CAN I GET A HIGH FIVE AND AN AMEN?: SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN AMERICANS TESTIFYIN’ TO THE LINK BETWEEN LANGUAGE, LITERACY, LEADERSHIP, AND THEIR CULTURE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the three voices of African American leaders as they recalled their literacy development and those entities influencing that growth in their K-12 school experiences and beyond.

The questions that guided this study were: 1) What literacy K-12 experiences and beyond influenced the participants' ability to grasp the discourses of mainstream society that subsequently led to their current status within this society? 2) What institutions, other than formal schools (e.g. church, social groups) helped these select African American leaders essentially gain "successful" access into the mainstream community? 3) What materials (literature, books, curriculum) were used to help the individuals acquire those skills? How were those materials related to their home discourse? 4) How was their home language essential for the development of their self-esteem? 5) Given their lived experiences, particularly concerning their schooling, what are their opinions and perspectives on how educators can best assist students to acquire reading and other essential literacy skills in order to gain successful access into mainstream America? 6) Who were those individuals (including teachers and parents) who greatly influenced their literacy lives and success of the successful select participants?
The three African American participants, two males and females of different generations, gave voice to their recollections as young people through oral histories. The study revealed several key literacy experiences that took place in the young lives of these successful African American leaders that helped them gain access into mainstream society. Those literacy experiences include: parent and family involvement; church involvement, in regards to rich literacy experiences; personally relevant literacy activities; consistent and ongoing community involvement in their literacy lives; good role models, in regards to implicit and explicit pedagogy; high quantity and quality of experiences; influential mentors who influenced their literacy lives. Implications for the education of African American children are discussed.
DEDICATION PAGE

Dedicated to the Memory of My Grandfather-
The Great Zebeedee
Truly I am great because you always told me that I was!!
I love you and miss you deeply!

To my Mom, Miriam Stephens- “I am fantastic- because you are”!!

To my entire family-I love you so much!!

To the children of Camden, New Jersey-
You are wonderfully and beautifully made!!!

To my Ancestors-
Thanks for being there for me while I survived
and thrived from this part of my journey!
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

God has given me wings...

There is nothing that I cannot do and no place that I cannot go....

I am vibrating with the spirit of My God---

Jesus---I love you deeply and profoundly. You kept whispering in my ear through this whole journey. You kept saying to me that, "This is not about you! It is much deeper than you will ever know—This is about the children that will come after you."

I am vibrating with the spirits of my ancestors.

There is nothing that I cannot do!!

I thank you -my African Mother---You are me and I am you! I thank you Harriet Tubman. I thank you, Sojourner Truth. I thank you Mary McLeod Bethune. I thank every Black man and Black woman who died for me so that I may become a free, educated, Black woman.

I am dancing with glee because

God has blessed me with a wonderful family...

Mommy (Miriam Stephens) ---You are truly my Shero!! You are my best friend!! I was truly the smartest cherub in heaven when I picked you to be my mother!! I love you always!!!

I love you Daddy, Samuel, for just loving me more than anything in the world!

I love you Dino! You have always been my biggest fan and I yours!!
I love you Nora! You will always be my beautiful sister who 
encouraged me to be a philosopher!!

I love you— all my nephews and nieces... I do this for you!!! Yes-I do it all for you!!

Precious and Purr-fect- Your sweet faces always cheered me up when things were going wrong.

Sometimes people come into your life to inspire you

They take you to the next level...

They are called Teachers

Thanks to my advisor and chair, Dr. Evelyn B. Freeman. You were there for me when no one else was!! You will be right there with me when God takes me to those great places that He has promised that I would go on this earth!

I want to thank Dr. Cythidia Dillard and Dr. Tyrone Howard, and Dr. Robert Ransom. I found solace with you. It is much deeper than you can ever imagine!! Special Thanks to Mollie Blackburn for becoming my third reader!

It is a mission from God!!

Friends Are Special and Cherished

To all my teachers past and present that believed in me-I love you!!

I want to thank my friend AJ, Marge, Michelle, and Bridgette for praying for me all the time and just for being my true friends!!
To my church family, Pastor Keith Troy, and Mrs. Troy—It was always a joy coming to church and hearing constantly that through “Christ All things Are Possible”

Special Thanks

I particularly want to thank Dr. Asa Hilliard, Dr. Gene Harris, Dr. Rich Milner for their beautiful oral histories.

I would also like to thank Dr. Maya Angelou and Dr. Michael Eric Dyson for agreeing to be a part of this present study, but demands on their schedules did not permit it. I received much insight from you anyway!!

As well, I want to thank all those very successful African American leaders that I amazingly met during this process. Thank you for your insight!

My Purpose: It is all about the children

Lastly, I want to thank the children of Camden, New Jersey. All of you inspired me! I would have never done this, if it were not for you!!

God told me that my purpose was you!! You need to envision what you can become.

God Bless You All!!!
VITA

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Honey, I love a whole lot of things - A whole lot of things
Like when my cousin comes to visit and you know he's from the south
And every word he says just kinda slides right out his mouth
I like the way he whistles and I like the way he walks
But honey let me tell you I love the way he talks
I love the way my cousin talks...

(Eloise Greenfield, 1995)

Educators in the United States who work with urban African American students continuously seek ways to motivate students to read, write and communicate in the standard codes or dominate discourses of the U. S. more proficiently. The academic success for African American students in reading, writing and other communication academic areas continues to lack in overall success in many of today's present educational settings. Ladson Billings (1994) notes that African American students make up 12%-17% of the public school population, but 41% of the special education population, mostly due to reading and writing difficulties. In
1981, Bray indicated that African American students lag far behind in standardized test scores particularly in comparison to Caucasian students in literacy (reading and writing subject areas) as well as in mathematics. Elderman (1987) reiterates that African American students continue to drop out of school in higher rates than most other ethnic or racial groups. And even still, after almost two decades later, Smitherman (2000) and Gay (2002) confirm that African American students continue to lag behind in both literacy and reading areas.

Another challenge regarding the education of African American students has been the ever-changing demographics of the teaching force. Many K-12 teachers are becoming increasingly different (ethnically, economically, and socially and culturally) from the students who are within the urban classrooms where many African American children are schooled (Hale, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Furthermore, Delpit (1995) has emphasized that cultural communication problems continue to rise within classrooms because of the ethnic and cultural differences and the lack of diversity training given by teacher education programs, particularly in regards to language and literacy learning. These conditions many times inhibit the most optimal conditions for literacy learning for many African American students within the K-12 classroom (Delpit, 1995).
As well, Hale (1986) and Irvine (1990) would insist that there may be a problem with the pedagogical practices within the classroom that do not align with the cultural background or the learning styles of many African American students.

There are other variables that inhibit the literacy learning of many African American students and other students of color such as economics, lack of resources, and poor learning conditions. However, many educators would agree that more effective educational strategies must be set in motion to help students become interested, prepared, and more capable in regards to learning the languages (discourses) that will move them in and out of various groups and that will enable them to gain success in mainstream society.

**Controversial Oakland Ebonics Debate**

In 1997, the Oakland, California School Board announced a controversial resolution concerning Ebonics. Ebonics is a Black language form readily spoken by many African American children in the Oakland school district as well as by many African American children throughout the country, particularly in urban districts and communities. The resolution was a reaction to the academic realities of the African American children in that school district.
African Americans comprised more than 53 percent of the students enrolled in the Oakland school district, but yet over 71 percent of the suspensions and special needs students throughout the school system. The academic condition for African American students within the Oakland school system challenged the school board members to take a course of action that would help teachers more effectively instruct African American students within their classrooms. As well, since most of those students in special needs classrooms were placed there because of reading and language difficulties, the school board approved a resolution that would give support through teacher training efforts to hone teaching strategies particularly in the area of literacy and linguistics education.

The purpose of the resolution, as maintained by the school board, was to help African American students acquire the so-called standard code of the English language (or that of the language of wider communication) through the first language form of many of the African American students (Ebonics or Black English). The resolution was controversial because it announced that Black Language or United States Ebonics was a legitimate language and that Ebonics should not be labeled as a deficient communication code, but should be maintained and affirmed within the classroom to assist with the smooth transition or acquisition of the second code or that of the language of wider communication (Perry, 1998).
However, the most controversial component of this resolution was the specific language program for teachers. The resolution, according to the Oakland school board, would support teachers in addressing the linguistic needs of African American children by utilizing the powerful language abilities that they already bring to the classroom from home. It would also initiate the process in shifting the attitudes of teachers towards the language form called Ebonics.

This particular element of the resolution, that of instructing teachers how to facilitate and negotiate their own language to acquire another language, had been misconstrued by many citizens to mean that teachers would be trained to teach Ebonics to children who already spoke the language (or language form). To say the least, the media had a “frenzy” with the announcement of this resolution and misrepresented the intent of the Oakland School Board by declaring that the Board wanted funding to instruct teachers on how to teach African American students a substandard language form or broken English (Perry, 1998).

Many “successful” African American leaders such as Bill Cosby, Maya Angelou and Jesse Jackson strongly spoke out against the misrepresented resolution and declared it a disgrace to the African American community and the entire educational system and both implied and stated that they were appalled that Oakland would even consider such
a proposal. Unfortunately, many of the same African American leaders spoke out against this resolution before fully understanding its intent. Ironically many of these leaders readily communicate through Ebonics/Black language form in their writing and/or oral communication styles. As well, many of the same leaders retracted their disdain after further investigation of the proposal and discovering the true intentions of the Oakland School Board educators (Perry, 1998).

The resolution by Oakland school board demonstrates, and is an example of, miscommunications that arise between some educators, scholars, mainstream society and African Americans themselves, particularly pertaining to how African American students, other students of color, and poor children are to be taught. To perhaps assist in alleviating many of these miscommunications, it is imperative that educators listen to the voices of those who have been able to successfully acquire the discourses needed to move in and out of mainstream society. These voices must and should come from African Americans who understand the complexities of being African American in this society, as well as the literacy processes needed to obtain those discourses.

Although the media continued to malign the school board about its controversial decision, many educators and linguists who truly understood the complexities of the resolution spoke out in its defense and the intent of this school system to address the unique needs of many of its students (Delpit, 1998; O'Neil, 1998; Smitherman, 1998, 1977). Through all the
educational drama, educator Teresa Perry (1998) posed the very important statement in her article “I ‘on know why they be Trippin’: Reflections on the Real Ebonics Debate,” that could have placed the controversy in perspective and assisted in understanding why the school board would make these changes and would take such an action. Perry stated that:

No one interviewed or talked to even a handful of...African Americans who grew up speaking Black language and who have become fluent in the standard code...Nobody thought it worthwhile to...find out about those practices institutionalized in historically Black schools, churches... that helped Black language speakers become...readers, writers, and powerful speakers (p.13).

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

This research study collected the oral histories of successful African American individuals on how they acquired the so-called standard codes (discourses) within mainstream society, particularly within their Pre K-12 educational experiences. There was a particular attempt to discover those elements that assisted these select individuals in their literacy acquisitions. This investigation was conducted by collecting the personal narratives (literacy histories) of three select African American leaders through interviews (narrations). These select individuals all consider themselves speakers of Black Language, as well as, speakers of the Language of Wider Communication (Smitherman, 1998).
The main purpose of this study was to give teachers, teacher educators, and scholars ideas about how to utilize the voices and resources of communities to help in the optimal acquisition of literacy learning and in this case specifically African American students. It is also important to reiterate that this study does not wish to homogenize all African Americans in one group in regards to speaking Black English or growing up amongst African Americans or growing up in African American schools. Many African Americans would not purport to speak the language or "language form" called Ebonics. However, there are many African American children and adults who do. This study is primarily for those children who may need pedagogical activities that align with who they are as an African American person.

However, I must note that it would be important for readers of this work to find salient activities, pedagogical philosophies, and community ideas that would be beneficial for their students, regardless if those students are teacher interns or K-12 students in the public school arena.

It was the my purpose to capture the literacy experiences of those select participants when they were children and discover, describe, and analyze those elements and entities that assisted them in the development of their literacy learning. How did they learn to successfully negotiate their way into their secondary discourses, particularly those discourses
needed within specific mainstream groups? By capturing the lived experiences of these successful African American leaders as children, the researcher intended to give some voice to those students whom educators wish to assist, particularly within the K-12 classroom.

Thus, the purpose of this study entails the documentation of those experiences, remembrances, perspectives of these select individuals to enhance the literacy activities within U.S. classrooms, particularly for African American students. Results of this investigation will assist in the development of teacher education courses, curriculum, and materials, as well as philosophical and ideological perspectives within teacher education programs. Because the purpose of this research was to collect information that can develop further institutional and educational reform and alternatives, collecting the "voices" of select individuals from this targeted racial group through interviewing is most appropriate.

The specific researcher questions were:

1. What literacy K-12 experiences and beyond influenced the participants’ ability to grasp the discourses of mainstream society that subsequently led to their current status within this society?

2. What institutions, other than formal schools (e.g. church, social groups) helped these select African American leaders essentially gain “successful” access into the mainstream community?
3. What materials (literature, books, curriculum) were used to help the individuals acquire those skills? How were those materials related to their home discourse?

4. How was their home language essential for the development of their self-esteem?

5. Given their lived experiences, particularly concerning their schooling, what are their opinions and perspectives on how educators can best assist students to acquire reading and other essential literacy skills in order to gain successful access into mainstream America?

6. Who were those individuals (including teachers and parents) who greatly influenced their literacy lives and success of the participants?

**Scope of the Study**

This qualitative study was conducted through in-depth interviewing. The methodology used was in the form of gathering K-12 literacy experiences of the participants through oral histories (life narratives). Some researchers have spoken to the power of this methodology (Casey, 1993; Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Thomas, 1999). According to Witherell & Noddings (1991) “Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments, and faceless subjects” (p.280).
According to Thomas (1999) “retellings (oral histories) present not only the events of the lives of individuals, but also give the listener a chance-through analysis-to examine how these events helped to shape the lives of these individuals in reference to their position in society” (p. 78). As well, Casey suggests "oral history, read in all its rich wholeness, will illuminate conscious human activity in a way positivism never can" (p.8).

The results through analysis from a pilot study in a research methodology class taken by the researcher in Winter quarter 1999 indicated that those “best practices” for teacher educators to use within their classrooms to teach Black children are embedded in the cultural and linguistic heritages deeply rooted in the Black community and within historically Black institutions (Foster, 1997). Interviews were conducted during this pilot study to inquire about the Pre K-12 schooling and literacy experiences of African American leaders in a major urban midwestern city. These individuals were asked about the institutional practices that they felt enhanced their literacy learning.

The pilot study found that many cultural, language and linguistic practices were embedded within the institutions from their communities and cultures. The pilot study also indicated that deep and more sustained learning within literacy activities took place when home language and cultural and linguistic activities were practiced within institutions such as the family unit, church, and schools for these African American individuals (leaders).
This current research was grounded in both interpretive and race-centered, critical theory (Africentric) paradigms to better interpret findings that link "home" language, literacy, and culture to a more profound acquisition of other languages (and more specifically discourses situated within the language of wider communication). Interpretive methods (through interviewing) were used to best understand and report the lived experiences of the participants in this study. "Interviewing is one of the most powerful ways we use to understand our fellow human beings." (Fontana & Frey, 1994 p. 361)

Africentric epistemological views provided a road map or insight into understanding the participants (how they view their world and their cultural lens in this group with whom they identify). Using this epistemological framework, the researcher best analyzed how these African American leaders obtained "successful" access, negotiating through and with their identified group's cultural and linguistic heritages to those discourses needed in mainstream society. I identified those fundamental elements within the African American culture that have helped these select successful African American leaders become "successful" African American adults. "Africentricism is more than information or textbook knowledge about Africans and African Americans. It represents the building of a new scholarly tradition. Included in this tradition is an approach to scholarly inquiry that is
consistent with the ways in which people of African descent see and experience the world" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p.146).

Africentric epistemology assists in helping to answer the following fundamental questions that were pertinent to this particular study: What are those theories that examine how African American students acquire these necessary instructions through their own cultural and linguistic tools/lens in order to go in and out of role/discourses needed to be successful in various social groups in society? In other words, how do African American children best acquire “the interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society?” (Delpit, 1995 p. 29).

In short, through these lenses of inquiry (particularly Africentric paradigms), as well as the perspectives and voices of the African American participants in this study, we may see that developing a strong foundation in one’s personal cultural or home literacy and language has been and continues to be a powerful tool for the advancement of that individual and his or her group.

**Overview of the Chapters**

The remaining chapters of this study are:

Chapter two will discuss the literature and qualitative research that represents socio-historical, socio-cultural and what I will define in chapter two as specific “literacy histories or literacy stories.” I will begin with a discussion of textual studies that include teachers and
educators within the classroom in regards to the teaching of literacy skills, particularly as we focus on literacy learning and literacy acquisition for African American students. I will further discuss literature that informs pedagogical practices. I will then highlight five qualitative studies that give rich examples of the intent of this particular study, in terms of examples of interviewing as a qualitative research method.

In chapter three, I will discuss my theoretical framework, methods of data collection, and analysis of data. I will also introduce participants.

Chapter four will give voice to those successful African American leaders on their experiences in K-12 that helped them become the citizens and human beings that they are today. Data from the lived historical interviews, the collection of short interviews from mentors, discussion of observations and other data sources are all included in this section.

Chapter five is the analysis or discussion of the data collected. I have found seven “critical literacy ingredients” or themes in my analysis. These themes will be discussed in detail within this chapter. This chapter will also highlight the voices of the mentors of the participants in the study. Finally, Chapter six will discuss in detail how the research questions that guided this study were answered by the data. I will then summarize, review, and further discuss data and themes found in chapter four. I also discuss conclusions and implications for future research in this same chapter.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

"I am not so very robust, but I'll do the best I can;"

And the seedling from that moment

Its work of life began. So it pushed a little leaflet—

Up into the light of day— to examine the surroundings—

And show the rest the way"

(Paul Laurence Dunbar, 1998)

Introduction

As educators make their way into the 21st century, in regards to education for all children, but particularly focusing on the education of low income and historically underrepresented students within the U.S. school system, they must find ways to meet students’ needs. Many of those needs, according to Foster (1997), can be identified through the voices of those who have first hand experience of being both underrepresented (Black, Hispanic, Native American), citizens and being
educators/teachers themselves. According to Foster, these (authentic voices) are extremely vital in the debate. In short, these voices must be heard in order to facilitate real educational change.

Many teacher educators (Au & Jordan, 1987; Delpit, 1995; Dillard, 1997; Ferdman, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994) have been focused on literacy learning, particularly in regards to reading acquisition and communication skills. Delpit (1995) is concerned about those discourses (modes of communication), both oral and written that will move children in and out of worlds (social communities). These discourses would give children access into those worlds (groups) that they have either historically been kept out of, or those groups that are considered successful in this society.

Preparing teachers to educate African American children and other children of historically underrepresented groups has been and still is a tremendous and formidable responsibility. Delpit (1995) affirms that approximately 40 percent of the children in the K-12 public schools are currently African American and other students of historically underrepresented groups, including those who are living in poverty. However, many of these students are from homes that differ from the homes of the already existing teachers and this situation will most likely
be that way in the future based on teacher interns in teacher education programs and institutions (Delpit, 1995). There are and will continue to be cultural contrasts in the classroom (racial, economic, gender) that many times differ from those of the teacher in the classroom. More often than not, these teachers have come from and will continue to come from middle class, mainstream, and suburban homes and are predominantly female and Caucasian (Delpit, 1995; Foster; 1997).

Many scholars suggest (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings; 1994; Foster, 1997; King, 1997; Shade, 1997) that the different backgrounds of students and their teachers will continue to perpetuate difficulties within the school and classroom setting for diverse students or other students of historically underrepresented groups.

To ensure that teachers possess the ability to work with all students, an awareness and knowledge of different cultural groups must become a more essential and encompassing component of teacher education programs. Teachers must be involved in teacher education programs that will help them modify existing programs, create more transforming programs, and change negative or stereotypical attitudes of teachers and teacher interns.
As well, teacher educators have the arduous mission to develop educators who will face an ever-growing population of historically underrepresented groups. In order to facilitate this change, teachers need to be educated or continuously reeducated on how students best learn, their learning styles, and what type of environments and pedagogy will assist them in optimizing learning for their students. Within mainstream school settings, particularly as we think about the urban classroom, teachers' knowledge and understanding of how culture affects learning, as well as the attitudes of teachers will greatly support the planning, delivery, and technique that they evoke within the classroom. This may be found in culturally responsive teaching practices.

Delpit (1995) states that “good teachers must attempt to understand the culture of the students that they teach” (p.30). Thus, teachers must become students themselves. They must become literate about different ways of knowing, understanding, and thinking. Shade (1997) affirms that “all people have unique cultural experiences that influence their styles of learning” (p. 159). Shade (1997) continues to affirm that “there is a relationship between an individual’s learning style and his/her cultural group membership” (p.160).
Throughout this chapter, I describe theoretical definitions of discourse, culturally responsive pedagogy, learning styles, and culture for the purpose of describing how these definitions are used within and for this particular study. Secondly, the I offer a literature review (textual and conceptual) that focuses specific questions that the study will attempt to answer. This literature review discusses: 1) spiritual significance to the African American Discourse community; 2) definitions of Discourse, Bilingualism, and Culture; 3) the teacher’s role in the acquisition of secondary discourses through honoring and respecting home discourse within the classroom; 4) the role of African American discourse within African American literature for the urban classroom; 5) the role of African American discourse for cultural and self affirmation for many African American students; 6) The importance of learning styles for African American students. The final section of the chapter documents research studies that were done using interviewing or life history methods. These studies helped guide this present research and also identify many key characteristics that are needed for optimal learning for many of these students within the classroom.
African American Discourse: Spiritual Significance

According to Richards (1990), “a peoples world view affects and determines behavior... a world view helps to inject meaning into life and to determine which experiences are meaningful and which are not” (p.209). Smitherman (1977) emphasized that “both in slavery times and now the Black community places high value on the spoken word” (p.76). Smitherman classifies modes of discourse in the African American community in the following four categories: call response; signification; tonal semantics; narrative sequencing. Smitherman (1977) further reiterates that “each discourse mode is manifested in the Black American culture on a sacred-secular continuum” (p.103). In other words, Black discourse is very deeply established within the African American worldview. Asante (1987) posits that African American discourse is linked with that spirituality and its link with African worldview, speech, language, and/or the “word.” In other words spirituality, which is linked to discourse, is the fundamental component linked to African American survival (Asante, 1987).
The pre-slavery background was one in which the concept of Nommo, the magic power of the word, was believed to actualize life and give mastery over things. All activities of men, and all movements in nature rest on the word... and Nommo, that is life force itself... The force, responsibility, and commitment of the word, and the awareness of the word alone alters the world... (Smitherman, 1977 p.78).

To further emphasize, this view, Dandy (1991) states:

"The African worldview emphasized religion as a way of life...and the magic power of the word. These concepts evolved into the deep structure or the underlying meanings in the language as it is used today by Africans across the diaspora" (p.26).

Therefore, according to this synopsis, spirituality and the word are intricately linked. The word or to give voice to the word, not just manipulation of language or words is of extreme importance to the African worldview and the survival of its people.
Culture, Language, Discourse and Bilingualism

Ferdman (1990) states that “cultural identity involves those parts of the self—those beliefs, values, and norms that a person considers to define himself or herself socially as a member of a particular ethnic group—and the value on those features in relation to those of other groups” (p. 359). Second language learning, or more appropriately, discourse acquisition is relative to how one both views the world and how one identifies him or herself culturally and how one values and maintains those discourses. In addition, Delpit (1995) states that “the acquisition of the first language is a wondrous process, drawing upon all the cognitive and affective capacities that make us human” (p. 52). In this regard, because the language and communication styles of a cultural group and individuals within that group are so important, it is necessary for the development and humanity/survival of that individual within his or her group. In short, placing the first language, in this case Black communications, at the forefront of teacher pedagogy and student learning (Dillard, 1997) is most appropriate and essential.
However, Delpit (1995) also makes it clear that in order for children to survive and thrive in mainstream society, they should have control of those discourses that will allow them access into cultures or groups of power. Those discourses that Delpit refers to many times are found within the “Language of Wider Communication” (Smitherman, 1998) or so-called Standard English in society as well as those communication styles that are encompassed within what Delpit terms as “discourse of power.”

Delpit (1995) affirms that children must explicitly be taught those codes and skills that will make them bilingual and bicultural in this society.

Bilingualism...is defined as the ability to communicate by using two different languages or dialects. Essentially, students must be taught that they can achieve competence in both dialects: Standard English and Black Communications. They use Standard English to communicate effectively in an educational setting: in the market, in the school, to converse with those who speak another language and in settings that may help them achieve upward mobility (Dandy, 1991 p. 116).
To state this clearly, and for the sake of understanding this study and its purpose, I define the home and community language as the primary discourse of an individual. In short, this primary discourse will be referred to as Black Communications, Ebonics, or Black Language and/or Black English. Further, the Language of Wider Communication or so called Standard English is defined as those “interactional styles and spoken and written codes that will allow...success in the larger society” (Delpit, 1995, p. 29).

**Pedagogy and Second Language Acquisition**

As teachers, teacher educators, and scholars continue to find ways to improve the literacy education of all children, particularly African American children and other students of color, many have suggested that the answers may be found within the cultures, languages, and discourses of the ethnic and cultural groups themselves (Baugh, 1999; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Smitherman, 1977).

In any given classroom, the teacher is by far the central component for the success of students. He or she establishes the atmosphere for learning. Therefore the pedagogy of the teacher is crucial to the most optimal learning for African American students. Benson (1982), Ladson-Billings (1994) and Delpit (1995) have reported that students are more
engaged within the learning process when pedagogy is rooted in their home discourse. These same scholars reiterate that rap, "word and language play activities," and other ethnic linguistic devices should be utilized in teaching and classroom practices.

Through qualitative and textual literature studies, the aforementioned scholars have found that students' literacy interest in schools is usually heightened and elevated when the home language of students is taken into consideration and becomes an essential ingredient (component) within the classroom atmosphere and the teaching practices utilized by the classroom teacher.

Specifically, Ladson-Billings (1994) found that those teachers who recognized the linguistic richness of the students and facilitated learning through the students' culture were the most successful teachers. Some researchers (Delpit, 1995; Hale, 1982; Smitherman, 1977) found that cognitive acquisition becomes less difficult in the classroom when students are exposed to activities that make connections to their cultural needs as well as acknowledge and match their cognitive learning styles.
Smitherman (1977, 1998) emphasized that African American cultural activities via black language fulfill communication and linguistic needs that reinforce community belonging. These communication forms (rap, word play), often acknowledge group and individual identity (Hale, 1982). Ladson-Billings (1994) also emphasizes that African American students must experience success with literacy learning and learning in general in order that their schooling experience be fruitful and meaningful to them. Many scholars (Hale, 1982; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Smitherman, 1977, 1998) highlight that teachers who incorporate the use of predominant in Black language activities within the classroom, such as rap and verbal play, will help those students within their classrooms experience success. Therefore, these communication forms characterize the cultural values of the child and are mechanisms for both cultural affirmation and literacy learning for students.

The Role of African American Literature

Keulen, Weddington, and Debose (1998) assert that African Americans are not just bidialectical but are bilingual/bicultural in the same fashion as many Mexican Americans are bilingual and bicultural in Spanish and their own Mexican culture. Keulen et. al. (1998) also note that high reliance is placed on “oral tradition” such as folk tales, songs,
poetry, verbal game. Keulen and colleagues state that within the classroom, “teachers may find in African American literature a rich and effective means of maximizing the relevance of language arts instruction to the everyday lives of African American children” (Keulen, et.al. 1998 p. 76).

