UNDERSTANDING HOW LITERACY IS SITUATED
IN FOUR FAMILIES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation study documents literacy practices that occur in out-of-school contexts, specifically in four homes of middle-class families, to investigate potential relationships and collaborations between formal classrooms and informal learning that occurs in out-of-school contexts. The purpose of this study was to intimately understand what parents and children value in terms of literacy, the multiple contexts of literacy for families, and the nature of the school's impact on family literacy. This study will add to the understanding of the relationship between family-based and school-based literacy.

Qualitative research methodology was best suited for this dissertation. Data collection methods included interviews, observations in the homes, field notes, collection of documents and artifacts, and collective case study. This study deconstructs the myth of a single, mainstream concept of suburban family literacy and it attempts to offer an in-depth approach to understanding middle-class children and families who have experienced success and failure in their passage across the school-community boundary.
There are four significant findings that can be reported about the four middle-class families in this study: 1) variability in family literacy practices is a characteristic within and across families at all socioeconomic levels; 2) middle-class children who are engaged in technology-based literacy at home might choose to write more in their home-based contexts; 3) literacy is shaped by access to the cultural capital of the classroom through volunteerism in the school setting; and 4) variability in opinions and the influence of state-mandated tests on family literacy practices was apparent in the four families in the study.

Implications of the study include: 1) educators and researchers need to re-think how they define literacy within and across all families regardless of the student's culture or socioeconomic class; 2) middle-class families practice literacy in unique ways within their own homes and a single, mainstream notion of family literacy does not exist in suburban families; 3) parental roles have changed for some middle-class families due a heightened awareness of state-mandated testing in the schools; and 4) educators, administrators, and school personnel can benefit from culturally relevant professional development to better understand and provide space for non-mainstream families.
To my husband, Drew
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the public domain, literacy achievement is simplistically associated with schooling, rather than with families, communities and schools. A sobering percentage of children in the United States face difficulties with literacy; the personal and societal costs of these literacy problems is enormous. The ongoing controversy and public debate about the literacy crisis are often accompanied by demands for better schools and more rigorous curricula. Contemporary researchers heavily critique current curricula for failing to understand the diverse literacy activities that children experience within their communities (Heath, 1983; Moll, 1990; Morrow, 1995; Schiefelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984) and families before entering school (Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). The relationship between schools and homes needs to be redefined. This study will add to the understanding of the relationship between family-based and school-based literacy.
Throughout history, the family has been the primary source for learning. Prior to the advent of formal schools, children engaged in teaching and learning with their parents, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives. Despite the vast public and private educational systems that are available today, some parents teach their children at home, due to their confidence in the valuable teaching and learning that will occur in the context of the family. Family literacy is a familiar term in the popular press and in academia because it is an area that has been extensively studied and discussed. A tremendous body of research and instructional programs have contributed to various understandings of its nature and processes (Heath, 1983; Moll, 1990; Morrow, 1995; Taylor, 1983; 1986; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Public agencies, such as the National Center for Family Literacy, and private foundations, such as the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, have demonstrated their support of the family as a primary source of learning by funding programs that provide training and assistance to families for the promotion of literacy.
On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed a $26.5 billion dollar bill called "No Child Left Behind." In order for schools to receive funding, they must coordinate a family literacy program that involves a school-based component for adults and children, as well as a home-based component (S. Rep. No. 107, 2001).

Now is the time for literacy researchers to document literacy practices that occur in and out of school contexts and to investigate potential relationships and collaborations between formal classrooms and informal learning that occurs out of school (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

**Three Major Directions in Family Literacy Research**

In the past two decades, extensive research has been conducted in the area of family literacy. Three major directions in family literacy research have emerged: parent involvement programs, intergenerational programs and understanding the multiple contexts for literacy in family-based settings. Handel (1999) describes the first two directions in family literacy research as "either parent involvement programs whose major purposes are to help parents help their children and also support school learning and intergenerational programs that simultaneously focus on both child and adult literacy learning, that is, programs that are designed to foster literacy for parents or other adult caretakers as well as children's literacy" (p. 7).
These interventions are based on the well-established concept that important adults can influence their children's literacy development and that literacy failure can be perpetuated across generations (Sticht & McDonald, 1989).

Unfortunately, some parent involvement programs are designed because parents are being blamed for the illiteracy problems in the United States. Former United States secretary of education Terell Bell (1988) described his position with the following comment, "Not even the best classrooms can make up for failure in the family." Many scholars in education criticize family literacy programs that "focus on teaching parents to do school-like activities in the home and to assist children with homework" (Auerbach, 1989, p. 165).

The third direction of family literacy is not associated with programs or interventions, instead it focuses on the multiple contexts for literacy within family-based settings. For family literacy programs to be successful, the program developers and practitioners need to interview the adult participants to understand their individual values, family values, and community values (Gadsden, 1994; Purcell-Gates, 1993). Before family literacy programs are implemented, an understanding of some of the complex issues surrounding families and how they acquire literacy must be established.
In light of the increasing diversity in American families, more research is needed to observe the ways in which literacy and learning become socially significant in family life. This dissertation study may be compared to Taylor's (1983) seminal study of family literacy in the context of suburban middle-class America that was conducted almost twenty years ago. In Taylor's (1983) study, she documented how literacy is deeply embedded in families' lives through daily routines and values that are integral to the family setting.

A second aspect of her study documented the seamless transition for children between literacy practices in middle-class homes and literacy practices in their schools. Subsequently, researchers such as Heath (1983) demonstrated in her seminal study of three different communities the lack of congruity between schools, communities, and families that exist for non-mainstream families.

Heath's work has been followed by many researchers (Finn, 1999; Hicks, 2002; Huli & Schultz, 2002) who have documented this incongruity and have speculated about its impact on the literacy outcomes for children of non-mainstream communities. A parallel literature has emerged, one grounded in practice, that promotes training non-mainstream families to adopt middle-class literacy practices.
However, since Denny Taylor conducted her research the middle-class suburban family setting has dramatically changed. Therefore, many researchers and educators make invalid assumptions regarding how middle-class literacy is being practiced within middle-class homes. Over the last two decades, there has been an increase in the amount of time parents spend at work, and there has been an increase in the amount of technology that adults and children experience at home on a daily basis. There has also been an increased emphasis on the amount of state-mandated testing students encounter at school. In academic literature, middle-class students and their families have been portrayed as if they all experience a singular family literacy experience in their suburban homes. Cultural diversity is a bigger characteristic of families at all socioeconomic levels. Middle-class and upper-middle class children continue to have the least amount of challenge in the achievement of literacy, yet leading literacy researcher Marie Clay (1998) writes of the diverse paths to similar outcomes. This dissertation study deconstructs the myth that a single, mainstream notion of family literacy exists among suburban, middle-class families. Relatedly, it challenges the wisdom of imposing middle-class literacy practices on non-mainstream families.
By revisiting the families in middle-class America, this study will add to our modern day understanding of family literacy in the rapidly changing family setting. This study attempts to offer an in-depth approach to understanding family literacy within one context, suburban middle-class America.

The long-term implications that may result from the research include: greater sensitivity of educators to the complexity of families, the diverse ways that literacy is embedded in all families and an exploration of changes and improvements to current educational practices especially important for the non-mainstream children and families who continue to have the greatest challenges to literacy achievement. This study has the potential to bridge the gap between teachers and families and to change teachers' attitudes toward family literacy.

The Value of Diverse Families

Revisiting What It Means to Be Literate

In today's changing society, it is critical that classroom teachers understand the functions, uses, and forms of family literacy and the cultural frames their students bring to the classroom. In order to forge a successful partnership with students and families, educators and school personnel have to acknowledge and respect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of families they work with, otherwise, the partnership will be unsuccessful.
It is important when studying family literacy to have a broad perspective. This entails respecting all cultures and understanding how different families engage in literacy within their own sociocultural settings. Research has shown (Heath, 1983; Taylor-Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) that incongruities exist between school-based and home-based literacy practices and discourses. In short, not all middle-class families share the same reading, writing, and speaking practices. It is increasingly difficult to define middle-class families today. Since a seminal study of middle-class family literacy has not been conducted since Taylor (1983) conducted her study, many researchers and educators have invalid assumptions that a singular notion of middle-class family literacy practices exist within contemporary middle-class, suburban communities.

As a former teacher in the Homestead community where my research took place, I know that the Homestead student population is becoming more diverse. In fact, based on the 2002 general enrollment report for one elementary school in the Homestead City School District, twelve native languages are spoken in the student’s homes. Based on a Citizen Survey conducted in 2000, the average income for the City of Homestead was $23,749.00.
While statistics provide valuable information about a community, in this study, the focus is on understanding whether parents and children's family literacy values are connected to school-based practices. There is a body of research that indicates that non-mainstream communities do not experience the same seamless transition to middle-class school-based literacy practices even though their families are of the same socioeconomic status as other mainstream families. Even though non-mainstream families may have middle-class aspirations for their children and push education strongly, there are academic literacy discourses and values that are embedded in the middle-class culture that formerly working-class or non-mainstream families may not understand.

Educational researcher Deborah Hicks (2002) describes her personal challenges from a working-class background when she attended a school that supported middle-class school-based practices. Hicks (2002) explains, “My family had middle-class aspirations and pushed education strongly. Still, there were unique struggles I faced as a learner who later encountered academic discourses and values that initially seemed foreign and dislocating” (p. 5). There are two goals that can be obtained by learning more about the non-mainstream communities within the middle-class, suburban setting.
The first goal for researchers, educators, and school administrators is to learn about non-mainstream family literacy practices so inaccurate or inappropriate stereotypes of non-mainstream families can be reduced. The second goal for researchers, educators, and school personnel is to provide entry spaces for non-mainstream students and families within the school-based community. Research has shown that the expectations or values of non-mainstream families may be different than mainstream families. Heath (1989) explains, “Other non-mainstream sociocultural groups also hold expectations of language learning that differ markedly from schools’ majority premises about literacy. Studies of different groups of Native Americans, as well as those from any one of the several different Hispanic groups (e.g. Puerto Rican, Chicano, recent Mexican-origin, Dominican Republican, Cuban), also document the varieties of ways that young children learn to use oral and written language” (p. 372).

Homestead is rapidly becoming more diverse and it is certainly similar to many other American communities that are also becoming more diverse. There are several characteristics about contemporary American households need to be considered in modern society. In the 1950's the married-couple household was more typical than it is today, with a father who was employed, while the
mother was at home caring for the children. This is a pattern that was not
common prior to 1950's and is again disappearing.

Today, many mothers and fathers are both working long hours outside the
home and in many homes, the single parent works long hours. According to the
U.S. Bureau of the Census (1991), fifty-five percent of women with children
under a year work, and about two-thirds of women with children older than a
year have employment outside of the home. Employment figures for single
mothers is even greater.

Women are working more to help raise or sustain incomes, there has been
an increase in workforce participation for both single and married mothers. The
Children's Defense Fund (2001) states that, "Married mothers increased their
work most in the 1980's and single mothers increased their work in the 1990's" (pg. 4). There are hidden costs of working longer hours. Parents who spend
more time at work may have to spend more financial resources on child care.
Hence, more children are being raised with multiple caretakers or extended
family, changing the complexity of families.

Technology has had a tremendous impact on families in the last decade.
According to Regina Lewis (2000), "There are now more than 116 million
"wired" Americans, with that number continuing to skyrocket" (pg.4).
There are more children online than ever before and they are getting online at earlier ages. Lewis (2000) indicates from her research, "Twenty-five percent of the recently polled AOL parents say their children are coming online as early as age two, with that number climbing to 90% by age six" (pg. 125). Technology is a new form of literacy for adults and children alike. There are three basic ways that people use the computer to communicate: e-mail, instant messaging, and on-line chatting. E-mail has completely revolutionized communication among people.

It is efficient, convenient, free, and allows forwarding to more than one person at a time, with the possibility of attaching pictures and documents. Instant messages allow people who are geographically far apart to converse quickly and easily in "real time". Chat rooms and message boards provide people with an opportunity to meet new people and express thoughts and opinions with other individuals. This infusion of technology in America has stimulated a resurgence of reading and writing online. Through e-mail, computers have enabled some of the participants in this study to engage in more advanced writing than what would have been accomplished without exposure to the computer.
Statement of the Research Question

This family literacy study explores the relationship between school-based and family-based literacy in a single, suburban community, typical of the communities whose children are likely to be successful in school-based literacy. Recommendations regarding school-community partnerships will be addressed so that collaborations with educators and families working across the school-community boundary can be established.

General research questions:

1. What are the multiple contexts for literacy in contemporary suburban families?

2. What influence does the school have on the multiple contexts of family-based literacy?

Sub-questions include:

1. What do parents value in terms of literacy activities?

2. What do children value in terms of literacy activities?

C. How are print and non-traditional literacies used in the home?
Definition of Terms

Family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children and extended family members use literacy in the home and in the community. Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done." These events might include using drawings or writings to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading and writing. Family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives. Family literacy activities may also reflect the ethnic, racial, or cultural heritage of the families involved (Morrow, Paratore & Tracey, 1994, p.7).

School literacies-the learning of interpretive and communicative processes needed to adapt socially to school and other dominant language contexts, and the use or practice of those processes in order to gain a conceptual understanding of school subjects. Community literacies-the appreciation, understanding, and/or use of interpretive and communicative traditions of culture and community, which sometimes stand as critiques of school literacies. Personal literacies-the critical awareness of ways of knowing and believing about self that comes from thoughtful examination of historical or experiential and gender-specific backgrounds in school and community language settings, which sometimes stands as critiques of both school literacies and community literacies (Gallego and Hollingsworth, 2000, p.5).
Theoretical Grounding

Prior to the 1960's when children struggled in school, "deficit theories", which blamed students and families, were most commonly used for explanations for children's problems in schools. In the 1960's and 1970's, scholars in linguistics and anthropology ventured beyond the schools into family and community settings to investigate how urban schools might reach students from cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds that differed from the mainstream. Educators were concerned with the trend that students of color, especially those from low-income families, were not successful in school (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

In 1965, a forum of scholars from linguistics, education, anthropology, and psychology were united by the United States Office of Education to investigate the relationships between children's language and school success. As a result, the forum of scholars determined that children socializing in different contexts are equipped with diverse knowledge and therefore respond in uniquely different ways to school requirements (Cazden, 1981).

Szwed (1981) argued for plurality of literacies and claimed the "literacy crisis" of the 1980's was linked to the problem that educators did not know how children used literacy in their social lives.
Heath (1983) acted on the need to study the relationship between school-based learning and family-based learning. In Heath's (1983) seminal ethnography of three communities, she documented how each community—a black working class community, a white working class community, and a racially mixed middle-class community—socialized their children by using dramatically different language practices.

Ultimately, Heath concluded that each community had diverse “ways with words” and when children from each of the communities entered school, only the middle-class students, whose language practices were like the teachers, were successful. Heath’s ten year study inspired other researchers to further examine how families use language and the kind of language practices that are promoted within schools.

In a sociocultural perspective, a child’s understanding of language is understood through sociocultural activities that the individual is engaged in with others. Children actively construct their understandings about language as they interact with others in their culture.

The assumptions that create the sociocultural framework include:

• Each member of a group brings his/her history and the history of their culture.
• Routines and patterns emerge within every cultural group.
• Language and behavior is understood best when it is examined within its social context. Children are active participants in their development.
• Children learn the norms and routines of their cultural group by actively participating in the group and by receiving guidance from more skilled members.
• Children belong to multiple cultures and they learn the different perspectives that are associated with each group.
• Meaning is made through collective collaboration with others in the group.

A sociocultural framework takes a more inclusive view of language development that encompasses a larger audience of learners, including many non-mainstream learners.

Social, cultural and historical factors contribute to language development. Vygotsky’s ideas about how to study children has encouraged other researchers to consider taking a sociocultural approach when studying children. Vygotsky (1986) believed an examination of individual development must be holistic rather than some traditional theoretical frameworks, which do not keep multiple factors in mind when analyzing a child’s literacy development.

From a sociocultural framework, Taylor (1983) stated her conception of family literacy, “To facilitate literate learning, we need to know more of the ways that children from a variety of social settings initiate, absorb, and synthesize the educational influences in their environment” (pg. 93) Teaching literacy within the sociocultural context of the family is an approach described by Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988), who advocate that the cultural and social practices of a family are key considerations in the development of family literacy programs.
Auerbach's (1989) "Socio-contextual model" is congruent with Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines perspective in valuing family's cultural and social practices. Auerbach's model also acknowledges that there are family-relevant, in addition to school-relevant, ways of bringing literacy into the home. Auerbach's model recognizes the positive contributions of family members and how cultural values and practices impact literacy development.

Research Methodology

Based on the nature of the research questions for this study, I selected a research design from the qualitative research tradition. My work as an elementary school teacher from 1993-2001 within the community where I conducted my research dictated my selection of the participants as the population of this study.

Data Collection

To address my research questions, I employed methodology that generally follows the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The purpose of grounded theory methodology is "...developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 272). A methodological assumption is that the researcher cannot neatly divorce the process of data collection from the process of data analysis. Instead, data collection and analysis are concurrent, recursive, and even symbiotic.
Data collection methods, then, are grounded and informed by the data collected and analyzed. For the pilot and dissertation study, I employed three methods of data collection: a) interviews with parents and children b) observations of conversations between children, parents, and siblings, c) field notes recorded during and after data collection, d) collection of documents and artifacts.

For the pilot study, I also employed a focus group. However, I chose not to use this method of data collection for the dissertation study. The information gained from these methods was analyzed for evidence of an evolving awareness of family literacy, attitudes toward literacy, and variation in the use of literacy in the different case study sites.

**Field notes**

The main method of data collection utilized was field notes. The observations took place in four different homes. I assumed the role of participant observer while in the homes collecting data.

I tried not to interfere in the normal activities of the families. However, I did not have a completely passive presence. I responded to conversations directed towards me. This role compares with the type of participant Spradley (1980) describes as moderate participation.
The focus for the observations was on the multiple contexts for literacy for suburban families. Detailed notes were taken for all occasions when a person was reading, producing or attempting to produce written language. Careful notes were taken when non-print literacies (computer, video games, DVD players, television) were used in the home. If there was an activity that was mediated by literacy, the actions that took place, the context of the activity and the participants in the activity were clearly described in my notes.

**Interviews**

Informal interviews with parents and children were audio-taped and transcribed. The interviews took place in the home. I asked questions and listened to each participant's response.

I captured events and people through thick descriptions of events and quotes made by the participants, in order to achieve a cohesive understanding of how all of the pieces fit together.

**Pilot Study of Family Literacy**

For Phase One, I conducted a pilot study with three different families during the winter of 2001. The participants had children in my second grade classroom.
My criteria for a purposeful sample selection were based on the parents' level of involvement in their child's education program and willingness to participate in the pilot study. In order to identify the three families for participation in a study (Stake, 1994), I selected the extreme cases. Families that I could learn the most from were selected for the study (Patton, 1990). After the three families were selected for an interview, I called each parent using the phone number they provided at the beginning of the school year. At the beginning of each phone call, I identified myself and provided an oral solicitation about participating in an audio-taped interview at school. If the parent participant orally agreed to participate in an interview, then I scheduled a time for the interview. The interview was audio-taped and consisted of scripted questions.

At the end of each parent interview, I provided an oral solicitation about participating in audio-taped focus group at school. If the parent participant agreed to participate in the focus group with other parents in the study, then I scheduled a time for the focus group. The focus group session lasted forty-five minutes. In two of the families the mothers were able to attend the focus group. In one family, both parents were able to attend the focus group. The informal interviews and focus group were tools for gaining insight into the parent's
perceptions of literacy, the educational influences in their lives and personal biographies of the families.

The purpose of the pilot study was to explore family literacy in relation to affective, social and historical factors that may have influenced the presence of literacy in each home, and to understand the effectiveness of interview and focus group methods.

At the conclusion of the pilot study, I learned that prolonged engagement in each family's home would provide more fruitful data in the dissertation study. Through the pilot study, I gained an understanding of the importance for identifying critical cases for my dissertation study.

The aim of critical cases are "those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things" (Patton, 1980, p. 103). In the dissertation study the participants (parents and children) were engaged in ongoing dialogue with the researcher about their understanding of literacy for an extended period of time.

I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) in order to select the four families for participation in a collective case study (Stake, 1994). Stake (1994) identified a continuum of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case study. An intrinsic case study involves naturalistic inquiry of a certain object.
When a researcher conducts an intrinsic case study he or she has no intention of using one case to understand a generic phenomenon or to develop theory. A researcher uses an intrinsic case study to learn about the case at hand, in all its particularity.

Stake (1994) also introduced an instrumental case study in which a researcher balances interest in a certain case with an interest in a general trait or generic phenomenon. The purpose of an instrumental case study is for the researcher to use an in-depth description of the case to better understand a generic phenomenon. As a departure from exploring only one case, a researcher may also implement a collective case study in which he or she explores several cases all at once.

The collective case study, is "...not a study of the collective but instrumental study extended to several cases" (Stake, 1994, p.237). For such a study, a researcher selects multiple cases with the belief that understanding the cases will promote a richer understanding of generic phenomenon. The purpose of collective case study was to closely examine the multiple contexts for literacy in suburban families.

In Denny Taylor's seminal study of suburban literacy study almost twenty years ago, she documented the easy transition experienced by most mainstream, middle class children. Since her study, most family literacy
research has been conducted in minority communities. However, literacy learning has changed dramatically for all families in the context of standards, testing and technology. By returning to Denny Taylor's context of suburban literacy, I carefully selected middle-class families that are representative of parents who work full and part time. For instance, in one family both of the parents work full time, in two of the families one parent works full time while the other parent works part time. In one family, one parent works full time while the other parent stays at home. As well as a family that represents the growing cultural diversity in suburban, middle-class America. There is one immigrant Vietnamese family and three White Caucasian families in the study. I included four diverse critical case studies in order to highlight the adaptations that families must make today. Two of the selected families had children in my second grade classroom during the 2000-2001 school year. The two other families I met while working in the community for 1993-2001; however, their children were not former students.

In Phase Two of the study, I called each parent to obtain permission. At the beginning of the phone call, I identified myself and provided an oral solicitation about participating in the study. If the parent orally agreed to participate in the study, then I scheduled a time for the first visit to the home site.
At the sites for the collective case study, I provided each participant with a written solicitation letter and consent letter in order to secure his or her informed consent before the case study began. After the participant read the written solicitation letter, had an opportunity to ask me any additional questions about the study, and signed the consent letter, the case study began.

In order to protect the identity of the community and participants in the study, I used pseudonyms for each participant and for the name of the community. Data from this study was shared with my dissertation committee members, in classroom situations, education conferences, and in education journals. I will store the interview audio-tapes and the field notes in my file cabinet at home.

Data Analysis

I read through my transcribed participant interview and my field notes for the collective case study, using Spradley's (1980) domain analysis, in order to develop conceptual domains. Then I coded the data according to these domains. Based on this coding of data, I searched for emerging patterns within and across the domains.

The validity of these patterns was based on: the triangulation of evidence from a variety of data sources—interviews, field notes, and collective case study; member checks; and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Member checks value the emic perspective of the participants by including their review of the transcription of interviews. Member checks attempt to bring the voice of the "researched" into the research process. Yet, grounded theory methodology delegates responsibility with the researcher for analyzing data and writing the study. Therefore, I take full responsibility for the write up of the research, but member checks informed the editing of the research write-up.

Peer debriefing provides the researcher with the opportunity to discuss the research process with someone who understands qualitative research. Different from member checks, peer debriefing brings in the perspectives of a peer who is not involved in the study. I selected a doctoral student in education at The Ohio State University to serve as a peer debriefer. Throughout the study, we met monthly to discuss the research design, fieldwork, and data analysis.

