believe that Mrs. Meyers had any ill intentions in this statement, it is still representative of a mindset that exists within the classroom.

I share this interview with Mrs. Meyers because it captures in words one of the purposes of this research. This research was meant to help dispel this notion that the mainstream dominant constructions of literacy are the standard and that literacy practices that do not match this standard are of no less value and may ultimately lead to invalid impressions of those culturally diverse students whose practices my not align with the limited and prescribed definition of literacy utilized in schools. Herein, it was clear that Mrs. Meyers utilized various child-focused teaching practices, but I was troubled with her response about home literacy practices. Given my study, misconceptions of and the devaluing of African-American students’ home practices is of great concern. African-American children are often viewed as participating in language and literacy practices at
home that diverge from the mainstream and are “impoverished” (Hart and Risley, 1995). While I realize that Mrs. Meyers did not direct her comment to African-American children, her comment mentally directed me to the perceived disconnect between the literacy practices of African-American children and mainstream standards.

With that dominant narrative at the forefront, this research reveals the ways in which children and families utilize and understand literacy in their everyday lives. Literacy is seen as a significant and contextualized piece of a family’s history that involves the active participation of generations in the past and present day. As previously stated in Chapter Four, literacy is a multi-layered notion that becomes contextualized by a family’s participation with literacy and literacy practices. In the development of family literacy traditions, I identified three themes around which literacy was situated: historical, educational, and social. I came to the conclusion that literacy in this African-American family was dynamic and could be experienced in a variety of ways.

This falls in line with Mosley-Howard and Evans (2000), whose ethnographic study involving four African-American families illustrated that there was a breadth and depth to the experiences African-American families had with literacy and themes that were present included: pride in cultural heritage, role of spirituality, value in education, and valuing kinship bonds, all of which were evident in my findings.

Similarly, it parallels Compton-Lilly (2009) who considered the ways that narratives shared in African-American families conveyed “legacies of literacy practices.” This ties right into the historically situated significance of literacy within the Thompson family. The existence of stories, practices, and inclinations towards literacy that reached
far back into the history of the Thompson family were brought forth and evidenced
almost as inherited traits in the lives of the Thompson children.

Accordingly, like the work of Gadsden (1992), which focused on
intergenerational connections that existed within four African-American families in her
study, I too found that those intergenerational connections and the active passing down,
carrying, and reverberations of actions propelled the weaving of a tapestry metaphor
forward.

My research is also reflective of the research on Funds of Knowledge offered by
Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonazález (1992, 2005), which
proposes research methods that examine households through qualitative methods to
elucidate the quality of experiences of children. A primary purpose of this line of
research is to draw on and value the knowledge that children bring from their home
environments. Here my research captured the literacy experiences and traditions of
literacy to which three African-American children were connected. Ultimately, I would
like my research to impact curriculum to broaden definitions of literacy that figure in
experiences of children and encourage teachers to draw on those experiences of culturally
distinctive children and what knowledge they bring to the classroom.

Like the aforementioned research, my study was driven using a socio-cultural
theoretical frame. This theory considers “culture” as a meaning making process. The
Thompson family made meaning of “literacy” in their home through their experiences
with literacy. I used the metaphor of weaving a tapestry to try to capture the complexity
involved in this process and to further indicate that this process gave way to traditions of
literacy that would be significant to this family. I feel as though the use of the tapestry
metaphor, along with my description of the *interlacing effect* presented in Chapter Four, and the consideration of multiple generations actively participating in the weaving of a tapestry further illustrate the remarkable intricacies involved in developing family literacy traditions; these are the nuanced ideas that I put forth in this field of research.