Studies (Heath, 1983; Lee, 1993; Perkins; 1992; Sims, 1982; Spears-Bunton, 1996; White, 1991) suggest that African American literature, which often embodies the discourse that evokes the very nature of the African worldview, within language arts instruction, can be used by teachers to assist students in acquiring literacy skills; to extend self concept; and to represent historical struggles. Many qualitative research studies (Lee, 1993; Perkins; 1993; Spears-Bunton, 1996) have found that African American students were more actively engaged within the literacy (reading) process, particularly in comparison to former literacy activities involving more mainstream (European type literature) when African American literature was used within the classroom. This research gives examples of what we know from studies that can improve student achievement through African American literature as an avenue for mainstream literacy acquisition.
African American discourse:

A Mechanism for Cultural and Self Affirmation

The theoretical and practical aim of the proposed study is to investigate the possibilities that culture and language can entail for literacy learning. Therefore, this proposed study utilizes theories from various perspectives. This study also discusses literacy in terms of a means to textually and orally perform more efficiently in terms of limited linguistic semantics. The study also reviews positions and research on how literacy can equip one for successful access into mainstream society as well as to fight against societal ills (particularly within their identified cultural group) and affirm one’s place in this society (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Through this process of learning, students are able to critically examine their cultural realities and perspectives through their own cultural lens and to voice concerns through some form of action (whether it be written, oral, or internal).
Ladson-Billings's (1994) notion of culturally relevant pedagogy and bell hooks's (1994) engaged pedagogy provide examples of relationships of how teachers can be more effective with their students in terms of providing emotional and human relationships that enhances both affective and cognitive growth.

Ladson-Billings (1994) suggests that language and literacy learning must empower students to grow socially and politically. In short, she suggests teachers should be vessels that navigate the endeavor for students to grow both cognitively and politically. Hooks (1994) and Hilliard (1997) both recommend that teachers must care for the spiritual well-being and “souls” of their students through engaging them in self actualizing and affirming activities in the classroom.

More specifically, students can be affirmed through literacy and language as he/she experiences success in order to negotiate literacy and language more effectively. Within this process one uplifts the group economically, socially, academically as well by his or her personal success. Through this self and cultural affirmation, one can successfully maneuver in almost any situation (including mainstream society).

“Literacy education, when it acknowledges the role of cultural identity,
may serve to enhance self-esteem as it derives from a sense of self in a
social context” (Ferdman, 1990, p.365). The historical purpose for
African American literacy according to Harris (1993) is to create
individuals who will assist in the movement to improve their race status.

According to Harris (1993)

African Americans demanded, created, funded, and maintained
educational institutions that would (a) provide literacy skills for all; b)
apprise individuals of and prepare them for the dominating cultures
institutions; (c) counteract the pernicious and venal images of African
Americans prevalent in popular culture; and (d) engender group solidarity
and commitment to uplift (276).

Thus, the role of literacy is not only to help students read and write
more effectively or just to acquire a skill for a career (job), but to help
them create and develop within their group/culture healthy, sound,
nurtured individuals who are equipped with the tools to understand their
own/group and cultural status within both their own cultural and linguistic
frameworks and those of mainstream society.

In addition, we must examine culturally responsive teaching.
Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural
characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse
students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the
assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within

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the lived experience and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2002, p. 109).

Gay (2002) suggests that within the framework of culturally responsive teaching, teachers must be able to first and foremost develop a cultural knowledge base. In other words, teachers must learn as much as they can about multicultural education. “This can be accomplished, in part by all prospective teachers taking courses on the contributions of ethnic groups to the content areas that they will teach” (p. 108). According to Gay (2002), teachers must also look at how to effectively examine curriculum within their classrooms. They must be able to find those elements within their school or classroom curriculum and make adjustments needed, particularly when looking for how ethnic groups are treated within these curriculum documents.

Gay (2002) indicates that “culturally responsive teachers know how to determine the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials and make the changes necessary to improve their overall quality” (p. 108). If teachers are trained properly, they will be able to “do deep cultural analyses of textbooks and other instructional materials, revise them for better representations of
cultural diversity, and provide many opportunities to practice these skills under guided supervision’ (Gay 2002, p.108).

Other important aspects of culturally responsive teaching are building sound and healthy learning communities where students are pushed and stretched academically through culturally responsive learning and teaching. “Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it” (Gay, 2002, p. 109). According to Gay (2002), this is how teachers truly show that they care about their students.

Another key element within culturally responsive teaching is cross-cultural communication; in other words, to engage students according to their learning and communication styles. “Culturally responsive teacher preparation programs teach how the communication styles of different ethnic groups reflect cultural values and shape learning behaviors and how to modify classroom interactions to better accommodate them” (Gay, 2002, p.111).

Finally, Gay (2002) emphasizes that the delivery of instruction, particularly in regards to ethnic groups in U.S. society, must be “multiculturalized.” She says, “a useful way to think about
operationalizing this idea is matching instructional techniques to the learning style of diverse students” (p. 112).

This last aspect of Gay’s culturally responsive leads into a deeper discussion on learning styles and communication styles that are crucial to the learning and teaching practices for African American students.

**The Relationship of Learning Styles for K-12 Teaching Practices**

In 1977 Smitherman stated that “the educational literature and research is shot through the roof with statistical information on the reading ‘disabilities’ of Black youth. Why are so many Black students coming out of school functionally ‘illiterate?’” (p.208). Over two decades later, Smitherman (2000) is still echoing the same sentiments based on data she has recently collected from a Black junior high. Many scholars have said that the learning and cognitive styles of the child are still not being recognized and valued within the classroom and that culturally responsive teaching has not really become an encompassing part of the classroom (Boykin, 1994; Shade; 1997; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In other words, “to help students learn, teachers need to appreciate the impact of culture on cognitive and learning styles” (Shade, 1997 p.61).
In order to truly appreciate the importance that learning styles can play in the lives of African American children within classrooms, especially if that classroom purports to be either culturally responsive or culturally relevant, teachers must understand the power and importance that Black language (which embodies the learning styles) and discourse (ways of thinking, doing, acting believing, talking etc..) have within the Black community.

Smitherman (2000) evokes clearly the importance that Black America, particularly in urban centers, places on Black language and the modes of discourses. Smitherman (1977; 1998; 2000) has addressed the importance of Black language development in her work for nearly three decades. She confirms that one who has a strong command of the discourses within Black language will most likely be placed on an elevated standing within the black community, especially within urban settings. Delpit (1995) reiterates that “the man (person) of words,” poet, philosopher, huckster, or rap song creator, receives the highest form of respect in the Black community (p. 57). Thus orality in the African American community is a highly relevant device within the culture.

Shade (1997) states that, “all people have unique cultural experiences that influence their styles of learning” (p.159). She also
indicates that "there is a relationship between an individual's learning style and his/her cultural or ethnic group membership" (p.160). If this tends to be the case, then the culture of African American children in the K-12 classroom is often dismissed and/or not incorporated in the classroom, unless that classroom has embraced culturally affirming philosophies and practices into the total classroom environment.

"Black children, therefore, need an educational system that recognizes their strengths, their abilities, and their culture and that incorporates them into the learning process" (Hale, 1982 p.4). Therefore, African American children have a need to be motivated in school by being allowed to use what they bring to the classroom--their culture, language, and discourse--in order to learn and take a greater part in the learning process.

"African American children require an active, stimulating, and highly arousing learning environment rather than a quiet, passive, receptive setting" (Shade, 1997 p. 179). Much literature has discussed that African American children have a tendency to learn best in relational style atmospheres. However, the K-12 educational setting is structured as an analytical cognitive setting (Hale, 1982; Shade, 1997; Hilliard, 1997). Relational style means that children tend to learn best in group settings
that concentrate on freedom, creativity, uniqueness, and expressiveness. However, analytical styles tend to concentrate on rules, conformity, controlled, and “normality” (Hale, 1982).

Relational styles usually come from the home setting. They tend to be a core part of the child’s overall being, his or her attitude, and his or her worldview. Hale (1982) suggested that children often learn their cognitive and/or learning styles from the socialization that they receive from their families, Black institutions (such as churches), and neighborhoods. Within African American communities there seems to be a high level of stimulus geared to the performing arts and/or visual arts.

Therefore, African American children most likely within the K-12 school setting or any academic setting prefer to learn through creative expressiveness. African American people tend to place a great deal of credence on performance (mainly oral performance) as an individual as well as within a group. African American children tend to prefer or lean towards the relational style, more often than not.

**Introduction of Oral and Historical Research Studies**

The following works are pivotal in looking at studies that have captured the rich experiences of individuals in regards to education and social change. Although only one focuses specifically on literacy, all of
these studies are relevant in describing how interviewing brings rich data and all that can be obtained by research. Two of these works capture and document the voices of not only African American leaders, in these cases, but all teachers at one time or another in their lives. In *Black Teachers on Teaching* (Foster, 1997) and *Thomas’ s(1999), GRITS: African American Teacher Elders, Their Beliefs on Education, And Recommendations on Teacher Practice* were essential in highlighting only African Americans and African American teachers. These studies of all Black teachers both focused on documenting their lived experiences through the life history method to ask teachers what practices worked for them in their classrooms as students and what works and/or worked for their students within the classrooms that they taught or teach in.

Two other works, specifically *I answer with my life* (Casey, 1993) and *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (Ladson-Billings, 1994) also are recordings of teachers and their success as educators. However, these two works have representations of both White and Black teachers within the study. As well, both these works make attempts to focus much on how education is used as a political tool for change and social reform, particularly within the study done by Casey.
All of the studies listed above, with the exception of Casey’s *I answer with my life*, explicitly offer suggestions, techniques and perspectives about educating African American children. Although Ladson-Billings (1994) does not focus on capturing the lived histories of these teachers within her study, she still used interviewing techniques to capture the pedagogical practices and experiences of the selected teachers. As those teachers unfold the stories in their lives (including the researcher in this case) and practices, teachers were able to reflect on their lives and what has worked for them both as a student and as a classroom teacher. Finally the last research study—*Literacy and Living: The Literate Lives of Three Adults* (Nielsen, 1989)—specifically focuses on the literate lives of adults and what literacy offers and means to them in their daily life transactions and relationships. This work shows “literacy as a reflection and creation of who these people are” (Nielsen, 1989, p.11).

**Oral and Historical Research Studies**

In *Black Teachers on Teaching* Foster (1997) records the life histories of Black teachers on their own teaching. These teachers represent varied backgrounds (with the exception of racial identity), including age, gender, socioeconomic and geographical background. Foster utilized the
life history method to collect the various voices of Black teachers and how they have come to understand their teaching and their lives within education and the education of children who were/are within their classrooms. This study mainly focuses its attention on the struggles of becoming and being sustained as a Black teacher in the United States.

Foster (1995) gathered and examined the voices of African American teachers from various generations to discuss their opinions, perspectives, and "best practices" that will and can help African American students and teachers within the K-12 classroom. In this study, she found that many African American educators believed, through both experience and opinion, that students can best learn through the so-called standard discourses of mainstream society through the arts. These art activities include (dance, drama, poetry and other artistic activities. The teachers, in this study, believed in structure (including discipline and curriculum that maintains structure). These teachers believe that children must learn through their own cultural lens, including Black language, discourse, cultural beliefs. As well they believed in good "old fashioned caring" and concern for students will help them acquire success.
In Foster’s work, she writes

Black teachers’ unique historical experiences are either completely overlooked or amalgamated with those of White teachers. In those few instances where Black teachers are visible, their cultural representations are biased by society’s overarching racism. For the most part, these cultural representations continue to render black teachers invisible as teachers of students of their own or of other ethnic backgrounds (xlv, Introduction).

Foster interviewed 20 teachers over a period of eight years. She was able to gather and record the voices of various categories or representations of teachers. For example- the “Elders” were former teachers who had long retired from teaching but who could vividly recall their experiences within a cultural historical framework. The second group she describes as the “Veterans,” those who have taught for a good period of time (more than five years), and the Novices or teachers who have just started their teaching profession.
In this study, teachers revealed several experiences as Black teachers; much of their experiences depended on where they were geographically and historically as teachers. The voices of these teachers also revealed key themes regardless of age or gender. Elder teachers discussed working in unfit conditions. They also recalled desegregation or integration versus segregation and its impact on the education of African American children. Many teachers elaborated on the "bad treatment" of Black children within the schools (this was thematic over almost every single narrative account). The elder teachers, in particular, are able to recall the closings of schools because of integration. As a result of these closings, many teachers lost their teaching positions.

The overall key elements within Foster's study, from the Black teachers' perspective, were that students must be appreciated within the schools in the U.S.; teachers must practice pedagogy and problematize curriculum in their classroom that aligns with the spirit of the children that they teach; teachers must shift attitudes in regards to what they view as deficiencies with African American children and other historically underrepresented students within this society.
The study within itself reveals that educators and scholars must continue to document the lives and experiences of those who have and are experiencing what it means to be underrepresented and what it feels like to be successful. In other words, teacher educators should attempt to listen to the voices of Black teachers when they are working with Black children.

In similar studies done by Foster (1995) and Thomas (1999) both researchers maintain that gathering the voices, perspectives, and experiences of African American individuals gives voice to children and teachers who have not historically been included in the decision processes that have and continue to be made in educating African American students for many years. According to both Foster (1995) and Thomas (1999), a dismal situation for African American children has been maintained throughout the years because educators, community leaders, and children within those communities have been dismissed from the decision table. However, those who many times do not have a permanent stake within the community are given voice and thus make the decisions for "other people's children." Both Foster (1995) and Thomas (1999) maintain that racism, lack of resources, and the silenced voices of the Black teachers and community leaders are reasons that have been instrumental in the continued perpetuation of inequities for African American students.
They reiterate that those “silenced voices” must be heard in order to make adjustments within the classroom for African American students today.

The study done by Thomas (1999) gathered and examined the voices of teacher-elders who taught before the desegregation period. Thomas examined experiences of the elders on those practices and elements that were found and institutionalized within the fabric of the Black community that could assist with the education of African American youth in schools today.

In her analysis, Thomas found that segregation did not necessarily mean substandard education. She also found that family and community were very important within the fabric of the classroom and learning involvement. She also stated that racial pride was taught and instilled within those students to aid in their success. Authority in teaching in terms of roles and how one conducts him or herself within the classroom, specifically in regards to the teacher’s role as authority figure was highly regarded. As well, culturally relevant practices were ingredients within the pedagogy of the teachers and used as a tool for progress. Most importantly, according to the teacher-elders, spirituality was central in all aspects of the education of African American children.
In *I answer with my life: Life histories of women teachers working for social change*, Casey (1993) collected the oral and life histories of women teachers on their political participation within their lives as teachers. In particular, she focused on gathering their biographies and political lives (political activities) that were situated in fighting for social justice. In this study, Casey conducts in-depth interviews and analyses on three groups of female teachers: Catholic, Jewish, and Black.

I include this research not so much for its ties to literacy acquisition for school-aged children, but mainly for its theoretical and methodological framework (oral histories) which informed the methods in this current study. Because Casey collected the voices of both African American and white women, she gave voice to teachers from different backgrounds. Casey (1993) stated that in her study she was “determined to include Black...women teachers...since black teachers have been an almost totally neglected group, and one that I expected would include a number of activists” (p.10). I particularly wanted to review the reasons why Casey used Black female teachers in her study and also wanted to discuss the voices of those Black teachers because it is pivotal for
understanding the importance of listening to the voices of those who have been historically underrepresented and misrepresented in the U.S. society.

In Casey's analyses, she found that the stories of the Black teachers presented a commitment to the "uplift of their race." As well, Casey (1993) states "the autobiographical reflections of these Black women are everywhere organized as arguments for a sense of self as defined in Black discourse and community, and against an alien identity as portrayed in dominant white discourse and institutions" (p.132). In other words, the voices of these Black teachers were essential to this discussion because Black community and discourse are given voice particularly for how schools can be constructed for optimal learning and justice for Black children.

The narratives of the Black teachers specifically reveal how many of their families and communities perceived the purpose and role of literacy learning. For example, in one "Black woman teacher's memory, my father wanted me to be in a position to never lift anything heavier than a pen" (Casey, p.132). In other words, in Casey's analysis-the father imagined his child's (the Black teacher's) success and its relationship to literacy and knowledge by utilizing the metaphor of a pen (which is most often seen as a symbol for academic and intellectual success). This
particular Black woman’s father wanted his child to be in a position of status and not that of a historically stereotyped Black woman who lifts a heavy load, perhaps for example in such positions or roles as that of a maid and/or nanny.

In this study, Casey said that it was essential to capture the nuances of how African Americans define themselves and to punctuate what they believe would be good for the overall community. The Black teachers in her study believed and stated strongly that their overall purpose was for the “betterment of their race.” This interpretation was by far the biggest single agreement of all the Black teachers who were interviewed in her study.

Casey states (1993) that many African Americans believe that “to be wise in ‘Black’ interpretations is essential to physical and psychic survival…” In that same quote she states that “to succeed at studying white knowledge is to undo the system itself” (p.124). All the Black teachers in her study felt that education for many Black children was not adequate or at least not accomplishing its job for the betterment of the race. She compared and utilized slave narratives with narratives within her study to make clear the importance and significance of Black interpretations and stories of the education of Black children, in particular.
Within this study, as in slave narratives, Black teachers echo their frustrations with systemic and institutionalized patterns of neglect and suffering on the part of this society towards Blacks (particularly children) and poor people. One teacher states “I am not very forgiving of teachers who do not address the needs of all their students” (Casey, 1993, p. 149). These accounts were echoed by many of these same Black teachers.

In short, this study demonstrated that Black women whose lives were committed to the political, social, moral, and economic uplift of their race were/are in a position to speak considerably about the education and improvement of Black children, because of their stern and passionate position as political and educational advocates for the children and young people of their racial group.

In Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1994) *Dreamkeepers*, she examines the lives of eight successful teachers of African American children in this study conducted over several years in a low-income urban elementary school setting. She finds specific examples of how and why these teachers—both Black and White—are successful with their students in terms of academic success rate according to the perspectives of parents and community members.
Gloria Ladson-Billings proposes a culturally relevant education for those students. Ladson-Billings describes culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy that empowers students to fight social structures with their own cultural referents and knowledge. Culturally relevant teaching is a philosophy that rests on three criteria: students must experience academic success, must maintain or develop cultural competence, as well as develop cultural consciousness that will allow them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1994 p.162).

As well, culturally relevant teaching embodies the overall philosophy that “utilizes student culture as the vehicle for learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1994 p.161). Ladson-Billings acknowledges that her pedagogical approach has been influenced by her very critical evaluation of various scholarships and research conducted by scholars such as Mohatt and Erickson (1981) who investigated interactions in Native American classrooms and found that teachers who used a specific interactional style had a much greater effectiveness thus gained heightened student motivation and interest. Teachers, therefore, changed their style (speech devices) to be more “culturally congruent” with the interactional styles of their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994 p. 16).
Another form of culturally derived pedagogical instruction that Ladson-Billings critically examined came from Au and Jordan (1981). Au and Jordan coined the phrase/term “cultural appropriateness” to present the application used to teach literacy skills to Hawaiian students. These students were prompted to use a form of “talk story” that encouraged comprehension rather than rote phonics drills, thus allowing students to use their own culture within the context of the classroom while the teacher taught literacy skills. These studies, Ladson Billings (1994) contends have come from a sociolinguistic language that analyzes the “ways in which schools can be made more accessible to culturally diverse learners” (p. 16).

However, in examining these studies, I have found that difficulties that schools have in educating students of diverse backgrounds, particularly in regards to literacy learning, result from problems in society and the struggle for power within this society. Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that these notions of cultural congruence and cultural appropriateness are lacking in the sense that they do not take into consideration those elements that can be taught to “transcend negative effects of the dominant culture” (p. 17).

She also notes that these negative effects that students must contend with are developed from institutional and societal practices that
have hindered and continue to hinder the development of many cultural and ethnic groups. In short, Ladson Billings, suggests that “one must take into consideration that language and the practice of this pedagogical approach must empower students to grow cognitively, socially, politically etc…” (1994, p.18).

In her study, Ladson-Billings (1994) found that successful teachers were those who provided opportunities for self determination; celebrated and valued the students’ home culture; and helped African American students develop consciousness that will equip students within their classrooms with those intellectual and political tools to fight against societal injustices.

The purpose of Ladson-Billings’ (1994) research was to examine practices that helped students be successful with these specific teachers. As well the study attempted “to examine what could be learned from African American students and their teachers that maintained the integrity of their culture and worldview” (Ladson-Billings, 1994 p. 146). Another aspect of Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study was that she was able to recall and document those teachers and experiences that she had within their classrooms that helped her become a literate and fully competent adult.
This is very important to note as we begin to look at lives of adults who have become successful in this current study.

Finally, in my discussion of learning, language, and teaching, as well as teacher education and those philosophies and practices within it, I would like to include Lori Nielsen’s (1989) *Literacy and Living: The Literate Lives of Three Adults*. This study, although it does not focus on how children negotiate literacy within classrooms and particularly does not use African Americans as participants is nonetheless important in this overall discussion, because it examines the literate lives of three adults and what literacy means in their lives on a daily basis. In other words, the importance of being a thoroughly literate being was examined in her study.

Nielsen (1989) writes that “the key to my understanding of societal change, and to the change in writing and reading education, was the notion of transformation. Learning and growth, I came to realize, were not defined by incremental stages or by quantities… they were ongoing processes” (p.5).
It became very clear to Nielsen in her study that literacy could not be separated from culture and those symbols and signs that make literacy meaningful to life in general. In Nielsen’s study, she reiterates that:

1. Teachers must make an effort to force themselves into making the child the curriculum (the most important aspect within the classroom) and not that of reading and writing.

2. Schooling is only one aspect of language learning and there are many other contexts outside of school that help readers learn to read and write. “Family literacy and the learner’s experience outside of school can have a demonstrable effect on the learner’s meaning making processes and hence his or her literate behavior” (p.137).

3. Literacy education must seek ways to change and to transform literacy education that is both dynamic to the student, but also teaches in a way that helps “promote the learner’s understanding of self in society” (p.138). In other words, literacy must be taught in a way that meets the needs of students.

**Conclusion of Chapter Two**

It is important that teachers examine, study, and deliver those elements in their classrooms that will help their students become competent in any setting. Smitherman (2000), best sums up this type of environment or
pedagogy, in regards to classroom teaching. Smitherman states, "What ...educators need to do at this juncture is to take serious cognizance of the Oral Tradition in the Black Culture. The uniqueness of this verbal style requires a language competence/performance model to fit the black scheme of things" (p. 58).

Students in this type of setting will most likely be involved in activities that value their world views (cultural and social) as well as their oral and communicative skills. These can be accomplished if we listen to the voices of those who have acquired success in school and those particular elements and practices that helped them acquire that success.

In short, the role and relationship of the teacher's knowledge, practice, and application of her transforming philosophies are important in trying to engage students in educational processes. Teachers must particularly incorporate in their classrooms the oral traditions that African American and many other historically underrepresented students bring into the schools from their cultures.

Summary

This section has reviewed several different models, philosophies, and studies dealing with literacy and learning particularly for African American students. The main purpose of this section is to introduce and
emphasize the importance of integrating and embedding cultural practices within the classroom philosophy and setting. This section addresses many aspects of teacher education. For example, there needs to be a deeper study into literacy practices that work for children in and outside of the schools and/or classrooms. It is more important in our schools to use Black language and all the cultural mores that it brings to “participate in the creation of the next generation of African American scholars, preachers, dramatists, writers, blues men and women—African American leaders” (Perry, 1998, p.15).

This chapter has highlighted both textual and qualitative research studies that discussed literacy acquisition, best practices, and language and discourse for African American students that inform this present study. Chapter three will include theoretical frameworks, methodological processes and procedures that guided the study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

African American students often have varying learning styles and utilize discourses from home that may be significantly different from the discourses spoken within the schools and classrooms that they attend each day. Samuels (1999) states that “when students come to school, they are confronted with a secondary discourse community that often differs significantly from the primary discourse that is used in their homes” (p. 48).

This research study collected the historical voices of three African American individuals on how they successfully acquired the so-called standard codes (discourse) of mainstream society, particularly within their Pre-K-12 educational experiences.
The project discovered those elements, through data analysis, that assisted these participants in their literacy acquisitions. Specifically, this investigation collected personal narratives (literacy histories) of three select African American leaders through interviews (narration). These individuals spoke of their experiences as children and young adults in the K-12 public educational system and beyond.

Research Questions

This study aimed to understand how African American children best acquire “the interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society” (Delpit, 1995 p. 29). In order to gain this understanding, three successful African Americans were interviewed to capture their voices and narratives in response to a series of questions. Therefore, to better understand this issue and discover those elements that may be found within Black institutions and other daily experiences and functions, the questions for this present study therefore are:
1. What literacy K-12 experiences and beyond influenced the participants' ability to grasp the discourses of mainstream society that subsequently lead to their current status within this society?

2. What institutions, other than formal schools (e.g. church, social groups) helped these select African American leaders essentially gain "successful" access into mainstream community?

3. What materials (literature, books, curriculum) were used to help the leaders acquire those skills? How were those materials related to their home discourse?

4. How was their home language essential for the development of their self esteem?

5. Given their lived experiences, particularly concerning their schooling, what are the opinions and perspectives on how educators can best assist students to acquire reading and other essential literacy skills in order to gain successful access into mainstream America?

6. As well, who were those mentors who were most significant in the lives of these African American leaders in regards to their literacy development?
It was my purpose to capture the literacy experiences of those participants, as they were children and discover, describe, and analyze those elements and entities that assisted them in the development of their literacy learning. The question therefore is—How did they learn to successfully negotiate their way into their secondary discourses, particularly those discourses needed within specific mainstream groups?

By capturing the lived experiences of these three successful African American leaders as children, I intended to give voice to children in the K-12 system today. In other words, the purpose of this study entails the documentation of those experiences, remembrances, perspectives of these individuals to enhance the literacy learning and activities within U.S. schools today, particularly for African American students. Thus collecting the “voices” of individuals from this targeted cultural or racial group through interviewing is most appropriate.

**Theoretical framework**

Oral histories have the unique design of capturing remembrances of the past to lay a foundation for today. Specifically, for this particular study, oral histories are most appropriate, because embedded in Afrocentric perspectives is storytelling and its unique role within the
African American community (Asante, 1990; Smitherman, 1977). This current project was grounded in both interpretive and race-centered, critical theory (Afrocentric) paradigms to better interpret findings that link "home" language, literacy, and culture to a more profound acquisition of other languages, and more specifically, discourses situated within the "language of wider communication" (see Smitherman, 1998).

This is a qualitative study of three cases primarily conducted through interviewing (narrative or "storying" methods). According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), "One method for creating field texts is oral history... Depending on the character of the research relationship, the oral history will vary in focus in detailed ways, such as in particular events narrated and in emotional quality that appears in the field text" (p. 419). As well, Noddings & Witherell (1991), state that "Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments, and faceless subjects" (p. 280).
Some of the ways in which scholars have theorized interviewing processes and their importance are highlighted within the following quotes. According to Thomas (1999), “retellings (oral histories) present not only the events of the lives of individuals, but also gives the listener a chance-through analysis-to examine how these events helped to shape the lives of these individuals in reference to their position in society” (p. 78).

As well, Foster (1997) states that “life history and oral history and personal narratives are forms of analysis that can bring the experiences of African Americans, including teachers, into view, in ways that reveal the complexity of their experiences” (p.xxi). As Denzin & Lincoln (1994) explain, “Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings” (p. 361).