Limitations

Understanding the limitations of this study can help the reader make sense of the findings and implications of the study. In this section, one limitation of the study is highlighted. The study took place in one suburban community. As a result, the findings are limited to a small number of families within one suburban community.
Organization of the Dissertation

The report of this study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides the background for the study, a statement of the research question, definition of terms, theoretical framework, an overview of research methodology, and limitations. Chapter Two presents an integrated review of the literature in the diverse nature of family literacy, school-based literacy: a sociopolitical perspective, and home-based literacy. Divided into five sections, Chapter Three describes the research methodology used in the study. Section One describes the chief epistemological and methodological assumptions for this study. Section Two describes the research question. Section Three includes the methods of data collection, data analysis, and considerations for the establishment of trustworthiness. Section Four suggests ethical considerations of the study. Chapter Four includes five main sections: 1) Description of the Families; 2) The Multiple Contexts for Literacy for Middle-Class Family Literacy; 3) The Role of Increased Technology in Middle-Class Family Literacy; 4) The Relationship Between Family-Based and School-Based Literacy; and 5) The Role of State Mandated Testing in Middle-Class Family Literacy. The report of the study concludes with Chapter Five which contains a summary of the study and its major findings, a discussion of the study's contribution to four bodies of research literature and substantive
recommendations for further research, methodological recommendations for further research, and policy implications.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the functions, uses, and forms of family-based literacy and its relationship to school-based literacy in four suburban, middle-class families. This study deconstructs the myth of a single, mainstream concept of suburban family literacy, it attempts to offer an in-depth approach to understanding middle-class children and families who have experienced success and failure in their passage across the school-community boundary. Finally, this study documents family literacy practices in a new historical period that has been significantly influenced by a renaissance of technology and school-based standards and testing. Given the purpose of the study, it is important to position it with respect to three areas of the literature: the diverse nature of literacy, school-based literacy: a sociopolitical perspective, and home-based literacy. For this literature review, I examine research from each of the five areas.
The diverse nature of literacy addresses the dramatically changing nature of literacy in the context of standards, testing and technology. The explanation of the sociocultural perspectives provide a context for literacy and language development in the family setting. The school-based literacy literature explores the nature of school-based literacy and the cultural values of the teacher and students. Finally, the family-based literacy literature examines the nature of home-based literacy and the cultural values of the family.

**Diverse Nature of Literacy Learning in Families**

A sociocultural perspective understands that social, cultural and historical factors contribute to language and literacy development. In this section, I review literature on how literacy learning has dramatically changed from a historical perspective for all families in the context of standards, testing, and technology. The current study focuses on the use of technology in the homes and its role in literacy. The study explores the nature of parental beliefs about testing.

Nineteenth century families in the United States lived and practiced literacy very differently than twentieth century families live and practice literacy today.
Given the diverse nature of literacy learning in families during the last century, it is important to position this chapter with respect to three areas of the literature: contemporary suburban families, sociocultural perspectives, and contemporary literacy development.

Contemporary Suburban Families

Today, middle-class families living in the United States are more diverse than in previous times. In some families, the mother works while the father stays home to rear the children; in some families, the mother cares for the children at home while the father works outside of the home. There are families that have both parents working full or part time; some parents work split shifts so both parents can care for the children. There are single parent households headed by women or men. There are families that include children from previous marriages and children from the current marriage. There are families that have grandparents who raise their grandchildren. In some families both parents are of the same sex. Regardless of the family orientation, the number of children in each family has declined. According to the 1991 U.S. Bureau of the Census, in the 49 percent of the families that have children under the age of 18, the families only had only one or two children. The number of families having more than two children is small, the 1991 U.S. Bureau of the Census indicated only 10 percent of all American families have three or more children.
As mentioned in chapter one, the role of the mother in contemporary families has changed as women are working more to raise or sustain incomes. The U.S. Bureau of Census, indicated that fifty-five percent of the women with children under one year of age work, and about two-thirds of women with children older than a year have employment outside of the home. The changing role of the mother has made an impact on families. Brooks (1994) explains, "Financial pressures create day-to-day problems, and cause parents to experience increased irritability, depression, and demoralization" (P. 16).

Brooks also (1994) found parents who experience stress are more irritable with children and they are less likely to give children affection. Children who receive less affection are prone to suffer more emotional problems. When a parent or caregiver is under too much stress, they will not be able to offer the praise, nurturing, and direction that children need for healthy development (Brooks, 1994).

Other societal problems that impact children and families include the lack of safety in schools and communities due to an increase in weapon possession in the United States. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, Department of Justice, Center of Disease Control, and the National School Safety Center (1999) examined common elements of school-related violent
deaths that occurred when someone was in transit to and from school or a
school-sponsored event.

The following findings were documented:

* Less than 1% of all homicides among school-aged children (5-19 years of age)
  occur in or around school grounds or on the way to and from school.
* 65% of school-associated violent deaths were students; 11% were teachers or
  other staff members; 23% were community members killed on school proper-
  ty. * 83% of school homicide or suicide victims were males.
* 28% of the fatal injuries happened inside the school building; 36% occured
  outdoors on school property; and 35% occurred off campus.
* The deaths included in this study occurred in 25 states across the country and
  happened in both primary and secondary schools and communities of all sizes.

Based on the research addressing firearm-related injuries and
interventions to prevent youth violence in schools and in the community, a
coordinated effort across the school and community boundary must be
established.

According to research projects conducted by the Center of Disease Control
(1999), "The projects found that effective strategies include school-based
curricula that emphasize the development of addition, parenting programs that
promote strong bonding between parents and children that teach parents skills
in managing conflict in the family, as well as mentoring programs for young
people, are also very promising" (p. 3).

**Sociocultural Perspectives**

It is important to begin this section by defining the term literacy. Literacy
deserves a broad definition that acknowledges the family’s social reality and
focuses on the family’s strengths (Auerbach, 1989). Unfortunately, literacy is
often narrowly defined as school-based literacy practices in the school setting.
or school-based practices that are being performed in the family setting.

Researchers studying emergent literacy understand that language development begins long before a child uses his or her first words (Bruner, 1978). However, there is a significant body of research that discusses the extensive volume of literacy that occurs in out-of-school contexts (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

Social Interactionist Approaches

In this section of the literature review, I discuss social interactionist approaches in an effort to better understand the relationship between family-based settings and young children's literacy development. A prominent figure to sociocultural theory is Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky offered a unique explanation of language development which is a social interactionist approach. Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist who began his work in the 1920's. One of the major beliefs of Vygotsky's theory is the role of children in their own development. Children are not passive receptacles that are filled with information by more knowledgeable adults. Instead, children actively participate in the construction of their own understandings, which take place in collaboration with other members of the culture (Corsaro, 1997). Vygotsky's perspective differs from Piaget's viewpoint in that Vygotsky did not think development occurred in distinct stages. Vygotsky believed that higher mental functions developed by participating in social activities (Wertsch, 1989). As
children make attempts to deal with everyday problems, they learn from their interaction with others around them (Corsaro, 1997). Vygotsky believed that a teacher's role in student learning is to constantly monitor and challenge the child within his or her zone of proximal development (Santrock, 2000).

Vygotsky defined the Zone of Proximal Development as "the distance between actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). The zone of proximal development is defined by the difference between a child's test performances under two different conditions: with or without help. A Vygotskian approach to learning emphasizes the social contexts of learning and that knowledge can be mutually built and constructed.

A sociocultural perspective understands social, cultural and historical factors that contribute to language and literacy development. The social component and the amount of participation needed by adults and children in learning activity have been critical elements to consider in contemporary literacy development.
A study conducted by Rogoff, Matusov and White (1996) at the OC School in Salt Lake City School District involved parents' participation in an optional school program working in classrooms three hours per week (per child). During the study some of the parents at the OC school were interviewed about their opinions of how learning is defined. Based on the parent interviews there were three different theoretical notions of learning that existed amongst parents.

Some parents viewed education as learning that should be directed by adults because they were the "experts" who should transmit knowledge to the children. Some parents viewed education as learning that should be directed by children because the children will acquire knowledge through their own active exploration. The researchers call the first two approaches to learning "one-sided" approaches to learning. Finally, some parents viewed education as a combination of both active learning by the children along with more skilled guidance from adults. Therefore, learning is viewed as a collaboration amongst adults and children in a community of learners. The community of learners model is not a blend of the two "one-sided" approaches, it is a distinct instructional model that is based on a different philosophy. The purpose of the study was to determine "what is learned through the kind of participation that
occurs in learning activities structured according to the different models”

(Rogoff, Matusov and White, 1996, p. 390).

The researchers discovered in the study that children learn best through social collaboration with others, and by being responsible for managing their own learning. This is considered a community based model of learning. This is very different than an adult run model of learning that expects children to compare their performance with others and to carry out tasks that are not meaningful or interesting to them.

Also in the adult run model, a child’s performance is judged in comparison to others. This study made an impact on my thinking as a researcher because it enabled better insight into how parents perceive teaching and learning.

Technology

This section explores how technology, from a historical perspective, has had a tremendous impact on contemporary literacy development in the last decade. Technology is a new form of literacy for both adults and children. Young people are growing up in an increasingly connected society and they feel comfortable with technology as a new form of literacy.
According to a recent study (2002) conducted by America Online of parents with children online the following positive results were reported regarding online technology:

- 71% said the computer had improved the quality of their children's homework;
- 70% said the computer had a positive effect on their children's skills for entering the job market someday;
- 64% said the computer had enhanced the quality of their children's overall written communication; and
- 56% said the computer had increased their children's interest in hobbies.

There are pros and cons to children's involvement with the computer. Computers have been integrated so rapidly into homes and schools, that the impact that computers have on mental development and academic achievement is unknown. Dr. David Elkind explains the differing opinions surrounding the advantages and disadvantages of the computers in his book Miseducation of Preschoolers at Risk.

Some people in our society believe the computer is a cultural tool that will enhance intellectual potential; other people perceive the computer simply as an additional technological piece of equipment used to promote efficiency at work (Anderson & Wilkins, 1998). Computers, when compared to television, have more to offer in terms of social interaction because the computer is interactive and it demands participation.
Parents indicate that 60% of their children's overall computer time is used for writing papers and exploring information, and children like to work collaboratively with brothers and sisters on computer projects (Anderson & Wilkins, 1998). Computer games have distinct benefits when played in moderation by children. First of all, computer games allow children to become acquainted with the mouse and improve the hand-eye coordination that is required with the computer.

Reasoning and drawing skills are enhanced through computer games. Finally, computer games can be used as a motivational springboard for children to learn more computer skills beyond simple games on the computer. (Anderson and Wilkins, 1998).

The Internet

The Internet allows people to communicate with one another in a world commonly called "cyberspace". Anderson and Wilkins (1998) explain how the Internet began, "Created in the 1960's to protect defense data from nuclear attack, the Internet is a worldwide network of computer networks. It is in the center lane of the so-called information superhighway" (p. 69). There are advantages and disadvantages of the Internet which parents and educators should consider.
I will provide a cursory review of the benefits to the Internet, then I will describe some of the drawbacks of the Internet that parents need to consider to ensure a safe online experience for their children. The computer provides three basic ways for people to communicate: e-mail, instant messaging, and chat. E-mail has completely revolutionized communication amongst people. It is efficient, convenient, free, and allows forwarding to more than one person at a time, with the possibility of attaching pictures and documents. Instant messages allow people who are geographically far apart to converse quickly and easily.

Chat rooms and message boards provide the opportunity to meet new people and express thoughts and opinions with other individuals. This renaissance of technology in America has stimulated a resurgence of reading, writing, and research online. Through e-mail, computers have enabled some of the participants in this study to engage in more advanced writing and research than what would have been accomplished without exposure to the computer. A benefit of the Internet is the quick access it provides to libraries all over the world. Children can access information from the Library of Congress to enhance their learning at home and school.
If children have access to computer technology at home, they can do research alone, or with the support of caregivers, this is a benefit that would not have been envisioned ten years ago (Anderson & Wilkins, 1998).

According to Regina Lewis (2000), an advisor for AOL Online, "There are now more than 116 million "wired" Americans, with that number continuing to skyrocket" (pg. 4). There are more children online than ever before and they are getting online at earlier ages. Lewis (2000) indicates from her research, "Twenty-five percent of the recently polled AOL parents say their children are coming online as early as age two, with that number climbing to 90% by age six" (pg. 125).

The Internet is not monitored or censored by the United States government and it is a place for people to express themselves and "is an outlet for freedom of speech in the broadest sense" (Anderson & Wilkins, 1998, p. 70). Unfortunately, due to the uncensored nature of the Internet, some children use the computer to explore pornography and violence that most parents would consider inappropriate. Therefore, parents and caregivers can ensure a safe online experience for their children by employing parental controls technology and by spending time with children on the computer. Lewis (2000) explains, "Parental controls let parents control the content that your children
can access, whether or not they're allowed to use e-mail and instant messaging, and even how much time they spend online" (p. 142).

Due to the introduction of the Internet and the computer, many American children and families are engaged in a new historical period that provides a diverse context for technology literacy learning. Children can use computers to expand their thinking, research, writing, drawing and reading skills. Children can communicate to friends and family members in different places throughout the world by e-mail. Unfortunately, children can use computers as a way to explore areas that portray sex and violence too.

It is apparent that in the new millenium, school-based and family-based learning is embedded in a new historical period of literacy learning with technology. Therefore, educators, parents and caregivers must spend time learning what children do online to ensure a safe online experience for children.

The Importance of Social Relationships in Language Acquisition

Children are not passive; instead they are actively constructing an understanding of language which takes place collectively with other members of the culture (Corsaro, 1997). Development does not take place in distinct stages; rather, higher mental functions develop as a result of participation in social activities (Wertsch, 1989) and "attempts to deal with everyday problems" (Corsaro, 1997, pg. 15).
Mikhail Bakhtin had similar beliefs about the impact of social relationships on language development as Lev Vygotsky. Bakhtin was a linguist, writer, philosopher and literary critic. The concept of dialogicality is based on the belief that "when we use language, whether oral or written, we enter into a dialogue, a relationship with others" (Dyson, 1995, pg.8). Bakhtin views dialogue as a series of utterances or units of communication (Wertsch, 1989). Utterances differ from sentences as a unit of language; an utterance could be made up of phrases, a sentence or a group of sentences. When engaged in dialogue with another person, a response is expected when an utterance is used. Utterances are layered on top of one another, they are situated within the context of the moment. Each individual utterance derives its meaning from the "unique sociocultural space" it holds in the interaction of certain speakers within a specific context (Dyson, 1995).

The meaning held by each speaker must be taken into consideration, in addition to the words or signs which they are capable of using for communication. Bakhtin's critical contributions to the sociocultural approach focused on social situatedness of communication, as well as historical and cultural influences that prevent any utterance from being neutral. In conclusion,
the study of language alone is incomplete; social relationships in the context of language must be considered.

**Social Situatedness of Communication**

Social situatedness of communication is a body of scholarship that provides important guidance and a foundation of understanding for the relationship of school culture to language and literacy acquisition. One of the key questions of the current study is: What influence does the school have on conversations and activities about family-based literacy? Answering this question leads to an exploration of the following studies that discuss the importance of social situatedness of communication within peer culture. In the first study conducted by Anne Dyson, she discusses “the multiple social worlds of the classroom” (Dyson, 1993, pg. 3). Dyson conducted an ethnographic study in an K-1 urban classroom in the San Francisco East Bay. Dyson was a participant observer in the classroom for several years.

Dyson vividly describes the complexity that exists when the multiple social worlds of the children become interconnected in the classroom. The three worlds Dyson described include, “the official school world, in which they were students, the peer world, in which they were co-workers (and perhaps friends), and the world of their respective communities, which re-formed in the classroom amidst a network of peers” (Dyson, 1993, pg. 4).
The teacher in Dyson's study understood and incorporated a Vygotskian theory of language development into the classroom. The teacher carefully crafted the language she used with her children so that it reflected Vygotsky's theory of language development which is embedded in the teacher's beliefs of how children learn language from those around them. For example, within the classroom context of a career unit, the teacher addressed critical issues of gender within language by asking the children why the word police officer is used instead of the word police woman.

According to Dyson (1993) children borrow knowledge from their unofficial worlds (home and community) to help engage in their official worlds (school). Dyson states, "These worlds were formed in response to adult-governed worlds, but they were collaboratively enacted within the life space of the children. In this enactment, the children appropriated social stances and discourse acts of others, including adults (Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1962; Wertsch, 1991), but they used them in their social spheres" (Dyson, 1993, pg. 52).

In Dyson's study, it was apparent that some children had more social skills than others in the classroom. Some children were more capable of not only understanding cultural knowledge but also putting that knowledge to use in social interactions with peers.
For example, one child participant, Jameel, was able to make an "inroad" between the official school sphere and the unofficial school sphere by creating songs with information from his unofficial, school sphere. When Jameel performed the song for the class, he was staking a claim and communicating to his peers that he could stand up for himself and at the same time remain devoted to his peer culture. This exemplifies Jameel's creative use of an inroad amongst the two spheres: official and unofficial.

The current dissertation study examines the following question: What do children value in terms of literacy activities? Dyson's study influenced any understanding of the relationship between peer culture values and children's literacy efforts. Dyson's study of peer culture examined how children used their writing narratives as a method of defending themselves from other peer criticism or as a method to criticize other peers.

The children's writing was influenced by their social work amongst peers, and it took place within their unofficial worlds. The students' unofficial worlds were those worlds that involved their peers and their families not their "school worlds." Dyson's study clearly documents that social and familial relationships influence children's literacy values and that children become members of special communities within their classrooms.
School-Based Literacy: A Sociopolitical Perspective

In this section, I review literature on the relationship between school-based literacy and the values of the students, parents, and the teacher in a classroom setting. During the last two decades, researchers from a range of disciplines have documented a dichotomy between children's out-of-school literacy behavior and in-school settings (Heath, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Taylor-Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

The ethnographic studies of Heath (1983) and Ladson-Billings (1994) demonstrate the critical role of culturally-relevant teaching practices by bridging home and community practices with school and classroom practices, that will ultimately lead to academic success. School-based curriculum is generally based on middle-class literacy practices and values. Therefore, students who are from non-mainstream family settings often encounter problems in making the shift to middle-class, school-based expectations since they differ from their own literacy experiences in their home settings (Auerbach, 1989). Moll (1992) is a researcher who is an advocate of culturally-relevant teaching and he worked with Latino communities in the Southwest. Moll challenges educators to redefine the relationship between in-school and out-of-school contexts. He recommends that teachers invite community members into the classroom to share their funds of knowledge or areas of expertise. Ultimately, the children's
interest and investment in the curriculum may be invigorated. For members of the educational community, Moll's research demonstrates that funds of knowledge from out-of-school can be used to bridge communities of classrooms by recognizing the expertise of parents and community members. The first step in bridging home-based and school-based learning is to intimately understand both settings. I will first describe a review of literature surrounding school-based learning.

School-based settings are co-created by the students and teacher during the school year. John-Steiner, Panofsky & Smith (1994) explain, "...contexts shape and are shaped by individuals, tools {e.g., literacy practices}, resources, intentions, and ideas in a particular setting, within a particular time...Contexts are fluid and dynamic, constantly reconstituting themselves within activity" (Grabe & Walsh, 1998, p. 11).

The classroom context is influenced by classroom members' background and cultural experience. Therefore, a classroom member's position and participation in classroom social life is influenced by his or her social interaction and ability to incorporate the "...ways of thinking valued by the group" (Goodnow, 1993, p. 373).
Consequently, successful participation in classroom literacy practices requires students to assimilate the cultural identities of the group or divorce themselves from the family and community cultural values (Bloome & Green, 1984).

Some children who enter school-based settings will learn school-related language that may be unfamiliar to them. Other children will enter school already familiar with school-related language that they learned when reading books or writing at home with their caregivers or school-aged siblings. Language is used as a vehicle in the classroom for children to learn by using "the discourses that situationally define "what counts" as knowing (and reading and writing) within disciplines" (Hicks, 1996, p. 61). When children engage in reading and writing in the classroom they learn new social and academic discourse repertoires (Kantor, Green, Bradley & Lin, 1992).

The two research studies employed by Heath (1983) and Ladson-Billings (1994) investigated the language practices in school-based settings and in out-of-school based settings. I will briefly describe those findings now, and they will be described in more depth later in the chapter. In Heath's (1983) seminal research study, she documented that middle-class students, whose language practices are like the teachers, are more successful in school.
Nevertheless, some individual students come to school equipped with community-based language practices and values that may differ from the valued mainstream practices of the school. Based on her study, Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that teachers' who attempt to establish culturally relevant teaching influence students' success in school.

The sociocultural research in the last two decades investigated literacy learning as socially constructed activity embedded in multiple contexts: classroom, homes and communities. Cochran-Smith's (1984) ethnographic study explored the interrelatedness of different layers of context that support story reading at school: the classroom activity of rug time, off-the-rug activities, the general nursery-school environment, and the community's literacy beliefs. The community's literacy beliefs are comprised of the children's home and cultural values, and the teacher's home and cultural values. The multiple layers within the classroom context can not be understood as separate entities because the layers are interrelated and influence each other.

In Rogoff's (1995) seminal sociocultural research, she identified three planes of analysis: personal, interpersonal, and community. Rogoff argues that these planes are not hierarchical, but are best understood as interrelated with the whole sociocultural activity. Based on Rogoff's planes of analysis, literacy learning is not an individual activity performed in isolation of others.
Instead literacy learning is a situated activity performed within the personal, interpersonal, and community planes of action. In short, the local context (e.g.s. the classroom context or the home context) literacy activity is situated within, and cannot be divorced from the larger community context. As Graue & Walsh (1998) explain, "the local context is embedded in the many larger nested and overlapping contexts" (p.10).

Children's literacy experiences and values constructed in the home are linked to the classroom and the new experiences and meaning children gained in school are linked to the home. Dyson's (1993) research, previously described in this chapter, demonstrates that teachers who co-construct a permeable curriculum in concert with children's sociocultural worlds are successful at bridging children's family-based and school-based experiences.

**Parental Participation**

I will now describe a review of literature surrounding parental support and its relationship to school-based literacy. Most educators agree that parents play a crucial role in their children's education. According to Walberg & Greenburg (1991) from pre-school through high school, parents control eighty-seven percent of their children's waking time. This high percentage clearly calls for the parent to be intimately involved with their child's literacy activities in-school and out-of-school.
Reading is one very important activity requiring parental involvement (Walberg & Greenburg, 1991). Since reading is an essential survival skill, effective parental involvement can motivate children to master reading skills and maintain enthusiasm for reading for life. Edward's (1992) parental involvement research enlightened my thinking as a researcher because it illustrated some teacher's viewpoints about parental support based on common-sense, practical thinking instead of research based knowledge.

Prior to and during the 1960's if children struggled in school, deficit theories, which blamed students and families, were most commonly and explicitly used as explanations of children's problems in school. Edwards's (1992) research however indicates that many teachers still believe that there is a strong correlation between students' poor performance in school and parents lack of involvement in school. Students' home lives are blamed for their low achievement in school. Teachers report that parents of students who are having difficulty in school seldom attend scheduled parent-teacher conferences or return teacher's phone calls. They do not volunteer to help with school activities. Teachers complain that parents do not respond to information or messages that are sent home. Teachers often think that parents do not reinforce the activities that are taught at school. They rarely visit the school to observe or discuss their child's progress (Edwards, 1992).
After reflecting on Edward's research, it became apparent to me that some teachers need a more in-depth and accurate understanding of family literacy within the homes where their students reside. When teachers invite parents into the classroom, consistently communicate with parents, and devote time to nurturing a relationship with families, student success is more likely to occur. Sometimes, the families do not respond to the teachers' or school's request for communication. Unfortunately, many teachers do not recognize the many possible reasons why the parents are not using the "typical" forms of communication that the school is accustomed to. For example, the parents may be illiterate, the teachers may not accommodate the parents' work schedules, or the parents may feel intimidated by the school or teacher due to cultural incongruence. Teachers who lack knowledge about family literacy may rely on deficit theories to explain the relationship between school-based and home-based literacy. In Chapter Five, communication between homes and schools will be discussed in further detail.
Family-Based Literacy

The Context for the Family Literacy Trend

In this section, I review literature on family-based literacy and explore the relationship of family-based literacy to school-based literacy. There is an extensive body of family literacy research that indicates that a) children develop their basic cognitive and language skills in out-of-school contexts (Goodman, 1980; Sticht & McDonald, 1989; Teale, 1986); b) prior to formal schooling literacy learning occurs in the context of family-based activities (Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986); c) school-based achievement and test scores are increased for children who reside in homes with more books and whose parents have more education (Applebee, Langer & Mullins, 1988).