**Recommendations**

Throughout this research I engaged the idea that educators and schools could gain benefits by having access to the richness of practices and traditions that exist outside of school in families. However, one challenge of this idea is that educators may not view school practices that are anchored in dominant mainstream culture as problematic and those practices may not be representative of the practices and traditions of their African-American students or other culturally linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Therefore, I continue to insist that curriculum practices must be *culturally responsive* as proposed by Ladson-Billings (1992, 1994) and also be *biography-driven* as proposed by Herrera (2010). These practices are inclusive of, and regard aspects of children that are contextual, culturally linked and uniquely a part of who a child is as a whole. As an educator my interests are in the children I teach, I am invested in their learning and I feel impaired to do so if I do not understand my students or if I do not tease out or if ignore, the knowledge they bring to the class. In an effort to expand definitions of literacy and open up the curriculum to expose the uniqueness that children bring I recommend that educators utilize materials and teaching methods that allow children to access those home literacy practices and find ways to share them and validate them in their classrooms.

One teaching tool that could be utilized with younger children, perhaps children in grades kindergarten through third grade, would be a word or picture tree. The children
would be given the task of creating leaves on a tree with words or pictures that they associate with their family, or experiences that they shared with their family (i.e. a family reunion, holiday, a trip, the birth of a sibling). It would be important for the teacher to explain to the students that the options on what they share are endless, but more importantly that the tree is reflective of who they are as individuals. Children would be encouraged to complete the word or picture tree with other family members (immediate or extended). This activity involves getting a snapshot of an event that is significant to the child, but also brings forth a narrative of the family that the teacher may not otherwise have been able to access. However, what is key about this activity is that teacher find the value in a student’s work and what they bring to that work.

Another example of a teaching activity that would be more appropriate for older children, fourth grade through college, would be a family interview or a smaller modified project similar to this study. The idea would be that teachers would have the students’ consider how literacy is important to their family. The family interview could include questions like: What does a family remember about learning to read and write? This question alone seemed to open a floodgate of responses in my own family and the Thompson family as well. To increase the complexity of the work for older students, further research would be required that would be used to expose a deeper connection with literacy. At this level, the work could be an access point for the teacher to recognize shared knowledge with and between her or his students. The teacher could see students as the experts to each of their own history of family literacy as well as identify the strengths of their students. Having this deeper level of knowledge about students can contribute to more meaningful teaching practices. Additionally, this project would serve as learning
experience for the students in having a better understanding of how they may be reflections of their family’s experiences with literacy learning.

Bringing this kind of research into practice coupled with the willingness of educators to acknowledge the literacy practices of African-American or other CLD students could eventually bring about the expansion of the definition of literacy and ultimately allow for a curriculum that values these differences.

**Limitations of the Study**

This research sheds light on the complexities of literacy that can exist in African-American families. It does this by focusing on the ways in which an African-American family enacts literacy through narrative, shared experiences, use of cultural tools etc., which results in a metaphorical weaving of literacy traditions that are contextualized by generations of family members past and present. However, there are perceived limitations to this study.

First, in regards to participant recruitment my initial site for selection was my church, located in a western suburb of Saint Louis, MO. When addressing the congregation about the study, there seemed to be very little response for families’ participation. While members offered me words of encouragement through the endeavor of the work and concurred that the research was necessary, families were not as willing to participate. My initial thoughts were that a lot of families had plans for the summer or were concerned for the investment of time throughout the duration of the study. It was subsequently brought to my attention that some members of the congregation considered my use of the words “at risk” or “low achieving” in my presentation to the church to be a negative reflection of a child’s ability. The intended message of the presentation was to
give purpose to the study and to show that schools may perceive African-American children as “at risk” or “low achieving” due to lack of educators’ cultural competence, their limited definitions of literacy as well as invalid notions or beliefs about, and expectations for, African-American students, as I had experienced. However, it seems instead of the rigidity of the dominant mainstream classrooms being problematic, the child’s ability or assumed lack of ability was the hindrance. I believe this interpretation of the purpose of the study impacted the participant recruitment process. Ultimately, by extending the recruitment pool outside of the church the Thompson family responded and the study came to fruition. While I did not have several families interested in participating in the study, my time spent with the Thompsons was a truly transformative experience.