Hence, interviewing becomes both the tool and the object-the art of socialization, an encounter in which both parties (the interviewers and the interviewees) learn from experience. Interpretive methods were used to best understand and report the lived experiences of the participants in the study. This took place through both structured and semi-structured interviews.
I documented those fundamental elements (through the voices of the participants) within the African American culture, African American institutions, schools and mentors that have helped these African American leaders become successful African American adults within mainstream society.

Therefore, Afrocentric epistemological (Asante, 1990) views provided a road map to conduct this study. Afrocentric epistemological view posits that African worldview navigates life for many African American people (Asante, 1990). In other words, it is what gives balance and order to the lives of people of African decent.

Through an Afrocentric epistemology, the researcher best analyzed how these African American leaders obtained successful access, negotiating through and with identified group’s cultural and linguistic heritages, to discourses needed in mainstream society. In addition, Asante (1990) states, that Afrocentricity is the centerpiece of human regeneration. It is purposeful, giving a true sense of destiny, based upon the facts of history and experience” (p.1).
It must be noted, for many non-western cultures and communities the inclusion of spirituality is important within any discussion in terms of research or otherwise, in order to achieve quality and authentic research data. For example, oral tradition is grounded in Black churches. Therefore to give "testimony"-as in the case of the African American participants in this study is crucial. "Testimony in Afro-American churches that serve the inner city can be very valuable sources of data." (Stanfield, 1994 p. 185) Although the particular researcher did not have internal issues of whether to include or speak about the religious or oral traditions of African Americans and to include "testimonies" within the study, many researchers still find it difficult to accept. Stanfield goes on to state that, "American researchers would have to discard their usual dislike of religious topics and realize that many Afro-Americans and other people of color... cannot be fully understood unless the central place of spirituality in their lives is given serious consideration"(p. 185).
In addition to Afrocentric epistemology, sociocultural perspectives are grounded deeply within this study, because many studies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Taylor & Gaines, 1993; Foster, 1996; Heath, 1980) suggest that cultural and social influences from the home should be incorporated within the classroom atmosphere.

**Pilot Study**

Results from a pilot study that I conducted in a research methodology class in Winter quarter 1999 indicated that those “best practices” as discussed or told by the participants for acquiring second discourses and literacy learning are embedded in the cultural and linguistic heritages deeply rooted in the Black community. Interviews were conducted to inquire about the Pre-K-12 schooling and literacy experiences of African American leaders in a large urban midwestern city.

Three individuals were interviewed and surveyed on the literacy activities that took place when they were in the K-12 public school system. These individuals were asked about the institutional practices that they felt enhanced their literacy learning.
These institutional practices were included within home, school, church, and other organizations within their communities. The pilot study indicated that for these African American leaders, deep and more sustained learning within their literacy activities were practiced within institutions such as the family unit, church, and schools.

After careful study of the data, the pilot study informed me in two significant ways. First, all three of the participants indicated that much of their literacy learning took place in the church. It became apparent to me that church and group organizations’ embedded literacy activities may interest and sustain or hold the attention of African American students. Therefore, I was able to formulate deeper questions for this present study that would examine as many facets of interest for African American students, in regards to those specific activities that could inform classrooms and literacy events in today’s classrooms. For example, I only asked a few basic questions in my pilot study about reading experiences and materials that were used. Through my analysis of the data that I received from the study, I was able to formulate more detailed questions.
Secondly, I was able to examine how individuals (mentors) in the lives of the participants created effective environments of learning for their student(s) or mentee(s). Therefore, this informed me regarding what elements I would look for in environments and pedagogy that would foster deep and long lasting learning.

Selection of Participants

The participants for the three case studies were selected based on three specific criteria. First, these individuals were selected because of their cultural or racial identity as African Americans and their claim or knowledge of Black language. Two of the three participants are well-known in both the African American community and the mainstream community. Secondly, these individuals are deemed as successful in both mainstream and their own communities in terms of their positions (career or professional standing) in society, regardless of race or ethnic background. In other words, these individuals are representations of what mainstream society considers successful.
For the purpose of this study, I define success as an individual who has acquired those “interactional skills that will move him or her in and out of discourses needed for mainstream society” (Delpit, 1995 p.52). In other words, those individuals have considerable skills to give them the tools that allow them marketability in U.S. mainstream society. It must be noted that these skills are not necessarily in the form of institutionalized or higher level degrees. These skills can be in the form of how an individual has learned how to negotiate the abilities that he or she possesses.

Lastly, these individuals were selected by age and gender to obtain a better cross-generational context for specific purposes within this project.

Two African American males and one African American female of various ages were selected as participants to represent gender differences, age and generational experiences. An elder-scholar was chosen to provide years of wisdom and insight, particularly in regards to education for African Americans in the school segregation period within the US. One African American female in her late 40s was chosen because of experiences in the desegregation period and the insight that she could give to the study on how this period affected her as an African American
student. One younger African American male, in his late 20s, was chosen for specific and strategic investigative reasons.

Research (Gibbs, 1988; Gordon, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994) has shown that public schools are failing to adequately meet the needs of African American males, more so than African American females in the K-12 public school setting. This situation often results in high drop-out rates for African American males, particularly in large urban areas (Foltz & Leake, 1996; Kunjufu, 1995). Research has also shown that far too often Black children, in particular, Black males make up the bulk of the special education classes, retention, and suspensions in the public school setting (Foltz & Leake, 1996; Gibbs, 1988; Gordon, 1999). Most times, according to Gordon (1999), African American males are in special classes because of so-called reading and linguistic deficiencies.

Therefore, I focused on the stories of a younger African American male in order to understand the complexity in African American education, particularly for Black males. As well, since this participant is close in age to those Black males who are currently school-aged males, he could most likely give insight into challenges faced by them in today’s classrooms, but more specifically within literacy activities.
The participants in this study included: Dr. Asa Hilliard, Professor of Urban Education at Georgia State University; Dr. Gene Harris, Superintendent of Columbus City Schools in Ohio; and Dr. Rich Milner, Research Assistant Professor at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. I met all of these individuals through public school or university liaisons. I had heard all of these individuals speak in various forums such as conferences, school meetings, and university settings. I knew that these individuals were deemed successful and considered themselves both speakers of Black English as well as speakers of the language of wider communication (so-called Standard English).

Therefore, when it came close to the time when I would conduct my research study, I contacted all of these individuals and asked them to participate in this study. This study did not or would not include minors. Therefore, human subjects review at The Ohio State University exempted my study from a more in-depth review and granted approval for this research.
To emphasize again, these participants were selected based on several different criteria that included race, gender, and age as well as their status within society. Of course the two most important criteria are race and secondly their status as educated, fully employed, marketable, and highly skilled African Americans. It is important to reiterate that all of these participants have given the researcher permission to reveal their names.

Successful African American Leaders

Asa Hilliard is the Fuller Calloway Professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. He obtained all three of his degrees, B.A., M.S., Ed. D, from the University of Denver. His field of study and research includes urban education and African-centered education, development, and curriculum. He is a well known and sought-out scholar in his field of study and research. He speaks and lectures all over the United States and abroad. His wife is the mayor of East Point, Georgia. They have four children. Dr. Hilliard is 68 years old and was born during the time of deep segregation.
Dr. Gene Harris is the superintendent of Columbus Public Schools in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus is the second largest urban school district in the state of Ohio. The district comprises more than 140 schools, including alternative schools. Dr. Harris spent almost her entire career in Columbus City Schools. She has been a student, teacher, principal, supervisor, director, and assistant or deputy superintendent in Columbus Schools. She earned her B.A. from both Notre Dame and her M.A. from The Ohio State University. Her Ph. D. is from Ohio University. She is married and has one son. Dr. Harris grew up during the civil rights era in the U.S.

Dr. H. Richard Milner is Research Assistant Professor at Vanderbilt University in the School of Teaching and Learning within the College of Education. His B.A. degree is from South Carolina State University in English. H. Richard Milner earned his Ph. D. from The Ohio State University in Educational Policy and Leadership in 2001. H. Richard Milner is 28 years old.
Methods of Data Collection

Collection of data took place over a three and half month period (14 weeks) beginning in January 28, 2002, which was the initial interview with Dr. Gene Harris, Superintendent of Columbus Public Schools. I interviewed each participant twice for approximately 90 minutes for each interview (sometimes longer). Both interviews with Dr. Gene Harris took place in her Columbus City school office. The second interview with Dr. Harris took place three weeks after the initial interview. The interview and other data collection were continuous throughout the study. My interviews with Dr. Asa Hilliard in February were significantly longer than the other participants, mainly because I interviewed him at his Atlanta home and was able to take more time with the interview process. Both those interviews, with Dr. Hilliard, lasted for about 2 hours each time. My interview with Dr. Milner took place in two different locations. The first interview took place at a restaurant in Columbus, Ohio in early March. The second interview took place at a conference that both he and I attended in early April.
I was inspired to conduct and initiate this study in 1998 after reading an article written by Dr. Theresa Perry (1998) in an anthology entitled *The Real Ebonics Debate*. Since that time, informal data collection has taken place such as the collection of articles, brief discussions, and a pilot study (conducted in Winter Quarter 1999 at the Ohio State University).

However, the formal phase took place from the first day of interviewing until all data had been collected and analyzed. Participants were given permission letters and forms to sign before conducting interviews. Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted by the researcher, in order to give greater depth to the collected data and/or experiences of the participants. The collection of data (including interviews) took place from January until May.

Fontana and Frey (1994) affirm that "structured interviewing refers to a situation in which an interviewer will ask each respondent a series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories" (p. 371). However, they in turn emphasize that "unstructured interviewing provides a greater breadth than the other types, given its qualitative nature" (p. 371). Two interviews were collected from each participant, all of which
were face to face interviews. "These are very important for the researcher and the researched alike, because nonverbal communication both informs and sets the tone for the interview" (Fontana & Frey, p. 371). Audiotapes were used to capture the voices of those interviewed. Also permission was given to use the actual names of the participants in the study.

I utilized more structured interviews particularly for the first interview because I wanted to capture very specific remembrances of participants' childhoods concerning their literacy learning. I did have to refocus my participants and clarify statements. I chose to do this after the questions were asked and I saw that the particular participant may have not understood the question clearly or began to discuss other matters that related to the question, but not particularly focused on the question.

As well, I probed deep into some questions particularly within the follow-up questions. I also had many conversations concerning literacy and the overall education of African American students while the tapes were off, with all of my participants. I felt very comfortable with doing this, because I had formed a relationship with my participants' that was based on deep respect. I also asked very specific questions about their homes and those institutions that were influential in their literacy processes and or learning. Most importantly, all of these participants were
able to give at least one example, and sometimes more, of those individuals who influenced their love of literacy.

During the second interview, I asked specific questions concerning their perspectives and opinions on literacy education for African American children. Specifically these questions leaned towards how African American children can be engaged and challenged within their literacy. However, I had follow-up questions for each of them because I wanted them to clarify something that they may have said in the first interview. For instance, Dr. Rich Milner said that he “felt that he had terrible reading teachers” until he was in his senior year in High School, when he had a very interesting and inspirational teacher of English.

I wanted him to clarify this answer in asking the question— were all his teachers terrible or were some of his teachers terrible reading instructors? He responded by acknowledging that he felt many of his teachers had good intentions and were fine teachers but were not good reading teachers because their pedagogy was not founded on culturally relevant teaching practices. However, in grade twelve, he had an African American female teacher who introduced him to literature and discourse from an African American perspective. This is important to note because, he wanted to clarify that his teachers were well intentioned but just did not
know how to utilize culturally relevant or congruent practices, mainly because of lack of training. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for accuracy of data. The transcriptions were then analyzed for recurring or emerging themes over all six of the interviews.

Observations of Participants

Observations of these individuals were ongoing as I had observed them in various situations and forums before this actual study had officially begun. I was able to attend a conference in March 2002, in the city of Philadelphia and observe Dr. Asa Hilliard who was one of the noted key speakers at this conference. I, as well, was able to observe Dr. Gene Harris in April at a “Sista to Sista” talk that featured Dr. Johnetta Cole, former president of Spelman College in Atlanta, in which Dr. Gene Harris was both a moderator and guest speaker. I observed Dr. Rich Milner in New Orleans in which he was moderator of a panel session on the topic of cultural vicarious efficacy. I also included in Chapter four an observation of Dr. Rich Milner that took place in Seattle, Washington in April of 2001 that I felt would be significant in this study.

Table 3.1 includes questions asked in Interview one and Table 3.2 lists questions for Interview Two.
Questions for Participants/Interview Questions

First interview - Participants gave pertinent background information such as age, occupation, and city/state of residence. These interviews from each successful African American individual were crucial in understanding the backgrounds that each individual brings to the research. Each interview was approximately 90 minutes in length.

1. Where were you born? What type of neighborhood did you live in? What type of verbal activities did you play with your family, if any? What type of school were you educated in (segregated, “separated”, integrated etc…)?

2. What type of activities - oral and written did you experience in community organizations, such as church, sorority and fraternity youth groups (sponsored by sororities or fraternities, or your own group of peers)?

3. What were your experiences as a child while you were in school? Specifically what activities did your teacher(s) utilize within the classroom to help you learn to appreciate reading and literacy activities?

4. What types of books, literature (including poetry, magazines etc…) did your teachers use within the classroom to help you learn? What literature interested you the most? Give examples.

5. What activities do you feel helped you to want to learn in school? What type of learning activities helped you to want to read in general (including activities outside of school and home)?

6. At what point in your life did you begin to feel comfortable about going in and out of discourses, particularly when you felt the need to use the discourse of wider communication (so-called standard English)?

7. Who was the most significant influence in your life, particularly in regards to literacy acquisition?

Table 3.1 Interview Questions
Interview Two Questions

Opinion/Perspective Questions based on lived experiences

1. What experiences did you have, as a child, that you feel now would help school-aged African American children best learn how to read and write in schools today?

2. Through memory, try to think of an experience that you had within one of your K-12 classrooms that helped you in your reading process?

3. In your opinion, how would you describe good reading instruction?

4. What advice would you give to new teachers coming into education about how to teach reading to children of different backgrounds?

5. Each individual was asked other specific questions written as follow ups to 1st set of interview questions.

Table 3.2 Interview Two Questions

Field Notes

As I sat with the participants within our interview sites, I was able to take field notes of what I observed either in the office, home, or restaurant. Through taking notes of what they said to me while we were chatting, I was able to gather the character and commitments of each participant. I, as well, took note of pictures, awards, and posters up on the wall of those participants who invited me either to their office or home. Many of them spoke about literacy learning for African American children and themselves before, during, and after the interview process.
Collection of Mentor Interviews

During my interviews with participants, each leader recalled and named individuals or entities, particularly mentor/teachers (including parents), that had been most influential in their literacy lives. I contacted these individuals and simply asked—In which way did they feel influential in the literate lives of the African American participants? These individuals included the cousin of Dr. Asa Hilliard, Dr. Jacob Carothers; the mother of Dr. Gene Harris, Mrs. Thelma Thomas; and a former teacher of Rich Milner’s, Natalie Ford. I received permission from all these individuals to use their names within this study. All of the participants stated how the Black church was a factor in their literacy development. However, since Dr. Asa Hilliard discussed in length that the Black church, specifically the Church of God in Christ, was most key in his literacy development, I attended and observed church services in a Church of God in Christ in Columbus, Ohio. This church was selected based on conversations with local church goers that were familiar with the Black church. I took notes after I left the sanctuary for ethical reasons. I also
analyzed documents from the church in regards to those literacy skills/activities for their youth. My interviews, my observations, and my mini interviews with those individuals deemed as most significant in the literacy lives of these select African American leaders, and my document analysis of flyers made up the body of my data sources.

Table 3.3 summarizes the sources of data.
Interview Processes

Interviews: I conducted 6 face to face interviews with my three participants in various cities including Atlanta, New Orleans, and Columbus. These interviews were conducted from January 31st to April 5th. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Field notes/Observations: I took note of the types of materials that were on the walls of each participant's office (excluding Dr. Rich Milner, because we met both times in restaurants) and the type of environment that they worked and lived in. I also took note of what was going around me during this time.
I also was able to observe lectures and or presentations that I attended that were facilitated by each individual African American leader.

Audio-recordings: I recorded every interview to ensure accuracy and to capture as much as I could for authenticity purposes. Recordings were important because accurate representation of the voices of these participants was paramount because of the high profile of each of them.

Interviews with Mentors of Participants: Interviews with mentors took place after all interviews with participants were conducted.

Other Documents: I analyzed the voices and responses of family members, former teachers, and or friends. Brief interviews with participant's friends and/or family members were conducted and analyzed. I also collected and analyzed documents from the Church of God programs and flyers.

Table 3.3 Data Collection

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Data Analysis Procedures

Inductive data analysis was ongoing during the collection of data in order to recognize influences in the process, and to also identify the direction of the research. As well, ongoing analysis of the data assisted in formulating emerging themes that developed while analyzing interviews and participatory inquiry. "At the heart of analytic induction is the thesis that there are regularities to be found in the physical and social worlds" (Huberman & Miles, 1994 p. 431).

During my analysis, I was able to review results from a prior semi-qualitative study that I had conducted in Winter 1999. While doing this, I looked at key themes that had emerged from this pilot study. This guided me on creating a process to best analyze my data sources. I would look for key words, phrases, and interpretations that forced me to find and examine those phrases or descriptions that would reoccur several times within the study from each participant. In other words, I was looking "to discover and test those linkages that make the largest possible number of connections to items of data in the corpus. When one pulls on the top
string, one wants as many subsidiary strings as possible to be attached to
data. The strongest assertions are those that have the most strings attached
to them” (Erickson, 1986, p.148).

Of course, there was ongoing and consistent analysis of the data.
Review of the transcripts and themes and patterns helped me to deeply
analyze and think about the study. The transcriptions were analyzed for
recurring or emerging themes over all six of the interviews. I was also able
to discuss the data with my participants, because all of them had done this
type of research before and knew the specific elements to look for so that I
would be able to accurately analyze and find recurring and emerging
themes. I did find inconsistencies and interruptions of patterns, in
particular with Dr. Rich Milner. For instance, unlike Dr. Asa Hilliard and
Dr. Gene Harris, Dr. Rich Milner did not feel that he had the type of solid
or good education that they relayed several times in their interviews. He
also did not mention anything about community involvement. I felt that
this may have been due to his age and lack of years of experience
compared to Dr. Gene Harris and Dr. Asa Hilliard.
Each case study had been placed in a separate folder, but after I looked at the voices of each participant in the folder, I would encounter patterns and themes within each narrative history and review or search back and forth in two open folders for similar patterns. As well, I would listen to tapes over and over again to familiarize myself with each individual participant. This helped me to locate the main points that were important to them during my data collection. I underlined or highlighted codes as they emerged within each case study. Then I looked at those themes that emerged over all case studies and compared them for similarities and differences. In short, I looked for patterns that were theoretically grounded such as within race-centered perspectives and language and discourse acquisition theories previously discussed in Chapter Two.

My body of data consisted of approximately 500 minutes of interviews, several minutes of follow-up questions or comments. I was able to meet with two of the leaders at different professional conferences to seek clarification and discuss data. I personally transcribed my tapes. This was a daunting procedure, but because of my deep interest and the interesting narratives from each participant, the task of listening seemed like reading a profound book. I felt that it would help to transcribe my
own tapes in order to become more personal with my data and with voices of these African American leaders. Glene and Peshkin (1992) stated that, “working with the data, you create explanations, pose hypothesis, develop theories, and link your story to other stories. To do so, you must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data you collected” (p. 127). By transcribing audio-tapes, I felt that this assisted me in the processes that Glesne and Peskin speak of above.

Finally, I was able to contact a few of the family members, mentors, and/or teachers of these select African American leaders, as well. This was important because I was able to speak to those people that the participants indicated were most influential in their literate lives, particularly in their development of their second discourse or the discourse of wider communication. This process not only validated and assisted in the triangulation of the study, but it also gave voice to those mentors and teachers whom the participants deemed as most influential in their literacy development.
Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness consists of four components; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (these are the constructivist equivalents of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility of the research will entail the concrete reality or lived experiences of those involved in the research process. Since the voices of the participants will be foremost and the voices are valid, and the research/data will be subjected to a comprehensive member/participant check, in turn, the researcher will be both credible and dependable.

Credibility

A credible qualitative study answers three questions:

1. What techniques and methods were used to ensure the integrity, validity, and accuracy of the findings?
2. What does the researcher bring to the study in terms of experiences and qualifications?

For credibility purposes, I utilized persistent and ongoing data checks, member checks, and triangulation. I found it quite important throughout this process to maintain consistent contact with my participants. I knew that checking with my participants and their voices...
constantly would help in analyzing and recording precious lives and stories of the participants in a way that would be beneficial to all if us that were in the process. I needed to get accurate accounts about what went on in their lives so it became my mission to continuously check with them throughout this process. It therefore became very important for me to establish a relationship based on respect.

**Member Checking**

Member checking is crucial to the study for many different reasons. One reason is to give the people in the study a chance to read and discuss what they have said and to verify it. Secondly, it is to allow those individuals in the study a part of the ongoing process of data analysis. This sets the tone for trustworthiness and respect with regards to the study.

Thirdly, "because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them" (Frey & Fontana, 1994, p.372). Therefore, member checks were conducted throughout the dissertation process. The researcher continuously discussed analysis of data with participants via various forms of communication. This was done through phone calls and e-mail. For instance, I sent a copy of the transcribed interviews to each participant via e-mail. All three of the
participants responded either by replying “everything is fine” or “I will leave it up to you.”

As well, research participants were given opportunities to read the transcribed data before the researcher finalized the document. It is essential that the participants not only contribute to the data through their voices and lived experiences but that they contribute to interpretations and correct or verify any misconceptions or facts that may have unintentionally been collected. Both informal and formal member checks were crucial in this report. It was very important for me to give, discuss, and have the participants in my study check the data for accuracy. Various forms of communication for member checking were used throughout the process. These various forms of communication included e-mails, phone calls, and, when possible, face to face contact.

**Triangulation**

“Triangulation is a process by which the evaluator can guard against the accusation that a study’s findings are simply an artifact of a single method, single data source, or a single investigator’s bias” (Patton, 1980, p. 332). Therefore, I used various data sources. These data sources included the participant interviews which were the main source for the study. However, other data sources were observations such as lectures,
and the collection of brief interviews from family members, mentors, and teachers about the literate lives of these participants as they were students and young people in the K-12 school systems.

I also observed a church service and analyzed documents from the church, looking for themes that correlated with the voices of my participants. "Triangulation is less tactic than a mode of inquiry. By self-consciously setting out to collect and double check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence, the researcher will build the triangulation process into ongoing data collection" (Huberman & Miles, 1994 p. 438). I felt that this process was accomplished with my multiple sources for the study.

**Peer Debriefing**

Guba and Lincoln (1985) assert that "peer debriefing is the process of engaging, with a disinterested peer, in extended and extensive discussion of one’s findings, conclusions, tentative analysis, and occasionally field stresses..."(p. 237) Throughout my data collection, my interviews, my observations of lectures, and my document analysis, I was constantly speaking with two peers (one teacher in my area and a graduate student) about wording that I could add to this study or those phrases that should be left out for another possible study. Their insight helped me to
think about ways that I could improve not only the validity of the study, but also the fullness of it. In other words, through my discussions, my peers made me think about how I could make the study richer. I was also able to discuss this study with professors from many different parts of the US. Throughout my research study, I was also in the process of locating full time employment as an assistant professor.

Because I had several interviews, many of the universities that had asked me to give a job talk also asked me to be prepared to discuss in great length the purpose of my dissertation and more than anything my findings. As stated previously, I had conducted a pilot study very similar to this study. As I analyzed data from this current study, I retrieved the same findings similar to those found in my pilot study. In that sense, I was able to use debriefing in an informal way with both my peers and my future professor colleagues who challenged me through their thought provoking questions.
Transferability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), "the object of the game in making transferability judgments is to set out all the working hypotheses for the study, and to provide an extensive and careful description of the time, the place, the context, the culture in which these hypotheses were found to be salient" (p. 242). The main purpose of this study was to collect the literacy histories of successful African American leaders and discover, describe, and analyze those elements, those mentors, and literacy activities that were pivotal in their learning to negotiate in and out of various discourses within this society.

Transferability was not the main objective of this project, however. The main purpose of this study was to give teachers, teacher educators, and scholars ideas about how to utilize the voices and resources of communities to help in the optimal acquisition of literacy learning and in this case specifically African American students. However, the researcher must note that it would be important that the readers of this work would be able to find or locate salient activities, pedagogical philosophies, and community ideas that would be beneficial for their students, regardless if those students are teacher interns or K-12 students in the public school arena.
Ethics

There should always be a deep concern about the ethics and how we function in portraying the lives of our participants. I found it quite important to portray the lives of my participants as accurately as possible, particularly because they gave me permission to use their names in the final draft of this manuscript.

Clandinin & Connelly (1994) state that:

In personal experience models the ethical dimension of researcher-participant relationship are highlighted. When we enter into a relationship with participants and ask them to share their stories with us, there is the potential to shape their lived, told, relived, and retold stories as their own. (p. 422) Therefore, I wanted to take great care in how I documented and wrote out my final draft and how I presented my findings (voices of these African American participants).
Summary

This chapter highlighted the purpose of the study and its theoretical framework. This chapter introduced the participants in the study. However, the participants in the study will be further introduced later in this body of work. This chapter also discussed, in detail, those procedures and processes that were followed in this qualitative research study. The following chapter will highlight the voices of the African American participants in this study. These voices will reveal the literate lives of the African American participants.
CHAPTER 4
SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN AMERICANS TESTIFYIN

Oral Histories

The following section presents the oral histories and voices of African American leaders as they discuss those elements in the form of mentors, institutions, and activities that assisted them in gaining or acquiring those literacy skills needed in mainstream society. The voices of their mentors, literacy influences, and lecture and church observations will be highlighted within these profiles.

Chapter Layout

First, I will give a short introduction to each participant and his/her position in this society. I will then discuss the African American participants within a profile, particularly in regards to their literacy experiences that were revealed to me within their oral histories. I have merged those voices of the participants, the voices of their mentors and my observations to weave together an individual profile.
In Chapter five, I discuss seven themes that emerged from the voices of these select participants. These themes I have coined as critical literacy ingredients and lessons. I named these themes critical literacy ingredients and lessons because they discuss the critical or important literacy experiences that encompassed the young life and/or young adulthood of these select participants.

**The Participants/Profiles**

These participants in this study were selected based on several different criteria, which included race, gender, and age, as well as their status within society. Of course, the two most important criteria would be that of race and of their status of “success.” It is important to reiterate, as revealed in Chapter Three, that all of these participants have given the researcher permission to reveal their names.

Dr. Asa Hilliard is the Fuller B. Calloway Professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. He obtained all three of his degrees, BS, MS, and Ed.D from the University of Denver. His field of study and research includes urban education and African centered education, development, and curriculum. He is a very well known and sought out scholar in his field of study and research. He speaks and lectures all over the United States and abroad. His wife is the mayor of East Point, Georgia.
Dr. Hilliard is 68 years old and was born during the time of deep segregation. Dr. Hilliard has four children.

Dr. Gene Harris is the superintendent of Columbus Public Schools in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus is the second largest urban school district in the state of Ohio. The district comprises more than 140 schools, including alternative schools. Dr. Harris spent almost her entire career in Columbus City Schools where she has been a teacher, principal, supervisor, director, and assistant superintendent. She holds degrees from both Notre Dame and The Ohio State University. Her Ph.D. is from Ohio University. She is married and has one son. Dr. Harris is 49 years old and grew up during the times of the civil rights movement.