Due to the passage of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation in January of 2002 (S. Rep. NO. 107, 2001) which urges a coordinated effort between schools and families, now is the time to document literacy practices that occur in out-of-school contexts and to investigate potential relationships and collaborations between formal classrooms and informal learning that occurs out-of-school (Hull and Schultz, 2002).

Education scholars agree that the relationship between school-based and family-based literacy needs to be studied. However, recommendations regarding
how the school-community partnerships will work across the school-community boundary may differ.

**Three Major Directions in Family Literacy Research**

In the past two decades, extensive research has been conducted in the field of family literacy. Scholars from linguistics, education, anthropology, and psychology have studied families and schools to determine how children are socialized differently in the settings of home and school. Nonetheless, three major directions in family literacy research have emerged: parent involvement programs, intergenerational programs, and understanding the multiple contexts for literacy in family based settings. Handel (1999) describes the first two directions in family literacy research as "...a) parent involvement programs whose major purpose is to help parents help their children and also support school learning and b) intergenerational programs that focus on both child and adult literacy learning, that is, programs that are designed to foster literacy for parents or other adult caretakers as well as children's literacy" (p. 7).

These interventions are based on the well established concepts—that important adults can influence their children’s literacy development and recognizing that literacy failure can be perpetuated across generations (Sticht & McDonald, 1989).
The third direction of family literacy that is explored in this dissertation study is not associated with programs or interventions; instead it focuses on the multiple contexts for literacy within family-based settings.

**Parent Involvement Programs**

In this section, I describe how concern about low literacy rates, unemployment and insufficient work skills for competition in the global market (see Shor, 1986, for an in-depth analysis) are at the root of educational change. When there is no apparent solution in the school setting for these societal problems, society turns its attention to the parents role in their child’s literacy development at home (Auerbach, 1989). Unfortunately, some parent involvement programs are designed because parents are being blamed for the illiteracy problems. Former secretary of education Terell Bell (1988) described his position with the following comment, "Not even the best classrooms can make up for failure in the family."

Many scholars in education criticize family literacy programs that “focus on teaching parents to do school-like activities in the home and to assist children with homework” (Auerbach, 1989, p. 165). In short, parent involvement programs cannot be limited to a desire to break the cycle of illiteracy (Purcell-Gates, 1993).
Instead "a broader definition of family literacy that acknowledges the family's social reality and focuses on the family's strengths" (Auerbach, 1989, p. 165) would be more meaningful for families and is based on sound research conducted with families (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1993; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

For parent involvement programs to be successful, the program developers and practitioners need to interview the adult participants to understand their individual values, family values, and community values (Gadsden, 1994; Purcell-Gates, 1993). Before family literacy programs are implemented, an understanding of some of the complex issues surrounding families and how they acquire literacy must be established. Purcell-Gates (1993) explains, "We, as a nation, can no longer simplistically conclude that poverty results in low literacy.

The relationships among poverty, literacy level of the family, and opportunities for young children to learn about print within the family context are much more complex; and, at this time, the exact nature of these relationships is unknown. Thus, one of the crucial issues for research into family literacy is to describe better the separate and interdependent ways in which poverty, low literacy, and children's "readiness" to learn in school interact" (p. 671).
Family literacy programs must be developed on solid scholarly research instead of inaccurate assumptions based on common sense thinking. In a deficit driven family literacy program “homes of low-income and minority students and of students who speak English as a second language (ESL) are considered “literacy impoverished,” with limited reading materials and with parents who neither read themselves nor read to their own children, who do not provide models of literacy use, and do not value or support literacy development” (Auerbach, 1989, p. 169). However, there are a compelling number of studies (Chall & Snow, 1982; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Diaz, Moll & Mehan, 1986; Goldenburg, 1984; Purcell-Gates, 1993; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) that have refuted the belief that low-income, minority, and immigrant families don’t value or actively support literacy development.

In some cases with immigrant families, the parents understand the value of school as a vehicle to change their children’s status in society so they nurture and support their children’s efforts to become successful in school. Some families even come to the United States primarily for a better education for their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987).
Multiple Contexts of Family-Based Literacy

In this section, I describe how the current study substantively contributes to research in family-based literacy. I close with a discussion of how the methodology of the current study complements the methodologies used in this area of research. In this section, family literacy is not associated with programs or interventions; instead, it focuses on the multiple contexts for literacy within family-based settings.

Since the 1960's and 1970's scholars have explored beyond the school-based settings to the family and community-based settings to investigate how schools might reach students from cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds that differed from the mainstream (HuLi and Schultz, 2002). Family literacy researchers have focused their attention on the relationships, behaviors, and contexts that promote sharing of literacy practices and knowledge among family members. Both Taylor (1983) and Heath (1983) conducted ethnographies of family literacy.

In these scholarly investigations the researchers became members of the culture and studied the families through participant observation. This allowed them to witness the ways literacy was used in the homes.
Denny Taylor's (1983) classic three year study of six families of proficient readers, which introduced the term "family literacy," discovered that parents of successful readers deliberately avoided teaching literacy because they recalled their own negative experiences with learning how to read when they were in school, and they did not want to teach reading using that same mundane method. Taylor found that within each of the families she studied, the parents were essentially unaware that they were teaching literacy to their children. The literacy events that the parents and the children participated in together naturally evolved as part of their daily lives. Taylor (1981) concluded, "In the families participating in this study, literacy is deeply embedded in the social processes of family life and is not some specific list of activities added to the family agenda to specifically teach reading." (pg. 92).

Another study by Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) among poor urban families confirmed the findings that Taylor (1983) found in her first study among middle-class families--learning to read takes place on a daily basis as part of everyday life. Literacy is integrated in socially significant ways into many parts of family life.
There was a study conducted at Harvard University by Jeanne Chall and Catherine Snow (1982) that determined that indirect factors influencing a child's school achievement includes frequency of children's outings with adults, the number of maternal outings, the emotional climate of the home, the amount of time spent interacting with adults, the amount of financial stress for the parents, and enrichment activities. Parental advocacy at the schools had a greater impact on quality of reading and writing than parents directly helping with literacy activities such as reading homework.

**Culturally Relevant Literacy**

Shirley Brice Heath (1983) created a landmark work in her *Ways With Words* when she showed that children from low income families in the South were demonstrating literacy practices that were previously unrecognized.

Heath examined the literacy behaviors in three different communities: Trackton, Roadville, and the mainstream communities of the Piedmont Carolinas. Heath's goal was to study the effects of preschool, home, and community environment on children's language development that is required for classrooms and jobs. She documented the diverse communication amongst the different families within different communities that she studied.
Her work demonstrated how in a small geographical area, multiple literacies exist and all of them are culturally significant because they are embedded within families and are valued by the families. Trackton is a black working-class community. The people of Trackton originally were farmers and are now working in mills. Roadville is a white-working class community of families who have worked for four generation in textile mills. These two communities are only a few miles apart from each other. The two communities are surrounded by neighborhoods of black and white mainstreamers who have held the power in the mills, schools and retail businesses. Her research made a significant impact on how language development is understood from a culturally-relevant perspective; she heightened the educational community's awareness of the multiple viewpoints surrounding literacy in out-of-school contexts. Heath's research is a seminal study of language socialization and family literacy. She found that the literacy present in Trackton and Roadville had different conceptions of story and story-telling and that reading and writing events occurred in different ways and for different purposes in the groups.

The children of Trackton gained attention from others by performing, and they used language in songs, tales, and rhymes to attract attention to themselves. Parental protection was not as valued in Trackton. Therefore, the children
spent a lot of their time from the toddler stage onward, in common outdoor areas unattended by adults and among peers. In Trackton, little structured, school-related learning took place in the home. Some children attended preschool, but for the most part the children were unprepared for their school-based experiences.

The Roadville children had more parent supervision and more structured literacy experiences. For example, parents read to them and asked them questions about the reading. They were more likely to attend preschool. The children of Roadville had a greater understanding of the value of reading compared to the children of Trackton. In the beginning, children in Roadville were successful in school, although they gradually fell further and further behind and were waiting to drop out of school. The Roadville children had very few positive feelings about school and hoped they could remain in school long enough to get their diploma. Heath's study unveiled the unfortunate fact that all of these children had the right to be successful in school and could have been successful in school.

The school system and the educators did not understand or value the literacy skills that were embedded in their culture and out-of-school family settings. They were forced to fit into a system, a box, in which they were not capable of fitting into, and they failed.
It is apparent that the socialization habits of the three groups differ greatly, and only those of the mainstreamers seem to fit the expectations of the school and other mainstream institutions.

The United States can no longer simplistically associate low family literacy with poverty. Purcell-Gates (1983) explains, "The relationships—among poverty, literacy level of the family, and opportunities for young children to learn about print within the family context—are much more complex; and, at this time, the exact nature of these relationships is unknown" (p. 671). Teachers can build more effective relationships with families at school if they have more knowledge about the culturally relevant literacy practices in out-of-school settings.

Recommendations regarding the need to bridge school-based and family-based literacy practices will be focused on in Chapter Five. Chapter Five contains a summary of the study and its major findings, a discussion of the study's contribution to four bodies of research literature, substantive and methodological recommendations for further research, and policy implications.

Given the purpose of the current study is to investigate the multiple contexts for middle-class family literacy, and to determine whether the school has an influence on the multiple contexts of family-based literacy practices, research literature germane to the study's purpose was reviewed.
In this chapter, a review of the areas of the diverse nature of literacy, literacy and language development, peer culture, school-based literacy, and home-based literacy provided a means of positioning the current study within the existing research literature.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to investigate the literacy practices of four middle-class families and to present findings about the relationship between school-based and family-based literacy. In this chapter, I present the methodological framework that has guided this study, including a description of the study’s data collection and analysis processes. After I describe the rationale of my research methodology, I provide a statement of the research questions for this study. Next, I outline in detail the research design: sites, access, data collection, pilot study, collective case studies, data analysis, and trustworthiness. I close the chapter with a discussion of the chief ethical concerns involved with this study.
Rationale of Research Methodology

Research questions that explore the meanings and values that people ascribe to certain behaviors and events, such as the research questions in this dissertation study, are best understood through qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is founded on methods established in the fields of sociology, history, and anthropology. In the respective fields, researchers are interested in studying about individual behaviors and communication. In qualitative research, the researcher’s ultimate goal is to become knowledgeable about the meaning and values of others by observing and interacting with the research participants. Some of the research techniques that are frequently used in qualitative research include open-ended interviewing, participant observation, observation, and document analysis. According to Bogden and Biklen (1982), using a variety of these methods can help the researcher to establish thick descriptions of the behaviors, events, and communication amongst individuals.
Statement of the Research Questions

This study examines the relationship between family-based literacy practices and school-based literacy practices and the impact of increased technology and state mandated testing on middle-class family literacy. It focuses on the following questions:

1. **What are the multiple contexts for literacy for suburbau families?**
2. **What influence does the school have on the multiple contexts of family-based literacy?**

Sub-questions include:

A. What do parents value in terms of literacy activities?
B. What do children value in terms of literacy activities?
C. How are print and non-traditional literacies used in the home?

The research questions for this dissertation study are aligned with my assumptions about literacy practices from the sociocultural perspective. A sociocultural perspective takes a more inclusive view of language development that encompasses a larger audience of learners, including many non-mainstream learners. Social, cultural, and historical factors contribute to language development. Teaching literacy within the sociocultural context of the family is an approach described by Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988), who advocate that the cultural and social practices of a family are key considerations in the development of family literacy programs.
To answer the research question, I adopted an interpretive approach as my theoretical framework. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that a theoretical framework is the belief system or worldview that guides the researchers methodological decisions.

In this dissertation study, a sociocultural perspective on the nature of literacy learning establishes the theoretical framework guiding methodological assumptions and decisions for collecting and analyzing data. According to Graue and Walsh (1998), the aim of interpretive research “...is to keep ideas and understandings as close to the field as possible to provide both relevancy and vibrancy that generate interpretation close to the local source” (p. 159). An assumption that underpins the interpretive approach is that the researcher cannot neatly divorce the process of data collection from the process of data analysis. Instead, data collection and analysis are concurrent, recursive, and even symbiotic.

Research Design

In this section, I describe with detail the research design. Specifically, I highlight the issues concerning the site, access, data collection, pilot study, data analysis, and trustworthiness. To explore participants' beliefs, attitudes, and literacy practices, I employed a qualitative methods approach.
Sites

My interest in, and proximity to the families in Homestead, dictated my selection of participants. As an elementary school teacher in the Homestead City School District for eight years, I have established a commitment to the school and the community. I also had access to families within the Homestead population for this research. All four families in the dissertation study live in Homestead. Homestead is situated in a predominately White Caucasian middle-class suburban city in the Midwestern region of the United States. According to the 2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census the population of Homestead is 24,230. In the past twenty years the population of Homestead has dramatically increased. According to a Citizen Survey conducted by the city of Homestead in December of 2002 the average income for the community is $23,749.00.

According to the Homestead City School District historical information, in the 1991-1992 school year there were 7,255 students enrolled in the entire (K-12) school district. In the 2001-2002 school year there were 13,130 students enrolled in the entire school district. School buildings are opened at the beginning of each school year. Due to the support of the Homestead
community, the district has passed school levies easily for the last ten years.

Access

For this study, I filed for approval from the Human Subjects Institutional Review board of The Ohio State University Research Foundation (see Appendix A).

I will provide a brief explanation of how I first became acquainted with each of the four families in the dissertation study. In Chapter Four I extensively describe each family and my relationship to each family. I met the Smith family because their daughter Allison was a student in my second grade classroom. Two years later, Rachel, their middle child was also a student in my second grade classroom. Mary Smith was an active parent volunteer in my classroom and she and I established a close parent-teacher relationship. I first met Nilesh Nguyen when his son Andrew was a student in my second grade classroom during the 2000-2001 school year. I became close to Nilesh as we worked together to help improve Andrew’s behavior at school through daily communication.

I met Andrea Walker when I was student teaching in third grade at Underwood Elementary nine years ago in the Homestead School District. Andrea was a third grade teacher at the same grade level. I met Leah Sanders
eight years ago at Highland Elementary where she and I taught at the same grade level for three years. However, until the beginning of my dissertation study, I was only in the Sanders home on one occasion for a staff member's baby shower. Therefore, I really did not have much firsthand knowledge about her family life.

**Data Collection**

For this dissertation study, I employed four methods of data collection: a) interviews with parents and children (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982), b) observations of conversations between children, parents and siblings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982), c) field notes recorded during and after data collection (Spradley, 1980), d) collection of documents and artifacts (Bogden & Biklen, 1982). The information gained from these methods will be analyzed for evidence of an evolving awareness of family literacy, attitudes toward literacy, relationship between homes-based and school-based literacy practices, and variation in the use of literacy in the different case study sites. A multitude of data sources provides the richest description possible of the families' home environments, literacy-related behaviors, literacy-related interactions, and literacy-related values.
Participant Observation

In this dissertation study, participant observation took place when I was in each of the four family's homes. I would read books, play video games, help with school work, play hide-and-seek, play school, and play computer games with the children while in their homes. This was a critical part of my fieldwork in the Sanders family and in the Walker family because I established a close relationship with the children so that the children were comfortable talking and sharing with me. In the Smith and Nguyen families, I already knew the children since they were previous students in my second grade classroom. Therefore, the close relationship had already been established. I visited each family's home for three months. I went to each family's home once a week for two hours per visit.

While in the homes, I collected data in the following ways: audiotaping, taking field notes, and collecting documents and artifacts. During each visit I audiotaped conversations between family members. I also observed and audiotaped parents reading books, playing video games, helping with school work, playing hide-and-seek, playing school, and playing computer games with the children while in their homes. Furthermore, I audiotaped each interview...
interview with parents and children in each family. Every tape was transcribed verbatim (see Appendix B for a sample of transcription).

I took field notes before each visit and immediately following each visit to the home. My field notes are full of vivid description. My intent was to capture the details of the daily lives of each family member.

**Informal Interviews**

I had some general questions in mind that I would refer to during the interview of each parent and child (see Appendix C for a sample of interview questions). However, I let the participant talk extensively about related topics that emerged from my questions that were meaningful to them. After each informal interview I transcribed the interview data.

If a question was unanswered or additional questions emerged that I felt were important, I would casually ask them during a later conversation with the parent or child on a later visit. I modeled my interview strategies from Bogdan & Biklen’s (1982) work regarding participant observation-like studies. Since I knew some of the participants beforehand, the interviews were more like a casual conversation.
Parent and Child Interviews

During the three months that I visited the home, I conducted the interviews with the parents and children. After I had established a rapport with the family members, I began interviewing them when it seemed like an appropriate time. Occasionally, I had to establish a date and time when I would informally interview a parent because of his or her work schedule.

Teacher Interviews

As the study developed, it became apparent that it would be useful to have a structured interview with some of children's teachers. While I taught in Homestead for eight years, I felt additional teacher perspectives of family-based and school-based literacy and home-school communication would be fruitful for the study. I selected two classroom teachers and one remedial reading teacher. The classroom teachers were selected because they have the most contact with the family during the course of the school year. The remedial reading teacher was selected because she was responsible for the majority of one child participant's reading instruction at school. After the three teachers were selected for an interview, I called each teacher using the phone number
provided by the school secretary. I identified myself and provided an oral solicitation about participating in an audiotaped interview at school.

If the participant orally agreed to participate in an interview, then I scheduled a time for the interview. One classroom teacher and one remedial reading teacher agreed to be interviewed. Each interview was audiotaped and consisted of scripted questions (see Appendix D for a sample of interview questions). The interviews took place in the teacher's classrooms and they lasted for thirty to forty-five minutes in length.

Field Observations

I observed in each family's home for twelve visits, each visit lasting for two hours in length. I used a tape recorder during each visit to the home. Before each visit, I read through my previous field notes and considered the following question: What do I still not yet know? Bogden and Biklen (1982) recommend researchers ask themselves this question while conducting fieldwork. Field notes were taken using a “free-association form” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996); therefore, I did not write in a structured format and I tried to write as much as possible about the home-based literacy interactions, parent behaviors, child behaviors, sibling interactions, and parent-child interactions. Reflection was embedded into my field notes by using "observer’s comments."
Bogden and Biklen (1982) also recommend that the researcher use observer comments throughout the field notes and at the end of an observation the researcher should write additional information as he or she is contemplating the theory that is emerging. In my field notes, I followed Bogden and Biklen’s recommendation and incorporated observer comments into my notes to refer to later when analyzing and writing the dissertation. After several visits to each home, I also wrote “memos” to myself to document what I was learning from the participants throughout the research process. According to Bogden and Biklen (1982), “These memos can provide a time to reflect on issues raised in the setting and how they relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues” (p. 149). The memos helped me clarify the key linkages amongst the “observer comments” that were scattered throughout my field notes.
Collection of Documents and Artifacts

Throughout the dissertation study, parents shared educational records and school-based communication with me. Data that I reviewed and often collected includes: children’s school report cards, parent-teacher conference comment forms, teacher newsletters, school newsletters, school and home communication journal, children’s school work, children’s writing notebooks, children’s drawings, children’s diaries, and e-mail communication between friends and family members.

Phase 1: Pilot Study

For Phase One, I conducted a pilot study with three different families during the winter of 2001. The participants had children in my second grade classroom. My criteria for a purposeful sample selection were based on the parents’ level of involvement in their child’s education program and willingness to participate in the pilot study. In order to identify the three families for participation in a study (Stake, 1994), I selected the extreme cases. Families that I could learn the most from were selected for the study (Patton, 1990). After the three families were selected for an interview, I called each parent using the phone number they provided at the beginning of the school
year. At the beginning of each phone call, I identified myself and provided an oral solicitation about participating in an audiotaped interview at school. If the parent participant orally agreed to participate in an interview, then I scheduled a time for the interview. The interview was audiotaped and consisted of scripted questions.

At the end of each parent interview, I provided an oral solicitation about participating in audiotaped focus group at school. If the parent participant agreed to participate in the focus group with other parents in the study, then I scheduled a time for the focus group. The focus group session lasted forty-five minutes. In two of the families the mothers were able to attend the focus group. In one family, both parents were able to attend the focus group.

The informal interviews and focus group were tools for gaining insight into the parents’ perceptions of literacy, the educational influences in their lives, and personal biographies of the families. The purpose of the pilot study was to explore family literacy in relation to affective, social, and historical factors that may have influenced the presence of literacy in each home, and to understand the effectiveness of interview and focus group methods.

At the conclusion of the pilot study, I learned that prolonged engagement in each family's home would provide more fruitful data in the dissertation
study. Through the pilot study, I gained an understanding of the importance for identifying critical cases for my dissertation study.

The aim of critical cases are "those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things" (Patton, 1980, p. 103). In the dissertation study the participants (parents and children) were engaged in ongoing dialogue with the researcher about their understanding of literacy for an extended period of time.

**Phase 2: Collective Case Study**

Case study methodology was selected because each family is part of a bounded system. According to Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis, "The most straightforward example of 'bounded systems' are those in which boundaries have common sense obviousness, (e.g. an individual teacher, a single school, or perhaps an innovatory programme)" (1983, p.3).

The use of case studies applying the interpretive approach is best suited for this dissertation study with its use of qualitative methods such as observation, interview, and documentary analysis provides the opportunity to explore relevant variables and interpretations as they emerged from the situation. I was also able to construct vivid descriptions. The interpretive approach allowed me to focus on the phenomenon and meaning making as “situated, historically, socially and culturally” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. xvi).
Stake (1994) identified a continuum of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case study. When a researcher conducts an intrinsic case study he or she has no intention of using one case to understand a generic phenomenon or to develop theory.

A researcher uses an intrinsic case study to learn about the case at hand, in all its particularity. Stake (1994) also introduced an instrumental case study in which a researcher balances interest in a certain case with an interest in a general trait or generic phenomenon. The purpose of an instrumental case study is for the researcher to use an in-depth description of the case to better understand a generic phenomenon. As a departure from exploring only one case, a researcher may also implement a collective case study in which he or she explores several cases all at once. The collective case study, is "...not a study of the collective but instrumental study extended to several cases" (Stake, 1994, p.237). For such a study, a researcher selects multiple cases with the belief that understanding the cases will promote a richer understanding of generic phenomenon.

The purpose of collective case study was to closely examine the multiple contexts for literacy in suburban families.
Using the case study approach I documented what occurred in the homes and observed the ways children from a middle-class setting initiated, absorbed, and synthesized the multiple literacies present in their home.

I also documented the relationship between home-based and school-based literacy practices. Due to the increase of state mandated testing and the increased use of technology, middle-class family literacy has changed in the last ten years. In Denny Taylor’s seminal study of suburban literacy study almost twenty years ago, she documented the seamless transition experienced by most mainstream, middle class children. Since her study, most family literacy research has been conducted in minority communities. However, literacy learning has changed dramatically for all families regardless of socio-economic status in the context of standards, testing, and technology.

I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) in order to select the four families for participation in a collective case study (Stake, 1994). By returning to Denny Taylor’s context of suburban literacy, I carefully selected middle-class families that are representative of parents who work full and part time. For instance, in one family both of the parents work full time, in two of the families one parent works full time while the other parent works part time. In one family, one parent works full time while the other parent stays at home. There are three White Caucasian families and one immigrant Vietnamese family.
I included four diverse critical case studies in order to highlight the adaptations and diversity present in suburban, middle-class families.