Another limitation of the study relates to data sources used for data analysis. I had several sources in which to obtain data that included various audio and video recorded interviews and observations, the collection of literacy artifacts as well as a family journal. The variety in data collections methods was to capture the most comprehensive view of the participants’ understanding and use of literacy within the home. However, I was unable to collect the family journal from the Thompson family. Darren in particular was very excited about having the journal as a part of the study and he wanted to make certain that he would be allowed to draw in the journal. Carol wanted to make sure that Darren understood it was intended to be a “family” journal. I believe that Darren’s attempt to take ownership of the journal in that manner was still very telling about his thread in their family tapestry. While I still have an abundance of data on the Thompson family, so
much that it could not all be analyzed for this study, I believe that the journal would have offered family impressions and further supported my findings.

While I set these points as “limitations” I acknowledge them as areas that I can appropriately address in my future research endeavors. Moving forward I will be mindful of how my intended purpose is communicated in family recruitment and I will make sure to obtain all data sources, and additionally consider having the families use digital recorders to capture stories, thoughts, impressions and experiences that I as a researcher would not be able to observe. I take the limitations as challenges to provide an authentic voice for culturally and linguistically diverse families in future research.

**Future Research and Endeavors**

This study uncovered several options for possible future research. I currently have lines of research that I would like to pursue with the data that I have with the Thompson family, however there is one I consider most notable. In regards to the social significance around the weaving of family literacy traditions discussed in the previous chapter, I would like to further research the dynamic between siblings and the development of sibling relationships around literacy in the Thompson family. Nathan, Luke, and Darren opened up a whole new world to me during the course of this study. I became fascinated with the boys’ interactions and “play” with a deeply contextualized science-fiction fantasy world. While this study focused more on intergenerational connections of literacy, when looking at the formation of bonds within a family, the sibling relationship around literacy involved intersections of identity and agency that I would like to explore. Like with this research, I see this enactment of literacy in the home environment as
valuable asset for teachers to tap into and aid in their understanding of their students and the tools they bring to the context of the classroom.

An endeavor to which I am personally connected came from sharing my own personal literacy experiences, but was also validated through this research. I would like to start a family literacy program that centers around initially African-American families co-narrating, co-authoring and co-illustrating their own family stories. Families would be encouraged to include multiple generations in this process.

During this study I was able to share a number of stories about my family. For those pieces I could not fully remember, I was able to talk with my parents and siblings, to fill in the blanks. I realized that my family was helping me to shape and craft these stories. During one of my observations with the Thompson family, I had the opportunity to see a picture book that the mother had created for her family that included beautiful photographs that she had taken of her boys finding and unfortunately breaking a robin’s egg. She added the story to the pictures and had the pictures and story bound in a book for her entire family to share and have forever. This was truly remarkable and I continued to believe that this an experience that would be invaluable to African-American families.

Therefore, I would like to set up a program that brings African-American families together to share these stories, experiences, and traditions that exist within families by creating their own books. A book that would serve as physical manifestation of the family’s literacy traditions that could be archived and shared as family artifact. I believe a program like this would be an incredible opportunity to unearth the bountiful generational stories of literacy that exist within African-American families. It would accordingly, be
my contribution to the creation of many tapestries of literacy traditions in African-American families.

**Tying Up Loose Ends**

When I started this study, I set out to gain a better understanding of how an African-American family enacted literacy and literacy traditions situated around a focal child. I anticipated seeing the child at the center of the study with the family participants as key agents in the establishment of a family definition of literacy. However, throughout the process of this research I realized how the family, as a unit, was the foci of the study. I realized that interactions between family members, including those intergenerational connections, were reflective of a reciprocity that was not limited to the focal child. On this journey, the complexity and multi-layers of literacy and literacy traditions in a family emerged. The family narratives and experiences around literacy, past and present, were carried on the each of the threads that contributed to their tapestry of family literacy traditions. While I isolated historical, educational, and social significance as themes to frame the experiences of literacy in the Thompson family, the contributions to their tapestry went beyond those themes.