Dr. Rich Milner is research assistant professor at Vanderbilt University in the School of Teaching and Learning within the College of Education. His BA degree is from South Carolina State University in English. Dr. Milner is originally from Griffin, Georgia. Rich Milner received his Ph. D. from The Ohio State University in Educational Policy and Leadership in 2001. Dr. Milner is 28 years old and is presently single.
The following pages will reveal the individual voices of the African American leaders in this study as they discuss their K-12 and beyond literacy experiences within a varied historical context.
Dr. Asa Hilliard

Don’t let them die out
All these old Blk/people
Don’t let them cop out with their memories
Of slavery/survival
It is our heritage...
Sit down with em brothas and sistuhs.
Talk to em. Listen to their tales of victories/woes/sorrows.
Listen to their Blk myths.
Record them talken their ago talk for our tomorrows.
The laughter comen out of tears,
Let them tell us of their juju years
So ours will be that much stronger.
(Sonia Sanchez, 1997)

I knocked on the door and rang the doorbell of Baba Asa Hilliard’s
Atlanta home (Baba means father in Swahili). He did not answer right
away so I called him on his home phone to let him know that I was outside
waiting. He apologized to me as he opened the door. He said, “I did not
hear you. I was on the porch looking at an ‘Oldies- but- Goodies’ video
tape. He showed me a copy of the Oldies but Goodies video tape as we
walked on his porch. Baba Hilliard seems to be a very humble man with a
gentle smile.
We walked to his basement and then into a beautiful room at the back of the finished basement that looked like his office. There were bookshelves and books on almost every corner of the room and a lovely wood finished round table. I looked on his wall and saw a picture poster of Dr. John Henrick Clarke, Dr. Ben Jochannan and a few others that he would later name as his mentors. Baba Hilliard and I sat down at the round table and begin our talk.

**History and Background**

Baba Hilliard was born in Galveston, Texas in 1933 at John Silly Hospital during deep segregation. He told me that his parents lived in Bay City, Texas but there was no hospital there at the time. Bay City was a small rural community about 90 miles south of Houston. It was a segregated town.

*Our side was the poverty side more or less. For the most part you would say it would be a poor community even though all the Black professionals were in that same community—the undertaker, the physician.*

He told me that his father was a high school principal but nonetheless he would still consider himself poor. He also explained that although most of his life he lived in communities that were quite economically mixed, those communities were almost all African
[American]. He explained to me that his father was a great storyteller who was always telling stories. His mother was the one who initiated games with the family.

My dad was a great storyteller so whenever he had a minute he was always telling stories. However, with my mother, it was more likely to be games. We would play Monopoly and all kinds of games.

Dr. Hilliard was educated in segregated schools until 6th grade when he was about 12 years old. When he completed 5th grade, his mother and father separated and he moved to Denver, Colorado with his mother. There he attended what was considered an integrated school.

It [Junior High School] was not really a very integrated school—it was mostly African [American]... But as I went up in grade levels it became more mixed. We had Asians, one of the very few communities that had Japanese and Chinese. We had Mexicans largely. We had Jewish kids.

All of his teachers from 6th grade until 9th grade were white teachers until he reached 9th grade.

Until my 9th grade year, we had one Black teacher, Mrs. Thelma Bell. During my senior year... we finally got Gil Kruger who was the Black coach and physical science teacher. The schools were in low income areas.

Dr. Hilliard explained that he and his family were on welfare after his parents were divorced. After their parents were divorced around his sixth grade year in school, he moved with his mother to Denver. Although
they were still on welfare, his mother was somehow able to buy a home
and move out of the projects.

_We were on welfare once my mom and dad divorced. We had a
pretty tough time...My mom was creative so she managed to buy a
house when we were on welfare... It was from hand to mouth.
We were barely making it until I started working. So to help
my mom out, my brother and I got paper routes. In addition to
the paper routes, we got sweeper boy jobs after school._

He particularly remembers his oral speeches from organizations
that he was a member of either from school organizations or from Church
functions. These activities not only helped him learn to speak well, but
taught him valuable lessons.

_Well the special verbal activities that I recall was in Texas in the
4th or 5th grade. I was put into what we call junior declamation-
which was making speeches. I was actually entered into a contest
at Prairie View [University] that was a great experience for me. I
remember being awestruck by being in a college to do this
competition... All this energy around competition for a track meets
at Prairie View [University] and they also had as a sidebar -this
competition for oratory. I think I won second place in the
oratorical contest. We would have to memorize speeches-long
speeches- and give them to judges... Besides that, we had, of
course plays, we had dramatic stuff you would get involved in.
Also by high school [in Denver], we had activities in student
government that required speeches and running for office-things
like that. Probably one of my most memorable experiences was
when I ran -in school politics-and they had an organization called
junior achievement and I was in that. I was president of my junior
achievement company. That required that I go to the meetings
where all the business people were-that required that I had to give

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a speech. That was the first time where I was caught completely off base because I really had not prepared well...I got up to speak all of a sudden I realized that I did not know what I was going to say.... They were all white businessmen. They were being as nice as they could possibly be to make me feel good about not being able to speak. I vowed at that point that that would be the last time that I would stand before any group even young children without being prepared...

I observed Dr. Hilliard speak on several occasions, but I particularly had a chance to hear him in Philadelphia, where he spoke about African Indigenous Education and its importance to children in Africa and in the United States. One of the things that were revealed about this speech that I observed particularly after our interviews was the fact that Dr. Hilliard was over prepared. I sat at the front of the room in the second row. I was able to observe that Dr. Hilliard had so much information and was well prepared. For the interest of time, he had to skip many pages of his lecture. As well, it is important to note that he brought books, overheads, and other materials for the audience of about 300 people.

School and Community Activities

Dr. Hilliard recalled many of the activities that he had within school. Because he lived in two different communities during the years when he was growing up, he had varied and wide experiences in terms of
his education at home and in school. These activities he recalled helped
him to become a better reader and writer of the language of wider
communication. He most importantly recalls those teachers who were
beneficial in his life as far as helping him improve his oral and written
abilities. He notes both a K-12 teacher and a freshmen college instructor
who helped him with his skills.

_I lived in Texas -segregated Texas in the summer- and
"integrated" Denver during the school year. I’m in really two
different linguistic communities. I’m in one where largely a form of
Black language was spoken—that was typical, as well as, the formal
English. We had a lot of well-educated people [African
Americans] in Houston. But in Denver, we had less of a
professional community and probably more, of what we now call
Ebonics. I was socialized more in that community then in the Texas
community because I was not there long enough but probably the
key feature for me was—two experiences... One experience was
meeting a teacher in High School, Mrs. Linderman. She saw it as
her mission to take children, regardless of who they were— and she
took a particular liking to me— to make sure that we were
disciplined in our use of the language. She was a European
woman. She modeled the way she wanted us to speak. She was
not disrespectful of the way we spoke which I appreciated but she
would say—’I want you to go to college and for that you have to be
able to speak correctly and write correctly.’

He then recalled a professor whom he had in college who
continued with his development as a fully literate individual. This
professor further assisted in the development of Dr. Hilliard’s literacy
skills, through his “thoughtful” critiques.
I got to college, the University of Denver—thinking that I was pretty good at English. I remember in my Freshmen English Class—writing an essay thinking it was so super. I thought it was so super! I found that my writing was horrible. I got this paper back from this professor and it was just marked up to pieces and I was just crushed. I said—How can he not recognize all this great writing? I remember—The essay was about a book that I had read. I think it was by William Bee's-Edge of the Forest. It had to do with this guy who sat down and looked at all the birds and the bees. And he made all that come to life...It was really interesting. I remember saying that... This was a great book in my book report. I remember his comment [professor's] on that was—'well be careful how you use the word great—in effect you have not read enough books to be able to make a judgment that it is great and even if you had, would you carelessly just because you happened to take this off the shelf randomly and use the word great. You could say that it was an enjoyable book, it was a good book—but great should be reserved for something that is truly exceptional.' He was very precise in his critique and very open in assisting me with all that stuff.

Those two teachers were very influential—both Mrs. Linderman and I cannot remember the professor's name but it has caused me to focus on crafting writing. I had probably taken for granted that if you could conjugate a verb and spell and knew some of the other rules of grammar and all that—that it would probably take you through. But really using writing as a communication system and to do that well—that is what they called my attention to, so I was trying to be better at that.

Dr. Hilliard recalled those books and activities that interested him most. The simple activity of listening to himself speak in a tape fascinated him. It forced him to listen to his voice and think about the way he spoke and make appropriate adjustments.
Well most of my teachers just used textbooks. There was very little beyond text books. Film-if you count that as language use—incidental language use. We did some tape recording when I was in junior high to listen to ourselves at one point to speak and that was a fascinating thing...A tape recorder was one of those things where you had to learn to listen to yourself. It could be an intimidating thing. I said to myself that I did not know that I sounded like that to other people...I thought that was a good verbal experience.

He remembered how he and his brother would love to buy and read comic books. After they would read comic books, they were able to listen to those same comic characters from the comic books on the radio. This experience made it come alive to them. As well, the radio show experience became a family activity.

But the reading experience that I found interesting was first comics. I love comics. My brother and I would buy new comics and then we would trade comics. I liked adventure. You know Captain Marvel, Captain Midnight, Popeye, Terry and the Pirate-especially the ones that paralleled the radio shows. I would listen on the radio. We would listen as a family to these radio series that would come on. My mother included and we had a lot of fun getting ready to hear it as we all listened together. If I found that program like the Green Hornet in a comic book and he was also on the radio, that was a lot more fun.

Dr. Hilliard spoke about how there were not many books and printed materials to read in the library that were about and for African [American] people. He does, however, recall how he would read anything that he could get his hand on anyway. As well, although he loved to read
books, he was not satisfied because much of the material that he read was not about his cultural experiences.

*I don’t remember much exactly about the things that were in the library. For example, there were not any books on Africa or on Black people other than Booker T. Washington’s *Up From Slavery*. That is the only thing that I can remember about us [African Americans] in the library. I had that hunger, but I was not satisfied. But I would read anything that I could get my hands on.*

Dr. Hilliard recalls his experiences in church and how those church activities influenced his learning. He felt that Bible verses and discussing those verses with his church members were vital experiences in his life.

*My grandfather was a bishop in the Pentecostal church—so I was raised in the church. Of course you would have to read the Bible. Within the Sunday school classes, you had Sunday school materials that had to be read. But that was a part of how you did Sunday school. You had to take turns reading verses and discussing those verses. Although it was a very good literacy experience, the people that designed it did not think of it that way. They were thinking more of getting you into the theology and so forth. That was a very important experience.*

**Various Activities for Literacy learning**

Dr. Hilliard remembered those specific activities that he felt helped him most to succeed in school and to acquire skills needed to survive and thrive in this society. He also recalled that he had more activities outside of the school context than he had within it.
The key thing that drives my experience in literacy was the range of things that I was able to get involved with or encouraged to get involved with through my parents and friends. I participated in things that were my own interest. For instance, I was a member of the Civil Air Patrol. You gotta read to learn about flying and all of that. I already mentioned student government. We had city wide conferences on student government. We would read baseball cards. I was interested or I loved the encyclopedia... I was a paperboy I think that I mentioned that. We would not only throw papers, we would read them, as well. I always liked books. If I had money I would buy books... My mother made sure that we had library cards. That was a big thing. We were always paying fines for overdue books. We would have lots of books. As I look back we had a lot of activities going on. Of course in school [there were activities]-but probably more so outside of school.

As he begin to discuss when he felt comfortable going in and out of discourses, Dr. Hilliard recalled how his mother and other Black people whom he knew would code switch or change their speech when they spoke with white people, for example on the telephone. He felt that this was necessary and an integral part of life as Black individuals in U.S. society.

I always knew who my mother was talking to on the phone. Even though, I could not see who was on the other end-I knew if it was a white person and I knew if it was a Black person. I could tell because her language would change. And that was not just her—that was everybody. Everybody’s [referring to African American people, in general] language changed when they talked to white people. And so the earliest memory that I had that is the way it always was. We knew that they spoke one way and we spoke another. The code switching was almost integral to how you had to live. So I never had a time where I felt uncomfortable talking to
white people or talking in class or talking to make speeches. My concern was whether I was prepared with information.

Role of the Church

Dr. Hilliard recalled the most important entity in his life as far as developing his communication skills was the Black church. He explains that the church “gives the most rich literate involvement.” He recounted how the members of the church would encourage him and other youth to be leaders and/or at least take on leadership roles.

I was raised in the Church of God in Christ until I was about 14 years old. It was an extremely literate church. I had dozens of role models, because we had preachers coming through all the time and I’m watching dozens of them give sermons—men and women. It [Black church] gives the most rich [richest] literate involvement that I can think of. I was encouraged—if you have something to say then say it. If you thought you wanted to be a preacher at 4 years old. The whole congregation would stop and place you in the middle of the pulpit and you would talk as much as you wanted to talk. Everyone is telling you ‘Yes’—‘Go on’—‘Amen’—‘Praise the Lord’—and all of that. I don’t care of how many sophisticated series of pedagogy that I have seen, there is almost nothing that I know of that boosted in a total way a person’s capability to communicate. And right now many of the professionals that I know came out of that same experience, that are at the highest level.

He goes on to speak about how other African American leaders and teachers whom he knows were a part of this type of environment and how important he felt the Black church was and is in shaping Black leaders and role models within the African American community. He
gives credit to the social environment that the church creates that helps to develop leadership and strong literacy skills for youth. He also speaks about the importance of music and its influence on how one learns through music, rhythm and instruments.

I had a chance to go to visit the First Church of God in Christ in Columbus, Ohio. Within this church, youth have their church services in the first level section of the church. The youth are children within the age range of 7-18. I went to one of their services and it revealed much of what Dr. Hilliard described in our conversations. In my observations youth were placed in leadership positions. This particular day, most of those placed in leadership positions, such as leading in prayer, reading scriptures, and acknowledgments seemed to be between the ages of 12-16. Children were given the opportunity to use many different literacy skills, such as leading in songs where they had to learn the lyrics by heart, memorizing Bible verses, and leading in conversations about the scripture. They were also able to see a role model in the form of the youth pastor who gave the sermon. Dr. Hilliard continued to speak of specific individuals who were raised in the Black church and who were also a part of the Oakland Ebonics Controversy.
Carrie Secret comes out of that same church. She was the one at the center of the Ebonics controversy in Oakland. [She was a teacher who taught the language program that was so controversial in Oakland]. If you watch her on video—not just the words—but it is about the environment that she creates that fosters communication. To me being brought up in a communication rich environment which I might add links music to speaking. The preacher preaches—you got the call and response of the audience and then we always had bands in the church. In fact, I played in the band. I learned how to play trombone by the same rule that you get to do whatever you want to do and they support you. Yes, you play— but if you really want to understand Black music, it has to fit with what the preacher wants. There are certain things that happen and after you know it— it happens automatically. For example at a point where the preacher wants to raise the fervor of the congregation—the organist—the band—the drum—everything is a part of that. When he gets ready to stop it, you gotta know what to do. You can’t just play at the end like you did at the beginning. So this is just an amazing thing. I thought about this many times—how communication environments were very rich in texture were created there [church].

Dr. Hilliard also stated that if people want to learn how to make speeches, a good place to go would be the Black church.

So that was a very big influence on me and even now if you want authentic connections with people, I am more likely to go there [church] for my model for what that looks like then out of some textbook on how to make speeches. The church was a very important thing. It was not that church, but our churches in general. Traditionally that would be one.

Dr. Hilliard also recalled how specific individuals influenced his literacy life in his later years, mainly when he became an adult. The
church was the primary greatest influence on him as a child, and as an adult, there were individuals who came into his life and helped to make him the leader that he is today.

_There of course are really key individuals that have been extremely important to me, by what they did. In fact, it was after I became an adult and that was Dr. John Henrick Clarke. Another is my cousin-Dr. Jacob Carothers who advocates what he calls beautiful speech, which comes from African tradition- "telling the truth clearly". He is one of the best writers. I had a couple of university professor like Francis Russ who I worked with for three years on a program teaching philosophy. Charles Merryfield. What great clarity! It is more than just manipulating words but depth of understanding... and I might add Tony Browder, most recently...._

**Dr. Jacob Carothers**

Dr. Hilliard deemed Dr. Carothers as one of the most influential mentors in Dr. Asa Hilliard's education professional work. I spoke with Dr. Carothers about his influences on Dr. Hilliard in his later life. Dr. Hilliard believes that his real education came when he learned about the contributions of ancient African people. Jacob Carothers has just retired from Northeastern University in Chicago as a Professor. Dr. Hilliard stated that Jacob Carothers became influential to him more so in his young adulthood then in his childhood. I had a chance to speak to Dr. Carothers from his Illinois home and ask him a few questions in regards to his influence on Dr. Hilliard.
My question to him was- why do you think that Dr. Hilliard
mentioned you as one of the most influential mentors/teachers in his life?

In our conversation, Dr. Carothers elaborated

_Actually I did not know Asa, until we were grown in the field [careers]. He was in Denver... I knew his father well because of our family ties. But beyond that we did not have that much contact until our young adulthood. I was studying about Africa under my mentor Dr. John Henrick Clarke. Asa was influenced by what I was doing in trying to find out about Africa. Africa had been so maligned in history—in books and on television that it became necessary to infuse “correct and authentic images” of Africa [which means beautiful speech]. Much of our history has been stolen and we needed to do some damage control. Under the influence of my mentor Dr. John Henrick Clarke, I was studying the ancient African civilization. Asa was so impressed with the study of the Nile Valley and the history of Africa, that he began to deeply study this. It was his [our mission] to put together a marvelous story told by our ancestors. This was vital in what Asa Hilliard now sees as the African centered curriculum movement. Asa was very much involved in on recording the positive effects that African civilization has on modern civilization. We had been learning so much about Africa. Asa is very much involved with the problems and atrocities that Africans [people of African decent] have had to face historically. Asa has made it his life mission to assist our people through education by studying and recording the greatness of Africa. As well, within African Centered Curriculum movement, he is able to do this more effectively. I think that because I was involved with it a little earlier and because he saw me studying this under my mentor Dr. John Henrick Clarke, I had a great deal of influence on his education-his African centered education. This is how I believe that I was influential on his education._

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The conversation between Dr. Carothers and me emphasized where many of Dr. Hilliard’s deep beliefs come from in regards to the education of children. As well, Dr. Hilliard mentioned “beautiful speech” in our conversations, when referring to Dr. Carothers.

Dr. Hilliard specifically recalled a teacher whom he met while beginning his teaching career. This individual impressed him because he created an atmosphere within his classroom that was in Dr. Hilliard’s words “a spiritual experience” for his students.

_I remember when I first started teaching. I was teaching High School and there was this guy Harold Peoples, who was Time magazine’s teacher of the year. He was on the cover, I think at that time. I thought-, why would Time magazine come to Denver and give this teacher such an honor? I said to him... “I just want to know what it is that you are doing.” He let me come in his classroom. I sat in the back and I mean the kids in that class were spellbound. What he was doing the day that I walked in was reciting poetry. I remember him reciting—“Oh would God the gift would give us to see ourselves as others see us” but he was doing it in Irish [accent] and even though he did it that way those kids were hanging on to every word. I was sitting there like—“Wow- look at this guy!” It was such a pleasant experience for him and the kids. It was a class but it was not a class. It was a spiritual experience...._
Interview Two with Dr. Asa Hilliard/Opinions and Perspectives

The second interview focused more on the thoughts and perspectives of literacy learning for African American children. Dr. Hilliard gave his thoughts, opinions, and perceptions about educating African American children, the literacy wars, and the Oakland Ebonics situation.

Dr. Hilliard explained how he felt that some educators within this society have made reading a puzzle. In other words, he spoke on how he felt educators made the learning and teaching of reading such a sophisticated and complicated matter. He contends that it is an uncomplicated process.

*Americans have made the teaching of reading a puzzle when it is very straightforward. We have all these thousands of professionals that are trying to solve this puzzle about how to teach kids how to read. One thing that I have learned about pedagogy, in general, is that the biggest crowd out there are the “puzzle crowds.” There are a bunch of people that have no puzzle and routinely in very short periods of time can teach anybody to read, at any age. Renee Fuller- the one with a creative reading philosophy called Ball, Stick, and Bird- You can have students reading in just a few minutes and over the course of a few months, they can be fluent readers -even if they are very young-even if they are said to be retarded. Thaddeus Lott has the highest reading scores in Houston. He has the DISTAR Program. But I think he is using it in a “Black Way.” Those kids all read. They are two and three grade levels over where they need to be. Over here in Tifton Georgia-the whole town reads now. One white woman was trying to help little Black kids learn how to read at one elementary school and they*
read around 30, 000-50, 000 books at the end of the school year-in one school -where you had all these “so-called” illiterate kids. Then a year or so later, the whole town had read a million books-now they are going for 2 million books. You had Paulo Freire who taught adults who had never learned how to read in 30 hours time. They read well enough to read the daily newspaper. I can go on and on and on and on-how come we have this “puzzle thing” about how to teach reading. Number one, I do not accept this thing that there is a problem in teaching kids how to read. If we want them to read, then they will learn how to read. But with that as a preface-the biggest thing that I can say about reading for our kids [African American children] is creating a social environment where reading is valued. That is the bottom line.

Dr. Hilliard went into a deep discussion on how learning, specifically reading must be created within a strong social environment. He explained that the love and desire to read must be made meaningful within social activities. The reason why many children do not read is mainly due to the fact that their parents do not enjoy reading or in some cases can’t read. He believes though that many parents can read, but do not enjoy the act of reading and this results in the lack of interest for students.

When I describe what was happening in my church, -my mother having us all read every Sunday-in every case you are talking about a social environment. Reading is almost incidental to getting together and for many children who don’t read- the parents don’t read. In other words, parents don’t read, not can’t read! Some can’t read-but some parents that can read do not find it a pleasurable and meaningful activity so they model a disinterest at minimal and sometimes a dislike for reading...Nor do they [parents] have any time where reading is the central activity and
everybody is doing it—Like reading to someone, if that alone can be done. They do not make time. If that alone can be done, the technique is simple.

He goes on to discuss that every reading technique that he has ever studied works and is effective in teaching reading.

*Every technique that I have ever seen works in teaching reading. I did a study in Africa about six different ways to teach reading and every one of them works. I was trying to figure out the best way. The issue is—whether they are tried or not. Phonics works. Whole Language works. Whole Language mixed with Phonics works. No method works.*

Dr. Hilliard recalled the beliefs and strategies that Septima Clark thought would help people learn how to read. There were simple techniques that she and her people used to get people to read with very little resources and many times no real facilities.

*Septima Clark is a big hero in South Carolina. Septima Clark was the one who helped start the freedom schools and started the literacy campaign in the south so that Blacks would have a chance to vote. She took people who she had just taught how to read and what she told me was that I use them as teachers. I prefer teenage mothers who just learned how to read and could not read. That is who I want to teach reading—not a reading specialist. Reading specialists have arrogance. Whether they know it or not—that is what they convey and they intimidate people who are trying to learn to read. I would rather have someone who still appreciates not knowing how to read and now they are reading. And then they can remember some of the little things that helped them to learn how to read. They can imitate those simple strategies that helped them learn how to read.* All of these classes were conducted many times under a tree. Where ever they could be------They used laundry bags as paper. They used crayola as writing utensils. They
had thousands of people that learned how to read and pass their literacy test. Almost anybody can teach somebody else how to read, until they make it a puzzle about how to do it.

Parent Involvement

Dr. Hilliard elaborated on what steps he would take or make in order to help parents to become interested in reading and reading activities. He speaks of ways that educators can get parents who cannot read to read and learn to love it. He also elaborates on how to get parents who can read to become engaged in the reading process.

What is missing isn’t the method of teaching or the activities that the kid has to do other than to be a part of a community that values reading and literacy. They use it—that is how they know they value it! They use it! If it is not there, then we have to create it. You have two groups of parents. You have the parents that can’t read and you have the parents that don’t read. Both of them need to be involved in something that changes how they use reading. Ones that can’t read, they need to have the opportunity to master the techniques of reading—some type of literacy program. In Tifton, Georgia, many of those parents can now read, not all but many of them now can read who weren’t reading a couple of years ago. This is because they organized this way to approach reading instruction for parents. There was nothing special about how they learned. The method of teaching you kinda make it up as you go along. If you give an environment that fosters reading and good stuff to read—you can take someone that does not know how to read and make them read! [For] the ones that already know how to read but they are too busy playing cards or looking at the NBA, then what you have to do is find a way to awaken their critical capacity. You have to give them challenges that enable them to shift their focus to some things that also matters—but there are some people that their whole life is nothing but sports and partying...
We started a study group on African history. We get people turned on. This is interesting to them because it is relevant to them, but they have to get the information so they have to read it! It might start off with a slide presentation and then they will be oh my God I did not know that! Why did I not know that! They have to see something that they have not seen before! We have to offer something that will engage their latent interest...

Dr. Hilliard continued to speak about those experiences that he feels will help children learn to become good readers, speakers, and writers, as well as those things that should not be done in classrooms. He is also discouraged by how students, as he has seen in today’s classrooms, are not engaged in social processes that would help them in their reading processes.

Kids today they [classroom teachers] got them sitting in rows filling out forms-dittos-. It is all chopped up into disaggregated pieces of more whole social processes.... You become an individual fragmented step by step. Kids may work all year without ever reading a book!

Discussion of Ebonics Debate

Since Dr. Hilliard was one of those leaders who spoke out regarding the Ebonics situation and personally knows many of those teachers and leaders who were involved in the Ebonics Program controversy. I asked him about his feelings and wanted him to explain to me his perceptions of what really happened in Oakland and around the country when the situation got to the media. He explained that during the
whole Ebonics controversy and even before that, students were getting
good results and doing well within the programs that were already in place in
the Oakland school system. He said that many people do not know what
was really going on and the history behind what was going on.

_The fundamental thing that must be said about the Oakland Ebonics Program is that you have to start with the fact that they are high achieving [students in the program]. They are some of the highest achieving kids in Standard English. They preserve their Ebonics and learn a whole lot of other things. Everything else has to be looked at in light of the fact that they have overachieved while everybody was criticizing them. You must start in Carrie Secret’s class. They [other classrooms and schools] don’t want to compete with the kids in her class in Standard English... That program was in operation as a state level program called the Standard English proficiency program. The same person who inspired it was Ernie Smith and led the people who implemented the statewide program going full board especially in Los Angeles. Ernie Smith was also a consultant to the people in Oakland before the board decided to do something about what was happening to the kids. You first have to know about what was happening in Oakland. Oakland had acknowledged the Asian languages, the Spanish Language and it broke up kids and they put three or four kids [African American] in this bilingual program. It was raw! So there is something that came before the Ebonics explosion. If they acknowledge the foreign language aspect of other students, one must acknowledge the foreign language aspect of our kids [African American students]. We want them to learn Standard English, but we don’t want them trashed anymore than the kids that speak Japanese or Chinese or other languages. Here comes Ernie with the theory. When the media gets in there, they lift this phrase or word out of the resolution “genetics.” They saw “genetics” relationship and they immediately think biology and then they [media] trashes Oakland because they are ignorant of linguistics. I am saying everyone was ignorant on the Oakland situation. They did not understand this linguistic term...First they did not know what Oakland proposed. They did not know the linguistics. They..._
don't know the pedagogy. They did not know the outcome of the Oakland effort. So for some reason, everybody had a knowing and knowledgeable opinion about something that they did not have information on—not everybody—but almost everybody. Of course what I thought that meant was that people did not like not so much the language but they did not like the people of Oakland. I think this was a reaction against the people in Oakland. White people and Black people did not like poor Black people who sounded like that way so they were not just responding to the language that way but to communities that spoke that language. They disrespected communities. The flip side of this is that you have powerful pedagogy that comes out of the Oakland experience and Carrie Secret is the best example of that. We can now see Carrie Secret but the cloud of confusion had her hidden when that controversy came up.