According to Hicks (2002) many working-class families have middle-class aspirations and while the families may push education strongly the values and practices that the children experience in their working-class home settings are uniquely different from the middle-class, academic discourse present in the middle-class, suburban school settings. Students are more likely to struggle in school-based settings when they are not members of dominant, mainstream school culture. The reason the non-mainstream students are more likely to struggle is because the school curriculum is generally designed for predominately white, middle-class students who make up the dominant culture.

The purposeful sampling strategy for Phase Two drew participants who: 1) lived in the Homestead community 2) had a child in elementary school in Homestead City School District, and 3) were willing to participate in the collective case study.

**Phase 3: Obtaining Permission**

In Phase Three of the study, I called each parent to obtain permission. At the beginning of the phone call, I identified myself and provided an oral solicitation about participating in the study. If the parent orally agreed to
participate in the study, then I scheduled a time for the first visit to the home site.

At the sites for the collective case study, I provided each participant with a written solicitation letter and consent letter in order to secure his or her informed consent before the case study began (see Appendix D for a sample of a consent letter). After the participant read the written solicitation letter, had an opportunity to ask me any additional questions about the study, and signed the consent letter, the case study began.

In order to protect the identity of the community and participants in the study, I used pseudonyms for each participant and for the name of the community.

Data from this study was shared with my dissertation committee members, in classroom situations, education conferences, and in education journals. I will store the interview audio-tapes and the field notes in my file cabinet at home.

Phase 4: Data Collection

The four methods of data collection: a) interviews, b) observations, c) field notes, d) collection of documents and artifacts were described in detail earlier in this chapter.
Phase 5: Data Analysis

From the data from the Collective Case Studies, it is apparent that print and non-print literacy are embedded into all four families as a way of life. The children are immersed in familial contexts in which their parents use literacy related tasks as they are engaged in their daily activities. For example, in the Smith family, Mary and Rick, get up each morning, they eat breakfast, read the newspaper, and Mary checks her e-mail. As their children Allison, age 11, and Rachel, age 9, get up each day, they also eat breakfast and look at specific sections of the newspaper. Taylor (1981) and Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988) discussed in their studies of families the implicit nature of functional literacy within the daily routines and rituals of family life. Taylor (1981) explains, “From a very young age, print formed one “medium” for the mediation of experience. Before children could read and write in the traditional sense, they were writing letters (p. 155). I also observed similar routines and rituals in the families in Homestead. However, several of the families in this collective case study also incorporate non-print literacy activity into their daily lives.

In the Walker family, three year old Ellie has been able to recognize her initials for over a year. Letter and name recognition seems to happen naturally as a way of social organization and daily living. Even though she has not formally
started school, she is learning about print as part of her day-to-day experiences. Her father, Scott, explained when he first noticed that Ellie could recognize her name.

M: Do they ever point out words or recognize words in the house or the car?

S: Well, with Ellie she pointed out her name on the teddy bear to me and they have their initials on their sippy cups and they recognize those. Ellie can pick out hers. (#1, p.4)

In the Nguyen family, Nilesh frequently reads work-related material at home for professional development purposes. Leah Sanders will occasionally will listen to books on tape in the car while driving Nate and Jenny to and from their extracurricular activities in the evening. Reading, writing and non-print literacies such as e-mail communication are overflowing in the lives of the families in this collective case study. All of the children in this study are growing up in families that value literacy, and it is integrated into their daily lives. The parents assist their children as much as possible in their moment-to-moment experiences with literacy.

In some families parents are supporting their children by helping them write an e-mail to their friends or grandparents. In some families they are listening to their child read and asking them questions about what they read, and in some families they are proofreading their re-copying of books they have just read.
While there are similarities and differences in the literacy routines and rituals in the families in the study, there is one common theme which is weaved throughout each of the families: parents and children are supporting each other as they are engaged in literacy tasks, influencing the first steps in independent literacy achievement.

**Stages of Data Analysis**

Two stages of data analysis were used in this dissertation study. In the first stage, I analyzed the data from each family’s case study. In the second stage, I analyzed the themes that cut across the four families to provide a framework for the development of interpretive theory concerning the continuity or discontinuity that the families experience as their children cross the home-school boundary.

**Understanding The Individual Families**

There was a multitude of literacy practices, routines and, and rituals embedded into all four family’s homes. In Chapter Four an extensive description of each family’s unique literacy practices will be explained in-depth. Data analysis for each family began with the first visit to each family’s home. I selected data that focused on my research questions and I used Spradley’s (1980) qualitative research technique of domain analysis to determine the “cultural domains” present in each family.
Spradley (1980) explains, “Cultural domains are categories of meaning” (p. 88). I examined the transcribed participant interviews and field notes in order to generate cultural domains. Then, I selected the semantic relationships that emerged from the interview data and field notes.

As shown in Table 3.1, I prepared a domain analysis worksheet for each family to highlight my interpretations of the data (see Table 3.1,3.2,3.3 & 3.4). Data analysis was guided by the guidelines established in Spradley’s (1980) *Participant Observation.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y&lt;br&gt;Reasons for Using Non-Print Literacy in the Home</td>
<td>Efficient form of communication (is a reason for) using e-mail in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y&lt;br&gt;Reasons for Using Print Literacy in the Home</td>
<td>Knowledge of current events (is a reason for) newspaper reading in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y&lt;br&gt;Reasons for School-Home Communication</td>
<td>Knowledge of classroom activities (is a reason for) school-home communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Means-end</td>
<td>x is a way to do y&lt;br&gt;Ways to Communicate Between Home and School</td>
<td>E-mail (is a way to) communicate with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Means-end</td>
<td>x is a way to do y&lt;br&gt;Ways to Prepare Children for School</td>
<td>Test-prep workbooks (is a way to) prepare children for school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Domain Analysis Worksheet- The Smith Family
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>Children’s recreational activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for Using Non-Print</td>
<td>(is a reason for)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy in the Home</td>
<td>using video games in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>Social book club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for Using Print</td>
<td>(is a reason for)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy in the Home</td>
<td>reading in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>Knowledge of classroom activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for School-Home</td>
<td>(is the reason for)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>school-home communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Means-end</td>
<td>x is a way to do y</td>
<td>Parent volunteers in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ways to Communicate Between Home and School</td>
<td>(is a way to) communicate to teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Means-end</td>
<td>x is a way to do y</td>
<td>Reading with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ways to Prepare Children for School</td>
<td>(is a way to) prepare children for school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Domain Analysis Worksheet- The Sanders Family
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>School-preparation worksheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for Using Non-Print</td>
<td>(is a reason for)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy in the Home</td>
<td>using the Internet in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>Work-related reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for Using Print</td>
<td>(is a reason for)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy in the Home</td>
<td>reading in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>Knowledge of child’s Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for School-Home</td>
<td>behavior (is a reason for)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>school-home communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Means-end</td>
<td>x is a way to do y</td>
<td>Parent-teacher conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ways to Communicate Between</td>
<td>(is a way to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home and School</td>
<td>communicate to the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Means-end</td>
<td>x is a way to do y</td>
<td>Chapter book summaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ways to Prepare Children</td>
<td>(is a way to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For school</td>
<td>prepare children for school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3: Domain Analysis Worksheet- The Nguyen Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>Efficient form of communication (reason for) using e-mail in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for Using Non-Print Literacy in the Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>Pursue recreational interests (is a reason for) recreational reading in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for Using Print Literacy in the Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rationale</td>
<td>x is a reason for doing y</td>
<td>Knowledge of classroom activities (is a reason) school-home communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for School-Home Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Means-end</td>
<td>x is a way to do y</td>
<td>Written notes (is a way to) communicate between home and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ways to Communicate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Home and School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Means-end</td>
<td>x is a way to do y</td>
<td>Storybook reading (is a way to) prepare children for school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ways to Prepare Children for School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Domain Analysis Worksheet-The Walker Family
Themes to Compare and Contrast the Families in the Collective Case Study

In the second stage of data analysis, I look carefully at the similarities and differences of the cultural domains among the four families. The second stage of data analysis is undertaken to provide more explanatory power to the findings of the study. I search for emerging patterns within and across the domains. I examine the distinct similarities and differences with a literacy lens and highlight the differences in their literacy values, practices, routines, and rituals. Within each family case study the findings are divided into four sections as follows:

a. Multiple contexts for literacy for middle-class families
b. Role of increased technology in middle-class family literacy
c. Relationship between family-based and school-based literacy
d. Role of state mandated testing in middle-class family literacy

In Chapter Four the findings will be explained in more detail. In the beginning of Chapter Four, each family's literacy practices are discussed separately. Comparisons amongst the four families highlighting the differences are discussed in the later part of Chapter Four.
Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined techniques for establishing trustworthiness—the extent to which the reader trusts the argument and evidence presented from the study. The two criterion areas for establishing trustworthiness are credibility and transferability. Credibility is established through triangulation of methods, peer debriefing, member checks, and negative case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The credibility of this study is based in part on the triangulation of evidence among the data from the interviews, observations, field notes, documents and artifacts, and collective case study. I intentionally selected multiple methods of data collection in order to allow for triangulation of evidence from a variety of methods. Triangulation of multiple methods gives the researcher diversity in the amount and type of data sources that can be compared, which will ultimately provide trustworthiness. The credibility of this study is also based on member checks, peer debriefing, and negative case analysis. Member checks value the emic perspective of the participants by including their review of the transcription of the informal interviews. Member checks ensure that the participants are accurately represented in the research process.
In this study, participants in the collective case study reviewed and interpreted interview data. Although I had complete responsibility for the write-up of the research, member checks also informed the editing of the research-write-up.

Peer debriefing is an opportunity for the researcher to talk about the research process with someone who understands qualitative research. Unlike member checks, peer debriefing brings the perspective of a peer who is not involved in the study. This distance from the research at hand is valued in that the peer debriefer can provide a fresh perspective from someone who is not professionally invested in the research. For this study, I identified and invited a fellow doctoral student at The Ohio State University to serve as a peer debriefer. Over the course of the dissertation study, the peer debriefer and I met once a month to discuss research design, data collection, data analysis, and data representation.

Negative case analysis involves the inclusion of outlying data or cases which undermine my analytic categories. A trustworthy account provided explanations for why some data does not conform to my interpretation of the data. Negative case analysis is not a sign of weakness in the research, instead, an indication of the researcher’s honesty and willingness to complicate the findings.
Transferability is the degree to which the findings of the study may be applied to other sites and populations. In this dissertation study, transferability will be established through the description of participants' demographic characteristics, family-based literacy practices, and school-based literacy practices.

In Chapter Five, I suggest potential populations that the finding may be transferable. Ultimately, the burden of transferability lies on the research consumer, not the research producer. It is the responsibility of the research consumer to determine similarities between the population of this study and other populations of interest in order to transfer findings from this study to those populations.

**Ethical Concerns**

A study such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study has heightened awareness in the research community about ethical issues such as consent, harm, deception, and privacy (Christians, 2000). Christians encouraged researchers to fully disclose any ethical concerns related to their inquiry rather than deceiving the participants to such concerns. In this section, I will focus on one ethical concern: the tension between involving the participants in the research process and the researcher's responsibility to provide an interpretive representation of the participant's lives from the researcher's perspective.
The participants were involved in member checks and read through the interview transcripts so that they could comment on the accuracy of the transcripts. The issue of how the participants may feel about my interpretations of data collected in their homes was a concern that I grappled with as a researcher. Therefore, I made every attempt to accurately portray each family member in the study, to be respectful of the families, and most importantly to share the dissertation study with each family.

Summary

I close this chapter by briefly reviewing the major topics of this chapter. I introduced the methodological framework, outlined the research design, and explored ethical concerns with the study. In the following chapter, I present the findings of the study.
CHAPTER 4

THE FAMILIES AND THE FINDINGS

In this chapter, I describe the families in the study. Next, I present the results from the interviews, observations, and field notes employed in this dissertation study. All four families in the dissertation study live in Homestead. Homestead is situated in a predominately White Caucasian middle-class suburban city in the Midwestern region of the United States. According to the 2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census, the population of Homestead is 24,230. In the last twenty years the population of Homestead has dramatically increased. There is a tremendous amount of farmland that is being developed into housing communities. Homestead is easily reached by two major freeways. The original downtown has been maintained and it has a lot of character. The main street that runs through the downtown is lined with old fashioned black lamps and there are a few quaint shops and restaurants.
The other parts of Homestead are similar to many Midwestern suburbs; they are very commercialized. There are numerous strip malls composed of grocery stores, restaurants, and shops. According to a Citizen Survey conducted by the city of Homestead in December of 2000, the average income of a Homestead resident was $23,749.00. In the last ten years, the (Homestead City School District) has also experienced significant growth in the student population. According to the (Homestead City School District) historical enrollment information, in the 1991-1992 school year there were 7,255 students enrolled in the entire (K-12) school district. In the 2001-2002 school year there were 13,130 students enrolled in the entire school district. While new buildings are being opened each school year, the district has a strong commitment to quality education and has passed school levies consistently for the last ten years due to the support of the Homestead community.

The Smith Family

Rick and Mary, the Smith parents, met while they were in high school. Mary earned a college degree in nursing. Rick studied electrical design at a technical school. Mary worked as a nurse for thirteen years at a private medical practice until 1997 when she decided to stay at home full-time and raise their three children. There are three children in the Smith family. Allison, the oldest child is 11 years old and in the fifth grade.
Rachel, the middle child is 9 years old and in the third grade. Seth, 5 years old, attends preschool, two days a week.

The Smith house is the hub of their cul-de-sac. Mary has a warm smile and is friendly to everyone she meets. The neighborhood children wander into the Smith's house and Mary offers help, advice and snacks.

In the summer, Mary watches Jessica, who lives across the street. Jessica's parents work full time and her parents are friends of Mary and Rick. Jessica is exactly the same age as Allison so they enjoy the time together. Mary is devoted to keeping her family organized and content at all times. She takes a central role in the family and remains at the heart of the family. I first became acquainted with Mary because her daughter Allison was a student in my second grade classroom. Mary was an active parent volunteer in my classroom and she and I established a close parent-teacher relationship.

Mary and Rick put their children first and they have high expectations for academic success. Mary is a highly intelligent woman who strives for success in all aspects of her life. The Smith home is always tidy and she organizes their home so that the children have clear expectations about what they are expected to do after school and where to put their belongings. Mary makes sure that the children make their beds each day and I have observed her
checking that they do so. Rick is pleased that Mary is able to stay home with their three children.

He commented on his feelings about Mary’s hard work rearing the children:

R: I mean overjoyed that Mary is home with the kids. I mean it was great when she worked, we had a whole lot more but guess what you can tell the difference in the kids when mom gets to stay home with them, and to see to it that they have some discipline. The kids that don’t have parents home after school, do you think they are doing their homework? They are like I will get around to that when I want to. They eat whatever they want to eat, they don’t have any structure. So their whole life is like, I will do it whenever I feel like doing it. Not all of them fall into that but a good many do. I mean I know this day and age a lot of moms and dads have to work but it benefits the children if one of the two can stay at home and see to it that they have a little bit of backbone there.

(#1, p.6)

Rick and Mary both grew up in a small town in the Midwest. Mary is from a middle-class family, and as a child her father was a Spanish teacher and later on he became a principal. Her mom stayed at home raising the two children, in their family. In a conversation with Mary one afternoon at the kitchen table, she described her family background to me:

M: My mom stayed home and my dad worked two jobs. My dad is 100% Hungarian and my mom is from Lebanon so she is first generation. I have one sister who lives in (a East coast state). I grew up in (a small Midwestern town) and my parents still live there. My dad was a principal and both of my grandparents lived in a nearby town.
M: Did your grandparents play a significant role in your learning to read?

M: My mom’s mom, (grandma) didn’t read and my mom’s dad (grandpa) read Arabic and English and he wrote Arabic too. My dad’s parents (grandparents) could read and write in Hungarian and English. They had many books at their home.

M: Were you encouraged to read and write at home?

M: In the first grade I read on the eighth grade level. My mom took us to the library and my dad checked our school work. Writing was different, I was encouraged to write letters. I wasn’t encouraged to write stories. I wrote in travel journals that my aunt Meredith sent for a trip. My dad brought books home and at the store I would get books. (#2, p.1)

Mary has many memories of her early years, especially of what it was like to grow up in a Catholic family. She attended Catholic schools for elementary school. She has vivid memories of the times that she spent with her sister playing “Catholic school” when she was a young child. Interestingly enough, her two daughters also play “Catholic” church at home, she described her Catholic upbringing to me:

M: Well, when I went to Catholic schools we had religion as part of our curriculum, so it wasn't anything in addition to, but it's funny, because my sister and I would play church at home. So we would read the mistlettes and read the bibles and play church at home. And my girls do that too. But they have CCD and stuff now so they are reading those books and doing their workbooks for that. Rachel likes writing stories, she likes writing stories about everything, she writes stories about
Jesus. And they like to read the music and the songs. I guess I didn't do
a whole lot of that because it was a part of my curriculum in school.
(#2, p. 1)

Rick is devoted to his family and has coached both of the girls in softball
since they began several years ago. Rick helps the children on the computer and
they avoid having him check their school work because he expects it to be done
well and if not, he makes them re-do it.

In other words, like Mary, he has high expectations for their academic
work. He is employed as an electrical contractor. One evening Rick described
his job to me. We were in the family room talking while Seth played a game on
the coffee table. Mary was out running errands with Rachel and Allison.

R: For example, like the new schools in Homestead we would take the
blueprints and actually count how many receptacles, how much pipe,
wiring, how many lights, the electric service and then we put a price on
it and turn it in. I take care of the design build end of it which is CAD,
Computer Assisted Drawing. I can get drawings and put them on the
computer and generate them myself. So I will put all of the notes and
put everything on there, then I will go to a building and take a look at it
and say here is what you need to put in this building in order to make it
compatible for what you are looking for. I will say this is what it will
cost me to design it for you, here is the labor cost and the material cost
for you to accomplish this.

M: So you have people that work with you that do the labor?

R: Right, I get the work and they do all of the installation. I don't do
any hands on labor anymore. I do project management. I do the
purchasing, the design and the estimating. (#1, p.5)
Rick grew up in a working class family of four children and he was the second child in birth order. Rick's father worked in a steel mill and Rick's mother stayed at home raising the four children. Rick described his father's work at the steel mill in the following conversation with me.

R: My dad worked at the steel mill for twenty seven years. Then they shut down and they moved it to Tex Arcan, Texas, to get a bunch of Mexican people who would go to work for less than what they were paying these guys so they shut the mill down in 1981-1982. After most of the kids went to school. So the valley just went downhill after that and it became a pretty depressed area. You didn't have a whole lot but the steel mills and the coal mines, that is what everyone planned on doing because that was all that was there. He never did get another job after that, there wasn't anything to be found and he had a heart attack a year later and his health has gradually gone downhill since in the past 17 or 18 years.

My mom never had a minute to do much of anything. With four kids she was home all of the time so she was busy cooking, washing clothes. I remember one night we each got to stay up until eight thirty one night, we took turns, and the rest of the kids had to go to bed at 8 o'clock. So it was your special treat, you could stay up for an extra half hour. On Monday nights, she would take a big load of laundry in a duffle bag and she would wet it down and she would stand there and iron on a Monday night. Then she would have stuff that she would do on Tuesday and Wednesday. She was regimented and she always had stuff that she had to do. She always had to have the house clean. She didn't have much but it was always spotless, everything was in it's place. So there wasn't a lot of reading that I saw her do because she was always so busy. She may have read after I went to bed, I don't know. She would read us books and my dad would tell us stories when he
would tuck us in. She would generally go in and read us a book and then he would come in and tell us stories about when he lived on the farm and stuff like that. (#1, p.3)

The Smith's Home

The Smith's home is eight years old. It lies at the end of a cul-de-sac in a subdivision that was established twelve years ago. There is a large wrap-around porch on the front of the home that has a rocker and other chairs to sit on. The Smith children and other children in the neighborhood, gather in the street and front yards to play hockey, roller blading, football, soccer and biking. When it is warm outside, Mary sits on the front porch to watch the children play outside. Occasionally, I have sat outside with Mary to talk or to wait for the children to come home from school. As you walk into the front door, there are hardwood floors throughout the entryway, hallway, and kitchen. To the left of the front door are the stairs to the second level. An office is located immediately on your left that has photographs of the family all over the walls of the room. There is a large desk with the computer and printer, all of the software is located in a cabinet of the desk. There are a few plants near the window and a large closet off to the far end of the room. To the right of the front door is a formal living room with a piano and the girls play it regularly.
Through a large opening is the formal dining room that leads to the kitchen. If you go straight ahead as you enter the front door, you are in the large eat-in kitchen. This room is the central point of the home and often is occupied by one or more members of the family or neighborhood children.

To the left of the kitchen is a door leading to the basement stairs and beyond the basement door is a laundry room and the garage. Straight beyond the kitchen is a large great room that you step down into from the kitchen. There is a large L-shaped couch and a large armchair off to the end of the room and a television and VCR on the back wall. Both ends of the great room have glass doors that lead outside.

The basement is the children’s playroom. It is carpeted and there is small sofa on one wall. On another wall is a television and video game that is set up and ready for use. A large closet on one wall is filled with board games, electronic games and other toys. There is a miniature grocery store set up in the playroom and a chalkboard.

Upstairs there are four bedrooms and two bathrooms. Each child has their own bedroom. Rachel’s bedroom has two twin beds along each wall and a desk is located between the two beds. The desk faces the window so that Rachel can look out into the neighborhood cul-de-sac.
Rachel uses her desk regularly and she has a lot of interesting items on and in her desk, such as old checkbooks that her parents let her play with, a calculator, diaries, and at least ten notebooks of various sizes where she writes stories.

On the right hand wall, as you enter the bedroom, there is a television and video game located in a cabinet. Rachel has a lot of stuffed animals and toys spread throughout her bedroom. Seth’s bedroom has a double bed tucked into one corner of the room and a desk and bookshelf along the other walls. Seth’s bedroom has major league baseball memorabilia on his bedroom walls.

Allison’s bedroom is across the hall from Rachel’s and next to Seth’s bedroom. She has a large dresser with a mirror on the left wall and the double bed is along the wall near the window. Allison recently had her room painted and redecorated in pastels. Her furniture is all white. Next to Allison’s bedroom is the bathroom that the children share and beyond the bathroom is Mary and Rick’s master bedroom and bathroom.
The Smith Children

Allison

Allison was a student in my second grade classroom four years ago. Allison is a quiet and smart student who strives to do her very best in everything that she attempts to do. She is a well-rounded child who plays the piano and violin. She participates in basketball and softball. Allison was well-liked by other children at school and has many friends, some of whom she has remained friends with since she was a toddler. Allison is much more outgoing at home and in out-of-school contexts. Allison is an avid reader; she likes to e-mail her friends, grandparents and me.

Most of the e-mail that I receive from Allison are chain letters that she receives and forwards to me. Occasionally, she will write a short note to me:

MRS. SCHULZ,

I SAW YOU AT SCHOOL. I WAS GOING TO WAVE BUT YOU WEREN'T LOOKING AND I WAS GOING TO SAY HELLO BUT MY TEACHER WON'T LET US TALK IN THE HALL WAY. I WAS GLAD TO SEE YOU THOUGH! DID YOU HAVE A NICE EASTER? I DID. STEPHEN HAD HIS FIRST SOCCER GAME LAST SATURDAY. HE ALSO HAS ONE TODAY, SATURDAY APRIL 13. HE HAD A LOT OF STEALS AND IT WAS FUN TO WATCH HIM PLAY. HE WAS ONE OF THE TALLEST OUT THERE. WELL, I GOT TO GO AND I HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON!