This research also allowed me to reflect on my own family’s literacy tapestry and gave me an opportunity to connect and reconnect to my family in ways that I had not imagined. As I continue this line of research and later develop a family literacy program that considers the narratives that contribute to the active weaving of the tapestry of family literacy traditions, I hope that this type of research and future programming will one day open up the school curriculum to acknowledge the impact that family literacy traditions have on children.
References


Appendix A

Script for Participant Recruitment

Good morning members of {Church name}

I would like to speak with you today about the project that I will be conducting for my dissertation. During the past three years that I have been away at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I have largely focused my studies on literacy development in African-American children. Often, literacy in the schools is seen as a set of skills that are reflected by the child’s scores on large-scale tests, like the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or more specifically the Missouri Assessment Program, used here in St. Louis. These measures of literacy skills are most often favored and used in the mainstream classroom. As a result, a child from a culturally or linguistically diverse background may be forced to engage in literacy practices that are very different from those in which they participate in their home or the out of school environment. This limited measure of literacy does not serve the needs of children from diverse backgrounds or reflect values of literacy traditions and practices they bring from home. This is precisely why I would like to look at the home literacy practices in African-American families.

I remember as a little girl reading my favorite book “All the Little Pretty Horses” to my dolls. I would describe the pictures to my dolls and even let them ask me questions. I had a big white wicker chair that I would sit in with my legs crossed and arms resting on the arms of the chair, this was reminiscent of the way my grandfather, Papa Byrd, used to situate himself in the old green chair on the back porch. Even now I reflect about the stories my grandfather shared with me, watching him write his sermons and in my own home seeing every single Ebony magazine from about 1985 on come through the front door. These were my home literacy practices as a child and there was no place for them in the classroom.

Given that my own personal experiences with literacy within my family were so richly profound and reflective of my natural affection towards literacy, I intend to examine literacy within the family free from the constraints and dictates of school. Therefore this project will focus on literacy that develops at home or the out of school environment.

For this study I want to discuss what home literacy practices look like, I want to explore how families talk about home literacy practices, and I want to look at how literacy can be passed down through generations of family members. Lastly, I want to explore how all of these dynamics develop around one child within a family. Unfortunately, literacy practices that develop in minority cultures or non-dominant groups, including African-Americans are not leveraged in the classroom. This creates a lack of diversity in the classroom and practices that are valued in minority cultures, do not match up with the dominant school practices. Therefore, I hope that this project will illustrate the value in the contributions of family traditions and home literacy practices on the development of literacy for African-American children.

Currently, I am looking for families to participate in this study. Let me briefly explain what I am looking for and what would be involved. Then if you feel your family would like to participate, I can offer you more details. I am looking for three families that
identify as African-American and working or middle class. Each family would have to represent three generations, first generation grandparents/aunts/uncles, second generation parents/aunts/uncles and third generation children. Each family would also have multiple children. Within the families I am looking for children that in 2009-2010 school year completed the first, third and fifth grades respectively. These children will serve as the focal children of the project. These children would also be viewed as a child that struggles or had difficulties with reading and writing. I have set this requirement as these are the children that suffer the most from because of dominant school practices.

The project would run from June 14th through August 6th or 8 weeks. It would involve a family interview at the beginning and the end of the project, which would be audio- and video-taped. It would also include two brief interviews with the focal in your family and one to two home observations each week. These interviews and observations would only be audio-taped and will allow me to see literacy practices in the home, watch the focal child interact with family participants and hear stories about and around literacy practices. Lastly, each family will be given a family journal to write about literacy practices at your leisure.

There is little to no risk involved in this project as all materials will be kept anonymous with non-identifying codes and uploaded to a secure University server. If any of you are interested or know of families that maybe interested, please speak with me after the services or call me at 314-276-6790. I also have business cards with my contact information. The families that are selected will meet with me before the study to receive more details, sign consent forms and ask any questions about the project or the process.

I truly appreciate you allowing me this time to speak with you and I hope that some of you will be able to participate in a project that is dear to me, but will also be a window into your family’s invaluable experiences with literacy in the home.