Reading Wars

I asked him to elaborate on the reading wars such as the whole language versus phonics war and how he felt about those reading philosophies/and or programs and other programs. He explained that many or all of these programs/philosophies can work, but they must be placed in proper context or used along with other programs or materials to make it work for African American children. He also discussed that it is most important to talk to those educators who are successful with their students and who have positive results because of their pedagogical processes and philosophies.
I had mentioned that I have seen programs work even those that I philosophical disagree with like D1STAR. But when I go to Wesley School with a leader like Thaddeus Lott, the students are the highest achievers so I moderate my dislike in light of the success of the program. For me, one of the big things about reading is the reading wars. You gotta choose up sides. Usually you gotta be either a whole language person or you gotta be a phonics person. I don’t think you have to choose up sides. The fact is that there is a component of teaching reading that has special significance for African [American] people. If a person who speaks Standard English is going to teach an Ebonics speaker how to read sounds but they [Ebonics speakers] are hearing different sounds-then it has to be phonics based. Some of it has to be phonics based but it can’t be exclusively phonics based. It has to be contextualized. You have to have prior experience. So now where I always go, rather than to the theory or myself listening to fifteen different theorists trying to teach reading, what I will do is try to find someone who is successful in teaching reading. Then I will listen.

He specifically recalled his experiences with spelling bees from his school days and how essential he felt that they were to him and his classmates.

I felt this was important to include because spelling bees and memory activities help children, but some educators and theoreticians have this perception that those type of activities do not assist children within their learning and reading processes and that they are low level and useless forms of learning activities and skills. He explained his opinions on the importance of spelling bees, based on his experiences below.
The spelling bees helped me. It takes you back to the same thing that I said a while ago. The theoreticians are not paying attention to results. They are paying attention to their theory. For many theoreticians anything that looks like rote is supposed to be low level. Anything that is rote happens to be bad. Well I don’t happen to believe that! In fact if it is bad- you have to take it out of medical schools, because there are certain things in medical school that doctors have to learn by rote. If it is always rote then that is bad. It is real easy if you make it rhythmic then rote is very easy for many people. What rote does is gives you a repertoire that frees your mind to go out and do work. Again theoreticians do things to trash certain things that we need. I don’t have that problem. I hope that I never join any of the reading religions. And once again, the important thing about the spelling bee was that we learned to spell. We used phonics-that is how we learned to spell. Chocolate -C-H-O-C. It did it! I would not say that that is the only method of learning, but it got me through something. Spelling bees helped me a lot. Right now, I still use some of the techniques that I was taught when I was in elementary school, when I try to spell words now that I don’t know. The brain has many ways [to take in information] if you give it enough stuff it will learn it and synthesize it. But what we would do is collectively respond to the teacher and she would say then “ok-let’s spell so and so[ a spelling word] to the whole class”.

Dr. Hilliard elaborated on how he feels schools and classrooms are crippling children in education today. He stated that educators have many programs, however, they are still not working for many children. He commented that schools are still failing children at alarming rates and that special education programs are set up to make money, and they have not worked for many children in the U.S. He explained why he feels this way.

I believe that schools cripple the ability for children to analyze, synthesize, and extrapolate all of that. I think that we now have a lot of schools that cripple that. Theorists advocate these models to
their death and the kids are still failing. I am very impatient with educators. Unless you can walk the walk, then you cannot talk the talk. Many times, it is not a deficiency in capability. It is a deficient nurturing environment. Instead of saying that they just don't have the opportunity—we just say that they [students] don’t have the capacity. It is rare that people don’t have the capacity—really rare! Almost all students are misdiagnosed. You do not have 5.5 million kids that are Special Education. Now get this now! Half of those 5 million [children] are learning disabilities. You have got two million learning disabled kids. Why would you have so many learning disabled kids but not that many visually impaired kids. The answer is you have a lot of fake categories. If you act like kids have all of their faculties, and if you teach them a good approach, you can teach them anything. The puzzle is not a puzzle. If every teacher finds that this kid can't learn, then it is probably something else.

Dr. Hilliard suggests that educators must find out and discover the role that culture plays on and with the learning process. He continued to discuss special education and believes that it is a way to maintain power in this society by placing children in a program that he perceives as not working.

We [educators] have to really find out what role culture has on teaching and learning. These are valuable conversations. Culture, in effect, is prior knowledge. In educational theory—it says that you are supposed to pay attention to what people already bring [to school] in order to teach them. Naturally people bring unique experiences to teaching and learning and that ought to be attended to. We actually have to analyze what is happening in education to find out what “kind of tricks” are being played in education to maintain power. Special Education is one example. That is a useless, worthless practice in education. And I don’t want to learn the “Black way” to do it! I don’t want to learn the Black way to create that system...Special Education does not benefit kids. The literature says that we are doing all this stuff and kids don’t get
better. They get worse. We have all these theories and it causes us to run this mega billion dollar system that is not beneficial.

Dr. Hilliard elaborated again on an educator and artist who has success with his students. Suzuki is a Japanese musician who took students who were not considered musically inclined or talented and guided them to become musicians. “He [Suzuki] thought that genius was universal and that you can make everybody a Virtuoso, in his case music.” Dr. Hilliard believes that Suzuki’s type of philosophy would work for most children. He believes that if teachers will think that their students have the capacity to learn and to do well and if they treat them that way, as well as create a nurturing environment, then they will learn.

I think if I were to have a theory, it would be Suzuki. He [Suzuki] thought that genius was universal and that you can make everybody a Virtuoso, in his case music. Because there are some people that would tell you that some people have musical talent and some people don’t. Suzuki says that everybody has the capability. He took kids that were supposedly not musically inclined. He would not even take the ones who they said had talent just to make it harder. He has the right to talk. He takes a random group of people and makes them into Music Virtuosos. But the theory is—the common theory is that that can’t happen... We need to look at kids and say you got all of these eight capacities and what matters is how I nurture them. That is the Suzuki approach and it seems to work—those others don’t work...

Dr. Hilliard also believes that educators need to stop blaming children for their failure to learn and start looking at their own pedagogy
and belief systems. He also emphasized those teachers who are very successful and most always successful with their students. He believes that teachers, particularly young teachers, should look to them (those successful teachers) as models for what beliefs, philosophies, and pedagogical practices that they will choose.

We never say anything about the quality of instruction... There is pedagogy that will engage children and they will be excited about it. I say 99 times out of 100, the spotlight never goes to the teacher. It is always the child. Many times, there is something wrong with the instruction... Teachers need to critique their teaching. I always go to people that don’t fail to teach reading. Paulo Freire does not fail. Renee Fuller does not fail. Carrie Secret does not fail. Then I ask what are they doing to the extent that I understand what they are doing? Usually it always involves dealing with prior knowledge and making that a principle in how you teach students. Paulo Freire in his 30 hours of working with adults listens for 12 hours to collect prior knowledge to teach. He teaches phonics based on the language that somebody has. The situation was a political discussion. Renee Fuller has perfected an approach situated in the context of a story. Once the students learn “story” they will endure the torture of phonics. In fact, it is not torture anymore. I guess in contextualizing in prior knowledge, I think after that the specifics in teaching reading becomes less important. We also must address motivation. If you are teaching me and coming out of my experience, my motivation is going to be higher. In other words, it should be grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy. The best advice on how I can tell new teachers how to teach reading is to find someone who has been successful in doing it and intern with them. And that is going to give you more than one way, because there is more than one way to skin a cat. If I wind up with Thaddeus Lott [in his school] then I will probably be teaching DISTAR methods. If I wind up using Paulo Freire then I will use Critical Consciousness Approach. If I wind up with Renee
Fuller, I will use Ball, Stick, and Bird. What they have in common is that they don't fail to teach kids to read... I submerge my own instincts in order to learn from a Master. And then maybe a couple more masters and then eventually I will try to get something that is really harmonious to my talents. This is how you learn—there is no other way. As well we always have to start with the fact for many educators that there are no puzzles at all.

Summary

Dr. Hilliard’s education as a young person was literate rich in both formal and informal institutions and contexts. In his oral history, he revealed much about his life and offers a very rich and detailed synopsis of who he is and where he came from as a literate person. He also offers much about his perceptions of how teachers and educators can optimize the learning for African American students.
"Off the Hook"

Interview with Dr. Gene Harris

Sista Dr. Supe (Superintendent)

The glory of the day was in her face,
The beauty of the night was in her eyes.
And all her loveliness, the grace
Of morning blushing in her early skies.

And in her voice, the calling of the dove;
Like music of a sweet, melodious part.
And in her smile, the breaking light of love;
And all the gentle virtues in her heart...

(James Weldon Johnson, 1997)

I walked into the superintendent’s office about 10 minutes before the interview. Her receptionist greeted me with the warmest of smiles. I had to wait about 10-15 minutes before the interview was supposed to begin because Dr. Harris was just leaving the Mayor’s office and was running a little late. This interview took place in the late afternoon around 4:30. When I walked into her private office, we talked a little bit about the doctoral program and the research process. We sat at the small round table in her office and I begin to ask question about her life and literacy experiences.
History and Background

Dr. Harris was born on the near East side of Columbus, Ohio in 1953. She pointed to a picture on the wall of Mount Vernon Avenue that was a part of her old neighborhood. Dr. Harris grew up in the civil rights era and attended school mainly in the 1960s and 1970s.

*I grew up on the near East Side of Columbus when Mt. Vernon was probably one of the most vibrant streets in the Black community—a lot of businesses. In fact that picture on the wall over there in the blue frame is a picture of Mt. Vernon in the 40s...It was the poor part of town. I was raised by both my parents and at the time that I lived on Garfield Ave. I have an older brother and an older sister and of course me. I grew up in Columbus on the near east side—in what would have called the poverty area—the high poverty area of the city.*

Dr. Harris remembered those special verbal activities that she had with her family as a child. She recalls hand games that she would do with poetry and rhymes and car trips that included verbal games. She also spoke of how her family really enjoyed the game of Charades.

*We did all the hand games...while you were doing the poetry that went along with that all the time. We did not have a lot of money so we did a lot of car trips. We had cousins who lived in Indiana—so we made up games while we were driving in the car. We were big in Charades. We played Charades as a family. It was a word game.*

Dr. Harris recounted her years in elementary school and those activities that were emphasized in her elementary school by her teachers.
Good oral reading and public speaking were highly emphasized in schools. Teachers expected high performance.

*My elementary school was Garfield Elementary School... All my teachers were Black. My principal was Black. I did not know it then, but it was a high poverty school...But it was a school where reading was emphasized. I did not know of anybody who did not learn to read. At least I thought that everybody was learning to read. It was a school that emphasized a lot of public speaking. It was a segregated school.*

Dr. Harris remembered when she went to junior high school, it was the first time that she had gone to school with white children. She stated that she was still able to compete with the white children and continued in the honors track.

*In junior high, we moved north and I went to Windmoor. It was integrated. It was the first time that I have ever gone to school with White kids. Now I had gone to church camp with White kids—but I had never gone to school everyday with White children. I spent 7th, 8th, and 9th grade at that school. It was assumingly “better than” the near east side school that I had been assigned to earlier.*
School and Community Literacy Experiences

Dr. Harris remembered those types of communication activities that she experienced both in and outside of school realms including going to the library and her church activities. She also recalled those leadership roles that were pushed on her and those varied activities that she had growing up in her church and school functions.

*We all had library cards and I had to walk to the east side library once a week and get books - take books back. At school, I was always pushed to Master of Ceremony programs and be the host or be up front at a lot of things [programs] at school. At church, the expectation was that we would participate in every seasonal program there was - whether it was Easter or Christmas. All of those things that were involved in that was always a long speech or poem of some kind... You had to learn it and recite it from memory. At church also, we were pushed very hard to be a part of the youth group. So, I ended up secretary, vice president and then president. So what that meant was that I had to learn to run a meeting. I had to learn how to speak to the group. I went out to speak for the group for general meetings and state wide meetings. Also at church camp was an extension of our youth group. I ended up being the girl co-president (or something like that) of the camp. For that week when I was a senior in high school, I was responsible for all of the activities that went on at the camp as far as announcements were concerned. We had a routine... It was prayer. It was singing. It was all those things. I had to organize and lead them.*
The activities that Dr. Harris recalled in school that helped her gain strong literacy skills were reading, writing, and oral communication. She recalled how she was expected to read a lot. She said that her teachers expected much from her and her classmates and pushed them to read. It was mandated that students read and work a lot throughout her schooling from elementary until high school.

I was pushed to read a lot! And so I did! They [teachers] said read!! You read. They say write-you write!! It all culminated though my senior year. Everyone was required to take English literature-your senior English course. We had ten papers [essays] that we had to write. Count them ten. Ten! You knew you had to write them going in there. We wrote ten. There were no excuses. Everybody in there had to write ten!! We did a lot of reading of the classics. I bet you, that year, we read at least 15-20. Oh yeah. Had to read them! That level of expectation I had really grown up with from the segregated elementary school to the integrated junior high and high school. In each one of my classes, I had that type of expectation in regards to reading and writing.

She recalled verbal activities and stated that she always felt that verbal activities and other activities involving communicative skills were something normal in school. It was just what was always expected from her perspective as a child.

There were some classes, where we engaged in verbal presentations too. That was another area that I was able to finesse tune. I grew up thinking that it was the norm—that everybody was doing that. That is how you learn to deal in life!! You learn to read, how to express your thoughts in writing and how to also present them verbally. I had the opportunity to practice that throughout.
Dr. Harris recalled that literature captivated her. Through literature, she became more enthusiastic about the reading process. Although she liked to read, she became even more engaged and started to really make connections within a Black literature class that she had taken in her junior year in school. She recalled how the 11th grade class opened her eyes and helped her to understand herself as an African American woman a little better.

*It was 11th grade, I believe that we had to take a Black history class and that is when my eyes were opened to everything that was out there about Black folks! I remember being introduced to Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, the poetry of Langston Hughes. I actually got to meet Gwendolyn Brooks when I was a sophomore at Notre Dame. But it was that 11th grade course that really opened my eyes. I read the autobiography of Malcolm X and I was like Oh my God!! I read *The Letter from the Birmingham Jail* written by MLK Jr. and *Why We Can’t Wait*. These things are just coming back. I just remember! Wow—this is exciting as I look back. I just remember having the whole world open up. It was the civil rights era too. I graduated from high school in 1971. These were the 60s—all kinds of civil disturbances had happened. And MLK had been killed in 68. We were having some racial problems at my high school. But then, it all was topped off with 11th grade Black History. It said—[the Black History class] this is what you been looking for! All this time, this is what you have been leading up to. It was a Black history class, but it was taught like a literature class because you were learning literature. And then the very next year, I took the required English course—the English literature required course. It kinda pulled all this stuff together. You could see it from a historical perspective. You learned how MLK had gotten to where he was. I don’t remember any of the references right now but some of the historical references had been made and some of
the Black literature came apparent in the English lit class. It was a wonderful follow-up[ to the Junior Black History course].

Dr. Harris felt that much of her learning success came from the high expectations and beliefs of her teachers. She said that she became hungry for knowledge after she knew there was no option but to be successful.

I had expectations from me everywhere. At home, at church, at school until—I did not know that I had an option. But then after I got into the learning thing, I got very hungry. The things that were introduced to me in class, the literature, and the fact that I liked to read—it just made me hungry. The other thing—the specific activities that made me want to learn was writing...The public speaking aspect—I enjoyed...So those kinds of things and group activities were very inspiring to me—that made me want to go to school.

Dr. Harris recounted the point in her life when she began to feel comfortable about going in and out of discourses, particularly when she felt the need to use the discourse of wider communication or more appropriately—“so-called” standard English.

I’ll tell you when it was. It began when I was in 6th grade—actually it was 7th grade... 7th grade year was the time that I realized that there was a difference in the way people presented themselves in the neighborhood and how people presented themselves in other places. There were all these white kids and it provided some confusion for me. I did not really become comfortable with moving back and forth until I went to college and sometimes when I went to college I didn’t move back and forth. They heard what they heard!! Because—then—you know I’m 18—I’m fresh out of the civil rights movement. I don’t care that I’m at Notre Dame!! ... So there was some defiance I had during that time. In 7th grade, there was
some confusion-I was like-oh my God what is this and why do I have to change?... But by the time I got to Notre Dame, I was defiant. I understood it clearly, but I was defiant. I thought- why should I have to conform? And then I snapped out of it!!

She told me a story about how she used the phrase “off the hook,” in a conversation with one of the Columbus City high school students and how she caught herself using Black discourse. She commented that although she used “off the hook,” she knows in what places it may not be accepted, like in a school board meeting.

_As you can see talking to me maybe I have not snapped out of it. I heard myself say to one of my students-"I took a young man with me to visit the Mayor today. I took a young man from Columbus Alternative High School-a young white kid- a great kid. And before we went over to see the mayor-I was describing something. And I heard myself say to him-"It was off the hook"!!! So as you can see I don't always conform. I may still be in that defiant role. You will not hear me say-“off the hook” at the board meeting! I won’t do that!_

After our first interview -Dr. Harris and I discussed some events that were going on at my present assigned job. She went on to discuss the meaning and significance of ‘off the hook’ particularly for African Americans.

_'It’s off the hook’ goes beyond-‘That is so nice.’ It’s definitional! Sometimes when you think about the phrases that we use in Ebonics-using it in our [African American] vernacular, it expresses something more than the mainstream language would allow you to express. It connotes something very different and much more passionate and much deeper! ‘Off the hook’ is much deeper than” it’s so very nice”!'
I asked Dr. Harris who was the most significant influence in her life, particularly in regards to literacy acquisition. She stated that it was her mother and that the way her mother carries herself inspires her. She also recalled how her mother would read to her and her siblings or at least have her children read to her every evening and check their papers.

*If my mother walked into Ohio State University or your church and she was given a task-like Mrs. Thomas—you need to present X, Y, and Z. You would think she was the most polished—She is one of the most polished people that I have ever seen. She can lay it out so clearly. You would think why didn't I think of that? She is very well spoken. She insisted that we read!! There are pictures with my mother and my brother sitting with him—reading. My brother, he is the oldest [Dr. Harris's brother was a star on the long run Cosby Show]. We had to read every night. She made us read to her, every night!! Yes—She is the one—watching her—how she handled herself, as well as, the fact that she insisted that we read... She would read our papers—especially at the elementary level. She really insisted that they were done well!*
Thelma Thomas

(Mother of Dr. Gene Harris)

Because Dr. Gene Harris deemed her mother as the most influential person in her literacy education, I went to her home to talk with her about her daughter, Dr. Harris. I asked her to describe the types of literacy activities that she promoted within her home and with her children. As well, I wanted to find out about those extra curricular activities that she encouraged her children to become involved in. I also asked her to elaborate on parent involvement and expectations.

Mrs. Thomas stated

First of all, Dr. Harris was the last of my three children. She is four years younger than her nearest sibling. We have always been a family that read. I took them to the library. I always required them to read. They had to read! When she came along, that was just a part of our life. In the summer, to keep them abreast or keep their minds fresh, we went to the library and got books out of the library. Even back then the library had a program that would reward children for reading a certain amount of books in a period of time. We would go back and read books. They would repeat what the books had said so I would know that they understood what the books were about. That is how reading was cultivated. Also we were religious as a family. We did a lot of church. In church during many services, they did recitations. They could not do short recitations. Their recitations had to be a minimal of three to four verses. They had to do all of them without stumbling. They had to do the recitations without a microphone. They could not mumble. They had to be a part of the Easter programs and Christmas programs, and Mother's Day programs. They could not
just read those parts of plays they had to memorize. That was part of her background.

Dr. Harris talked about her family and teachers having high expectations for her children. Mrs. Thomas emphasized high expectations in her conversation as well. She also spoke about the importance of parent involvement and community responsibility.

I always had a vision that they would become educated! I had high expectations. I knew if they wanted to have a better life-they had to go farther. That was always a goal to have higher education for my children. We did not have much, but we had the necessities. However, I would expose my children to as many cultural things as possible. I was always active in the PTA. I was always there! The teachers would come into the homes at that time, although I never had problems with any of my children. But I thought that type of teacher involvement was important [teacher coming to the homes]. I knew every teacher! At one point, I was secretary of the PTA. I was very active.

Mrs. Thomas went on to discuss the role that parents should play in the lives of their children. As well, if parents are not involved, then schools should be active in recruiting volunteers for the children, particularly tutoring them.

The parent might say “get your homework done”, but the parent has to check the homework. Perhaps they don’t know [read] but at least they can look at the paper to see if something is on there! I believe that when you have so much apathy with the parents then teacher must have a one on one relationship with the students. My suggestion would be to have smaller classes. We need volunteers. We need volunteers in the latchkey programs to pick up the slack for what they parents are not doing! If senior citizens and other people would volunteer just a few hours a day for our young
people, it would make a world of a difference. Retired people and people who have time can come in and help with our children.

Mrs. Thomas continued to speak about community involvement.

_We must get the community involved! I don’t even know what our churches are doing. Our churches used to be the backbone of our communities. However, to me nothing can take the place of a parent. I don’t know anyone who would do more for my children then I did! Again, but perhaps the resources of our churches could be tapped into. I think education and the need for education has to be instilled in a child at a very young age. It is almost impossible to instill in a child the importance of education when they go into Junior High School. We need to make them aware. I started telling my children that they had to go to college from the first day that they started school. I told them ‘you are going to go to college—you don’t have a choice or an opinion—you are going to go to college! I knew that is where they were going so that they did not have to worry about a job or work at a minimal skills job. If it isn’t college at least some training that would give them a good livelihood. You weave it[ this attitude] throughout their lives in everything you do. You let them know that education is going to take you a step higher in your life. The church was the harbor of all our activities!_

This conversation revealed Mrs. Thomas’s deep feelings about the involvement of the church, community, and parents. This conversation also revealed where many of the philosophies of Dr. Harris came from, particularly in regards to community involvement and parenting. More of Dr. Harris’s perspectives are revealed in her second interview.
Interview two with Dr. Harris

Interview two with Dr. Harris occurred a few weeks after interview one. In addition to her perspectives of how African American children can be taught for success, Dr. Harris emphasized the importance of teacher responsibility, parent participation, community responsibility, and their role with and for school aged children.

Dr. Harris stated that children will learn best if they are able to participate in those activities that are needed to be successful in literacy activities. These activities would include taking out library books.

I’m probably a dinosaur. But I believe that children learn to read and write by reading and writing! My experience is - is that what we did [children/students in the past]! I think I talked about going to the library and those experiences ... I already talked a little bit about my school experiences and how teachers had expected us to not only write but to write well ... But I think that we have to add some things to that. The society today is much quicker.... I believe that our children have to be fully engaged in the reading process. They have to do projects. They have to do things that are meaningful to them. They have got to see the connection between what they are learning and what they are doing and what it holds for life.

She began to speak about how activities can be made more relevant to the lives of students.

... I think that our students are looking for more relevance for themselves. They are saying to themselves - what does this really mean for my everyday living? So that means that they need to read about themselves - they need to write about themselves. They need an opportunity to explore so that they can make some meaning out
of their lives. If they had that opportunity to read and then do something about it, then it will be meaningful to them. It will be engaging to them.

Dr. Harris recalled a high school experience that helped her make connections to real life and what she was learning in school.

I think that the experience of my entire senior year in high school really placed some relevance or helped me understand the relationship and relevance between education and life... My senior year was the fall of 1970 to June of 1971... It was the year of the racial unrest that really started at Linden McKinley High School. In 1965, when my brother graduated from Linden [McKinley], it was a predominantly white school. It was probably sixty-eight percent white. By the time I got to my senior year in 1971, the [school] balances had tipped... There had been some immediate white flight in the six short years to make up the student body... It was a very difficult situation for some students and the student body, as well as, the community. And in the middle of my senior year, prompted by an act that took place during a Black History assembly during my senior year, we began the racial unrest. That racial unrest resulted in our High School being closed for several weeks during our senior year. It was so traumatic but I think that what happened prior to that. It was the first year that a Black History course had been placed in Linden-McKinley High School. But it was not until I got to that Black History course that I began to really understand what is going on around me. Martin Luther King had been shot and killed on my 15th birthday in 1968. I'm watching the civil rights movement every night on the nightly news. I'm seeing it- having what I now understand as being cognitive dissidence. For me that was all happening in some other place in the country-in the south-and I could not get the relevance for what was going on in Columbus, Ohio until February of that year. We have this Black History class going on and the teacher was really laying it out pretty well for us. I just could not get it until we had that that racial unrest and then to have it at school.... And so, school was still going on.
This Black history teacher had helped us see the connection between what we had been watching all those years on television and what was happening, not just in Columbus, Ohio, but right in our high school and what that really meant for us. So we wrote about it. We read about it. We experienced it. It was in that room, that class, we read the autobiography of Malcolm X and Black Boy by Richard Wright and Native Son. I read Ralph Ellison-The Invisible Man. All of those things began to just come alive for me. It was really pivoted around that class that was getting us ready. We had no idea that something in February as awful as the unrest was going to happen. That class was getting us ready for real life experiences. That was not the typical class that I was in.

**Good Reading Instruction**

Dr. Harris spoke about those activities that she believes can help students read better. She stated that they need activities that are age appropriate to children, exposure to literature, basic decoding skills, writing activities, and people around them who have positive attitudes towards learning and reading.

*Good reading instruction has to be age and cognitively appropriate for children. There are certain things that I do believe we need to give them very early. Our kids need several things very early. They need the exposure to literature. They need the exposure to someone that can open their minds to understand that learning to read is the gateway to life for them. Then they need to be taught some very strong decoding strategies. It [Reading] becomes not a chore but it becomes something for them that is very enjoyable. It's got to be age appropriate. It's got to be developmentally appropriate. It has got to be presented so that it is not a chore, but an opportunity so that it opens a gateway to learning. Children need to see us as being excited about reading and in being able to read. Then we need to help infuse that! Good reading instruction*
also is combined with writing. Reading and writing go neck and neck. They need to understand that it [writing] is another level of expression. If we are just doing one without the other, we are missing the boat. Children need to understand that writing is an extension of this reading that they are doing. They need to know that it is another level of expression that is just as important and just as relevant as learning to speak well. Reading instruction almost needs to be invisible once you get past the primary grades. It needs to be reinforced, but it needs to not be viewed by children as a chore. It needs to be infused in everything that they are doing—in the science and in the mathematic. It needs to be in every content piece that they do.

Dr. Harris also emphasized that teachers need have as much background knowledge as they can about the students whom they are teaching. She gives her advice to teachers about what can be done for children in the classroom.

They [teachers] need to be aware of those backgrounds. We need to not assume that everyone comes from a literature rich environment or even an environment that infuses reading. My best advice to them is to find out where your children are and what they already know. Find out what kind of reinforcing factors they have in their lives. In other words, who is going to be there to support them?

Will there be anyone to support their reading instruction? Knowing this information will determine or should determine the kind of reading instruction that goes on in the classroom. For example, I have never met a child that comes to school and does not want to learn how to read... However, if we set up a situation where they are going to be inherent failure then we turn the lights off. So we must set up a situation where it requires that they have a lot of support outside of the classroom to reinforce the reading skills we are teaching. If those structures are not there—then we set up the child for failure. This is why we need to know what kind of
reinforcements they have. This should guide how we present our reading instruction...

I asked Dr. Harris about students who are not gifted, but have problems reading and writing. I wanted to know her perceptions about what can be done to help them. She explained that much of the help that we can give to children comes from our attitudes.