Allison Smith (E-mail, April 13, 2002)
Allison is finishing her last year of elementary school. It will be interesting to observe this transition to the next academic and social level.

Rachel

Rachel was a student in my second grade classroom last year. I met her when I had her older sister, Allison, as a student. Rachel is an outgoing child in school and in-out-of-school contexts. Rachel has many long lasting friends at school and out-of-school. Rachel plays the piano and she plays softball on her Dad’s team. Rachel is a smart student who excels in school. She is an avid writer. In my classroom, she usually had two or three stories that she was writing at one time. There is a parent volunteer sponsored publishing shop in our school and I encouraged students to write and publish books frequently.

In the spring each year, I sponsored an “author party,” and the students invited parents and caregivers to attend, they read their published stories aloud, and we had punch and cookies afterwards. Rachel published more books than I had a child publish, in all of the years that I sponsored the event. Rachel reads and occasionally she gets on the computer and sends e-mail to friends, out-of-town family members, and to me. She likes to play games alone and with her brother on the computer. Her favorite computer games are Backyard Soccer, Monopoly and Math Blaster.
Seth

Seth is an athletic young five year old boy who likes to play soccer, baseball, and basketball. He attends preschool two days a week for the afternoon. At the emergent stage of reading; he reads patterned books from memorization. For example, one evening when I was babysitting all three children, Seth said he wanted to read a book to me called Brown Bear. Brown Bear What Do You Hear? by Bill Martin. He read the book through memorization to me and he was beaming from ear to ear. He is extremely proficient on the computer as well.

The Sanders Family

Jay and Leah, the Sanders parents, met while they were in college. They both earned college degrees in elementary education. Leah always wanted to be a teacher and she and Jay have both taught in Homestead City Schools for the past sixteen years. Three years ago, Leah began teaching on a part-time basis. She job shares an elementary classroom with another teacher. Leah alternates teaching with the other teacher, so one week she will teach for three days and the following week she will teach for two days. Leah made this decision because she wanted to have more time with her three children and she wanted to volunteer in her children's classrooms.
Leah and Jay are both from middle-class families. In a conversation with
Jay, he described the urban setting where he was born, then he explained how
his family moved to Homestead thirty years ago when it was considered a rural
area.

M: Where were you born?

J: Columbus, Ohio on 23rd Avenue, it is not the nicest of neighborhoods. I
am not exactly sure how long I lived there and I lived here the rest of my
childhood. I lived down the street. My parents still live down the street on
Foster Rd. Foster Road is just on the other side of the golf course. Foster
Road was pretty much a tar and gravel road so that tells you how rural this
area was back then. Very few houses. Homestead was a very small school
district.

M: So there were miles between the houses?

J: Where my parents live everybody has 5 acre lots so the houses are
spread out.

M: Still?

J: Yeah, now there are little pockets of subdivisions that have been built
around them.
My parents, my grandparents and my aunt and uncle bought fifteen acres
together and they sub-divided it. So they each have 5 acre lots and they
kind of have a compound with the three houses.

M: Tell me about how many siblings you have?

J: I have one older sister and two younger sisters. The one who is older is
2 years older than me and the one younger is 2 years younger than me, and
one that is 8 years younger than me.

M: And do they live near here?
J: Yeah, actually my one sister is two houses down and the other sister lives in Homestead and one sister lives with my parents. She is developmentally handicapped, she is two years younger than me.

Jay's mother worked at home raising the four children while Jay's father worked outside of the home. Jay describes some of his childhood memories to me:

M: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood memories?

J: My dad worked a lot. So he wasn't home a lot. My dad is an entrepreneur of all kinds of businesses. He owned a restaurant, he was in the construction business. So he wasn't home a whole lot and I don't recall him ever being involved in my homework or anything like that or reading, that was mainly my mom's job. Fairly normal, we tried to have dinner every night. I'd say I had a fairly normal upbringing.

M: So your mom was home with you a lot?

J: She was definitely a homemaker. She was your stereotypical 60's mother that was at home and took care of the family, cooked dinner and couldn't get out much cause she couldn't drive. When she did drive it was emergencies only. I mean I don't know even to this day if she has ever driven on the freeway or not. (#1, p. 2)

Jay is easy to get along with and well liked by everyone he meets. As a elementary classroom teacher, he is very dedicated to his students and school

He coaches an extra curricular Science Olympiad Team at his elementary school. He is the Cub Scout leader for his son's Cub Scout Troop and he and his children have a very close knit relationship. Jay and Vincent, the oldest
child. are sports fans so they have a lot in common. Jay enjoys playing golf and
reading about it. He also follows college football.

Leah grew up in a middle-class suburb about fifteen miles from
Homestead. Her father worked outside of the home while her mother stayed at
home raising Leah. She was an only child for many years. Her parents had a
second child when she was eight years old. Leah fondly remembers her
childhood memories.

M: What were your earliest memories of family life?

L: My mom stayed home and my dad came home around 5:00pm.
We had fruit cocktail every night with dinner. I was the only child
for eight and ahalf years. (#1, p.1)

Leah had a very close knit relationship with her grandparents on her
father's side of the family. She described her relationship with her grandparents
when we were talking one afternoon at the kitchen table.

L: My mom’s parents lived in California and my Dad’s parents lived in a
Midwestern city. They played Monopoly and Candyland with me as a
child. Jay and I play games with the kids too. Every Sunday, I had dinner
at my grandparent’s house and we would watch Wild Kingdom. My
grandparents were students and I was the teacher and we would play
school. My grandpa helped me learn to drive. They had an adding machine
and we used to play store and add up the cards. (#1, p.2)

Leah is very organized and provides structure for the household.
I met Leah eight years ago at Hathaway Elementary where she and I taught at the same grade level for three years. Shortly after I began working with Leah, she made an impression on me as an extremely organized teacher. However, until the beginning of my dissertation study, I was only in the Sanders home on one occasion for a staff member's baby shower. Therefore, I really did not have much firsthand knowledge about her family life.

The daily routine and schedules that Leah has established in their home seems to keep their children regulated, and they have patterned behavior in terms of what they do each day after school. For example, when Nate and Jenny come home from school, they put their shoes by the door and their book bags by the armchair in the family room. If the weather is warm, Nate immediately goes outside and plays basketball alone or he plays football with some friends who live nearby. Jenny may watch television, or get on the computer and work on Kid Pix, a writing program, or play a video game or go outside and play.

The Sanders Children

There are three children in the Sander's family. When the study began Nate was eleven years old and Jenny was eight years old. Leah was pregnant with their third child, Margaret, whom she gave birth to in March of 2002.
Nate and Jenny attend the same Homestead elementary school and arrive home at the same time as Leah. Jay arrives home from the elementary school where he works around five o'clock.

If Jay is needed for transporting the children to a sporting event, Cub Scouts, dance lessons, a friend's house, or a doctor's appointment, he arrives home earlier. Family life is fast-paced in the Sander's home because Jay and Leah are busy managing five various schedules. Leah and Jay have an active social life of their own. Leah is in a book club that meets once a month at a member's home. They also have a group of friends with whom they play cards monthly and another group of friends with whom they vacation with each summer. The Sanders make a concerted effort to eat dinner together every night before going to and from the children's activities. Both Leah and Jay value the dinner routine since they both have fond memories of that pattern in their own families.

Nate

Nate is an outgoing child who has many friends at school and in out-of-school contexts. Nate is an avid sports, following college football and basketball. He is in his last year of elementary school and attends a multi-age elementary school in Homestead. He is in a combined fourth and fifth grade classroom as a fifth grade student.
Nate is involved in Cub Scouts and he plays on several sports teams throughout the year (football, basketball and baseball). Nate does not spend a lot of time on the computer at home or at school, at the most once a week for thirty minutes.

Nate heads outdoors immediately after school to shoot basketball alone or to find some neighborhood friends to play sports. In the winter, he spends more time playing video games since he cannot go outside and play sports. One afternoon, Nate, Jenny and I were in the basement playing video games when we talked about what they like to do on the computer:

M: How often do you play video games?
N: Twice, everyday. Before homework. I play right after school now that it's cold, sometimes when it's warm I play.
M: How do you get the video games?
N: Birthday, Christmas or I buy them myself. I bought Super Mario and NFL Blitz 2000 (#7, p.1)

**Jenny**

Jenny is also outgoing like her big brother. Jenny is eight years old and she is a second grade student in a second and third grade multi-age classroom. She attends the same school as her brother. Jenny likes to play with Barbie dolls. She also likes to have friends come over and to visit her friend's home to play Barbies. Jenny gets on the computer a little more frequently than Nate. She
also plays video games less than Nate. While playing video games with Nate, she described what she likes to play and how often she plays video games.

J: These are all of our video games.
M: Which ones do you like the best? If you could put them in order from the best to worst what would that order be?
J: 1. Snowboard Kids
2. Mario Cart
3. Super Mario
4. Donkey Kong 64
5. Mario Party
6. Excite Bike
7. NBA
8. NFL Blitz 2001
9. NFL Blitz 2000
M: Have you played all of these?
J: All except NBA
M: Do you usually play alone or with friends?
J: I play with Nate, sometimes I play alone. I don't have friends over to play video games. My friends and I play Barbies. (#12, p.1)

Jenny usually starts her homework without any prompting from her parents, who both describe her as a motivated learner. Jenny was very excited that her mom was expecting a baby. Leah was pregnant for the majority of the time that I conducted research in the Sanders home. She delivered Margaret in March 2002.

The Sander's Home

The Sanders home is designed to feel very open inside. The house has cathedral ceilings in the formal living room and dining room with light colored carpets and fabric throughout the first floor.
The kitchen is cozy with a desk and hardwood floors. The eat-in kitchen and family room create the feel of a great room. A large basket is centered on the middle of the coffee table that always contains the daily newspaper and other magazines for reading.

A fireplace and television are located off to one end of the family room. There are many windows and sliding glass doors along the back of the living room that look out into the corn field.

Leah and Jay finished their basement several years ago, and unlike the first floor, it has a dark atmosphere with sports memorabilia hanging on the walls and tucked into the corner of the family room is the computer and printer. There is a sophisticated surround sound entertainment system with a television, DVD player, and stereo system. In a separate room off the downstairs living room is a playroom for the children, filled with toys, a television, and video game system. On the second level there are three bedrooms. Leah and Jay have a television and VCR in their bedroom while the children do not. Margaret, who is an infant, sleeps in a crib in Leah and Jay's room. When she gets older, she and Jenny will share a bedroom. The children's bedrooms have elaborate bookshelves in their closets that resemble a classroom library. Each large plastic tub has a label indicating the type of books it contains.
Jenny has the same bedroom furniture that her mom had in her bedroom as a little girl. I know that this is important to both Leah and Jenny because on separate occasions they shared this with me. As you enter Jenny's room, there is a desk along the wall. Jenny has quite a collection of Barbie dolls, furniture, and other toys in her room.

Nate has bunk beds and his bedroom is decorated in a Midwestern university sports theme. He has a sports locker along one wall and a dresser along the other wall. Near his bed, Nate has a plastic basket that contains the current books and magazines that he is reading.

The Walker Family

Scott and Andrea, the Walker parents, met after they graduated from college at a fitness club and were married a year and a half later. Andrea earned her degree in elementary education and she has been teaching in the Homestead City School District for the past twelve years. She began teaching on a part time basis three years ago so that she could spend more time with her two young children. There are two children in the Walker family, Lucy and Ellie. Lucy is six years old and in Kindergarten at Sutton Elementary in the Homestead School District. Ellie was two years old when the study began and she turned three in February. Ellie attends preschool two days per week.
I met Andrea when I was student teaching in third grade at Underwood Elementary nine years ago in the Homestead School District.

Andrea was a third grade teacher at the same grade level. Prior to the dissertation study, I had never been in Andrea and Scott's current home. Years ago, I had been in their first home when several teachers met there before going on a ski trip together. After I was hired by the Homestead City School District, I taught with Andrea for three years.

Scott and Andrea are both from middle-class families. Scott grew up in a small rural community in the Midwest region. During a conversation with Scott, he described his family background:

S: I had a pretty solid family background because my parents farmed, full time, so we always had breakfast and dinners together growing up. I had a younger brother and twin younger sisters. My brother and I helped out on the farm. We always did things together, had meals together and we didn't have close neighbors so we would play together or play by ourselves. You had to get along with your siblings. (#1, p.1)

Scott works as a graphic designer. He spends an extensive amount of time on the computer for his work, and computers are a personal interest of his, too. Scott described his job to me one evening while visiting their home:

S: I do a lot of work with the graphic images. A lot of scanning and cleaning them up. Taking things out, putting things in, making signs and banners. There is always new technology coming out so I am always reading manuals, books, trade journals and stuff like that. On the side I am working on web sights for people. So I do a lot of reading and writing putting proposals together for people to do
the web sight form. Or just even learning about the web myself. I spend a lot of spare time doing that myself. (#1, p.3)

Andrea grew up in two different Midwestern suburbs. Andrea's mother stayed at home until she was in fourth grade when she went back to work as a nurse. Her father worked outside of the home as an engineer.

During a conversation with Andrea she describes how she grew up in a very supportive family.

There are three children in Andrea's family. Andrea has a brother and a sister who she visits and talks to on a regular basis. Andrea's parents live about fifteen miles from her home. Andrea's parents watched Lucy when she was a baby several days a week, while Andrea worked. When Andrea started working part-time, her parents watched Lucy and Ellie less frequently.

Andrea explained to me the role her parent's played in her own education:

A: I think my parents really encouraged education, really put education as a high priority in our life. But they never pressured us, they made us realize that education was important and that they always wanted us to do our best. (#1, p.2)

The Walker's Home

When Scott and Andrea were first married, they built their first home in Homestead and lived there for seven years. They decided to move into a larger home and they have lived in their current home for the past four years which is also in Homestead. The Walker's live in a newer subdivision and the homes are
less than ten years old. The Walker home is bright and open with white ceramic tile covering the floor from the front door throughout the large eat-in kitchen area. The kitchen and family room are adjoining so it is one large great room. At the far end of the family room is a television, VCR, and a fireplace. To the right of the family room is a study that gets a lot of use by the entire family. Two glass doors separate the study from the living room and they are usually left open. Computer technology fills this study. The Walker's recently updated their computer screen so it is large and they have other high-tech equipment such as a printer, digital camera, and video camcorder in this room. Scott's parents live out-of-town and they like to send digital photos of Ellie and Lucy to them.

They have many windows along the back of their eat-in-kitchen that overlooks the backyard. All of the neighbor's backyards face one another so it resembles a neighborhood park. To the left of the kitchen is the upstairs play room that is filled with toys neatly organized in large plastic boxes and stacked onto shelves. The girls use these toys often. On many visits to the home, the toys had been spread out on the floor because the girls were playing with them, or a large Lego project was under construction and it was not to be disturbed.

Downstairs in the finished basement there are two large rooms, a bathroom and a storage area. This area is used as a gigantic playroom for the girls and a
work out room for Andrea and Scott. The girls spend a lot of time pretending they are in a gymnastics competition. They like to jump on the mini-trampoline and land on the twin mattress that is in the middle of the large room. Off to the side is an overstuffed chair that Scott or Andrea sit in as the gymnastics "judge" while the girls play on the trampoline. I have also acted as the gymnastics "judge" while visiting the home.

The exercise equipment is located at the far end of the room. Andrea keeps reading materials on the stairmaster so that she can read while exercising. She enjoys reading her subscription to Parents Magazine. Scott is a triathlete and works out on a daily basis. Scott also spends time reading magazines and books about exercise and nutrition.

The Nguyen Family

Nilesh, Andrew's father, went to grade school and high school in North Vietnam and he was required to join the army in his country when he was twenty years old. In 1975, the communist party took over his country and he was jailed for six and one half years. Nilesh escaped North Vietnam to the Phillipines in 1971 and after getting his legal documents in order he became a refugee to the United States. Nilesh has lived in the United States for eighteen years. One afternoon while visiting the Nguyen home, Nilesh explained his family background to me:
N: I have a very long story. I went to elementary school, after elementary school I went to high school then after high school I had to join the army.

M: So they had a requirement?

N: Yes, because my country at war and they took every young people in the army who was 20 to 21 years old had to join the army. And I am an officer. (smiling)

M: Oh!

N: OK, then about five years, communist in five year by 1975, the communist took over my country. Then they took me to jail. For six and a half years the communist took me to jail.

M: So your own country took you to jail. Because you were an officer? I don't understand?

N: I was fighting them before. Because I am the enemy before, you got it? North side, South side they fight each other.

M: Yes. The southern part of Vietnam, those people in power took you to jail.

N: Yes, now the government over there is communist. They took over and they took me for jail for almost 7 years.

M: You were in jail for almost 7 years? Oh my goodness!

N: Yes, almost 7 years. Jail is not like it is over here, here you can eat, exercise and go inside and outside. Jail in the communist you have to work in the rice field for 8 hours a day and no good food. So most people die because they don't have enough good food.

M: Of starvation?

N: Yes of starvation.

M: So how did you get out of that situation?
N: OK, they put you in jail and they don't let you know when you going to come out, when you leave. You just keep a hope and pray. Pray everyday and sometime they will call on you and say "You are released." I went out, after almost 7 years then I live with my family because I have no job so I depend on my family for about six months. And I tried to escape. I tried to escape from my country. Somebody tried to help me escape my country by boat. I went to the Phillipines. The Phillipines from Vietnam took about 600 miles coast to coast. I mean the sea between the two countries is about 600 miles, I took by boat. It took me about 13 days from Vietnam to the Phillipines. No food and no fresh water.

M: How many people were on the boat?

N: 65 people were on the boat, 35 died on the boat. About 30 made it.

M: What did they die of?

N: Mostly children, no food and no water. Women and children can not keep dry and thirsty. The man can keep thirsty and hungry much better. That is why all men alive, and women and children died.

M: How many people did you know who were also getting on the boat? Did you know anyone else trying to escape too?

N: Most people who have the ability to escape to America do but some people cannot leave the communist county like me because they fight them before. Something like that.

M: Well, you were probably so angry because you were put in jail?

N: Right

M: I can understand. (#1, pgs.2-3)

Nilesh and Lee met in the United States in 1992 and were married shortly after they met. They were both born and raised in North Vietnam. Nilesh is fifty-three years old and Lee is forty-nine years old. Nilesh speaks, reads and
writes in English. Lee speaks very little English. According to Nilesh, she has picked up English very slowly.

She came to the United States ten years ago. In her home in Vietnam where she lived until she was thirty-nine they spoke Vietnamese only.

Nilesh and I have known each other since fall of 2000 when I met him at “Meet the Teacher Night” as Andrew’s second grade teacher. He is a gentleman who has very high expectations for Andrew in terms of behavior and academics. Andrew is an active child who likes to explore his environment and his father wishes that he were more well-behaved at home and at school. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Nilesh and I developed a strong parent-teacher relationship while I was Andrew’s teacher. We communicated daily through a chart that monitored Andrew’s behavior. Andrew made significant progress during his second grade school year.

I did not meet Lee at all when I was Andrew’s classroom teacher. She never attended the school for any events or parent-teacher conferences. If I called their home, Andrew or Nilesh always answered the phone. The first time I met her was when I began the research. Lee was friendly from the moment I met her and she always said, “Hello Mrs. Schulz,” that was all that she said to me for the first few visits.
After awhile, she started to talk a little more to me, which I know was difficult for her. In the beginning of February, Lee was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Luckily, it was diagnosed early. She had to undergo an invasive surgery, and for several weeks she slept in a twin bed, which they moved from upstairs to the downstairs living room. Nilesh explained that the doctor told her not to walk up and down stairs for awhile. Nilesh asked Jung, Lee’s sister, to stay with them to help out. Mrs. Nguyen was out of work for awhile due to the surgery and Nilesh had to miss some work to take care of his wife. She is very soft spoken woman and a gentle mother to Andrew, their only child. When Nilesh and I would talk, many times Lee would sit with us but Nilesh spoke for her. One afternoon, when the three of us were sitting at the kitchen table, Nilesh explained Mrs. Nguyen’s family background to me:

M: Was she encouraged to read and write at home?

N: Just a little bit, she picked it up real slow.

M: Did her parents read or write at home?

N: No, not English, Vietnamese.

M: Did your parents read and write?

N: Yes, but mostly my dad. My mom, just a little bit, I told you before, women in my country are 2nd class, they don’t have a chance to go to school if they were born before 1950. But now a girl can go to a school equal to a boy but not in my mom and dad’s time. (#2, p.2)
Nilesh started working for the factory years ago, as a janitor and he trained himself on the computer and they hired him to do computer work for the company. Lee also works for the same factory packaging the CD’s. Nilesh and I talked about his job one day:

M: What kind of work did you do when you arrived in the United States?

N: OK, the first one they put me in welfare. I don’t feel that is right, but after two months, I asked if there was any work I could do, any work. Then one agency get me a job downtown at a hotel. I cleaned up toilet, cleaned up rooms and stuff like that. I tried to find a job by myself first but I had no skills. They ask me what kind of job you want and I say whatever it takes. And they referred me to the factory, they make compact discs. They make music and computer disc and stuff like that.

M: Now is that what you are doing now?

N: Yes, I keep that job until now.

M: Wow, that is great!

N: Yeah, (smiling) at first they have me clean the factory and I say OK and I do. Then a couple of men say that they think I do a good job and they want me to do something else. It is easier, I work on the computer.

M: Oh, you work on the computer. Do you make the cd’s?

N: Yeah, I make the cd’s, music cd’s, the cd’s that make music.

M: Where did you learn your computer skills?

N: Mostly, I learn by myself.

M: On their computers at the company?
N: Yes, at the company and I buy one and I put one upstairs and I try to learn myself. (#1, p.5)

The Nguyen's are going to move from Homestead to a condominium soon. Due to Lee's extended battle with ovarian cancer and chemotherapy, she can not work and they can not afford to stay in their home. They are considering moving to a nearby suburb where Lee has a sister who also lives in the condominium community. Andrew will have to leave the elementary school that he has attended from Kindergarten through third grade. Nilesh feels badly about making the move because it will be difficult for Andrew to leave Highland Elementary.

Andrew

Andrew was a student in my second grade classroom during the 2000-2001 school year. Andrew was an average student academically in second grade. He made significant progress in reading and writing while in second grade. He started the year as a child with behavioral needs. According to his first grade teacher, he was a behavior problem. I invited Mr. Nguyen into the classroom early in the school year to discuss putting Andrew on a behavior chart. The behavior chart involved daily communication through a note that I sent home to Mr. Nguyen about Andrew's behavior.
Mr. Nguyen agreed that Andrew needed to work on his behavior at school and was a very supportive parent throughout the school year. Mr. Nguyen explained to me that Andrew had a lot of trouble in first grade and that he wanted to get him on the right track. Andrew made significant progress in his behavior during his second grade year. At the end of the school year Mr. Nguyen gave me a nice card thanking me for working with Andrew.

Andrew liked to write stories about Pokemon video game characters. He started reading Goosebumps books in second grade and he still reads them in third grade.

The Nguyen’s Home

The Nguyen’s have a new two story home in Homestead. The neighborhood is five years old. The Nguyen home is predominately covered with aluminum siding and there is some brick surrounding the porch by the front door. There are several different home styles within the neighborhood. The homes are all large. The Nguyen home has four bedrooms and two and one half bathrooms. If you enter the home through the front door, to the left on the first floor there is a carpeted living room with a large couch, a loveseat, and a medium sized TV in the corner where Andrew can play Nintendo or other video games. There is no art work on the walls. There is a plant sitting in front of the window.
This living room connects through a large opening to the carpeted dining room. In the dining room there is a table, four chairs and a china cabinet. There are a few pieces of china in the cabinet but it is predominately filled with nice glass pieces. Tucked in the corner is a fold up treadmill that Andrew said his dad uses for running.