Thank you.
Appendix B

Parent/Guardian Letter of Consent for Minors

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Kelly M. Byrd. I am a third year doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I, with the assistance of my advisor Dr. Anne Dyson, will be conducting a study that will illustrate the value in the contributions of family traditions and practices on the development of literacy for children with diverse cultural backgrounds. This study will last eight weeks, from June 14th through August 6th, 2010. I will be conducting two family interviews that will include your children, one at the onset of the study and one at the end of the study. These family interviews will last 60-120 minutes and will be audio-taped and video-taped for the purposes of transcription. I will also individually interview for approximately 10-20 minutes, the child that is selected as the focal child or primary child of interest at the onset and end of the study. Additionally, I will be making home observations that will last approximately 60 minutes (one to two days a week). I will be observing how your child/children participate(s) in literacy events and engage(s) with family participants during these literacy events. In addition, I will pay attention to the talk that develops during these interactions. The interview with the focal child and home observations will be audio-taped in order to accurately transcribe data. During the study I will collect literacy artifacts and family journals that may include works produced by your children. I am writing to ask for your permission to interview and observe your children throughout the duration of this study, including the focal child. The interviews will consist of questions about their general interests, interest in reading and writing, and about their engagement and participation in literacy events. Included in the home observations will be notes that I write describing the literacy practices observed as well as any narratives about literacy practices. I, the researcher will analyze all of the information gathered during the study. The video-tapes of the family interviews will be destroyed upon completing transcription and the audio-tapes and all other information obtained throughout the research project will be will be kept secure. The audio-tapes, fieldnotes (from observations), literacy artifacts (photocopied), and family journals will be kept in a secure lock box and only accessible to me. All data collected will be coded with an alphanumeric code for each participant, including your children.

The participation of your children in the study is voluntary and they can choose not answer questions or participate in observations at any time without repercussion. In addition, when I write about your children, I will not use identifying information. The information gathered will be used for my dissertation and shared in educational settings and academic papers.

There is little to no risk involved in this project, as previously stated project materials will be secured and kept private. Additionally, as the make-up of classrooms are becoming more culturally diverse it is crucial for educators to have ways of gaining cultural
competence that impacts the education of the students in which they teach. This research will contribute to broader perspectives of literacy development in African-American children. Furthermore, educators can better understand the benefits of accessing familial literacy practices of other culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Another potential benefit for the participants includes the collection interviews, observations and/or literacy artifacts can serve as historical reference of literacy within the family that can be kept to pass on to future generations.

While I am looking at how families enact literacy practices and talk about literacy practices, I have as a point of concentration a focal child to investigate the ways in which these children draw upon their home literacy practices. I would like for this research to typify the rich and invaluable knowledge of literacy that can be gained from the home context.

If you have any questions, you may call Kelly M. Byrd at 314-276-6790 or email me at: kmbyrd2@illinois.edu. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Anne Haas Dyson at 217-244-3389 or email her at: ahdyson@illinois.edu. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to allow my children to participate in the research project described above. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

____yes _____no  I agree to have my children participate in observations for this study.

_________________________________________ Date
Signature

____yes _____no  I agree to have my children participate in interviews for this study.

_________________________________________ Date
Signature

____yes _____no  I agree to have my children participate in the audio-taping of observations for the purposes of transcription.

_________________________________________ Date
Signature
Appendix B continued

_____yes  _____no  I agree to have my children participate in the video-taping of the initial and final interviews for the purposes of transcription.

________________________________________________________________________

Signature                              Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Anne Robertson at Bureau of Educational Research: 217-333-3023 or arobrtsn@uiuc.edu; or the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu. You are welcome to call the above numbers collect; please be sure to identify yourself as a research participant if you do so.