One of the reasons I think that I excelled is because they told me that I was smart. I think I have some innate basic intelligence, but a lot of it is self-fulfilling prophecy. I was told that I was smart. They treated me like I was smart! We have seen study after study-the placebo effect. If we believe it is so-it becomes so!

Dr. Harris spoke of the advice that she would give to new teachers coming into the field of education. She spoke of those steps and attitudes that teachers must exhibit in order to be effective.

I would say to teachers though, believe that you have a fresh canvas when you walk in and all the paint you ever needed all the tools and skills and believe that it can get done. I think a lot of our students even those that are average and even a little below average intelligence, that with the right amount of support and with the correct belief systems, they can be sitting right here in this office 10 or 15 years from now. It can happen!
Community Responsibility

Dr. Harris spoke strongly and forcefully about the importance of community responsibility. She stated that teachers and principals must call on volunteers from the community to help them in the classrooms. They must emphasize to business people, pastors, and volunteers that educators need help in order to educate the children in schools today. She stated that teachers and other educators must capitalize on the fact that if children are not well educated, then our economical system will collapse and more and more children will enter into the workplace “functionally illiterate.

I would also say that teachers and principals should look for all of the support of the community that they can possibly get. Don’t be afraid of it. Don’t think that you have to walk this journey by yourself, even when you have a situation when parents are not as supportive as they should be. I think for the first time in this nation, we are figuring out how important and how essential education is to the whole of our society. I understand it! I believe we owe people. Many people will see the value in education because of its economic value. The bottom line-if these folk [students] don’t get it -our economy collapses. I think for the first time the business community and the social service community see the value in education. Capitalize on their guilt. I repeat-Capitalize on their guilt!! Get them into your classrooms and make them assist you with your students. I think we capitalise on the guilt. Capitalize on this reparations talk, because I think there is some that are feeling guilty about that even. They are looking at it and saying, “My God! What did we really do? What did my ancestors really do in this nation? These children, over here with no shoes, that can’t read are victims of that! They are the results of generations of neglect.”
This part of our conversation, concerning community involvement, reminded me of a lecture that I heard that included Dr. Harris. I observed Dr. Harris sharing the podium with Dr. Johnetta Cole, past President of Spelman College in Atlanta, and incoming president of Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. This event was focused on the state of our schools and children. The audience was able to ask questions and receive comments from Dr. Harris and Dr. Cole. One audience member asked about the high illiteracy rate of children in schools and what can be done about that problem. Dr. Harris responded that volunteers from the community should come into the schools and help tutor children in reading. She emphasized the importance of this kind of community involvement. The role of mentoring and community involvement was echoed by both Dr. Harris and Dr. Cole.

Role of the church

Dr. Harris emphasizes that the church must again become a strong part of the community. She states that there is a disconnect between the church and the African American community and that the church was historically the backbone of the African American community.

_I was with a group of preachers yesterday. You got a responsibility too- my brothas! These are your people! I was the only woman in the room. The people that we deal with in the schools everyday are the people that you are to be ministering to. And ministry takes on_
a lot of different forms. It's not just what you do behind the sacred
desk [pulpit] every Sunday or Saturday-whatever the tradition may
be. But it is the outreach to others.
I think there is a disconnect right now. The church was
fundamental and crucial to the civil rights movement.. I think that
we have gotten so caught up in the mega church mentality. Build
these huge churches-that we are not ministering to individual
people-that we are not reaching out to them. I think that as school
people-I know that is certainly a mission of mine as
superintendent and we are getting a lot of that done.
I have to let that community out there know that they are just as
responsible for this work as I am. Everywhere I go- I am not
ashamed to say that I cannot do it alone! I cannot. The challenges
are so great that our kids face! We were trained to teach somebody
how to read, write, and do mathematics. What I would say to
young people and principals that we have got to bring the total
community into the school.

Summary

Dr. Harris speaks strongly and clearly about the role that her
teachers and her mother played in her literate life as a child. She also
echoed the same sentiments as Dr. Hilliard in that the church was vital in
her literacy development. Her opinions and perceptions involved a strong
lean towards community involvement in the overall education of African
American students.
Interview with Rich Milner

We wear the mask
We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes-
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile...

Why should the world be overwise,
in counting all our tears and sighs
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

(Paul Laurence Dunbar, 1997)

Dr. Milner and I met each other in a local restaurant in Columbus Ohio for our initial interview. He and I both attended a conference in Philadelphia where Dr. Asa Hilliard gave a keynote address. We were both scheduled to present at that conference as well.

History and Background

Dr. Milner is 28 years old and was born in Griffin, Georgia about 45 minutes outside of Atlanta. He recently earned his Ph.D. from The Ohio State University. After I asked him a question about his background, he felt it was important to tell me a story to begin this interview after I asked him about his background.
Well, let me offer a little story to sort of set the tone of which side of town that I lived on. When I graduated with my Ph.D. from Ohio State my parents had a reception for me in my hometown. At that time, they invited some of my former teachers along with my family and friends. My mom decided that she wanted me to write an article to put in our local newspaper. I was sharing with one of my teachers-my second grade teacher, Mrs. Louise Brick, whom I love and adore and has been good to me. She asked me to make sure that I include in that [within the local newspaper] that I grew up on the south side of town and that I attended this school called Forth War Elementary School. It was for the first time in my entire life what teachers thought about those of us who grew up on the south side of town. I say that to say that I started out living in a two parent home. We lived in a brick home with three bedrooms, one and half bathroom. I attended school in the ‘Hood. Then when I was in 6th grade, we moved to the North side to a much larger house, but I continued to go to the school in the ‘hood. The south side of town would be considered to be the ‘hood-the ghetto... But nonetheless, I grew up with people that lived in the projects.

I wanted to know about activities that were done in his home as a child. He stated that his parents were always working and much of his help came from his sister. However, his parents still took much time in some literacy activities. He then recalled

*My older sister is brilliant and can easily be in some hospital somewhere. She is a very smart person. She was very much a part of my educational growth and my maturity. What I recall is watching my dad reading a newspaper everyday of his life. My dad would read a newspaper everyday religiously. I observed that! It was always intriguing to me because he was captivated by it. The doorbell could ring, the phone could ring, but he was involved in that newspaper. And he read it from cover to cover. I can recall doing homework and my parents asking me to read out certain passages, but it was not anything so structured. It was very informal. I can recall my dad reading passages out of the newspaper-things like that...*
In addition, my parents were very strict about putting hangs on folk’s names. [If you refer to Susan Jones up the street as Susan Jones. [His parents would say] “That is Mrs. Jones to you boy!” If I said yeah or nah. They would say yeah or nah [repeating what I said to let him know that it was in appropriate]. They would instantly try to correct me.

Dr. Milner described the types of schools that he attended while he was growing up.

In elementary [school] it was all Black. I may recall one or two white students in the entire school. It was predominantly Black. When I left elementary school in 7th grade, the High School that I went to was very mixed. I guess you can say 60/40. Forty percent were Black. At that time there were not a lot of Asians or Hispanics. All I could see was Black or White. Very much segregated through elementary and then after elementary it became more integrated or diverse.

Dr. Milner recalled those oral activities in church that were very influential in his literacy development. He spoke of those activities that he was involved in that pushed him into leadership roles and that helped him to develop specific skills.

Church has been an integral part of my experiences. I can say first of all, you had to do an Easter speech. If you did not do an Easter speech, all hell was going to break loose. Part of it was learning the Easter speech and reciting the Easter speech. My mom was the coordinator of programs at church. I became a leader fairly early. I played the piano for my church and so I had to teach the words. And in the old Black southern churches—the piano player was the director. They were everything in that church. So what happened was—I had to learn how to spell. I had to learn how to write out the songs for the choir. Some of the members were old enough to be my mother. I had to do it somewhat intelligently. I could not do it half hazard. So those are the things that I remember most. I
remember participating in plays. We had to memorize the script. We were given that particular document and we had to memorize.

Social Class

Dr. Milner felt it was important to discuss socio-economic status before he explained his lack of activities with historically Black organizations. It was important for him to give more specific details about his family background for this reason.

I want to talk a little bit about class. My parents were working class but my mother owned a beauty shop and a barber shop. My parents were not formally educated [they have high school diplomas]. On the one hand they would have been considered those blue collar working class folks from the south side and on the other hand, we had things. My dad worked at General Motors. He probably made more money than the folks who were principals in schools. We had the things, but socially my parents were on different levels. They never claimed to be anything that they were not. We did not get involved a lot with the sorority and fraternal organizations. I think a lot of kids were able to get into that, because their parents were in the school system or because their parents were members of one church in our community. They were allowed in those groups, people who ... “high society or high status Negroes”. That is fine if that is what theory they wanted to do, but I never saw myself as that type of person. I think that it was unfortunate. I think that those opportunities should have been afforded to not only the elite, but it should have been afforded to other students that were smart and sharp, but did not have those connections, if you will. People saw my potential but they did not ask because my parents were not professionals in the school system. If you were a teacher in my hometown—you were next to God. Back in the day, teachers were revered and were marveled as opposed to how things are now.
Reading Experiences

Dr. Milner commented on his lack of good reading teachers while he was in school.

This is not to be critical but I don't think that I had very good reading teachers, throughout my K-12 experiences—period. I was actually a senior in high school before I liked to read. I was not a good reader at all. I had issues with what I now understand as critical and analytical thinking skills. It was difficult to me. My teachers were horrible. I think that they thought that they were doing the right thing. They would call on you one by one and they would have you take turns reading what some European American wrote. If you were lucky, they may have asked you a question to draw upon some inferences or something. The short answer of your question, I did not have good reading teachers. I had teachers that cared about me. They wanted to see me succeed, but Gloria Ladson-Billings and those other scholars were not around then. If they were, then my teachers did not know anything about them. The lessons were not culturally relevant. The lessons were not culturally responsive. I just don't think that the literacy activities were conducive to my interest.

He spoke extensively about Natalie Ford—his former high school English teacher. Dr. Milner deemed Natalie as a very important teacher in his literacy and reading appreciation. He first described her own background.

Let me talk about what changed it all for me or what made it happen for me. I had a teacher—Natalie Ford. She was my High School senior English teacher—my last year of school. She was a teacher whom I liked a lot—whom I respected a lot. And she really liked and respected me.
He spoke about how he was fascinated by the depth of experiences that Natalie Ford had in her life.

And I think what I found most interesting about her was the fact that she had different lived experiences. She moved to Georgia from Florida. She attended South Carolina State. Her father was an attorney. Her mother was a guidance counselor. For me, it was someone who had left Griffin—who had done something. It was intriguing for me to meet someone who had done some different stuff. So I was really drawn to her. She was an African American teacher. She taught English. She taught senior level English. I want to say it was American Literature.

Modeling

He spoke in depth about her modeling what she wanted from her students in her class, as well as outside of it.

But, I saw her reading. She was the type of teacher that would invite us to her home. She would have barbeques for us... She treated me like an adult. She genuinely gave a damn about Rich. I could tell it! And I was drawn to that! Here is this person that I respected in an abnormal way. She was such a good person. She had done all these interesting things. She had studied abroad. She had met all these people that I thought that I would never meet. So I was instantly drawn to her. I liked her, not because her teaching was so phenomenal, but because she had activities that were so great. It was because I liked her. She modeled—going back to this notion of modeling. She would read a book and say—“Rich this is great”! I remember her telling me about Alex Haley’s Roots and although I don’t think I was ready to deeply understand what was happening in that book. Because she read it and told me about it— I said, “I’m going to read it too”. Because I want to be able to have this joy—So I did! And you know how long that book is! It was her pedagogical spirit. She was teaching me, but she was such a good
person. It is part of what Elliot Eisner calls the implicit curriculum. She was teaching me implicitly about the importance of reading. And I don't even think she realized it! Through her modeling---through our conversations, it was never like Rich-you should read this! It was like, she would be talking about something else-something totally different.

He spoke about how she could explain things to him so clearly that she was able to take him to different places through her conversations.

Something unrelated to Alex Haley's Roots. For example, it was just like what Alex Haley said in Roots. She would relate it to life. If she is talking like this apparently there is something there. I related a lot to Natalie, because she took me to places where I never thought that I could go-through her conversations. She took me to Africa. She took me to Mexico. She took me to Chicago. And for someone who had never traveled to those places. That was major. Don't get me wrong, my parents and I took a vacation every summer. It was to Florida. When I saw people from New York or California, I was fascinated by them. I was like-"oh my God if I could get out there." I just wanted to live those experiences.

Dr. Milner described how he connected to various Black authors and their literature because they spoke of his experiences. Natalie Ford would share books with him that helped him appreciate those authors

I always connected to Black authors. I was fascinated by Langston Hughes. My best friend just sent me a postcard of Langston Hughes. I really respect him. Poetry was really a big part of it. I was fascinated by Shakespeare. I enjoyed a lot of the tragedies. Once Natalie got me interested in reading, I became one of those people that read all the time. But it was not until my senior year in High School. She would share books with me. I even read Terry McMillan's Disappearing Acts. I was able to relate to the brotha in there a little bit. One of the best pieces that I ever read in my life or the best is Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon. Toni Morrison is a literary genius. Let me make it clear to you. I can't read Toni all
the time, because Toni will “take you there.” I have a lot of respect for Toni. And then you don’t want to talk about college. I started out majoring in Political Science. I always wanted to be a teacher, let’s make that clear. But my parents wanted me to spread my wings a little. I’m not going to say that they were against it because my sister is a teacher. And so I was going to be an attorney. So I majored in Political Science for all of three weeks. And then I fell in love with the English Department at South Carolina State. After my senior year in High School, I loved to read. I fell in love with reading.

Dr. Milner also talked about a college professor who would not allow him to split verbs in her presence. He spoke about his appreciation to her for doing this for him.

*I met another professor in college. I think I have this affinity towards women. This lady is like my mom. Her name was “Sandra Freeman”. “Sandra” was just the kind of person –well if we go back to this notion of spirituality. “Sandra” was the kind of person-well you know how you can see the goodness in folk. And you know as an academic in a rigorous cut throat environment, she is the opposite. She is just a genuinely down home type of person. She would invite me to her home to eat. However, she was tough on me. I would split verbs easily-quickly. She would not let me do it. She was on me! Even now when I’m talking to her, I need to make sure my subjects and verbs agree. She believed in me from the beginning. I was very close to her. [To emphasize]. I would say my favorite poet would be Langston Hughes. My favorite author would be Toni Morrison. Readings that related to me as a Black man were important. I remember reading from Mother to Son [Langston Hughes]-that really resonated with me. Like I told you before, I had terrible reading teachers. I cannot remember those activities.*
Dr. Milner spoke a little about when he felt comfortable code switching from academic or specific social discourses to home discourse, particularly the language of wider communication (so called standard English) and how he felt that being able to speak both languages liberated him as a Black man. It gave him a sense of power.

_I honor both of my abilities to speak. I think that they are very important and very much a part of who I am. I hope to maintain them throughout my life. I majored in English... I can speak Black English better than anyone on this earth. But being able to cross-over was fascinating to me. Just experiencing these new ways of knowing... My parents would say if you want to know these things, then you will have to learn how to negotiate and code-switch. I was fascinated. I would always ask my parents from a very young age. “Is it Jesus’ name we pray or In Jesus’ name we pray? There are pros and cons to that. My friends now know that I can speak and I can speak well. I don’t try to advertise my intellect-using big words and stuff like that—that’s just not me. My pastor preached about that the other day. I can go there with you if you want me to. I think it goes back to this notion of emancipation. Once I became free and confident in my abilities to speak, I felt more comfortable in doing it in settings with a wide range of individuals. So when I got to the point where I deeply understood grammar and the mechanics of writing and speaking, I immediately became more confident. And I think that I was sort of oppressed before then. I grew up in the south. I always looked at white people as being able to speak better. [That is] Being able to speak Standard English better than I, as a Black man. So I was a little shy about speaking. I felt on some levels sort of oppressed, because I did not feel comfortable. I think that the system prevented me not to speak the way that I felt comfortable speaking._
I asked Dr. Milner about those influential people in his life, as far as literacy is concerned. Throughout our conversations and interviews, he would always bring up his parents and his former teacher, Natalie Ford.

My parents---I would say--my parents. Even though we may not have engaged in specific literacy activities, I would say that their expectations, their belief in my abilities was crucial. Albert Van Duran would call it-those verbal persuasions. My parents have been everything to me. They had such high expectations. They pushed me to be a reader. They pushed me to comprehend, even when I got the bad grades in reading. I was clearly weak in reading. When I give talks, I talk about my deficiencies in reading. I winded up having a masters and bachelor’s degree in English. It is because of my parents. Watching my dad read a newspaper everyday—I mean everyday! I did not want to let them down. They are such good people. I stand on their shoulders. I can’t let them down even now. I do my work on behalf of every Black man—every Black child. I think about my nieces and nephews. I find it a privilege to be able to do my work in this area and try to influence somebody’s life. So in short, I would say my parents [were most influential]. My father would say Rich, it’s just something about you. I don’t know what it is but you are going to be special. My teacher Natalie Ford was influential, as well as I mentioned before.

Second Interview with Dr. Milner

Dr. Milner and I met up with each other in New Orleans at a conference. We had our second interview at the restaurant in the Sheraton Hotel. He spoke more about the literacy activities that assisted him as a child. He began to speak considerably about the modeling and literature that Natalie Ford, his former high school teacher, exposed him to.

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He also stated that he grew to enjoy reading, because he was able to connect with certain authors and/or literature.

*I will start a little bit broader. But what was integral or very important to my learning to read and write was seeing my father read the newspaper every day—having him sort of carve out passages for me to read. That was very integral. I did not have very strong reading teachers, particularly in grade school. The reading was basically what I think they call the “Round Robin” where individuals take turns reading. Natalie Ford introduced me to Black authors who I thought were just amazing. I was able to connect with those people... connect with what they were writing about. As a result, I grew to really enjoy reading. For a long time, I hated it. I really did not enjoy it at all. I literally had no interest in reading. I think that my parents were concerned. Natalie really gave me the opportunity to really engage in literature and books that really interested me. The book that she introduced to me first was Alex Haley’s Roots. It was just amazing when I would go to her house. I was overwhelmed and amazed by her book collection. She would talk about the books and bring those to life in ways that made me want to actually go and read them... I think this notion of modeling is very important. I think that the person who is modeling for you—you should admire in some way or have respect for. I respect my dad--- so watching him read was important. And because I had so much respect for Natalie Ford who had done so much in her life and had seen different places and observing the things that she read and modeled were important...*

**Natalie Ford**

Rich Milner deemed Natalie Ford, his senior high school English teacher, as one of the most influential teachers/mentors on his literacy learning. She lives in Florida with her family and is now an administrator in a public high school. I contacted Mrs. Ford to discuss her influence on
Rich and her students. Mrs. Ford had much to say about the type of activities and pedagogy that she utilized within her classroom.

Mrs. Ford stated that

*Literature is everything to me. I have this passion for it. In this class that Rich was in however, they shut down at first. But after I let them know that literature—all of it—is relative, I was able to get them involved. I would tell them [her students] that every Shakespearean play or book was relative. It was a 15th century soap opera. I think that if you make literature relevant to your experiences, then you can really make it come alive. I would have them memorize pieces of literature from every Canterbury Tale. I would have a certain way that I would want them to recite it and say it. I would say it like this... I would recite it for them. They could not believe that I could recite all that literature by heart.*

Natalie Ford then began to compare her experiences with Rich. She explained how she was influenced by her high school senior English teacher as well.

*I, like Rich, was influenced by my senior English teacher. Rich was one of my best students. He reminded me so much of myself. He was determined he was going to impress me. He wanted to impress me—so the more he produced. This is how it was with my former English teacher. I wanted to always impress her. I learned many of my teaching strategies and high expectations from her. Although my senior high school English teacher [my teacher was white] influenced me to become a teacher, I wanted to do it with Black kids. One reason is because Black kids, many times, don't get teachers like that.*

She explained how she had high expectations for her students. She also wanted to teach Black children, because she felt that many times they did not have good teachers like she had.
I had my students read like four novels, two Shakespearean plays, memorize and recite many poems and lines from plays, and write several papers and essays. My students felt that my level of expectation was unrealistic. But then later on, they realized that they could do that and then some. I was important to me to teach Black kids, especially Black males. I would tell my students that you have to learn as much as you can, because the only thing that you can fight with is what is upstairs [the mind].

She began to explain her choice of materials for her students and why she chose specific materials.

I had them read novels like Manchild in the Promised Land by Claude Brown. You see most of my students came from economically disadvantaged homes. I would tell them that if they could get education over their belts, that they could rise to a great level or they could achieve even if they were not perfect. The main character in the book was hanging around with the wrong crowd at first but he eventually got himself together. It was not where he was at first in life, but what he became. I told my students that the television version Roots was a watered down version. I told them that if they really wanted to understand the horrors of slavery, then they needed to read the book. I would see a whole lot more bits and pieces within the book that would just floor you. I had my students read the Count of Monte Cristo because Alexander Dumas was a Black Frenchman. Many people don't know this. I helped them to see parallels between Malcolm X and between Julius Caesar.

For instance, Julius Caesar was killed because he was envied and had enemies disguised as friends. Malcolm X was killed because of enemies within the Nation of Islam who envied him. Julius Caesar’s wife warned him of enemies and told him about her reoccurring dreams about his demise and untimely death. Betty Shabazz –Malcolm’s wife warned Malcolm many times about his enemies in the Nation. They [students] will do anything if you make correlations to what is interesting to their lives. This is what I attempted to do for my students. This is how I taught Rich and his classmates. This is what I want for all students.
Creativity and Poetry

Much of this conversation with Natalie Ford revealed many of the same sentiments echoed by Dr. Milner about his former teacher and how she helped them in school. He continues to talk about his experiences in school and the pedagogical practices of Natalie Ford in the following conversation. Dr. Milner spoke about how creativity through literature sustained him throughout his life and helped him with his literacy acquisition. He particularly focuses on a poem that he was required to memorize by Natalie Ford.

Creativity was always key! As a teacher educator, I can look back in my classes as a teacher and see the issues. I think that the teachers back then were strict and mean. I think that strict can be good. I had a teacher that would literally beat us. She would hit us with a yard stick. One of the things that Natalie did was she had us do recitations. That may seem elementary. I actually remember doing Paul Laurence Dunbar's We Wear the Mask. I just related so strongly to that piece. "We wear the mask that grins and lies... It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes." I will never forget that poem because it was a part of what we had to do each week—those long recitations. That actually means so much to me now that I am able to sort of sit back and think more deeply about what those authors were trying to say—particularly those authors from the Harlem Renaissance. However, it seemed at that time—I was asking myself, how does this have any relevance to my life right now?

But now I can appreciate that I was learning things that now help me reflect on who I am and how I am supposed to build and understand what life is really all about. Those recitations really helped me. It was this notion of reading and rereading. It was some difficult words in poems and in that particular poem [We wear the Mask].
It is clearly not advanced reading. I think it probably aided and assisted my reading skills and in other reading endeavors. So as a result, my vocabulary increased. We had to learn these huge recitations. I mean long. It was really beneficial and I look back now and I am grateful. So I think that one specific task was key. Some of us made it into raps. I think what I respected most about her was that she knew the poems by heart herself. I remember one person said to her “Can’t nobody learn this.” You can’t even do it. She turned her paper over and went through it and was like--- “And what”- So my level of respect was elevated at that point [For Natalie Ford].

**Lecture Observation**

The conversation about his former teacher reminded me of a lecture that Dr. Milner gave at an AERA conference. In his lecture, he begin the lecture with literature that Natalie Ford had forced him to learn. There were two lecture observations that stood out to me while writing this manuscript. I had a chance to hear Dr. Milner speak at a conference sponsored by the American Educational Research Association in Seattle, Washington. Dr. Milner spoke about his experiences in graduate school and what sustained him. As a preface to his speech/lecture, he recited the poem *We Wear the Mask* by Paul Laurence Dunbar.
Culturally Relevant Teaching

Dr. Milner felt it was very important to talk about culturally relevant practices within our conversations. He also discussed what good reading should look like or the components that should be included in good reading instruction.

*It would be inconsistent and contradictory if I did not sort of talk about culturally relevant pedagogy and what Geneva Gay calls culturally responsive. Bell hooks calls it engaged pedagogy. I think we must use those in how we must fundamentally approach reading instruction in general. I think that good reading is reading that one can relate to. I majored in English so I know Shakespeare. I know his sonnets. I can quote them... However, the work that has been most beneficial to me has been work by African American authors for whom I can relate to. So I think that on the one hand we follow this tradition of knowing the classics. And I think that many of our elders would say that that is very important. But I think that we have to be careful about having people read for readings sake. I think students need reading in addition to those classics. They need literature where they can find out who they are. It also prepares them to be productive citizens in this society. I think we really need to think how we conceptualize the classics and how we conceptualize what is that every educator could do with reading. I think good reading lessons allow individuals to understand and relate to the issues being dealt with in that literature. I think that there are lots of lessons in Shakespeare or Hawthorne’s work. There are lots of lessons to that.*

Dr. Milner made it very clear that teachers must come into the classroom with an attitude that the child, regardless of background, will succeed. He makes this clear in the conversation below.
Many teachers enter a classroom with several mismatches [with students]. Their experiences are extremely different from the students that they are teaching. It is very important that teachers in the classroom get rid of deficit thinking. People have to go into the classroom with positive thinking and opportunities to learn. Teachers need to deal with their own issues and misconceptions about who students are and what they bring to the table. We must go into the classroom and realize that those students can learn and do everything in their power to help them learn. I think it is also important for teachers to go into the classroom and really understand that they are not the know-it-alls. Knowledge is negotiated! Students bring in a certain level of cultural knowledge and expertise that needs to be built on that is valuable and can be beneficial to the learning. This notion of teacher learning needs to be central in teacher education programs. This notion of neglecting the deficit model of thinking is also essential.

And also there needs to be a knowledge of self. Teachers need to really enter the classroom in a reflexive mode—constantly thinking about reflexivity—constantly thinking about who they are what their biases are and how that impacts what they decide to teach and how they decide to teach. Because ultimately, it is the teachers that decide how these students learn. I had a philosophical conversation about this with one of my colleagues, when I was in my doctoral program. And she was like—“If you want to stay in your classroom, you better teach what the state tells you to teach.” That is a bunch of bull! It is really the teacher who decides what is emphasized. I think this is so key in the learning process.

Dr. Milner spoke of his teachers, after I asked him a follow-up question about him having bad reading teachers. He explained that they were not bad teachers. They had the best intentions for their students at heart. However, many of his teachers were not trained well, he explained, in particularly they were not trained in culturally centered pedagogies.
I had very fine teachers. [These were] teachers who were committed to the community, teachers who were committed to my well being. I had teachers who sincerely liked me. I had teachers who I felt had my best interest at heart. With that I also had teachers who I felt were not trained very well. As I reflect, I can say that it was not good teaching. I was struggling in a [elementary] grade reading class, my teacher having me read out loud pages and pages and I'm stumbling over words. I mean every other word, I'm stumbling over. So for me that is not good teaching! It is horrible teaching!

I would definitely continue to say that I was not taught well. The instruction was sorry. When I think about reading, reading is something that happens. It was definitely a process. I really started reading in second or third grade. I did not like reading. Now I can look back at my teachers and say that I really respect them and love them. Whenever I see my teachers, I am able to hug them and celebrate my doctorate with them. Because truly in a lot of ways I can say that they are responsible for me being where I am. But reading is not one of their strong areas...