As you enter the front door and go straight ahead, you pass the first floor half bathroom on your left then you are in the large eat in kitchen. Linoleum runs from the front door throughout the kitchen and eating area. There is a wood table and four chairs and many windows in the kitchen especially in eating area so it keeps the home well lit. Directly off of the kitchen is a carpeted family room. There are two couches, a big screen TV. and end table that has a cordless phone on top of it. Also on top of the end table is a large aquarium with very colorful fish swimming in it.

Upstairs there are four bedrooms and two bathrooms. In Lee and Nilesh's bedroom they have a T.V. that Andrew pointed out has subtitles capabilities on the screen to “help you learn to read.” Andrew’s bedroom is very tidy. He has a single bed and two desks. Stacked on the shelf of the desk next to his bed are notebooks filled with writing. He has pencils and an electronic computer that teaches phonics and word concepts.
Deconstruction of the One-Size-Fits-All Myth of Middle-Class Family Literacy

First, I will provide a cursory review of the need for the deconstruction of the one-size-fits-all myth of middle-class family literacy. In the following section, I will present the findings from the interviews, observations, and field notes employed in the study.

In the educational community there is a prevalent myth that middle-class families consist of parents and children who have similar literacy values and are using print and non-print literacies in a similar way in their homes. Consequently, school policymakers, administrators, and teachers make assumptions about family literacy practices that may be invalid and potentially detrimental to the children they are supposed to be educating (Bishop, 1988).

Significant ethnographic research of middle-class family's literacy practices has not been conducted since Taylor’s (1983) seminal study. Therefore, this dissertation study will provide new and insightful knowledge to the educational field. There has been recent ethnographic research with urban family literacy that can be used to inform middle-class family literacy research.
In fact, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) ethnography of Black families who were poor and lived in an urban environment documents that despite the overpowering odds against them, the families overcame many challenges through intelligent use of literacy skills.

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) research refutes the commonly held belief that variables such as sex, race, economic status, and setting are significant factors in determining academic achievement. Unfortunately, school policy makers, administrators, and teachers tend to make judgements about student's academic potential based on such variables (Bishop, 1988). Rudine Sims Bishop wrote the forward to Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines book *Growing Up Literate: Learning From Inner-City Families*. Bishop (1988) explains, "Though others have drawn the same conclusion, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' statement that sex, race, economic status, and setting cannot be used as significant correlates of literacy still seems revolutionary, since many educational researchers almost automatically use those variables in studies of school achievement. Furthermore, school policymakers, administrators, and teachers often tend to base their expectations of whole classrooms and schools full of children on those criteria. If Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines are correct then the onus is on educators to look elsewhere for the causes of our failures" (p. ix).
Therefore, two myths about literacy need to be deconstructed. The first myth is that all middle-class families spend time engaged in similar reading, writing, and technology practices in their homes. The second myth is that all middle-class children experience a seamless transition from home-based to school-based literacy practices. In this dissertation study, as a researcher, I was able to participate in, as well as observe, the lives of four middle-class families.

Regardless of the sex, race, economic status, and setting, some families are experiencing a successful transition to school, while other families feel disconnected. Some of these families experience challenges due to the lack of significant help from institutions and schools who are supposed to serve their needs.

In this section of Chapter Four, I present findings from the interviews, observations, and field notes employed in this collective case study. In all four families, the parents and children live in homes filled with an abundance of print literacy (reading and writing), and non-print literacy (technology). Literacy practices are valued in each of the four families. All children come from homes where the adults are reading as a leisure activity, for work, or for both.
All children come from homes where the adults are writing in a variety of forms: 1) e-mail communication; 2) greeting cards or letters; and 3) calendar or to do lists. As a researcher, I wanted to become knowledgeable about the ways that literacy is embedded into the families’ lives and I wanted to observe the children’s firsthand experiences with literacy in their homes. The two central questions of the dissertation are as follows:

1. What are the multiple contexts for literacy in contemporary suburban families?
2. What influence does the school have on the multiple contexts of family-based literacy?

Common Literacy Practices Across Four Diverse Middle-Class Families

Over the three months that I spent with the four families, I observed two perspectives among the families that were similar to Taylor’s (1983) study of family literacy. The first perspective I observed is that the parents and children in the four homes used print as a means of social organization in their everyday lives. The second perspective is that the children learn about the meaning and usefulness of language when they are involved in socially significant literacy experiences. The table below illustrates the types and uses of reading, writing, and technology that were present across the four homes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Literacy Practice</th>
<th>Examples of Literacy Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading as a Form of Literacy Practice</td>
<td>Greeting cards, letters, e-mail, newspaper, novels, paperwork from work, magazines, online reading material, bible, picture books, and chapter books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing as a Form of Literacy Practice</td>
<td>Letters, greeting cards, e-mail, paperwork from work, narrative writing (story writing), and expository (chapter book summaries).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology as a Form of Literacy Practice</td>
<td>Use of e-mail, use of Internet, digital camera, creating computer web pages, computer-generated advertisements, video and electronic learning games.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memory-Aids Writing as a Form of Literacy Practice</td>
<td>Daily to-do lists, family and personal calendars, daily agenda, writing on post-it notes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Literacy Practices Common to All Four Families
In this next section, I look more deeply at the distinct differences that I observed during the three months that I spent in each family’s home. I present the findings for each family case study separately. I will examine each family with a literacy lens and highlight the differences in their literacy values, practices, routines, and rituals.

Within each family case study the findings are divided into four sections as follows:

a. Multiple contexts for literacy for middle-class families

b. Role of increased technology in middle-class family literacy

c. Relationship between family-based and school-based literacy

d. Role of state mandated testing in middle-class family literacy

THE SMITH FAMILY

The Multiple Contexts for Literacy for the Smith Family

Mary and Rick Smith have high expectations for their children academically and in extra-curricular activities. They are extremely involved in their children’s lives. For instance, Rick is the softball coach for all three of his children’s teams, and he is the vice-president of the girls softball league for the city of Homestead. Mary actively volunteers in both Allison’s and Rachel’s classroom. The principal, secretary, and teachers recognize Mary due to her active presence at Highland Elementary School.
Allison and Rachel were both students in my second grade classroom. I taught Allison first, then two years later I had Rachel in my classroom when she was in second grade. They are both above average in academic ability and have experienced a successful transition from their home-based literacy practices to their school-based literacy practices. Mary and Rick value news-related literacy and have imparted this value upon their children. Mary and Rick value non-print literacy, as all family members spend time reading and writing on the computer on a regular basis.

The Smith Family: Reading Diverse Genre

There are three children in the Smith family. Allison who is eleven years old, Rachel who is nine years old, and Seth who is six years old. Reading for pleasure is a valued activity in the Smith’s home. Allison is usually reading two books at a time. One afternoon when Allison and I were talking she explained to me that she finds out about good books from her fifth grade teacher and from other people like her sister Rachel.

M: What books have you read lately that you really like?

A: Well, my teacher explains to us what five books are about and then we get to pick one to read and we have four weeks to read it.

M: When do you read it?

A: She gives us twenty minutes during our SSR time to read it and I read it at home too.
M: Do you usually get it done by the four week deadline?

A: Yeah, sometimes I get it done earlier. I read another book at the same
  time. I don't like to read more than two books at a time.

I have observed Rachel while engaged in recreational reading at home and at
  school. Rachel enjoys reading the Laura Ingalls Wilder series of *Little House on
  the Prairie*. She explained that at school in her reading group she read her first
  Laura Ingalls Wilder book. Rachel explains, “I’ve read three of the Laura Ingalls
  Wilder books. I read two in my guided reading group at school and one at home.
  The books were *The Banks of Plum Creek, Little House in the Big Woods* and
  *Little Town in the Prairie*. Mary reads a variety of magazines when she is not
  taking care of her children’s busy schedules. She enjoys reading the following
  magazines: *Parents, Family Circle, Bon Appetit*, and *Women’s Day*. Rick reads
  *Sports Illustrated* while Rachel and Allison read *Sports Illustrated for Kids*.

In the Smith family, reading the newspaper is a family ritual. Rick, Mary,
  Allison and Rachel read the newspaper each morning. Rick and Mary get up
  early before the children and Rick reads the front page and the sports section of
  the newspaper while eating breakfast. Mary does a variety of literacy related
  tasks in the morning before, during and after the children get up. She makes
  breakfast, checks her e-mail, reads the bible, and reads the metro, food, and
  accent sections of the newspaper.
Rachel, age nine, is the first one up each morning. Rachel said that she usually gets downstairs before her sister so she usually gets to choose which section, the sports or the weather that she will read first while eating breakfast. Allison, age eleven, reads the sports and weather sections of the newspaper. Sometimes this is source of controversy for them since they have to share the newspaper. Both of girls like to report to Mary the sports statistics of their favorite baseball, football, and basketball teams. Seth sleeps in on the days that he does not have to go to pre-school. Seth likes to look at his favorite sports team pictures in the newspaper and at the baseball scores. On the weekends and in the summer the girls will act out a morning show drama for Mary and Rick. Rachel is the anchor. Allison is the sports broadcaster, Seth is in charge of the lights, music, and commercials for his toys.

The Smith Family: Writing Using Diverse Forms and Reasons for Writing

Letter and e-mail writing between family and friends belongs in the social-interactional category of writing. I observed or found evidence of letter and e-mail writing for social purposes in the Homestead families. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) also discovered letter writing for social purposes in their urban family literacy study. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines explain, “Families wrote letters to establish, build, and maintain social relationships” (p. 157).
In the Smith family the children and parents frequently use e-mail to write
to family and friends. In the following e-mail Rick wrote to his daughters,
Allison and Rachel, while at work:

Good morning giggly girls,
You 2 sure did have the giggles last night at bed time! One more day
of school and its vacation time!! Can’t wait, we’ll have a good time.
Have a great day at school and I’ll see you guys this evening.
Love and kisses,
Dad (E-mail, March 21, 2002)

Allison, who is eleven years old, writes e-mail messages to friends and
family members. I included an example of an e-mail message she sent to me
earlier in this chapter. In the following e-mail message to her friend (Kara) she
is writing it to maintain her friendship with Kara:

Kara,
Hi. Sorry I haven’t been e-mailing you things that I wrote in a while.
My Spring Break was so much fun. We went to Nashville,
Tennessee and went to my cousin, Jason’s baseball game. They lost
to Georgia, 14-4. It was pretty exciting but very cold! We also saw
the Parthenon which is a replica of the real Parthenon in Greece. It is
a museum. We saw the Tennessee Titans football stadium and the
Nashville Predators Hockey Arena. It had a weird name which is the
Gaylord Entertainment Center. We also went to the Hermitage
which is the home of Andrew Jackson. He lived there with his wife,
Rachel, and they owned 150 slaves! Andrew Jackson was the 7th
president of the United States if you didn’t already know that. Just
about everything in the house was the exact stuff that he had. We
even saw someone’s toothbrush! We couldn’t go into the rooms
though because there were glass things that didn’t open. We also
went to the Opryland Hotel. It was amazing and very big. There
were shops and restaurants. It had dancing fountains and the one in
the center shot up 80 feet! The hotel we stayed was a lot smaller but
it had a really big swimming pool, a game room, a workout room, and
an Applebees. Tennessee has a lot of fun things to do. I just wanted
to tell you hi and thanks for the e-mail. G2G and best friends forever. (BFF)
YOUR FRIEND,
Allison (E-mail, March 30, 2002).

In the Smith home, e-mail writing is more prevalent than letter writing. While letter writing still exists primarily around holidays or special occasions, the increased use of e-mail has decreased the amount of letter writing. Adults and children in the Smith family frequently choose to e-mail a note rather than write a letter.

For some families in the Homestead community, managing extracurricular activities such as Cub Scouts, soccer, football, softball, gymnastics, piano lessons, or religion classes is a way of life. Two families, the Sanders and the Smiths, have more extracurricular involvement than the Walkers and the Nguyens. In the Nguyen family, Andrew is not involved in any extracurricular activities. In the Walker family, Lucy takes gymnastics lessons. Families use a multitude of literacies (reading, writing, and the computer) to manage their personal lives and their children’s lives. For example, in the Smith family, Rick is the coach of all three of his children’s softball teams and he is vice-president of the girls softball league for the city of Homestead.
Mary indicated that she sometimes has to e-mail Rick at work to inform him about times and dates of upcoming softball games or practice schedules. Mary has typed letters for the softball league for Rick and she will send them to him as an attachment to review.

In the Smith family, Mary will occasionally write “to do” lists for the children and for her husband. Mary explains, “If I have to leave I will occasionally write a note to the kids like make your bed or dust the house.” (p.1).

The Role of Increased Technology in Middle-Class Family Literacy

As mentioned in Chapter 2, technology is a new form of literacy for both adults and children. There are advantages and disadvantages to children’s involvement with the computer. Through the voices of the participants, I will provide examples of each family’s stance towards computer technology.

All five members of the Smith family use the computer, read, write, and e-mail on a regular basis. In short, the computer is understood as a valuable learning tool that enhances the adult work and personal lives and the children’s school and personal lives. Mary and Rick allow their children to work on the computer while they are in a nearby room such as the kitchen or family room. The computer is located in the den, a room located on the first floor next to the front door of the home. Mary and Rick check their e-mail twice a day.
Mary gets online to renew and reserve library books because it is more efficient. Rick uses the computer at work. In a conversation with Rick when we were talking about how much the computer has changed our jobs, he shared the following example of how he used the Internet for a work-related task.

Rick had to lay off some people at his workplace and he told me how he used the Internet to help him:

R: The other day I came up with a lay off notice and I read through on the to find the right type of form because we had to lay off seventeen guys and nobody could find anything so I hurried up and found a form to send out (#1, p. 5)

Allison, age eleven, checks e-mail daily. Allison likes to maintain e-mail correspondence with her parents, sister Rachel, Uncle Jack, approximately six of her closest friends, and me. Rachel, age nine, checks her e-mail every couple of days.

Seth, age five, is extremely proficient on the computer. He likes to type and play computer games on the computer. I have also observed him type a letter to a friend and practice his alphabet through simple typing. He likes to e-mail his friends Kurt and Tyler, who are approximately his same age. His favorite games on the computer that we have played together include Backyard Baseball, Tonka Trucks and Little Bear. According to Mary, Seth has been working on the computer since he was three years old.
He is supervised when on the computer by his parents, other adults, like myself, or his sisters. Mary described to me how she introduced Seth to the computer one afternoon when the three of us were in their study and Seth and I were playing *Backyard Baseball*.

M: When did he start working on the computer like this?

Mary: It was last spring because I thought...

M: How old was he?

Mary: Three

Mary: I was checking my e-mail and he was sitting with me and he didn't know what it meant to click on the mouse and drag. So I just started showing him stuff like that while he was on my lap. Over the summer he didn't do much because we were at the pool. But then in the fall when his sisters were at school we started to do more at the library and bringing stuff (computer cds) home. He has a Tonka program that you put on the keyboard that is really interactive and creative. He really likes this Backyard cd. (#8, p. 6)

**The Relationship Between Family-Based and School-Based Practices**

I first became acquainted with the Smith family as their oldest daughter's second grade teacher. Two years later I taught their second child in second grade. Both Allison and Rebecca have extremely high standards for quality work and a good work ethic inside and outside of the classroom. After I started my dissertation study and I spent time with the family in their home, I learned that both parents want something better for their children than they had in their own personal school experiences.

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In the following data segment, both Mary and Rick explain their parental beliefs about academic standards that have directly influenced their children’s attitude towards the value of school-based learning.

**Parental Beliefs About Academic Standards**

Mary and Rick are both from the same small town, several hours from Homestead. In conversations with Mary and Rick about their experiences in school, Mary was not as academically challenged in school. Her parents took an active role in her education, as her father was a principal, and made sure that she was challenged outside of school. Mary described her school background to me:

> Melissa: Were you encouraged to read and write at home?

> Mary: In first grade I read on the eighth grade level. My mom took us to the library and my dad checked our school work. Writing was different, (than what her children do in terms of writing) I was encouraged to write letters. I wasn’t encouraged to write stories. I wrote travel journals that my Aunt Meredith sent to me for trips. My dad brought books home and at the store I would buy books. (#1, p.1)

In a conversation with Rick, he explained to me Mary was ahead of her peers in school. He also explained that neither of them were challenged academically or given much direction in school:

> R: I mean in our small town, if you passed, that was fine. If you were a 4.0 student you were at that level. I mean no one tried to elevate you

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to the next level. It was no big deal. They didn't try to elevate you anymore than you were. I was a pretty smart kid but when I went a little astray and the grades started dropping, my parents didn't say anything because I was still passing. I was getting C's but I wasn't getting the A's I was getting. I went to the guidance counselor, everyone goes to see him your senior year. I say to him, "What do you think I should take college wise?" He says, "I don't think you outta go to college. You should just stay here and get a job in the coal mine or the steel mill. "Like that is all I would ever amount too. So I said, "OK, fine with me, it was not a big deal because that is all I had ever seen."

Now Mary had the third highest average in the class. I mean she is a smart, smart woman. I mean she always has been, stuff comes easily to her. I mean even in college, it was just there. But they (the school) never pushed her. I mean she says I could have been so much more if I would have been in this day and age where they actually try to get more out of you than what you actually give. I gave what I needed to and that was it. She actually got into arguments with some teachers because she was teaching some of these high school teachers. They didn't like that. I mean her dad was a high school principal, a high school teacher. He taught history and Spanish and all of that. He saw to it that they spent their time studying when they needed too.

M: So your standards for your children are probably based on a combination of what you saw in your families and what you wanted as a couple?

R: And we decided, hey, here is what we want to do, and I am going to see to it that my kids are spending their time studying. Allison gets as mad as she can when we check their homework. If it is not right, I say, "Sit back down!" We have had to sit her back down three or four times. I say, "If you think that you are turning this in looking like this, you are wrong. You are doing it over." They say, "I'm not doing it over." I say, "I bet you are doing it over or you are not going outside to play basketball. Do it neat the first time or else you are not going out. You will save a whole lot of time by doing it right the first time." They have learned from that. They don't want me to check their work and I am the bad guy. But they are pretty good kids and they listen pretty well. (#1, p.3)
Due to their personal experiences in school, Rick and Mary want to make sure that their children work to their potential in school so they can be as successful as possible. Mary spends an extensive amount of time in the summer preparing all three children for school. I will describe the school-based learning that she does at home during the summer in the next section.

I interviewed Mrs. Johnson, who is Allison’s fifth grade teacher. The purpose of the interview was to gain an additional Homestead teacher perspective outside of the collective family case studies. I asked Mrs. Johnson several questions about her communication with parents.

M: How do you communicate to parents about reading and writing?

J: A number of ways, most formally through report cards. More informally as parents stop by or when they are helping in the classroom. You know, they say, “How is my child doing?” Through telephone conversations if that is necessary, usually that is more with a struggling child. Friday folders, if there is something that the parent needs to know about or whatever. In the Friday folders there is a place for actually writing a letter. So it would be in note or letter format. The other way is that in the Friday folders they take their work home and I ask the parents to look through their child’s work, and to read the comments that I have written on their child’s work.

M: In the Friday folder, do you write a note to each child’s parent every Friday?

J: In the Friday Folder I have several forms of communication. First I have the “Weekly-Teacher-Parent Report” for general behavior in the classroom. (See Appendix F) I have the “Friday Folder Parent Signature Sheet,” this is where I write a quick note to parents, if needed. The parents are required to sign this each week. The parents also write quick notes back to me in here. (See Appendix F) Then in the back of the Friday folder is all of the notebook paper, The
students use the paper to write a letter to their parents each week. I give them instructions about what they need to write about each Friday. So they write a full-page letter to their parents each week. Then the parents are instructed to write a letter back to the child. So this is parent-child communication but I will occasionally write a brief note to the parents as well. More often, I tend to write more notes when there is something that needs attention, as opposed to when everything is going great.

M: How many students do you have?

J: 27 students

M: That is a lot of writing each week.

J: Yeah and I do it every Thursday night so they are ready on Friday. The first week of school I always write a note to every family. This is also a place where I have the children keep in touch with their family when we are starting a new research project.

M: So how do you instruct them in letter writing? Do you do a guided writing lesson each week?

J: I do a bullet point outline and I tell them for instance, the first paragraph needs to be about our field trip, the second paragraph needs to be about what research topic you selected. This is their writing for Friday. Then the parents are expected to write back to them each week after reading their child’s letter. This paper at the front of the Friday folder explains the purpose of the Friday folder as a form of “Weekly Teacher-Parent Communication.” (See Appendix F).

M: This is an excellent idea!

J: I have found that you can tell the parents who don’t write back, their children are the ones who are not well supported at home. I can tell just by these letters. By the end of the year they have the entire record of their whole school year, documenting what they have done in math, science, social studies, reading and writing. Sometimes the parents write about personal things going on in their family. For instance, a parent might write, “We had a bad week this week,
hopefully next week will be better." The kids who get letters back are the ones that succeed in school. Even the kids who are struggling in school, when their parents are consistently writing encouraging notes back to them they become better students. They have improved more because of that parent-student contact.

Mrs. Johnson is trying to foster personal communication between family members. She accomplishes this task by requiring the students to write a letter to their parents every Friday and in turn the parents respond by writing a letter to their child each week. I have included some of the most poignant examples of letters written by either Allison or by her parents.

09/07/01

Dear Mom and Dad,

Would you please sign the yellow paper in the Front pocket to show that you read the note? Thank You. Also, if you could, will you please sign the parent signature sheet? If you do sign both, I will get extra money.

I have had a great first three days of school. We went to Mrs. Carter’s class and Mrs. Dotson’s class. Mrs. Dotson teaches math and Mrs. Carter teaches science. Both subjects seemed really fun. In science we will be doing lots of neat experiments like making boats, airplanes and studying powders. Well, I have to go. I love you.

Sincerely,

Allison

P.S. Please write a letter to me on the back. We also went to Mrs. Ryan’s class and she teaches social studies. Bye!

On the back of the letter:

Hi Allison,

It sounds like week #1 went great! Switching classes is quite grown up. It sounds as though you may enjoy science this year. Your handwriting in your letter to us is very legible. Good job! I
hope I have signed all of the correct areas. I am sure you'll let me know if I didn't.

I had fun this weekend. Did you? I miss you when you are in school. Have fun at recess sweetie! I love you!

Mom

Below Mrs. Smith's letter is a letter from Mrs. Johnson:

9/13/01

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith,

This has been a wonderful “first full week” of school! I really enjoy’s Allison’s participation during our discussions and her helpfulness. It is going to be a spectacular year!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Johnson

P.S. Allison is a great class secretary!

---

9/14/01

Dear Mom and Dad,

Hi! I think school is very fun so far. My favorite subject is Math. On Wednesday we learned how to play F.E.A.R. or Four In A Row. I won eleven times and I lost once!

Today on our field trip I had lots of fun. I saw many other instruments that I want to play but I like the violin and I want to stick with it. My favorite song for the orchestra was “Mission Impossible” song with an electric violin and viola. My favorite song for band was “Louie, Louie.” I love you.

Your Daughter,

Allison

On the back of the letter:

9/14/01

Allison,

I know that you enjoy math. I hope it will be fun this year. I am glad that you have been doing so much independent reading. Could you please read to Seth Monday night when I am gone? Thanks!
You are definitely a music girl. I bet the instruments sounded great. But you are right for now - 1 instrument at a time. Who knows what you will be able to add later.

It is a beautiful day in spite of the tragedies this week. They had a very touching church service on T.V. today for all of the victims and volunteers. Remember to keep all of those people in your prayers and if you need to talk about this or anything let me know.

Have a great week Allison! We love you and are very proud of you.

Love,
Mom

09/28/01

Mom and Dad,

Hello! In Science this week we did 2 very fun experiments. My favorite one was the catapults. Each group had one and we would push down the lever and an object would go flying. There were 4 objects which were a cork, rubber stopper, small aluminum ball, and a big aluminum ball.