Sincerely,

Kelly M. Byrd, M.S., CCC-SLP
Doctoral Student
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Appendix C

Participant Letter of Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Kelly M. Byrd. I am a third year doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I, with the assistance of my advisor Dr. Anne Dyson, will be conducting a study that will illustrate the value in the contributions of family traditions and practices on the development of literacy for children (specifically a focal child in your family) with diverse cultural backgrounds. I also want to consider how families enact literacy practices and explore the narratives that develop around literacy. The analysis of these narratives will serve as personal and historical accounts of literacy within the family. This study will last eight weeks, from June 14th through August 6th, 2010. I will be conducting two family interviews at the onset of the study and one at the end of the study and will include questions about experiences in learning to read and write. These family interviews will last 60-120 minutes and will be audio-taped and video-taped for the purposes of transcription. Additionally, I will be making home observations that will last approximately 60 minutes (one to two days a week). I will be observing you and the focal child as you participate in literacy events and possibly engage with additional family participants during these literacy events. In addition, I will pay attention to the talk that develops during these interactions. The home observations will be audio-taped in order to accurately transcribe data. During the study I will collect literacy artifacts and family journals that may include works produced by you as a family participant. I am writing to ask for your consent to participate in this research study.

Included in the home observations will be notes that I write describing the literacy practices observed as well as any narratives about literacy practices. I, the researcher will analyze all of the information gathered during the study. The video-tapes of the family interviews will be destroyed upon completing transcription and the audio-tapes and all other information obtained throughout the research project will be kept secure. The audio-tapes, fieldnotes (from observations), literacy artifacts (photocopied), and family journals will be kept in a secure lock box and only accessible to me. All data collected will be coded with an alpha-numeric code for each participant.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose not answer questions or participate in observations at any time without repercussion. In addition, your identity on written or photocopied materials will be confidential, as only alpha-numeric codes and pseudonyms will be used. The information gathered will be utilized for my dissertation and shared in educational settings and academic papers.

There is little to no risk involved in this project, as previously stated project materials will be secured and kept private. Additionally, as the make-up of classrooms are becoming more culturally diverse it is crucial for educators to have ways of gaining cultural
competence that impacts the education of the students in which they teach. This research will contribute to broader perspectives of literacy development in African-American children. Furthermore, educators can better understand the benefits of accessing familial literacy practices of other culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Another potential benefit for the participants includes the collection interviews, observations and/or literacy artifacts can serve as historical reference of literacy within the family that can be kept to pass on to future generations.

While I am looking at how families enact literacy practices and talk about literacy practices, I want to investigate the ways in which these practices develop outside of school. Additionally, I would like for this research to explore how literacy narratives contribute to the creation of histories of family literacy.

If you have any questions, you may call Kelly M. Byrd at 314-276-6790 or email me at: kmbyrd2@illinois.edu. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Anne Haas Dyson at 217-244-3389 or email her at: ahdyson@illinois.edu. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research project described above. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____yes  _____no   I agree to participate in observations for this study.

_________________________________________________________  Date

Signature

_____yes  _____no   I agree to participate in interviews for this study.

_________________________________________________________  Date

Signature

_____yes  _____no   I agree to participate in the audio-taping of observations for the purpose of transcription.

_________________________________________________________  Date

Signature
Appendix C continued

_____yes _____no I agree to participate in the video-taping of the initial and final interviews for the purposes of transcription.

________________________________________  ______________________________
Signature                                           Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Anne Robertson at Bureau of Educational Research: 217-333-3023 or arobrtsn@uiuc.edu; or the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu. You are welcome to call the above numbers collect; please be sure to identify yourself as a research participant if you do so.

Sincerely,

Kelly M. Byrd, M.S., CCC-SLP
Doctoral Student
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Appendix D

Letter of Assent for Minors

Dear Child Participant,

Hello, my name is Kelly. You may remember me from church, but I am also a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am working on a project with the support of my advisor, Dr. Anne Dyson who is a teacher at the University that I attend. I would like to do this project with you, your brother(s) and/or sister(s), and other family members. My project is about how your family uses and talks about literacy at home. Literacy means how you use reading and writing. In this project, I will interview and video-tape you and your other family members or ask you all questions about reading and writing. I will also observe or come and visit you one or two times during the week. I will use a small tape recorder during these visits; and I will watch and take notes about how your family is using and talking about reading and writing in your day-to-day lives. Lastly, I will be leaving a notebook with your family. The notebook will be a Family Journal. With the permission of your parent(s)/guardian(s), you can write or draw your feelings and thoughts about reading and writing.