In short, Dr. Milner's experiences were different from the other two participants in this study, in that he felt a lack of strong teachers (in formal schools) throughout most of his K-12 experience until high school, his senior year specifically and beyond. However, his opinions and experiences concerning culturally relevant teaching echoed much of what both Dr. Hilliard and Dr. Harris espoused within their literacy histories and stories. I will analyze this in the next chapter.
Summary

This chapter presented a profile of three very successful African American leaders and their K-12 literacy experiences and beyond, concerning specific literacy activities and remembrances. Each individual revealed a great deal about their literate lives and how their present had been shaped by their past experiences. The next chapter will analyze the voices of these African American leaders and will reveal critical lessons learned from their voices.
CHAPTER 5
EXAMIN' THE VOICES OF THOSE WHO TESTIFY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to find those critical ingredients that assisted successful African American leaders in grasping those discourses needed for mainstream society. Many of these critical ingredients were found in institutions such as churches, community, groups, and mentors. In the following chapter, I will examine these ingredients.

The participants, in this study, revealed that these literacy experiences were crucial in either acquiring good or excellent skills in many literacy areas, such as those important communication skills like reading, writing, and oral development for their literate lives. In order to explain my findings, I analyzed my data utilizing a cross-case analysis of each African American leader. Seven themes emerged in my analysis in the data. These themes will be coined “critical literacy ingredients” and lesson. They were named critical literacy ingredients, because these leaders reveal “critical” or important literacy lessons that assisted them in
acquiring those skills needed to go in and out of discourses that give them access to social worlds that led to their success.

These key ingredients and lessons are:

1. The successful African American leaders, in this study, experienced ongoing family and parent involvement.

2. The Church was vital and important for the success of these individuals, particularly within regards to their communication styles and in all areas of their literacy development.

3. These African American leaders became more engaged when there was something that they could relate to. In other words, they became engaged in activities when they were relevant to their experiences.

4. Community Involvement was vital in the education of these African American leaders.

5. These African American leaders had teachers who modeled good learning and teaching behaviors. These teachers also had high expectation for these select African American leaders.

6. The breadth and the depth of experiences within literacy activities for these select African American leaders were crucial in their second discourse acquisition.
7. The African American leaders, in this study, were explicitly supported by mentors and teachers in their need to move in and out of discourses that helped them achieve success and to gain access into various social groups in US society.

The following pages will reveal the cross analysis for each case and discuss and explain each critical literacy ingredient utilizing the voices of the African American leaders in this study.

**Critical Literacy Ingredient #1**

The successful African American leaders, in this study, experienced ongoing family and parent involvement. In other words, each African American leader was supported in various literacy skills, many times through family socialization, such as games. However, parent or family involvement in the literacy development of these African American leaders was also found in very explicitly encouraged or required activities. All of the participants in this study recalled those activities with their families, particularly parents that were beneficial in their literacy learning. All of them stated, however, that they did not realize the importance of this involvement at the time.
Below Dr. Hilliard, Dr. Harris, and Dr. Milner discussed those
verbal activities that they had with parents that helped them in their
literacy acquisition.

_I remember that might count as an activity was stories. My dad
was a great storyteller so whenever we had a minute, he was
telling stories. However, with my mother, it was more likely to be
games. We would play monopoly and all kind of games.
Occasionally, I think when I got into junior high or senior high, it
was Scrabble, which would be a verbal game. But all the games
were verbal even though they did not call it verbal games because
you had to read and converse. (Asa Hilliard-Interview 1)_

Dr. Harris recalled how her mother required her and her siblings to
got library cards and go to the library every week to check out books.

_One thing that my mother insisted on is that we read a lot. We all
had library cards and I had to walk to the east side library once a
week and get books- take books back. We were big in Charades.
We played Charades as a family. It was a word game. Gene
Harris-Interview #1)_

Dr. Milner recalled that his parents required him to read passages
from either his homework or books or from his father’s newspaper. His
father would model reading to him everyday. He discussed this below.

_What I recall is watching my dad reading a newspaper everyday of
his life. My dad would read a newspaper everyday religiously. I
observed that! It was always intriguing to me because he was
captivated by it. The doorbell could ring, the phone could ring, but
he was involved in that newspaper. And he read it from cover to
cover. I can recall doing homework and my parents asking me to
read out certain passages, but it was not anything so structured. It
was very informal. I can recall my dad reading passages out of the
newspaper-things like that...(Rich Milner Interview #1)_
Critical Literacy Ingredient #2

The Church was vital and important within the success of these select individuals, particularly within regards to their communication styles and development of leadership skills. These African American leaders all revealed very specific activities within their churches that groomed them on many different levels in regards to various communication skills such as reading, writing, and speaking. All of them, as well, recount their leadership roles in the church in the following section.

Dr. Hilliard describes his participation in church activities below:

My grandfather was a bishop in the Pentecostal church-so I was raised in the church. Of course you would have to read the bible. Within the Sunday school classes, you had Sunday school materials that had to be read. But that was a part of how you did Sunday school. You had to take turns reading verses and discussing those verses. It was a very good literacy experience, although the people that designed it did not think of it that way. They were thinking of more of getting you into the theology and so forth. That was a very important experience. (Asa Hilliard-Interview #1)

Dr. Harris, as well, emphasizes not only literacy activities that she had in the church, but also she recalls the varied numbers of activities that
the church offered. She also describes how many leadership roles she had to take on. In other words, she was pushed to be a leader in the church.

She describes those activities below

*At church, the expectation was, is that we would participate... There was always a long speech or poem of some kind. You knew how the teacher or the advisor valued you based on the length of the poem that you had to learn. You could not just read it—you had to learn it and recite it from memory. At church also, we were pushed very hard to be a part of the youth group. So, I ended up secretary, vice president and then president. So what that meant was that I had to learn to run a meeting. I had to learn how to speak to the group. I went out to speak for the group for general meetings and state wide meetings. Also at church camp was an extension of our youth group. I ended up being the girl co-president (or something like that) of the camp. It was prayer. It was singing. It was all those things. I had to organize and lead them. It was wonderful.* (Gene Harris-Interview #1)

Dr. Milner recalls much of the same involvement within the church that Dr. Hilliard and Dr. Harris described. All three recount many of the same types of activities in their narratives. His leadership in his church was vital in helping him hone or improve his skills particularly in spelling and in writing. He describes his participation below

*Church has been an integral part of my experiences. I can say first of all, you had to do an Easter speech. If you did not do an Easter speech, all hell was going to break loose. Part of it was learning the Easter speech and reciting the Easter speech. My mom was the coordinator of programs at church. I became a leader fairly early. I played the piano for my church and so I had to teach the words. And in the old Black southern churches—the piano player was the*
director. They were everything in that church. So what happened was-I had to learn how to spell. I had to learn how to write out the songs for the choir. Some of the members were old enough to be my mother in this small church... I had to do it somewhat intelligently. I could not do it hap hazard. So those are the things that I remember most. I remember participating in plays. We had to memorize the script. We were given that particular document and we had to memorize (Rich Milner-Interview #1).

To further emphasize the importance that the Black church played in the literate lives of Asa Hilliard and other African Americans, Dr. Hilliard recalls the specific literacy activities that were utilized within the church. Below he discusses how the [Black church] gives the “most rich literate involvement” that he could think of from any institution within the Black community. As well, he describes how the church was vital in encouraging leadership roles.

*I was raised in the church of God in Christ until I was about 14 years old. It was an extremely literate church. I had dozens of role models because we had preachers coming through there all the time and I’m watching dozens of them give sermons-men and women. It [Black church] gives the most rich literate involvement that I can think of. I was encouraged—if you have something to say then say it. If you thought you wanted to be a preacher at 4 years old. The whole congregation would stop and place you in the middle of the pulpit and you would talk as much as you wanted to talk. Everyone is telling you “Yes”-“Go on”-“Amen”-“Praise the Lord”- and all of that. For me right now, I don’t care of how many sophisticated series of pedagogy that I have seen. There is almost nothing that I know of that boosted in a total way a person’s
And right now many of the professionals that I know came out of that same experience who are at the highest level. Carrie Secret comes out of that same church.)... I thought about this many times — how communication environments were very rich in texture were created there [church] (Dr. Asa Hilliard – Interview 1).

Critical Literacy Ingredient #3

These select African American leaders became more engaged in literacy activities when the literacy activity engaged them through their own cultural lenses, especially when it became a social event gathered around family and or friends. Each African American leader explains those activities that were important to their lives. In other words, they explain those activities that were relevant to their experiences as young people and/or African Americans. These experiences specifically became culturally relevant.

Below Dr. Hilliard describes his love for comic books. Dr. Hilliard’s experiences differ from that of Dr. Harris and Dr. Milner, as I reveal in the following section. However, for Dr. Hilliard, his experiences with comic books would become culturally relevant.
But the reading experience that I found interesting was first comics. I love comics. My brother and I would buy new comics and then we would trade comics. I would go to those stores where we had old comics. I liked anything in comic books. I liked adventure. You know Captain Marvel, Captain Midnight, Popeye, Terry and the Pirate—especially the ones that paralleled the radio shows. I would listen on the radio. We would listen as a family to these radio series that would come on. My mother included and we had a lot of fun getting ready to hear it as we all listened together. If I found that program like the Green Hornet in a comic book and he was also on the radio that was a lot more fun (Asa Hilliard-Interview #1)

I must explain that during the time when Dr. Hilliard was growing up, there were not many books or materials about African Americans in the libraries. He also stated that he loved to read anything. However, he also emphasized that “He was hungry, but not satisfied,”

*I don’t remember much exactly about the things that were in the library. For example, there were not any books on Africa or on Black people other than Booker T. Washington’s Up from Slavery. That is the only thing that I can remember about us [African Americans] in the library. I had that hunger, but I was not satisfied. But I would read anything that I could get my hands on. I read magazines, popular science, anything that was expansive. (Asa Hilliard-Interview #1)*

Dr. Harris describes how her eyes were opened up to the world when she was able to take a Black History course. In other words, she
began to understand her purpose in this world and began to understand what was going on in the world and how it related to her as an African American living through the Civil Rights movement. She describes her experiences in that course below:

*It was 11th grade, I believe that we had to take a Black history class and that is when my eyes were opened to everything that was out there about Black folks! I remember being introduced to Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, the poetry of Langston Hughes. ...But it was that 11th grade course that really opened my eyes. I read the autobiography of Malcolm X and I was like Oh my God!! I read The Letter from the Birmingham Jail written by MLK Jr. and Why We Can’t Wait. These things are just coming back. I just remember! Wow-this is exciting as I look back. I just remember having the whole world open up. It was the civil rights era too. I graduated from HS in 1971. These were the 60’s—all kinds of civil disturbances had happened. And MLK had been killed in 68. We were having some racial problems at my high school. Experiencing these things and having these things introduced in the classroom was very helpful. And it helped me to kinda figure out who I was! (Gene Harris-Interview #1).

Dr. Milner goes on to explain how he always felt that he connected better with Black authors. He stated that Black works and authors fascinated him.

He states:

*I always connected to Black authors. I was fascinated by Langston Hughes... Natalie Ford introduced me to Black authors who I thought were just amazing. I was able to connect with those people and as a result or connect with what they were writing about. (Rich Milner-Interview #2)*
All of the participants were heavily influenced by materials that were culturally relevant to their lives and their socialization both as a part of a family, school, and community.

**Critical ingredient and lesson #4**

Community involvement was vital in the education of these leaders. Both Dr. Hilliard and Dr. Harris explain the importance of community involvement in acquiring literacy skills. In short, their voices revealed that community involvement is crucial in helping children move to the next level of their literacy development. Dr. Hilliard discusses his personal involvement in community involvement and Dr. Harris describes her perceptions/perspective about the importance of this involvement. However, in my analysis, I found that Dr. Milner did not explicitly discuss the importance of community involvement. I believe this lack of discussion can be explained by age differences and experiences from the two older participants. I also believe that the time (context) in which Dr. Rich Milner was formally schooled (school integration period) may have played a role in him not referring to community involvement. This may be due to the breakdown in community involvement after schools and communities were legally integrated and after the Civil Rights movement.
took place. For this reason, I have decided to discuss only the voices of Dr. Hilliard and Dr. Harris in this section.

Asa Hilliard describes the importance of the social aspect of reading. That is, within different groups within the community such as church and family, one can find rich literacy experiences.

*When I describe what was happening in my church, -my mother having us all read every Sunday-in every case you are talking about a social environment. Reading is almost incidental to getting together and for many children....* (Asa Hilliard-Interview #2)

Dr. Harris firmly speaks of community involvement as extremely vital in the education of African American children for various reasons. These reasons, she describes as being political, economical, and social. She states that businesses, preachers, parents and, teachers must be encouraged to get involved by the principal and teachers. She firmly states that the community must come together and as a superintendent that she cannot do it alone.

* Many people will see the value in education because of its economic value. The bottom line-if these folk [students] don't get it -our economy collapses. I think for the first time the business community and the social service community see the value in education. ... I had just told the business community in Columbus, I want books! I want books for all of the students in our lowest performing schools... Because, we...*
have books in our library, but many of our children don’t have literature at home—books of their home that they can read that they can curl up with. You would be amazed by the number of things that they are going to give me. To the young teachers, don’t go out and talk about reparations, but do go out and capitalize on the guilt that people are feeling now. Let them into your classrooms and let them see the challenges that you are faced with. Involve the community in any way that you can.

Call on preachers. I was with a group of preachers yesterday. You got a responsibility too—my brothers! I think there is a disconnect right now. The church was fundamental and crucial to the civil rights movement. Ministers were there gathered around that issue and I think that the smaller churches were not only involved with the civil rights work, but they were feeding people. They were taking care of keeping lights on for people and that kind of thing. I think that we have gotten so caught up in the mega church mentality. Build these huge churches—that we are not ministering to individual people—that we are not reaching out to them. … Everywhere I go— I am not ashamed to say that I cannot do it alone! I cannot. The challenges are so great that our kids face (Gene Harris-Interview #2) !

Critical ingredient and lesson #5

These African American leaders had teachers who modeled good learning and teaching behaviors. These teachers/mentors also had high expectations for these select African American leaders. In other words, the teacher/mentors of these African American leaders modeled what they wanted from the student/and or child. All three of the African American leaders in this study reveal in their discussion those specific remembrances that were influential to them throughout their literate lives. Dr. Hilliard

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recalls teachers who modeled good literacy behaviors. Dr. Harris recalls her teachers and mother modeling good literacy skills. Dr. Milner recalls his parents, as well as, his teacher Natalie Ford.

Dr. Hilliard recounts below that those teachers were good role models in his development. These teachers encouraged discipline within literacy skills.

*One experience was meeting a teacher in High School Mrs. Linderman. She was just a “Real Bear” about proper English. She saw it as her mission to take children, regardless of who they were, and she took a particular liking to me-to make sure that we were disciplined in our use of the language. I can still remember many of her lessons...I remember in my freshman English Class-writing an essay thinking it was so super...I found that my writing was horrible. I got this paper back from this professor and it was just marked up to pieces and I was just crushed. I remember that!! There were lots of other things that he called to my attention and I was at first really hurt about it—but by the end of the quarter, I was very grateful to him for being honest and further for being helpful—because I guess he could have gone out and fixed that stuff. He was very precise in his critique and very open in assisting me and all that stuff. (Asa Hilliard-Interview #1).*

Dr. Harris recalls below how teachers gave her an abundance of work to do and she was expected to the work without complaint. Teachers had very high levels of expectations for her and her classmates. Dr. Harris continues to discuss something she called self-fulfilling prophesies. If you believe that students can do it, if you have faith in their abilities, then they can probably do it.

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I was pushed to read- a lot! And so I did! They said read!! You read. They say write-you write!! It all culminated though my senior year. Everyone was required to take English literature- your senior English course. We had ten papers (essays) that we had to write. Count them ten. Ten! You knew you had to write them going in there. We wrote ten. There were no excuses. Everybody in there had to write ten!! We did a lot of reading of the classics. I bet you that year, we read at least 15-20. (I looked at her in disbelief and she said to me). Oh yeah, Had to read them! That level of expectation I had really grown up with from the segregated elementary school to the integrated junior high and high school. In each one of my classes, I had that type of expectation in regards to reading and writing (Gene Harris-Interview 1). One of the reasons I think that I excelled is because they told me that I was smart. I think I have some innate basic intelligence, but a lot of it is self-fulfilling prophecy. I was told that I was smart. They treated me like I was smart! We have seen study after study-the placebo effect. If we believe it is so-it becomes so (Gene Harris-Interview 2).

Dr. Milner goes on to describe the experiences that he had with his teacher, Natalie Ford who would make her students memorize long recitations. Dr. Milner points out that he did not find the relevance at first, but appreciated learning those recitations later on in life.

[Speaking of Natalie Ford] I was overwhelmed and amazed by her book collection. She would talk about the books and bring those to life in ways that made me want to actually go and read them...One of the things that Natalie did was she had us do recitations. That may seem elementary. I actually remember doing Paul Laurence Dunbar’s We Wear the Mask ... I will never forget that poem because it was a part of what we had to do each week-those long recitations. That actually means so much to me now that I am able to sort of sit back and think more deeply about what those authors were trying to say...However, it seemed at that time-- I was asking myself- how does this have any relevance to my life right now? But now I can appreciate that I was learning things that now help me reflect on who I am and how I am supposed to build and

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understand what life is really all about. Those recitations really helped me. It was this notion of reading and re-reading. ... I think it probably aided and assisted my reading skills and in other reading endeavors. So as a result, my vocabulary increased. We had to learn these huge recitations. I mean long. It was really beneficial and I look back now and I am grateful. So I think that one specific task was key... (Rich Milner-Interview #2).

Critical ingredient and lesson #6

The breadth and the depth of the literacy experiences for these select African American leaders were crucial in their experiencing ongoing practice with literacy skills. These experiences were found through their own self motivation, as well as through the encouragement of their mentors. The African American leaders reveal, through their voices, that their teachers and/or mentors required a high quantity of quality activities for their children/students. Each participant in this section recounts the varied activities that they had within their literate lives. These activities occurred in school, at home, within their groups, and other institutions.

Dr. Hilliard recalls the many activities that he was able to get involved with such as Civil Air Patrol, card collecting, student government, library. He emphasized that it was the “key thing” that drove his literacy experiences. He also emphasized that as a paperboy, he not only “threw papers, he read them, as well.” He states
The key thing that drives my experience in literacy was the range of things that I was able to get involved with or encouraged to get involved with through my parents and friends. I participated in things that were my own interest. For instance, I was a member of the Civil Air Patrol. We had city wide conferences on student government. We would read baseball cards. We kept collections of cards with players on one side. We had literacy in that way. I was interested or I loved the encyclopedia. ...I was a paper boy I think that I mentioned that. We would not only throw papers, we would read them as well. I always liked books. If I had money I would buy books... My mother made sure that we had library cards. That was a big thing... We would have lots of books. As I look back we had a lot of activities going on. Of course in school [there were activities]-but probably more so outside of school (Asa Hilliard Interview #1).

Dr. Harris stated that she was also a part of the student government in school, Girl Scouts, and library activities. She also recalls how she was made to read classics, as well as biographies in school. She states:

Well we did the classics-we read biographies ... (Gene Harris Interview #1)

Dr. Milner was involved in church activities such as the choir leader/director and pianist for his church home/affiliation. This was already previously discussed in literacy ingredient #2-involvement in the church. His experiences were not as varied as those of Dr. Hilliard and Dr. Harris within this section. I believe that age could have played a part in him not having the varied activities within his K-12 formal school years.

Critical Ingredient and lesson # 7
The African American leaders, in this study, were explicitly supported by mentors and teachers in their need to move in and out of discourses that helped them achieve success and to gain access into various social groups in US society. This literacy ingredient is crucial to this study, since it was inspired and informed by the Real Ebonics Debate. Each African American leader discussed those mentors/teachers who were influential in them acquiring skills needed for mainstream society. The mentors/teachers of these leaders were direct in their instructions on why these leaders needed these skills. Each African American leader explains below.

Asa Hilliard recalls how teachers showed faith in his abilities and believed in their students by the vigor and veracity of their instruction. Asa Hilliard goes on to talk about how teachers must believe in their students. They must believe that they have all of their faculties. He also states that teachers must take account for the teaching that is going on within their classrooms. The blame must not be placed on the child/children.

He recounts

_I want you to go to college and for that you have to be able to speak correctly and write correctly." So that was a very important experience for me._ (Asa Hilliard speaking of his former teacher Mrs. Linderman-interview #1)
If you act like kids have all of their faculties, and if you teach them a good approach, you can teach them anything. The puzzle is not a puzzle. If every teacher finds that this kid can't learn, then it is probably something else. (Asa Hilliard - Interview #2)

Dr. Harris discusses how she would want teachers to see children when they walk into a classroom—as having everything already there—"all the tools and skills that they ever needed"—to get the job done. She stated that with the right belief system, those students who are just average and who may even be a little below average can be sitting in her office (as superintendent) years from now.

I would say to teachers though, believe that you have a fresh canvas when you walk in and all the paint you ever needed—with all the tools and skills and believe that it can get done. I think a lot of our students, even those that are average and even a little below average intelligence, that with the right amount of support and with the correct belief systems, they can be sitting right here in this office 10 or 15 years from now. It can happen! (Gene Harris-Interview 2)

Dr. Milner recalled one of his undergrad professors who refused to allow him to split verbs. She would constantly correct his grammar. Dr. Milner emphasized that teachers must abandon negative thinking about students and give them plenty of opportunities to learn and expand. He discusses how it is truly an attitude that one has about his or her students.
However, she was tough on me. I would split verbs easily-quickly. She would not let me do it. She was on me! Even now when I'm talking to her, I need to make sure my subjects and verbs agree. She believed in me from the beginning. I was very close to her. (Dr. Milner speaking about one of his college professors—Interview #1)

**Discussion on This Data**

This data gave the rich oral histories of the leaders involved within this study that assisted them in their current status in today's society. These select individuals were not from elite homes. These individuals were, however, brought up in homes where literacy was valued. However, there were other organizations in which these select African American leaders were involved in addition to their homes that gave them literate rich instruction and were just as crucial in their literacy development as their homes. These organizations included the church, library, and group organization such as Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. Mentors and teachers were vital in the literacy development of these participants. Mentors were found in schools and families. It is important to include and discuss the specific roles that they have played in their lives. Before I end this chapter, I wanted to include in greater detail the voices of the mentors as they discuss their influence(s) on the successful African American leaders in this study.
Participants and Mentors

In this section, I will discuss the themes that emerged between the participants and their mentors. Many of the mentors recall some of the same remembrances as the participants. During my brief interviews with the African American mentors in this study, I only stated to them that they were deemed as influential in the literate lives of the participants. I wanted to know how they felt that they were. The following pages reveals their voices.

Asa Hilliard and Dr. Jacob Carothers

Dr. Hilliard stated to me that because he grew up during deep desegregation, there were not a lot of books and literature on Black people-“He was hungry, but not satisfied.” Therefore, his real education or what he would say his Africentric education came to him later when he was a young adult. Jacob Carothers was one of those people who influenced Dr. Hilliard in his literacy quests. Dr. Hilliard discusses Dr. Carothers below

Dr. Jacob Caruthers, who advocates what he calls “beautiful speech,” which comes from African tradition- “telling the truth clearly.” He is one of the best writers.
I found that Dr. Hilliard was greatly influenced by Dr. Carothers in two significant ways within his literacy experiences. First Dr. Hilliard states that Dr. Carothers is one of the “best writers that he knows.” Dr. Hilliard was obviously influenced and still influenced by the writings of Dr. Carothers. He was influenced by him because Dr. Carothers advocates what he calls “beautiful speech”

Dr. Carothers explains

*Asa was influenced by what I was doing in trying to find out about Africa. Africa had been so maligned in history—in books and on television that it became necessary to infuse “correct and authentic images” of Africa.*

In other words, to explain even more clearly, Dr. Hilliard was influenced by what Jacob Carothers explains as “correct and authentic images” of Africa or “beautiful speech”—telling the truth clearly. Because Dr. Hilliard was hungry and not satisfied as a child, he was forced to be satisfied as an adult by another adult, particularly in what we may now call culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). To sum this up, Dr. Hilliard became more satisfied with his education when he was able to see positive images of Africa that were not offered to him as a child. He has, as a result, found his calling in helping students and teachers throughout the United States gather that information grounded on Africentric
perspectives (see Asante, 1999) and development through his own pursuits.

Dr. Gene Harris and Mrs. Thelma Thomas (Mother)

Dr. Harris stated that her mother was by far the most important influence in her literacy life.

*My mother! You ought to see her in action. If my mother walked into Ohio State University or your church and she was given a task-like Mrs. Thomas— you need to present X, Y, and Z. You would think she was the most polished— she is one of the most polished people that I have ever seen. She can lay it out so clearly. You would think— why didn't I think of that? She is very well spoken. She insisted that we read!!*

In turn Mrs. Thomas basically repeated what Dr. Harris stated throughout her narrative accounts when referring to her mother as a great influence, role model, and one who had high expectations for her students. She demanded that they have ongoing involvement in literacy activities. Mrs. Thomas states that:

*We have always been a family that read. I took them to the library. I always required them to read. They had to read! When she came along that was just a part of our life. In the summer, to keep them abreast or keep their minds fresh, we went to the library and got books out of the library.*

Another theme that I found within the narratives of both Dr. Harris and Mrs. Thomas, her mother was their stance on community
involvement. They both echoed many of the same words. Mrs. Thomas echoed the same sentiments

_We must get the community involved! I don't even know what our churches are doing. Our churches used to be the backbone of our communities (Mrs. Thomas)._ 

In short, Dr. Harris was not only influenced by her mother in regards to literacy skills, she was also inspired by her mother in terms of how she envisions the role of the overall community in the education of young people.

**Dr. Rich Milner and Mrs. Natalie Ford**

Rich Milner stated throughout his narratives that he appreciated the pedagogy of Natalie Ford because she exposed him to literature and materials that enabled him to make connections to real life. As well, he was exposed to literature that helped him to see images of what he could be as a Black man.

_Natalie really gave me the opportunity to really engage in literature and books that really interested me. The book that she introduced to me first was Alex Haley's Roots. It was just amazing when I would go to her house. I was overwhelmed and amazed by her book collection. She would talk about the books and bring those to life in ways that made me want to actually go and read them... I think this notion of modeling is very important._
In the same form, Mrs. Ford reveals what she did to expose her students to good literature, but more importantly how she helped them to see connections between classics and African American literature. Rich’s belief that children can learn if they are influenced by literature and learning was inspired by Mrs. Ford and other experiences.

Mrs. Ford explains below

*I would tell them that every Shakespearean play or book was relevant. It was a 15th century soap opera. I think that if you make literature relevant to your experiences then you can really make it come alive...I helped them to see parallels between Malcolm X and between Julius Cesar...They [students] will do anything if you make correlations to what is interesting to their lives.*

In short, Dr. Milner, Dr. Harris, and Dr. Hilliard’s work is greatly enhanced by those human influences in their lives. Not only the type of work that they do, but how they do their work.

**Summary**

Within this chapter, the voices of the African American leaders revealed those influences that were influential to their literacy development and literate lives. Seven themes or critical literacy lessons were analyzed and discussed in this chapter. This chapter concluded with a brief analysis of those individuals deemed as mentors in the lives of these African American leaders.

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The next and final chapter summarizes and discusses the research questions of this study. It also summarizes and identifies implications for parents, teachers, teacher educators, and community organizations, and leaders for the education of African American children.
CHAPTER 6

CAN I GET AN AMEN?:

MOVIN' FORWARD BY FINDIN' WISDOM IN THE WORD

OF THE SUCCESSFUL

What can we do for children that we have not already done?

Can we love them more? Can we feed them more?

Can we give them more?
Can we listen to their voices more by once again becoming them- and
remembering our past?