In social studies we got new identities. My name was Eva Zsuzanna and I was from Hungary. I was the daughter of Magda Zsuzanna (Jenny Kelly) and Ferenc Zsuzanna (Nick Potus). We had a great 4 day week!!

Your Sweet Girl,
Allison

On the back of the letter:

Alligator,

Sounds as though science seems very interesting this year. You can do a lot of neat things with catapults. You keep up the good work and learn all that you can in all the subjects - study hard and listen to your teacher and it will make you a better student and person in years to come!!
Enjoy your week-and remember-up bight and early-listen to your mother in the mornings and help with your sister and brother. You're a good girl. I love you very much.

Enjoy your time at school!
Love and Kisses
Sincerely,
Your Father
Rick

11/30/01

Dear Mom and Dad.

This week, we have to write D.A.R.E. essays. I know you have read mine but could please check it over one more time? Thank you! I hope Officer Martin will like it. Personally, I think it is pretty good.

In art, we need to bring in a plastic hanger or twig. We are going to use them to make Phillipine windchimes. It sounds pretty interesting.

I hope we have fun while Mom is at the mall. I can't wait until we play Greenville on Sunday because I want to see if we can beat them. They are very tall and pretty good. Well. I hope we have a good weekend. I love you.

Love,
Allison

On the back of the letter:

12/02/01

Dear #1,

Super game against Greenville!! They have a really good team and you Lady Cats hung with them!! We will get them the next time we play them.

I had a great time with you, Rachel and Seth while Mom was out on Friday. Thanks for helping with everything while she was gone. You are a good helper with your bro and sis.

Your D.A.R.E. report is very well written. I think Mr. Martin will love it. Your cousins have set a good example for you. I'm glad that you admire all they have done. They are good boys as you are a good girl. Have a super week.

OOO Love and Kisses,
XXX Daddy

Allison Smith
D.A.R.E.-150 word Essay 11/27/01

What is every boy’s childhood dream? To play major league baseball! I would like to tell you a story about two great role models that I know who are pursuing this dream.

They are twins and their names are John and Jason Davis. They are each 18 years old and are attending college. John goes to Yale and Jason goes to Vanderbilt. Each one got a 4-year scholarship. They are very smart and love baseball. They attended the DARE program when they were young. John and Jason have stayed off drugs all of their lives, never drank, or smoked. They always kept their minds on their studies and school activities. When interviewing my cousins, John stated, “It’s not so much, just a waste of my time and detrimental to my baseball playing ability, but also a waste of money.” Jason said, “The main reason I chose to neglect products like alcohol, tobacco, and drugs is pure and simple. There are no true benefits to them. Using those products will only decrease my abilities as an athlete, and I do not want to jeopardize my possible future.”

Like I said, they love baseball and John will be staying at my house this summer to play in a summer baseball league. Jason got drafted to play for the Cincinnati Reds but he chose to go to college instead. Even now, they state there are only six or seven kids at their schools that have decided not to do drugs and they are each one of them.

Their friends and peer pressure has influenced my cousins but they did not cave into peer pressure. Their parents are as proud as the Statue of Liberty representing our country. I hope to follow in their footsteps. These 2 teenagers are perfect role models for everyone. Their choices have made their dreams come true. I hope your dreams come true too.

03/01/02

Dear Mom and Dad,

Next week is testing week. I am kind of glad though, because I like taking tests. We need to eat a healthy breakfast like eggs, oatmeal, granola, Kashi, Cheerios, and fruits but not sugar foods. We also need to get to bed early like at 8:30.
Our schedule for next week is reading, math, social studies and science. I will need to study over the weekend. There are study guides in my binder so we can go over them. I had a great week and I love you!!

Love,
Allison

On the bottom of the same page:

3/1/02
Dear Al,
You’ll do great. Just relax and read carefully. Have a great week!!

Love,
Mom

The Role of State Mandated Testing in Middle-Class Family Literacy

Mary values school-based learning and she works hard to try to understand how she can support her children at home so that they will be successful in school. When I was her daughter’ classroom teacher, she shared with me some of ways that she prepares her children at home for school. I became interested in studying the Smith family because of how much time she devotes to school-based learning. Her children have both been highly successful in elementary school.
In the following conversation, she describes to me the type of summer routines
she has established over the last few years to prepare her children for school
and for the state mandated testing they are required to take in school:

Mary: I have workbooks galore.

Melissa: How did you know what kind to get for them?

Mary: I went and I got some that were just reading or just math. But
these are good, I have got these every year for them.

Melissa: So it is test prep?

Mary: We'll start this summer. They think it is really cool
And they will sit down and work on these. They are just incredible.
 Allison, I bought this 4th grade proficiency book for her to go
through the summer before the test and I threw it away. But I even
have workbooks for his age. (Seth is working on the computer as we
talk)

Melissa: When do they work on these workbooks?

Mary: Weekends and after school if they don't have homework.
It is also our summer work.

Melissa: So you are using the McGraw Hill Grade Four Test
Preparation, McGraw Hill Grade Three Test Preparation, and
McGraw Hill Grade Two Test Preparation workbooks. Did you get
all of these from a teacher's store?

Mary: No, Borders. I also bought a map and geography workbook
for them and a mazes workbook. When you were doing all of those
mazes with Rachel in second grade she loved that so I bought one for
her to do here at home. I went in on this website and found
worksheets that they could do.

Melissa: So you got these worksheets at this website here on the
bottom of the page www.mathtestprep.com So how did you learn
about the website?
Mary: Two summers ago, when I decided that we needed to work over the summer. I went in under Yahoo and typed arithmetic worksheet and there were several websites but I have found the ones that I think are the most useful. Now I print off timed tests for Rachel to do at home. When she started to take timed tests at school, I wanted to prepare her for them so the tests on the website were useful.

Melissa: Do you know of other parents who use this website?

Mary: My neighbor, who is a former teacher, she told me about some websites, this website is the best. You can enter in any grade and it will give you sample test questions. Allison was having problems with fractions when they were first introduced. I was able to get work for her to help her with fractions.

Melissa: So do they ever act like they don’t want to do this work?
Mary: Oh my gosh! They love this stuff. I don’t know if you were like this as a kid, maybe I was weird, but I loved paperwork, school stuff. If you buy them a fresh workbook they like let’s go! I make a folder for them each summer and they like that.

Melissa: How do you feel about the learning that they are both getting at school this year?

Mary: Mrs. Thomas said to me, “I can tell that you work with Rachel outside of school.” So that’s good because then I think, ‘well, that’s good. I struggled with their ways of teaching at the beginning of the year.

Melissa: With both Allison’s teacher and Rachel’s teacher?

Mary: Yes, with both. I have been very pleased with Allison’s teacher, Mrs. Johnson. As the year progressed, she really challenged Allison, she helped her grow as a writer.
THE SANDER'S FAMILY

The Multiple Contexts for Literacy for the Sander's Family

Leah and Jay have both been teachers in the Homestead City School District for the past sixteen years. Therefore, they have inside information regarding the expectations of school-based literacy. Leah and Jay value traditional print-related literacy. They have established reading routines every night with the children and they pay attention to comprehension strategies since they personally recognize these skills as valuable to school-based literacy. Leah and Jay do not value non-print literacy as a tool of learning. Therefore, the family members rarely spend time reading and writing on the computer on a regular basis.

The Sanders Family: Rituals Around Reading

There are three children in the Sander’s family. Nate is eleven years old, Jenny is eight years old, and Maria is three months old. Reading is for leisure and enjoyed by all members of the Sander’s family. Leah reads novels, magazines, and cookbooks. Leah was often seen reading various baby magazines, she was pregnant for most of the study. Leah likes to cook and she explained that Nate, her son, commented on the age of her cookbook the other day:

L: I read a lot of cookbooks, I like cooking, yesterday, I cooked a lot and so I read cookbooks. Nate even asked me, “What cookbook is that?” It
was an old Betty Crocker Cookbook, like 1977, from my grandma. I use others for cooking but I use that one a lot.

OC: Leah is a member of a book club and reads a novel once a month for the club. She explained how the book club worked to me one evening.

L: I read a book a month for that (the club). And it is a variety of books, we just finished The Red Tent which is a biblical book that I didn’t care for.

M: So you meet once a month and do you alternate houses?

L: Yes, there are eight of us in the group and we meet at someone’s house each month and we each read the book and we have a discussion about the book. It is neat because everyone has different opinions about the book. We have read some Oprah Winfrey books and sometimes those have questions to discuss.

M: Do those Oprah Winfrey books have questions in them?

L: No, not in them, you have to go on the Internet and get them (the discussion questions).
(#2, p.1)

The Sanders’s children have various recreational reading interests. Jenny Sanders, age eight, talked about her reading interests with me, “I like to read

Mary Kate and Ashley books because they are fun and they (the main characters) are in the third or fourth grade.” Jenny’s older brother Nate, age eleven, read a chapter from Hatchet by Gary Paulsen to me one evening when I was visiting just before he went to bed. Nate told me that he liked Hatchet because of the “action” in the book. Nate also explained to me that he likes to read fantasy books and he has read all of the Harry Potter series. In fact, he saw the Harry Potter movie soon after it came to the theatre.
The newspaper is read by several family members of the Sandt’s family and it is kept in a visible location, on the middle of the coffee table in a large basket. Nate and Jenny read the “NOW” section of the newspaper, which is just written for children on Wednesdays. Leah also reads the “NOW” section and she talks to Nate and Leah about it and she also brings it in to her elementary classroom for her students to read. Jay shared his feelings about the newspaper with me one afternoon, “As hectic as our life is right now with them (the three children), I just love that time to get to the paper and read about what is going on in the world, community and sports.” On one occasion Jay told me that he likes non-fiction reading material. Jay explains:

J: I am finding out that I am a non-fiction guru. I don't know if that goes along with the newspaper because the newspaper is non-fiction. That has changed a lot because as a child I liked realistic fiction and some fantasy and that type of stuff. Anymore I am into biographies and I just like to know background information. Lately, I have been into this mafia thing. Just finding out through stories and real life accounts about the underground. That has kind of been my focus. Then of course sports, I like sports biographies. There are a lot of folks, authors, who have written about players that they have followed on the PGA tour. They write about what it is like to be on the inside as a professional golfer. I like authors who write about what it is like to be a college basketball coach or being on a college on a college basketball team. You know inside information. I like books like that, that has been my focus with my reading. (#1, p.4).

The sociocultural research in the last two decades investigated literacy learning as a socially constructed activity embedded in multiple contexts: classrooms, homes, and communities.
Reading together is one way for individual family members to develop and sustain relationships with family members and friends (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Parents in Taylor’s (1983) and Taylor and Dorsey-Caine’s study (1988) established ways to support their children’s reading and writing efforts. Family storybook reading is just one method of literacy support. As Morrow (1997) clearly explains, "Research indicates that reading to a child benefits the child’s acquisition of reading and writing. It provides a model for children to emulate, aids development of literacy skills, and increases interest in books and in learning to read and write" (p. 135). Through the voices of the participants, I will illustrate how parents support their children’s reading development through family storybook reading.

In the Sander’s family, the family storybook reading time is more structured in terms of parental roles in the process. Leah reads with Jenny each night and Jay reads with Nate. I experienced their bedtime reading routine when babysitting at the Sander’s home. Jay also told me about their family reading routine:

J: I think it is so important to read to them everyday, on a daily basis and to just be consistent. We try to read with them every night before they go to bed. Or at least lay in bed while they are reading. Instead of just letting them read, we ask questions about their reading too. Check comprehension in as fun of a way as you can without making it drudgery for them. (#1, p.7)
Reading together and sharing different perspectives is valued in the Sander’s family. Jay and Leah evaluate Nate and Jenny’s reading comprehension as they read with them. As elementary teachers they have firsthand knowledge about the importance of reading comprehension.

The Sander’s Family: Traditional Writing Practices

Letter and e-mail writing between family and friends belongs in the social-interactional category of writing. I observed evidence of letter and e-mail writing for social purposes in the Homestead families. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) also discovered letter writing for social purposes in their urban family literacy study. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines explain, “Families wrote letters to establish, build, and maintain social relationships” (p. 157).

E-mail writing is not a valued literacy practice in the Sander’s home. Leah tries to remember to check her e-mail at her elementary school where she works during recess time. Jay checks his e-mail everyday at his elementary school and if he does not have time during the day to get to it, he occasionally checks it at home since his work e-mail is forwarded to his home computer.

In the Sander’s home letter writing occurs around special occasions and holidays. For daily communication, the phone is used more often than letter writing or e-mail.
As previously mentioned in the chapter, Leah Sanders gave birth to their third child, Margaret, during March of the dissertation study. When Leah and Jay were at the hospital, Jay wrote two letters to the baby. In the first letter he explained how anxious he was to meet the baby.

He also explained that they were eager to find out the sex of the baby. The day after Margaret was born Jay wrote a second letter to her:

March 12, 2002

Dear Margaret,

I didn’t need to greet you today as baby, because at 9:49pm last night we found out that you were a beautiful baby girl. Your mother and I decided to name you Margaret Lee. We chose Margaret because it is such a pretty name that already fit you so well. The name Lee comes from your mom’s mom who was a loving, and caring woman who is smiling down from heaven right now!

Your brother and sister will be coming to the hospital today to visit you. They are both very excited and will be wonderful role models for you.

You have had such a pleasant disposition today! You’ve been very quiet and eating well. I tease your mom that you eat better for me.

We are both very excited and have shared the news with our friends and family. What a joy to have you in our family!

Love, Dad
Nate wrote the following letter to his parents in May while at school:

5-1-02

Dear Mom and Dad,

Thanks for helping out in the classroom. And helping me with work. I hope you like this letter and keep it for a long time. If I didn’t have you (in my) life and school would be so hard. THANKS!

Your Son,

Nate

In each Homestead family, there is a family calendar in the kitchen where important dates are recorded. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) found in their urban family literacy study that calendars remained in kitchens so that parents could recall when events were scheduled. This same practice is apparent in the middle-class homes in Homestead. Each family has pencils, pens, and a notepad near the phone in the kitchen. In the Sander’s family important phone numbers are located on paper on the refrigerator and they have a personal address book that holds important phone numbers in the kitchen. In the Sanders family, Leah is very systematic about her calendar and daily “to do list.” Leah keeps a detailed "family schedule" and a daily "to do list" (See Appendix) so that there is routine and structure to their daily family life. Leah showed me her daily "to do list" and described how she uses it:

L: First I have a to do list everyday.

M: Do your children know about that?
L: Oh yeah, because they always see that. So we always have a to do list because I write out everything. Even for them they have a daily agenda typed in their room. So I do that I type that on the computer for them. What they need to do before school starts.

M: That stays the same.

L: Like Jenny said, "Mommy you forgot to put brush your hair" and I said I think you know to brush your hair. So you know Jay always makes fun of those lists but it is actually a daily to do list for them with a time schedule and they need to be downstairs by 8 o'clock. So it kind of says a little agenda of what they have to do each day. Then I have a family schedule that I set up for the week, for the week, usually on Sundays. That tells any appointments that we have to be at and any things I want to accomplish for that day.

M: I would like to look at these.

OC: Leah went into the kitchen and retrieved the family schedule and calendar.

L: A family schedule is... well like tonight I put on there four o'clock you are coming over and seven o'clock is Scouts. Homework... I put their homework on there, and things I need to get done, phone calls that I have to make, let's see what else might I have on my agenda, just things I need to get done at home. Oh! I need to make a cookie list because I making cookies on Wednesday when I am off. So it's basic things to help me stay organized and I can just check them off.

M: So is it like a family to do list?

L: Yeah, it is my to do list, for appointments, because I have a calendar also. So I get my to do list from my calendar for appointments. So I use the calendar to set that up. (#2, p.2)

The Sander’s children also have a daily agenda that is laminated and it is located in their bedrooms to keep them organized (See Appendix H).
The Role of Increased Technology in Middle-Class Family Literacy

Leah and Jay rarely use the computer at home and their children are not frequent users of the computer either. Leah tries to check her e-mail each day at work, but sometimes she does not get around to it. Leah mentioned that she will e-mail out-of-town friends every couple of months in lieu of calling them by the phone. Leah and Jay are very busy in their personal lives and they believe the computer is a time consuming tool and they would prefer to use the telephone. Leah described her computer habits to me:

L: I don’t do anything online. I am very guilty about using the computer very much. I just don’t do it. Because once I get on there I just never get off and I feel like my time is too precious and I just don’t get on there. (#2, p. 2)

Jay described his computer habits to me:

J: We just got our school e-mail back on our home computer. So if I don’t catch it at work, I may catch it after I put the kids to bed or something like that. Then our personal e-mail I check it about every two or three days. My friends and people I know don’t e-mail me something if they need an answer right now because I am not one of those people who checks it every ten minutes. (#1, p. 5)

As a researcher who spent an extensive amount of time with the middle-class families, it is apparent that some families show excitement and value computer technology while others are uneasy about using it or they find it less useful.

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The Relationship Between Family-Based and School-Based Literacy Practices in the Sander’s Home

Leah and Jay are both experienced elementary school teachers in the Homestead City School District. Nate and Jenny also attend the same school district. Therefore, they intimately understand the school district’s curriculum, the school district’s attitude towards standardized testing, and the school district’s expectations regarding parent-teacher relationships. Leah and Jay do not expect teachers, principals, and administrators to give their children preferential treatment because they are employees within the same school district that their children attend school.

However, they both shared in conversations with me that they have received seemingly preferential treatment, and teachers have been more “honest” and forthright about their children’s academic progress because of their respective occupations as teachers in the district. This notion of teachers socializing children differently based on the occupation and social class of the parent was the focal point of Wilcox’s (1982) ethnographic research study. I will briefly review how her findings relate to my dissertation case study of the Sander’s family. In an ideal world, educational personnel are expected to behave in an unbiased manner and they should treat all children equally regardless of the parent’s occupation, teacher-parent relationship or the social class of the
parents. However, Wilcox (1982) documented in her research study that a hidden curriculum in two different first grade classrooms existed.

One first grade classroom was located in a lower-middle class area while the other was located in an all-white upper-middle-class area. Wilcox further explained that “there is considerable evidence that teachers label and form expectations of children with regard to their individual ability on the basis of the child’s membership in particular groups, the most obvious of which are social class, sex, and ethnicity” (p. 272). Another valuable finding that Wilcox (1982) uncovered in her research dealt with the image of who the child will become. Wilcox explains (1982) the children at the upper-class school “learned that they had positive futures ahead of them” (p. 293).

While at the lower-class school the teacher rarely mentioned or emphasized the importance of future consequences of present activities. In other words, the teachers had certain expectations for students based on the parent’s socio-economic status or occupation. Wilcox (1982) documented that the teaching staff at the upper-class school, “Seemed to generalize from the characteristics of the parents’ achievements to a set of expectations for the children” (p. 297). Whereas, at the lower-class school the teaching staff believed the parents had a less ambitious set of expectations for their children.
In conversations with Leah and Jay and as a former teacher in Homestead City School District for eight years, a “hidden curriculum” exists for students whose parents are actively involved in supporting or volunteering in their child’s classroom. While educators strive to remain as neutral as possible, some parent-teacher relationships have the potential to influence the amount of attention a teacher will give to a student. In a conversation that I had with Leah one evening, she shared with me that one of her child’s teachers was offering weekly verbal academic reports to Leah when she came to volunteer in the classroom. Leah explains:

L: I have always had a lot of communication, either the teachers have chosen to e-mail me but since I have been volunteering in the classrooms the last three years they keep me updated about what is going on. So I probably know more than the typical parent just because of my involvement in the classroom. They choose to tell me things all the time. Like in his (Nate’s) progress note, this year’s teacher, she said that because Mrs. Sanders comes in on a weekly basis, I will keep her in contact with what is going on with Nate in the classroom and how he is doing. On a weekly basis, I never asked for that. I was like wow, when I go in I purposely don’t want to ask about how they are doing because I feel like that distracts the teacher for why I am in there to help. So I have never chosen that but the teacher is just willing to do that. (#2, p. 5)

As soon as teachers are hired in the Homestead City School District they undergo an orientation called “The Homestead Way.” Teachers learn about the school district’s history, an overview of the curriculum, and basic expectations of home and community involvement.
Entry year teachers are paired up with a veteran teacher who is supposed to continue to mentor the first year teacher through the indoctrination of "The Homestead Way." Homestead teachers learn early in their careers that they are required to communicate to parents on a regular basis. In each school handbook parents receive the teacher's e-mail address as one form of communication.

Another expected form of communication in the elementary schools is a weekly or monthly newsletter, to let parents know about the current and upcoming events of the classroom. Due to their "insider" knowledge, the Sander's have certain expectations of school-home communication. Leah explains:

L: But you know being an educator, knowing what you know, your expectations are so much higher. You know? So I have felt informed with his teachers, except for his second grade teacher, I felt so out of touch. I didn’t know what was going on. And that was a teacher that I had to call every once in awhile to find out what was going on, there was no communication. No newsletters, nothing! We didn’t know what was going on at school. Nate wouldn’t bring homework home so that was one teacher I had to kind of get on him, but I think that was the only one.
(#2, p. 5)

In a conversation with Jay, he shared with me how he feels about the home-school communication with his children’s teachers:

J: We have been pretty pleased with the communication. I think not necessarily in Jenny’s career but with Nate, some of his teachers might not have been as forthright with us. But, knowing we were teachers, they were. If they saw some kind of problem they wouldn’t have been as up front with us and they would have said everything was ok. Just not to ruffle any feathers or anything. (#1, p.9)
The Role of State Mandated Testing in Middle Class Family Literacy in the Sander’s Home

Leah and Jay have firsthand experiences with the state-mandated testing in the schools as parents and as educators. Leah believes, as many educators believe, that state-mandated tests are not as valuable or important to the teaching and learning process as daily, familiar teaching and learning endeavors. In short, students perform differently in familiar context than they do in unfamiliar, laboratory contexts. According to Barbara Rogoff’s research (1984), “Skills that children seem not to possess in laboratory tasks thus appear well developed when these same children meet similar problems in familiar contexts” (p.2). Leah explained her perspective to me:

M: Do you think standardized tests are valuable in comparing schools or children?

L: I guess that is all that they compare though. To me as a teacher, I don’t use testing as a main focus for teaching. I mean daily teaching has more of an impact that those tests. I mean some students test well and some don’t.

Jay expressed his opinion about the usefulness or lack of usefulness of testing to me:

M: Do you think that it is important for all school districts to have the same measurements and standards by which students can be assessed?
J: I think that it is good in a way because you can see in a way how different school districts or socioeconomic factors make a difference in how well the students do on the test. I don’t have a real problem with having their scores compared. I think why we are comparing and what is our purpose for comparing? It leaves me bewildered sometimes and I wonder what we are using that information for? I don’t have a problem with everyone being on the same playing field in terms of what the test is but you have to realize they (the students) aren’t going to perform the same because some people are at a disadvantage because of cultures or experiences or what not. The tests need to be looked at compared and find out why the results are different and not necessarily punish people for not doing as well. There are so many things that are beyond the teacher’s control that are factored in that people are ignoring that it is just not fair. (#1, p.13)

Students, parents, educators, and school administrators are concerned because of potential consequences such as remediation or the diagnosis of a reading disability as a result of state mandated tests. Unfortunately, the results of state mandated tests can have a serious impact on a child’s self esteem and his or her academic career. Denny Taylor’s (1998) Beginning to Read and the Spin Doctors of Science examines the role of systematic phonics instruction and the political campaign surrounding standardized and state mandated tests. In the following quote by Taylor, she explains her opinions about the potentially damaging results for children who fail when they take standardized test measures.
Taylor (1998) explains, "To be ascribed a reading disability in the Foorman studies only takes the mispronunciation of a few pseudowords. It would be a joke if the test wasn't used so indiscriminately, and if children's lives weren't so adversely affected by the results" (p. 92). I talked to Jay about his opinion about how state mandated tests affect students' perceptions of themselves. Jay responded not only as an elementary educator, but also as a parent of children who have experienced such tests:

M: As a parent and teacher what kind of message do you think students get about themselves from the proficiency tests?