Your participation in this project is voluntary - this means that you can decide whether or not you want to do this project. If you want to stop working on the project with me or answering questions you can stop. The videotapes, cassette tapes and all other information from this project will be kept in a very secure place. This information will be in a locked box and only I and my advisor or teacher can see it. I will use a code and code name on any information that I have, so that when I write up this project you and your family’s name will be removed. I may ask you some questions about school, but nothing you say will go to your school or anyone at your school. Again, if you decided that you do not want do this project or answer questions you can tell me or your parent(s)/guardian(s) and this will not be a problem.

If you have any questions, you may call Kelly M. Byrd at 314-276-6790 or email me at: kmbyrd2@illinois.edu. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Anne Haas Dyson at 217-244-3389 or email her at: ahdyson@illinois.edu. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records. I have read and have been read the above information and understand and voluntarily agree to participate in the research project described above. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____yes   _____no  I agree to participate in observations for this study.

__________________________________________  __________________________
Signature                                           Date
Appendix D continued

____yes  _____no  I agree to participate in interviews for this study.

________________________  __________________________
Signature                     Date

____yes  _____no  I agree to participate in the audio-taping of observations for the purposes of transcription (or writing out).

________________________  __________________________
Signature                     Date

____yes  _____no  I agree to participate in the video-taping of the initial and final interviews for the purposes of transcription (or writing out).

________________________  __________________________
Signature                     Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Anne Robertson at Bureau of Educational Research: 217-333-3023 or arobrtsn@uiuc.edu; or the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu. You are welcome to call the above numbers collect; please be sure to identify yourself as a research participant if you do so.

Sincerely,

Kelly M. Byrd, M.S., CCC-SLP
Doctoral Student
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Appendix E

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How did you get into the profession of teaching?

2. What are your first memories of reading/writing/schooling as a child, into adulthood?

3. How did you literacy at home growing up?

4. What are your overall views and perceptions or literacy learning for children? What should that experience look like for children?

5. How do you teach children to select books?

6. What are your students exposure to media literacy in the school?

7. How do you view or understand home literacy practices?

8. What do you remember about Luke as a student?
Appendix F

Focal Child Interview Protocol (Initial and Final)

**Initial Interview Questions**

1. Are you a good reader or writer?
2. Do you use reading and writing at home? When? Where? What do you do?
3. Do you like to tell stories or create stories? If so, what are your stories about?
4. Do you like school?
5. What do you like best about school? What is your favorite subject?
6. What kind of reading and writing do you do at school? Do you enjoy these activities?

**Final Interview Questions (embedded in last interview)**

1. Do you read and write with anyone outside of school? If so, who and what do you do?
2. What activities do you like or dislike that are centered around reading and writing?
3. Did you use the family journal?
4. What stories or activities do you remember about this project?
5. Can you tell me a story about your participation in this project?
6. Are you a good reader or writer?
7. Do you think reading and writing is important? Why or why not?
Appendix G

Initial Family Interview Protocol (Background)

Initial Interview Questions

1. Where is the family originally from? Where were you born?

2. What are your occupations?

3. What is your educational background?

4. What do remember about learning to read and write?

5. How do use reading and writing in your daily lives? Has this use changed over time?

6. Do you enjoy reading and writing? Do you consider yourself to be inclined towards reading and writing?

7. What types of text materials do use at home? Where are these items kept in the home?

8. Does your family talk about reading/writing, text materials in the home or education? If so, how does this happen, who is involved, what are the topics?

9. Do the children have experiences with reading and writing outside of the home? Are the children inclined towards reading and writing?

Children

1. What do you like to read and write about?

2. Are you interested in reading and writing? What are some times that you like to read and write?

3. Do you use the computer? If so, how do you use the computer?
Appendix H

Final Family Interview Protocol

**Final Interview Questions**

1. What are your impressions of the study?

2. How do you see your role in the family as it relates to literacy?

3. Do you remember any other stories about literacy in your family? What do these stories express about your family history?

4. What does literacy mean to your family? Are there literacy practices or traditions you would pass down through the family?

5. What literacy practices do you feel have been passed down to you?