(Nicole Stephens, 1999)

This study was undertaken to discover those specific K-12 literacy
experiences of African American leaders that assisted these individuals in
grasping the discourse of wider communication (or that of the so-called
standard form of English). In short, those skills that allow them access into
various discourses within the United States, particularly those discourses
needed for "success." The questions that helped to guide this study were:
1. What literacy K-12 experiences and beyond influenced the participant's ability to grasp the discourses of mainstream society that subsequently led to their current status within this society?

2. What institutions, other than formal schools (e.g., church, social groups) helped these select African American leaders essentially gain "successful" access into the mainstream community?

3. What materials (literature, books, curriculum) were used to help those students acquire those skills? How were those materials related to their home discourse?

4. How was their home language essential for the development of their self-esteem?

5. Given their lived experiences, particularly concerning their schooling, what are their opinions and perspectives on how educators can best assist students to acquire reading and other essential literacy skills in order to gain successful access into mainstream America?

6. Who were those individuals, in the form of mentors or teachers who most greatly impacted their literacy learning and their literacy acquisition?

Throughout the study, the participants were interviewed and observed. Those deemed as their greatest mentors were also interviewed to find those experiences that influenced their lives. This chapter will review, discuss, and attempt to answer the research questions previously discussed in Chapter One. This chapter will highlight the previous six questions that guided this study. The chapter will then conclude with a short discussion
on implications, directions for further research, and a summary of the dissertation.

Meaning Behind the Title of This Research

Before I move on to a complete discussion of my research questions, it is important for me to explain the meaning of the title of this work. "Can I get a high five?"—within Black cultural expression or communications simply means that I am in agreement with you—or there is a victory, and I am the winner. It is usually in the form of a physical act (two people's hands slapping each others above their heads), however words are many times uttered to express agreement or joy.

"Can I get an amen?" is usually uttered, many times, during church services. It as well as- Can I get a high five? means---I am in agreement---usually with the minister or person speaking at that time about something that they have said that one can relate to or one has experienced for him or herself. In short, the phrase is uttered from emotion when there is remembrance of a struggle of some sort or when the person is dealing with the subject matter that the minister or individual is speaking about.

To make this clear, Black folks don't just tell stories, we have a testimony. Our struggles are built on unique stories and victories within the United States. Therefore, we testify. For that, the meaning of this title

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is how these participants came to become successful and proficient readers, writers, orators through their own cultural resources. In other words, they are victorious in their quest to communicate effectively within both their various discourses, as defined in this manuscript. In short, they testify about their language, literacy, leadership, and culture and all those experiences that helped them become successful. In that regard, Can I get a high five and an amen? : Successful African Americans testifyin,’ is appropriate for the title of this research study.

**Discussion of the Findings**

**Question 1: Literacy experiences in K-12 and beyond**

The first question in the study focused on those literacy experiences that helped these successful African American leaders become successful and feel comfortable going in and out of discourses that subsequently led to their success in mainstream society. In order to document these experiences, I captured their “literacy lives” through interviews and thus transcribed those interviews. I found very specific experiences that these individuals had that continue to help them become
fluent and have helped these leaders gain access into the positions that they hold today in U.S. society.

It is important to note that I have not read of any research like this one that has examined so intensely the specific literacy experiences of successful African American leaders as they were children and beyond. This study found those specific examples of lived experiences or literacy experiences that could possibly be influential in the literacy development of children in U.S. schools today.

The literacy experiences that young people in schools and other institutions are exposed to, greatly impacts their level of achievement in U.S. society. All of the participants in this study had various literacy experiences that greatly impacted their lives as told to me during our interviews and talks. Therefore, it is vitally important to review their overall literacy lives and make sense of and synthesize the discussions.

The level of experiences for these African American leaders (or the way in which they were influenced) was greatly influenced by the time or context in which they lived, as gathered and analyzed by the data. All of the participants in this study recalled activities with their parents and families such as verbal games, reading of the newspaper, and family gatherings around books or print in various contexts. Some of those
specific activities were Charades, Monopoly, and Scrabble. One
participant discussed storytelling as a very important activity in his career.
One African American leader elaborated on how her mother required her
and her siblings to get library cards and read every night. Another recalls
how his father required him to read passages from the newspaper. It was
also important for this participant to see his father read the newspaper
every single day.

My findings for this particular question extends research done by
Heath (1983) who does an ethnographic research on families and children
in two very different communities in the Piedmont area of the Carolinas
on their literacy interactions and influences in two very distinct
communities, one Black community and one white community. Heath’s
ethnographic study does examine those experiences within families and
communities that can influence children in school to become more fully
engaged in their literacy learning. However, this current study moves
beyond that, in that it examines other institutional experiences for present
successful African American leaders, that were explicitly and implicitly
(both consciously and unconsciously) done by their parents to help their
children learn to read and write.
The study done by Heath (1983) examines those experiences that were "unconscious literacy activities" done within the home and communities.

The African American leaders in this present study reiterated that their families emphasized excellence. This present study concentrates on examining experiences that can work to influence literacy learning for children in schools.

Not surprisingly, the participant leaders, in this study also had varied experiences in regards to their schooling. The two older African American leaders recalled, in depth, many of experiences in the form of extended activities within school and outside of school. However, for this question, their experiences in schools will be examined.

The two older leaders recall teachers demanding high levels of work in both quantity and quality. Their teachers explicitly told them that in order for you to be successful in this society there are various skills that you must acquire. The two older African American leaders recalls having to memorize long passages and poems, read and examine many texts, declamation classes etc...throughout their schooling specifically.
The two older African American leaders loved to read. They recalled many fond memories of their learning experiences in regards to their K-12 formal schooling.

However, the younger African American leader did not recollect those similar experiences within his formal schooling. His experiences were different in that they did not include the variety and depth of activities that the older participants had within their formal schooling. As well, he was unable to recall specific experiences from his formal schooling until he was a senior in high school. This experience is important to reiterate because the younger participant’s lack of activities may reflect what is going on in communities and schools today.

His experiences were similar in that he began to cognitively understand how important literacy learning was to his life. He was greatly influenced in his later schooling years through literature, which affected both his self-esteem and motivation. In short, it was not until his senior year that he became both, as one of the leaders stated in the study, “hungry and satisfied” in his literate life and his pursuit to want more.

To sum, all these leaders recognized those various activities in their families and schools helped them to grasp the discourses of mainstream society. They suggest and recall that the high levels of
expectations from them by their parents, mentors, and/or teachers helped them move beyond what they learned and linked their school. In extending this message of the link between home and school, the second question of this study examines those institutions beyond the home that greatly influenced the literacy lives of these successful African American participants.

**Question #2 Other Institutional Literacy Experiences**

The second question of this study focused on those institutions beyond school that influenced the literacy lives of African American leaders. In this study, I found that there were many outside influences beyond school that greatly influenced the literacy learning of these successful African American participants. Some of these institutions are an extension of the home, but are considered entities within themselves.
The two older participants recalled the Scouts—that is Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts—that greatly impacted their literacy experiences. They recalled having to read and lead in various activities of this organization. Trips to the local library influenced one of these leaders greatly, because activities within the library and the atmosphere influenced her love for learning.

However, an even greater impact on the literacy experiences and lives of these participant leaders found in this study was the heavy and profound influence of the Black church. The church was by far the most vital influence on the oral and leadership skills of these African American leaders. Each African American leader recalls having to memorize long speeches and poems for church celebrations, such as important church services during Easter and Christmas.

Each leader recalls holding leadership roles in their various churches and church functions. Each individual conveys that they were placed in roles in which they were forced to read more, lead in church discussions and encouraged to speak “their minds” in regards to theology, but recollected that church activities influenced them beyond learning theology. As well, allowing them to speak about “God” in front of the church, allowed them opportunities to hone their oral communication.
skills. Within this study, one leader recalls how having the opportunity to see various preachers perform sermons, both male and female ministers, greatly impacted his speech giving abilities. This same participant suggested that many of the African American leaders at the highest levels in this society came out of the Black church.

The findings suggested that beyond the spiritual influences of the church was the underlying influence on the literacy lives of that far the expectations of the church in that it influenced the overall communication skills of the children that attended. For instance, after observation of various church activities, I found that students used many or all of the literacy and communication skills that are required within formal schools. Children were encouraged not only to speak in front of groups of people, but they had to read and prepare lessons (such as for Sunday School). These activities often required writing, reading, and speaking. The child/student was expected to read bible verses to prepare for their lessons, write down notes and important points from the lesson and then deliver the lesson orally. Preparing for church activities required, as revealed in my analysis, the use of the three basic skills used in school by teachers—that is reading, writing, and oral communication.
The findings in this study extend research done by Thomas (1999), in which she interviews teacher-elders on their experiences as educators during the desegregation periods. These teacher-elders recall the impact that spirituality had on the lives of students in their classrooms and beyond. The study also examines how the church helped in other areas such as behavior, as well the physical needs (food and clothing) of students. Although the church may not have been aware of their influence, the study done by Thomas (1999) does not examine how literacy learning was so greatly embedded within the institution of the church. As well, it does not recall those specific literacy activities that influenced the literate lives of the students of these teacher elders or even the literate lives of the teacher elders themselves.

Question #3 Materials for literacy learning

The third question examines those specific materials in the form of books, literature, magazines that assisted the participants within their literate lives and literacy acquisition. The types of materials that are used within the classroom and beyond often influences the interest level of students. In short, it can influence the child in a way that will either hold
the attention of the student, or the types of materials that are used within a classroom and in the curriculum can disinterest children because the materials are not relevant to those experiences of that child or many children within the classroom. Keulen (1998), writes that “Teachers may find in African American literature a rich and effective means of maximizing the relevance of language arts instruction to the everyday lives of African American children” (p. 76).

I found differences within the generations of the participants in regards to the forms of literature that influenced their literacy lives. The materials enjoyed by the elder participant were quite different from those of the other participants within the study, in that Black literature was not readily available to him, because of his growing up during deep segregation at a time where there was very little. For example, the elder participant loved to read Marvel comic books. He explained that during the time when he grew up there were not many books on African Americans so he was able to enjoy books that were available to him. He, however, emphasized that he was “hungry but not satisfied” in regards to books and literature that would have taken him to the next level of learning.
The participant in the study who grew up during the civil rights movement was heavily influenced by Black literature. She recollected reading various books by such authors as Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. As well, she not only recalls reading about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X but she lived right in the middle of the civil rights movement and civil and racial unrest within her own community exposing her to not only literature, but real experiences. This experience made the literature real and rich because of the historical context in which she lived.

The younger African American leader recalls developing a love for literature that was mainly influenced by his high school English teacher and his undergraduate college education. Before his senior year in high school, he stated that he did not like to read very much. He emphasized that literature and other materials were not used within his classrooms that were culturally relevant to his experiences as a young Black man. However, in his senior high school year and in his undergraduate college years, he was exposed to such authors as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alex Haley as well as many of the authors that had influenced the literacy life of the participant who grew up in the civil rights era such as Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison. Those particular
types of literature, he contends, resonated with his experiences as a Black man in this society. This type of literature captured his interest and helped him gain the love for reading and literature that he had lacked within his earlier formal school years.

Studies done by Lee (1993), Perkins (1993), and Spears-Bunton (1990) found that African American students were more actively engaged within the literacy activities when exposed to literature that included characters who looked like them and situations within stories that were relevant to their lives. This present study extends those studies done by Lee, Perkins, and Spears-Bunton in that it actually documents how literature that relates to cultural experiences impacted and sustained the child when he or she became an adult. In short, these African Americans literacy lives were greatly influenced by the literature that they were exposed to during their school years. As well, these types of materials for these African American leaders, particularly for Dr. Harris and Dr. Milner, seemed to help them in their self-actualization processes.
Question #4 Importance of Home Discourse  

(Discussion of the Ebonics Debate)

This question was coined to discover if home language was essential in the development and the maintenance of the self-esteem for the select participants. None of the participants in this study directly discuss self-esteem within their interviews. However, the elder participant relayed, in referring to books about and for African American people, that although he was hungry (for knowledge), he was not satisfied. In other words, there was something missing from his literacy education. One participant stated that Black vernacular, when she uses it within certain contexts, gives a much deeper and richer meaning to what she or another is trying to convey. She also conveyed that when she learned about people who looked like her, a new world had opened or her eyes were open for the first time. In other words, she began to envision her life purpose more clearly. Moreover, the younger participant did relay that he was very proud of both his abilities (that is being able to communicate in both Black English Vernacular and the Discourse of Wider Communication). However, it was stated that he felt “free” when he began to feel comfortable in the Discourse of Wider Communication because a world
had been open that seems to be closed for many Black people (he was referring to Black men in particular).

Since this study was heavily influenced by the Oakland Ebonics Controversy that took place in 1997 in Oakland, California, it is important to review and discuss the Ebonics Debate along with second language or discourse acquisition. More than half of the students within the Oakland school system were African American children however more than half of those children had a grade average well below 2.0 (Perry, 1998). This suggests at least two things. One is that something had to be done in the city of Oakland to directly affect the literacy learning of children right away within the school district. The move to create a program to help students in their literacy learning was the district’s primary purpose. However, it was important to address the emotional and self-esteem issues that derive from failure, as well as, the degradation of one’s language or language form by teachers, the media, and fellow citizens. In a study conducted on successful teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1994) recognized that African American students must experience success for literacy learning to be effective and for their schooling experience to be fruitful. Further, as the media maligned and
criticized the language of a people, it also criticized and maligned perhaps the self-esteem of a large group of citizens that use that language.

The second suggestion is that this failure rate had to be due in part to the teachers within the classroom who had not been trained or did not value the rich linguistic heritage that students brought from home. This, in turn, had to have had some affect on the self-esteem of students, particularly because of the high failure rate for the children who speak Ebonics. The following scholars acknowledge the importance of being proud of one’s first language, which is intricately tied to one’s culture. Smitherman (1977) emphasized that African American cultural activities via black language (or the language of the home) fulfills communication and linguistic needs that influences community belonging.

Ladson-Billings (1994) found that those teachers who recognized the linguistic richness of the students and facilitated learning through the culture of the students were the most successful teachers. Asante (1990) posits that African American discourse is the fundamental component linked to African American survival.

As well, Ferdman (1990) states that cultural identity “involves those parts of the self-those beliefs, values, and norms that a person considers to define himself socially as a member of the group” (p. 359).
In short, when the media attacked a language of a people, they attack that which makes up the self and the identity of that group and individuals of that group. For these reasons stated above, it is vital for educators to understand the importance and relevance that language (in this case home language) plays in the self-esteem of children, as well as their optimal learning potential.

In sum, although these participants did not directly refer to self-esteem in their discussions and interviews, they acknowledged in one way or another, the importance that it played in their lives as young people and even in their lives today as defining who they are as African Americans, which is directly related to one's self-esteem. Therefore, African American communication forms characterize the cultural values of the child and are mechanism for cultural affirmation, self-esteem, and literacy learning for students.

Question #5 Opinions and Perspectives of the African American Leaders

This question focuses on the opinions and perspectives of the select leaders in this study on how children can be taught literacy skills in today's schools. Much of this question was guided by the second interviews with these select African American leaders. I asked questions that would guide them in giving their perspectives on how children can
experience optimal literacy learning. For instance, since each African American leader was inspired and informed by their own remembrances of what worked for them as children, as well as, from their own experiences as K-12 classroom teachers For these reasons, they each had much to say about what can work for children in today’s K-12 U.S. school system now.

Each participant spoke about culturally relevant teaching and or making education more relevant for students. They also conveyed their opinions on the importance of teachers having high expectations to improve the literacy acquisition of children. This specifically means having high quantities of quality work. Each participant also spoke a great deal about teacher modeling within literacy and communication skills. However, each had specific and unique issues that needed to be reviewed further in this section for emphasis.

For instance, the elder participant discussed in detail about reading puzzles. He relayed that there are too many people (referring to educators) with “puzzles” about how children can learn how to read and write. He conveyed that many reading programs work, but they must be used consistently. He spoke a great deal about the social aspect of reading. In other words, creating social environments that would allow and encourage
group reading for both children and parents. This theme on social environments for reading emphasized what some studies have relayed about how African American children learn best. For instance, much literature (Hale, 1982; Shade, 1997; Hilliard, 1997) has discussed that African American children have a tendency to learn best in relational style atmospheres. Relational style means that they tend to learn best within group settings. Hale (1982) further suggests that children often receive their cognitive and/or learning styles from the socialization that they receive from their families, Black institutions (such as churches), and neighborhoods.

The elder participant also suggested going back to basics. For instance, spelling bees, he suggests, teaches so much about words, phonics, and definitions. One other activity that was emphasized by the elder leader was oral communications. He specifically addressed how the church played such a vital role in developing leaders orally and in their oral speech giving. He emphasized that this was a very important skill to learn within the Black church. To state this further, Smitherman (1977), emphasized that “both in slavery times and now the Black community places high value on the spoken word” (p. 76). Further, he emphasized that if educators want to improve their teaching they should go to those
who are successful at teaching children and who have proven results. To further emphasize Ladson-Billings (1994) echoed this same sentiment when she observed teachers who are successful with their students.

The participant who grew up during the civil rights movement in the 60s, elaborated a great deal about the quality and quantity of teaching. For instance, if teachers are to help students improve in reading and writing and other communication skills, they must demand a high amount of quality reading and writing assignments and activities from their students. She particularly emphasized and concentrated on mentoring and volunteerism in her elaboration. She stated that if teachers and educators want to help students then volunteers must become more engaged in the education of students. In short, she emphasizes that educators “must pull all the resources from the community,” including business people, ministers, parents and elder volunteers to help in the teaching and learning of children. This was a very strong message from her interview.

The youngest participant discussed, in detail, the importance of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2002) states that “culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). He

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emphasized that if we are to capture students’ attention as well as maintain that attention, educators will need to make schooling more relevant to their student’s lives and be able to respond to their unique and cultural experiences. As well, he conveyed, that educators must recognize the unique gifts that students bring to the class. Further, he spoke about teachers dealing with “misconceptions about students.” In other words, teachers must recognize prejudices that may disturb the vigor and veracity in which teachers teach the students within their rooms. He also pointed out that continued teacher training, particularly in culturally relevant areas, is vital to the education of students and teacher education alike.

In sum, all the participants in this study believed and emphasized cultural relevance. As well, they all had ideas about educating African American children that were vast, in regards to educating children. These ideas included going back to the basics, in regards to reading and writing. These basic include spelling bees as mentioned by Dr. Asa Hilliard and more reading and writing as mentioned by Dr. Gene Harris.
Question #6 Influential mentors

The last question or topic for this research study focused on those individuals and mentors that helped these African American leaders in their literacy acquisition and were influential to them in their lives and education. This question became very important because these educators were able to point out and remember very specific and detailed activities and teaching and learning that continue to influence and assist them throughout their literate lives.

Although I interviewed very specific mentors for each participant in this study that assisted in its triangulation, it is still very important for me to highlight other influential individuals that were mentioned (or at least their pedagogy) to end with this final question. I will then speak about those specific individuals who were deemed as “most influential” to their literate lives. As well, I must emphasize that these individuals all came in the form of teachers, although some of them were not or are not “teachers” in the traditional sense of the word. However, for this particular question or discussion, we will define them all as teachers.
The elder participant spoke of two teachers in particular who influenced his early life in regards to literacy acquisition. One teacher of this participant, he recalls, made it her duty to make sure that the students in her class had command of the language of wider communication so that they would be able to attend college. He also stated that, she was a “Real Bear” about standard grammar and English. To emphasize this further, Lisa Delpit (1995) strongly conveys the same message mentioned above that teachers must demand that children learn the discourses that will take them in and out of worlds (or specific discourse groups) that will give them access to success. She also contends that teachers need to be direct with students and tell them exactly what they are teaching them and why. Delpit (1995) states “when implicit codes are attempted across cultures, communication frequently breaks down. Each cultural group is left saying, -Why don’t those people say what they mean?”(p.25). In other words, literacy instruction (or second discourse learning) must be made clear and direct to help the second language learner understand the lesson and its purpose. Again, the very explicit way in which the elder participant’s teacher taught him and his classmates is directly related to his success in acquiring the discourse of wider communication.
The elder participant also spoke of one of his most influential mentors, Dr. Carothers. He stated that when he began to learn under Dr. Carothers as an adult, it was beneficial to what he is doing now and has done throughout his career. He stated that when he was a child—he was hungry (for knowledge and reading), but not satisfied. Again, this statement has a profound meaning for him. Although, he had already learned the skills to compete in mainstream society, when he began to learn more about Africa and his culture, as an adult, through mentors like Dr. Carothers, he began to feel satisfied about his literacy learning and journey. He also began to think critically about how he could help people of African people of African decent all over the world progress.

This became important because as Delpit (1995) states “Let there be no doubt: a skilled minority person who is not capable of critical analysis becomes the trainable, low level functionary of the dominant society” (p. 18).

For this African American leader, the Black church was specifically noted as one of the most influential “mentors” in his life concerning his literacy learning. He explicitly stated that the church was a good model for literacy learning and that it taught him and other successful African American leaders such skills as oral speech skills and
leadership skills. Dandy (1991), states “The African worldview emphasizes religion as a way of life...and the magic power of the word. These concepts evolved into deep structure or the underlying meanings in instructions on how to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (p.21). Therefore, religion or those religious institutions in this case were and are very vital to literacy education and the way of life for its people.

The participant who attended high school during the civil rights movement in the 60s stated that her teachers demanded a high quantity and quality of work. The most profound part of her formal schooling was when her high school teacher exposed her to the lives of Black people and African American literature. This class and teacher helped “open her eyes” to a new world and helped her relate it to what was going on in society.” Studies done by Lee, (1993) and Perkins (1993) suggest that African American literature, within language arts instruction used to assist in literacy skills also extends self-concepts and represents historical struggles of African American people.
She also stated that the most influential person in her life regarding her literacy education was her mother. Her mother insisted that she read books every single night. She was also a role model in the sense that she read with her children every night. She also insisted on excellence from her children.

The younger participant spoke of his parents and a high school teacher as being his most influential role models. He remembers seeing his father read the newspaper every single day. Modeling, as well, was important to this leader as he continued to elaborate on his teacher Natalie Ford, who became the mentor who helped him learn to love to read and become hungry for literature. The teacher exposed him to African American literature that captured his attention. In addition, his teacher also was able to help her students relate classics to African American literature. This enabled students to become involved in, understand and extend their literature and literacy learning. Ladson-Billings (1994) in her qualitative study of successful teachers of African American children found that teachers who were successful with their students to enlighten their students to other worlds but by maintaining "the integrity of their culture and worldview" (p. 146).
In sum, the mentors/teachers were integral in the overall development of the literacy learning of these very successful African American leaders in that they assisted in helping them recognize their potential. These teacher mentors are greatly influential in pushing these leaders to acquire those skills needed to succeed in this society.

Implications

From a cross-case analysis seven themes emerged which were termed critical literacy ingredients. Many implications of this study were generated based on these themes.

The critical literacy ingredients are:

1. The successful African American leaders, in this study, experienced ongoing family and parent involvement.

2. The Church was vital and important for the success of these individuals, particularly within regards to their communication styles and in all areas of their literacy development.

3. These African American leaders became more engaged when there was something that they could relate to. In other words, they became engaged in activities when they were relevant to their experiences.

4. Community Involvement was vital in the education of these African American leaders.
5. These African American leaders had teachers who modeled good learning and teaching behaviors. These teachers also had high expectation for these select African American leaders.

6. The breadth and the depth of experiences within literacy activities for these select African American leaders were crucial in their second discourse acquisition.

7. The African American leaders in this study were explicitly supported by mentor/and or teachers in their need to move in and out of discourses that helped them achieve success and to gain access into various social groups in the US society.

The implications are reviewed as follows. The first implication I found was that parents must be allowed to participate in the literacy education of their children. Parents should be encouraged and inspired to take a greater role in the schooling process and literacy themselves. This can be accomplished if teachers provide ongoing contact with parents. As well, parents can be active in the teaching process by being allowed to bring in their own cultural and community knowledge. Parents and teachers can make a better impact on students if they work together to foster literacy activities and environments that encourage reading. An example of this participation can be in the form of a parent from the
classroom or community teaching students a lesson about their neighborhood. This can be represented in various manners. In short, parents can become very active in the teaching process by being allowed to bring in their own cultural and community knowledge.

Secondly, teachers in today’s schools should teach with vigor and veracity utilizing activities that are relevant to the lives of their students. They must also have high expectations for their students and abandon negative attitudes that could possibly affect the veracity of their instruction. Negative attitudes can be abandoned through education (being educated about those negative attitudes and miseducation or lack of education) and self-actualization activities and self (teacher) reflection.

The next implication is the importance of involving historically Black institutions or at least those lessons from those institutions that are rich sources of literacy learning for African American children. More specifically I am referring to the Black church. The Black church and other historically Black institutions provide strong resources that help develop vital literacy skills. For instance, the Black church fostered and honed leadership abilities and oral skills that give African American strong abilities that guide them in their everyday literacy and communication functions.
Further, the overall community involvement, which includes business leaders, senior citizens, and ministers, should be involved in the education of children. This community involvement entails many people, places, and things. This involvement comes in the form of economic support, spiritual support, and opportunities for volunteering.

Implication five suggests that teacher preparation programs should use the voices of African American leaders from multiple age groups and gender in training teachers. Culture must be seen as a conduit to teach children to communicate effectively in this society and to have access to mainstream groups. Field experiences should be richer. For instance, student-interns should be required to go into schools and educational institutions dominated by historically underrepresented groups. This should not be an option. Teacher education programs must require cultural sensitivity training within all of their classes, not just specific multicultural education course offerings. Teacher education programs must do a better job of teaching pre-teachers cultural values of underrepresented groups. More important, teacher educators must listen to the voices of those educators who are a part of historically underrepresented groups in this society, in this case African American voices.
Lastly, policies and programs, such as special education, should be problematized and reviewed to reveal if they are truly making a positive difference in the lives of young people who are in them. In that same sense, programs must be put in place or readopted in educational arenas that can work or have historically worked for many children.

Further Research

This research study is just the beginning of my effort. I plan to extend this study by collecting voices of more African American leaders from various age groups, genders, and backgrounds. I would specifically like to focus on younger African American male participants, because their lives could possibly add to the body of data about African American males. I believe that a deeper study can be done with successful African American males to elaborate more authentically on the unique needs of young African American boys in U.S. society and particularly in schools.

Finally, a deep study on how to bridge classic literature with African American literature would be beneficial to teachers within the classroom. Natalie Ford’s pedagogy was an excellent approach of helping students become more fully engaged in Eurocentric classic literature, as well as African American literature.
Summary

This study highlighted the literacy histories of successful African American leaders and those specific experiences that have helped them become competent readers, writers, and orators in mainstream society.

The findings of this body of work are very important, because they give so much rich information, ideas, and suggestions on how African American children can be successful in today's schools. Educators should acknowledge that listening to the voices of those who have "gotten ovuh" and learned other discourses in spite of the odds of being Black or minority in this society is one of the best means in assisting children to succeed and develop as fully as possible within literacy. Can I get an amen?
Appendix A

Consent Form for Participation

In Study
Consent form for Investigation

I consent in participating in research entitled: Can I get a high five and an amen?: Successful African Americans Talkin’ and Testifyin’ about the Link Between Language, Literacy, Leadership and Their Culture.

Evelyn B. Freeman, Principal Investigator, or his/her authorized representative Nicole M. Stephens has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at anytime to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me. I also understand that the principal investigator or her authorized representative may ask permission to use my name or identity within the final draft of the manuscript and or research.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: __________________

Signed: __________________
(participant)

Signed: __________________
(Principal investigator or his/her authorized representative)

Witness: __________________
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