J: I think the students are less concerned about it than the adults. You know I think that may change. The consequences of the results of the tests change every year so it is hard to keep track of exactly what the consequences are. I mean the consequence used to be the fourth grade guarantee which stated that if they (the students) didn't pass the test, they would have to stay in fourth grade. Naturally when that consequence was in existence, I think it would make more of an impact in terms of the child's emotional well being. Compared to now, it is just a number, it is just a score. Either you are proficient or you're not. But I think they (the students) realize if they didn't pass it, there are issues that they need to work on. Then again, with the fourth grade proficiency test a lot of it has written responses so that if you are not a good writer you will have problems. (#1, p. 14)

Leah and I also discussed how state mandated proficiency tests impact a student's self-esteem. Leah explained her perspective as an elementary educator and as a parent:

M: What do standardized tests do for a student's self-esteem? Do you think it makes an impact?
L: Yeah, I definitely think it makes an impact. Well, I shouldn’t say on everybody but on students who care it has an impact. Because they are the ones who get the most stressed about it. You know a lot of gifted children are very much on the edge, they want to know exactly what they need to do. For example, I have a child this year who is gifted and she is very emotional if things don’t go her way and she cries. So as she took the test she became very stressed. Although she is gifted, she has difficulty with spelling and taking timed tests. I think it puts on more pressure. I have seen children who get stomach aches from those tests. Like last week when I gave the (state mandated test) they got all worked up about it. They asked, “Who is going to see it? Who is going to read it? How will it be scored?” All of those questions came up. I think it puts undue pressure on them. (#2, p.8)

The educational enterprise is being controlled by many people who lack continuous classroom experience. Teachers are losing their autonomy and are being told that their students need to pass state mandated tests, feeling the pressure to teach for the purpose of the state mandated tests so that their students will be successful. As Tharp and Gallimore (1988) explain, “The entire system of schooling merely directs and assesses teachers; it does not teach and support them. Schools hire teachers, drop them in classrooms, and subsequently attend to them only to perform assessment. This is wrongheaded and destructive for every member of the community” (p. 189). Teachers are told to administer a battery of different kinds of tests.
Some standardized test results are used for internal purposes and are only shared within the school district and other tests are state mandated and the results are shared externally with "others" outside of the school district. Since there are so many standardized tests being administered, it can be stressful and confusing for teachers and students.

Jay and Leah, as previously mentioned, are both educators in Homestead and parents of two children in the Homestead City School District. The Sander's son, Nate, has experienced some reading challenges in his school-based setting but not in his home-based setting. Nate was placed in a remedial reading group early in his school career and Jay described his feelings about the placement:

M: Can you think of a situation when communication was good or not so good between home and school?

J: Nate was put into a reading group in first or second grade and we were pleased to see that happen. There was communication there that he could use some extra help and we (he and Leah) were the type of people who thought that the smaller size group and the more individual attention will only help him. There have been times when Nate has had more inexperienced teachers so I don't think that they were as on top of what type of comprehension skills needed improved so there wasn't as much communication. But I would say for the most part there have been teachers who have been good at keeping us abreast to what was going on. (#1, p. 10)

M: How did they determine that he needed to be placed in a remedial reading group this year?

J: This year with the new reading intervention teachers they have identified that Nate is one that they want to give more help too. I'm
not sure that the testing that Homestead gives is accurate as it could be. Just having experiences with it as a classroom teacher, you know you are seeing kids that are shown with our own district testing to be at the second grade level and you know that they passed the fourth grade proficiency tests. So that doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me.

M: So Nate is getting remedial reading help in a small reading group based on internal district testing?

J: Yes, they are in the beginning stages, so I am not sure exactly how it is running but he missed passing the fourth grade proficiency test by a couple of points. So they tested all of those children and I don’t know if they decided a certain number based on those tests that need to be put into this (remedial reading) group to be given reading instruction to work on whatever specific skills they need improvement on. He has been in our estimation an average reader who comprehends fairly well. We think he scored pretty well on his third grade tests. I am not sure of percentage in the average range. So you get a mixed message sometimes. I don’t know if I agree with all of the testing that is being used, I don’t know how accurate it is. (#1, p. 11)

It can be disconcerting to parents who are professional elementary educators to see children fail an assessment, knowing the children have more academic capabilities than what is actually measured by the test. In short, students may be fully literate but their literacy skills are not fully measured during that brief snapshot in time when they are taking the test. Leah and Jay intimately understand as parents and as educators that some tests are not an accurate portrayal of a child’s literacy knowledge.
Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) describe how an inaccurate portrait of a child's literacy knowledge must be examined in further detail. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) state, "Literacy is not a discrete event, nor is it a package of predetermined skills. The complex, yet oversimplified, boundaries that we have established so that we can count, weigh, and measure literacy do not exist. They are of our own making" (p. 201).

THE NGUYEN FAMILY

Multiple Contexts for Literacy in the Nguyen Family

Nilesh values academics and morality, and he believes that it is his job as a parent to teach Andrew these values. He also feels that Andrew will maximize his success if he adheres to a set homework routine each day. He believes that he has a critical role in developing Andrew's morality so that he can grow up to become a well educated, caring person who will be successful in life. Nilesh explained to me how he views his parental role one day:

N: In my country it a little different. A child has to learn from the parent, the parent is the example for everything. That is why I tell him, he has to be a good person, Not make crime on the outside on the street and inside respect the people, most of all the old people need respect. I raise him until he is eighteen years old. Eighteen years old is a long time for a child to respect a parent. Some families are different, they have children fifteen or sixteen years old and they have more power than the parents. Some of the parents listen to them, a little bit different. But school is very important for the child. Because everything they learn from that. But morality they learn it from my family first. (#2, p.1)
The Nguyen Family: Reading Work-Based and School-Based Material at Home

Nilesh and Lee have only one child, Andrew, who is eight years old. Nilesh reads work-related magazines about the computer for leisure. Nilesh also spend a significant amount of time on the computer reading material online. Lee spends very little time reading. During the study she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and was hospitalized. When she returned home to recover, she was not permitted by her doctor to go up steps for many weeks after her invasive surgery to remove the cancer. Therefore, Nilesh moved a single bed downstairs into the living room for her. During the majority of my visits, Lee spent her time watching videos or television in bed in the family room. I think due to this unusual health-related circumstance, it is hard to determine the type of typical reading she may have chosen if she were feeling better. She does not read, write or speak English easily.

Parent as Teacher: Academic Writing to Support Reading Comprehension

Andrew enjoys reading the Goosebumps chapter books. His favorite book is *The Attack of the Evil Twin*. As a student in my second grade classroom, Andrew, liked to read Goosebumps books. However, he became easily distracted during the assigned quiet reading time. Nilesh has a daily reading and writing routine established in their home.
Nilesh allows Andrew to get a snack and to watch television until 5:00pm each day. At 5:00pm Andrew sits at the dining room table and he does all homework that his teacher assigned. After he completes that work, Nilesh gives additional work to him. Nilesh gives Andrew work in reading, writing and math. The daily reading work that Andrew is required to do is usually to read one chapter from a book he picks out or his dad helps him pick out at the public library. After Andrew reads the chapter, he is expected to copy the entire chapter verbatim in his writing journal. Andrew has been doing this reading and writing routine for three years since first grade. Andrew explained to me how he became interested in reading and writing:

M: When did you become interested in reading and writing?
A: It all started in second grade. In first grade (Mrs. Hartley) gave us this book to read and so I read it.
M: How about writing, when did you start writing in these notebooks for your Dad?
A: It was when I was seven, when I was in first grade, I would get shorter books (notebooks).
M: Do you think writing in this notebook is helping you become a better reader?
A: Yes, it helps and sometimes I read it to my dad, if I don’t know a word. He says the word and I say it back to him about five times and I remember it.
M: So in first grade you started writing in notebooks every night after you read?
A: Yeah
M: So how many of these notebooks like this one do you have?
A: I don’t know, it is all upstairs.
M: Maybe you can show me later?
A: Ok
M: What kinds of things do you like to draw?
A: Knives, guns and Dragonball Z

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M: I don’t know what Dragonball Z is?
A: It’s like men and kids and boys and girls that have simple powers.
M: Are they in a book or on TV or video?
A: Books, video, and TV but not DVD.
M: Do you watch them on TV?
A: Yeah on TV and on video sometimes.
M: Everyday?
A: Not everyday, I don’t have cable. I watch it at my cousin (Terry’s) house or I watch the video that I get from the library.
OC: Later on, Andrew showed me the notebooks in his bedroom, there were approximately twenty of them at his desk in his bedroom.

Nilesh writes traditional letters to his sister-in-law and to his mother-in-law in Vietnam around Christmas and the New Year. Nilesh is the only person who actively uses the computer and he told me that he rarely types e-mail messages unless it is required for his work.

Nilesh explains, “It take me fifteen to twenty minute to type short message. I use it for work, but it take long time. I use only one or two finger each time.

My typing is not good.” Nilesh said he never thought of writing a “to do list” for Andrew. When I asked him about it Nilesh told me, “I don’t write to Andrew in English because I don’t write very good in English. I am afraid that I make a mistake.”

The Role of Increased Technology in Middle-Class Family Literacy

In the Nguyen family, Nilesh uses the computer but Lee, his wife does not use it. Andrew is only allowed to use the computer when his father is with him.
Nilesh does not trust Andrew alone on the computer because he previously damaged the computer. Nilesh also does not trust Andrew on the computer when Lee and Andrew are home together because he thinks Lee fails to pay close attention to Andrew's actions on the computer. Nilesh explained his mistrust of Andrew to me:

M: Does Andrew spend much time on the computer?

A: Not yet, not at home. I want him to use it but he is a handful. He uses drills and my pliers to open some stuff.

A: No (quietly)

OC: Andrew joined us at the table and he disagreed quietly.

N: My telephone. I am scared about him at home alone. Very scared about him alone. Sometime he messes up my computer. At home I get him to play a game in there (pointing to the formal living room where the video game is located)

M: So you have to be with him on the computer?

N: Yeah, but by himself or with his mom I don't know what he is doing. So I have to keep an eye on him to know what he play. I let him play a game in there on the computer. But when I am not home I don't let him play because he is a handful. (laughing) He mess with everything at home. Now he use the screwdriver and my pliers to open and to learn about some things about the telephone and there was a mobile toy that some people buy for him and he opened it. (#2, p. 6)

Nilesh values the computer as a learning tool and a precious commodity, therefore, he does not allow Andrew to use it often and never without his presence.
Nilesh has had to work really hard for everything they have and I believe that he thinks Andrew is disrespectful to the computer. In the following conversation with Nilesh he explained to me the subtle differences he perceives with respect in American culture as compared to Asian culture.

N: Children need to respect their parents, respect their grandparents and obey everything that the parent tell them to do. I feel it is a different way from here (in America). It look like the child in this country has more power than the parents. It look like that way.

M: I know what you are saying. (#2, p.1)

The Relationship Between Family-Based and School-Based Learning

In the Nguyen home, Nilesh listens to Andrew read to him each night. Since English is a second language for Nilesh, occasionally, he is unable to read some words in Andrew's books and he can't help him. However, if Andrew comes to a word that he can not pronounce, Nilesh has Andrew repeat the word several times to help Andrew obtain the word by memory. Nilesh values reading and wants to support Andrew as much as possible.

Nilesh does not know what kind of comprehension questions to ask Andrew and when to ask them. Nilesh focuses on what he can help Andrew with and that is correct pronunciation. Nilesh explained:

N: We go to the library and I let him read to me every night. It is all I can do but I don't know if he pronounce good enough or not. I don't know the American sayings only the Vietnamese sayings so I listen to him read the whole book or half of the book. My knowledge about English is not what I want for him, well when I speak it to you it is not right. But in school they teach him English by English. But to me in Vietnam they teach English by
Vietnamese. So that is why I can not teach him how to spell, how to pronounce. Sometimes, I say “pass it” to him because sometimes I do not know how to pronounce a word to him. I worry about it, that is the first one.

M: If he reads a book to you, are you able to understand what it is about?

N: Yeah, I understand what it is about but I don’t know if he pronounce it good enough or bad I don’t know. (#2, p. 2)

Nilesh is a strong advocate for Andrew’s learning in the home-based setting. He has a structured daily routine that I observed on multiple occasions.

Both Andrew and Nilesh have described the schedule to me. Andrew has more work required by his father, than any of the other child participants in the study. Andrew explains his routine after school:

A: I can watch television until 5:00. Then if the school gives me homework I do that first.

M: Does your Dad give you homework when you have school homework?

A: If the school gives me a lot, he will give me less. Like if the school gives me math journal pages 171, 172, 173 and 174. Then he (his dad) will give me less because if he give me more then it will probably take me way past my bedtime.

M: So do you have some kind of work for your Dad every night?

A: yes
Nilesh and I spoke about the additional work that he provides for Andrew beyond his school work. Nilesh explained to me that he gets the additional work for Andrew from the Internet. Similar to Mrs. Smith, he has been able to find web sites that focus on certain skills for a particular grade level. Nilesh pays close attention to the paperwork that Andrew brings home from school and he determines areas that Andrew needs additional help.

The Role of State-Mandated Testing in Middle-Class Family Literacy

When I asked Nilesh if he thinks that standardized testing are valuable in comparing schools or children, he said that he did not about any testing that was going on in the school. I asked him if he received any information from the school in the school newsletter or from Mrs. Thomas, Andrew’s teacher, about testing and he said he did not receive anything.

I spoke to Andrew about the Stanford testing that he took at school:

M: Did you recently took the Stanford Tests at school?

A: Yes

M: How did you feel about the Stanford tests?

A: It was kind of hard.
THE WALKER FAMILY

The Multiple Contexts for Literacy for the Walker Family

Scott and Andrea value non-print literacy and they have imparted this on their children. Ellie, age three, is capable of putting videos into the VCR independently. Lucy, age six, has her own e-mail account and she is just beginning to write e-mail messages to friends and family with her parent’s assistance. The Walker’s value traditional print literacy activities too. They have an established storybook reading routine every night. Both Ellie and Lucy have paper, pencils, marker, and crayons that are available for immediate use in their upstairs playroom for writing and drawing.

Scott and Andrea want to make learning fun and something that their children will look forward to doing. Since Andrea is an elementary teacher she intimately understands what is expected of Lucy in Kindergarten and in the upcoming elementary school years. Therefore, Andrea and Scott do not want to pressure or explicitly practice “school-related” learning. Instead, Andrea and Scott incorporate thinking strategies into their children’s daily activities. In the following conversation with Scott he describes the kind of interactions that he and Andrea have with the children:

S: We read to them every night or any chance we get. Don’t let them watch too much T.V. or for too long. I mean they watch a little bit of T.V. in the evening and some in the morning but compared to what I hear other kids
do, not nearly as much. Try to make a game out of learning, to make it fun. I mean they are going to get a lot of the official stuff later on in school. I mean it is more fun for everybody. I think they learn quicker that way. I mean we never sat Lucy down with flashcards and said you have gotta learn your letters or numbers that way. Instead we made more of a game out of it.

M: So you never sat her down and explicitly taught her those things but you have that electronic game that has the alphabet letters that Lucy likes to play with, is that the type of game you are talking about?

S: Well...let's say I give Lucy some raisins and I say, "Ok I just gave you two raisins, if I give you two more, how many will you have?" You know doing that type of thing. Or when we are brushing our teeth, I might say let's start with the letter B, how many words can you think of that start with the letter B? Just making games like that. (#1, pgs.3-4)

The Walker Family: Storybook Reading Rituals

Andrea and Scott enjoy reading for pleasure. They are both interested in nutrition and fitness so their leisure reading material consists of reading magazines related to their personal interests. Andrea reads Parents magazine and she also enjoys reading articles about health-related issues. Scott reads Running, Photography, and Bike magazines.

The Walker children, Lucy and Ellie, are at the emergent stage of literacy development. Andrea and Scott read books to them each night. Lucy is able to read patterned picture books independently. In the Walker home, Scott and Andrea alternate which child they read with each night.
Scott Walker explained how storybook reading began in their family:

S: Since they came home from the hospital we have read books with them, two or three a night. And they go through stages, right now they are in a stage where it used to be that Andrea kind of read with Ellie and I would read to Lucy. And now they both want to sleep in the same bed so either Andrea or I will read to both of them. More often than not it's Andrea just cause I will start to read one book and then Andrea will finish up or whatever. (#1, p.4)

One evening I observed their bedtime and storybook reading routine. In general, the Walkers like routines but they are also flexible to changes in their family reading routine. Scott read to Lucy who is just beginning to read independently this year in Kindergarten. Scott was lying on the bed while reading with Lucy. Meantime, in Ellie’s room across the hall, Andrea read a few books with Ellie. Andrea, Ellie, and I read Eric Carle's Planting a Rainbow. We each took turns reading, Andrea and I became very excited when Ellie, who is three, read some of the words to us.

A: OK what does that say? (pause)

OC: Ellie does not reply

A: All summer

E: I want to say it! All summer we (pause)

A: Pick them and bring them home (pause)
E: Bring them home and watch them grow, and grow and grow

A and M: Wow!

M: Good for you!

A: This is the last page. And when summer is over we know we can grow o-u-r (pause)

E: Rainbow!

Andrea carefully supported Ellie’s reading as she started a new line of text on each page. She also paused to see if Ellie would attempt to finish reading the lines of text independently. While babysitting Ellie and Lucy, a few weeks later, the bedtime storybook reading had already changed. The girls, as Scott mentioned, were interested in sleeping in the double bed together in the guest room rather than in their own respective bedrooms. So I read some bedtime stories to both of them at the same time since this was their current reading routine. Scott and Andrea want Ellie and Lucy to enjoy the storybook reading routine each night. Scott and Andrea let their children take ownership of the routine, by alternating the routine based on the children’s requests.

Teacher as Parent: Guide by the Side in Narrative and Technology Writing Contexts

Ellie, age three, recognizes environmental print. Scott told me that she first recognized her initials on her “sippy” cup at two years old.
He said that recently she pointed to and read her name on a "personalized" teddy bear that she owns. Lucy, age six, enjoys drawings pictures and writing people's names. Scott explains:

S: She (Lucy) gets pretty excited about doing little drawings and putting everyone's name on them. For all of the aunts and uncles and nieces and nephews. (#l. P. 4)

Lucy and Ellie are engaged in a variety of emergent writing activities in their daily lives. For example, Lucy's grandmother will dictate stories to Lucy and she will write them in her notebook. Lucy, Ellie, and Andrea play "school" and sometimes this involves writing. For instance, one day when I was visiting the home, Lucy, Ellie, Andrea and I played "school." Andrea played for awhile and she left to answer the phone and came back to Lucy's room approximately twenty minutes later. When I acted like the teacher, Lucy requested that I ask the students to practice handwriting.

OC: we were in Lucy's bedroom. Lucy and Ellie had picture books, notebooks, pencils, crayons, and backpacks lying on the floor and at Lucy's desk.

M: So how do we play school?

L: You just tell us words.

M: I tell you words and you write them?

L: Well, like 1+1 or something like that.

M: OK, boys and girls it is time for math so let's get out our pencils and paper. Are you ready?
L: Yeah (quietly)

M: Alright, today we are going to learn addition. Do you know what that means? That means we are going to learn how to add two numbers together.

L: I know that. I even know three numbers.

M: OK, so we are going to add $1 + 1 = $

OC: As I am writing the numbers on a clipboard, I am holding them for Lucy and Ellie to see and to copy on their paper.

L: It equals 2.

M: Oh, it equals two, OK thank you Lucy. You are so smart! OK, Lucy
Can you give us a problem to do, what would you like to do?

L: $8 + 8$

M: $8 + 8 = $

L: Equals 16

In recent literacy research there has been a growing interest in documenting and analyzing reading, writing, and dramatic play activities that occur in out-of-school contexts (Hull and Schultz, 2002). Ultimately, by understanding non-school literacy practices better, educators can begin to bridge practices between home and school contexts. From the data segment above, regarding the dramatic play episode, it is apparent that Lucy has personally internalized and is bridging her school-based literacy practices to her home-based context.
Some participants engage in more reading and writing for social purposes due to the convenience of the computer. For instance, Scott Walker indicated that because of the computer, he is now writing e-mail notes to his brother who lives out-of-town. Technology in the home has allowed them to remain closer because they did not engage in traditional letter writing before the onset of e-mail messages.

M: How often do you find yourself e-mailing friends, family or Andrea?

S: Daily

M: Do you think e-mail replaced letter writing for you?

S: I didn’t do letter writing before.

M: Do you talk to people by e-mail rather than the phone?

S: No, but it is a way for my brother and I to send each other back little notes. You know, “How did the guys do racing?” or “What is going on at the shop?” Or talking about college football. We talk to each other about things that we normally wouldn’t communicate about anyhow. We weren’t the type to talk to each other once a week or anything but e-mail has just sort of opened up a new avenue for us. You know my parents are down in Florida and we will e-mail them photos of the kids. They (my parents) will say they are getting together with their neighbors or taking a cruise, or going to the beach. So it provides another venue of communication.

((#1, p.3)

Andrea writes many lists to herself on post-it notes that she sticks to the top of the kitchen desk to help her remain organized. She has a pocket book
calendar that she places by the telephone; it remains open at all times when she is home. I have frequently observed Andrea writing in her pocketbook calendar or referring to it. In the Walker home, the children are not given “to do” lists, since Lucy is just learning to read independently.

The Role of Increased Technology in Middle-Class Family Literacy

In the Walker family, Andrea and Scott are usually in the room with Lucy, age six, when she gets on the computer. Ellie, age three, is not working on the computer yet. The computer is located in the den which is located next to the family room on the first floor of their home. Andrea and Scott use the computer for e-mail, the Internet, and to send digital pictures to out-of-town family members. Scott told me that he checks his e-mail throughout the day at work. They both e-mail friends, family, and use it for work-related communication. Scott is employed as a graphic designer. He described the type of computer work he does to me one evening:

S: I do a lot of work with graphic images. A lot of scanning and cleaning them up, taking things out, putting things in, and making signs and banners. There is always new technology coming out so I am always reading manuals, books, trade journals, and stuff like that. On the side, I am working on websites for people. So I do a lot of reading, writing, and putting proposals together for people to do in the website form. Or just even learning about the web myself. I spend a lot of time doing that myself. (#1, p. 3)
Lucy, age 6, is just beginning to learn how to type on the computer and send e-mail messages. She is proficient with starting the computer and knows how to load and play her favorite computer programs independently. Andrea is patient with Lucy as she attempts to learn the keyboard so that she can type. Andrea uses the same language with Lucy when she is learning how to type on the computer that she uses when she reads with either Lucy or Ellie. She pauses and gives some support and scaffolds her daughter's learning. She also gives them “wait time” so that they can attempt to figure out new literacy tasks with some independence. One morning I observed as Lucy and Andrea worked at the computer together:

M: So do you like having your own e-mail account?

L: Yeah, it's www.pbs.kids.org

A: Let's check your e-mail first then we'll go to PBS. Ok it says sign your name so you need to type in Lucy.

L: L-U-C-Y, now I have to spell Walker altogether

A: It is Lucy Walker you are right, it wasn't just Lucy.

L: Daddy said that it wasn't Lucy it was Lucy Walker altogether.

A: Oh, OK.

OC: Lucy is slowly typing, since she is new to using e-mail and typing too.

A: Now, what is your password? Do you know how to spell it?
L: Yeah

A: Now, go to the Inbox, yeah right there. Double click on the message. Do you know what that says right there?

L: Yeah, Dear Lucy.

The Relationship Between Family-Based and School-Based Literacy Practices

In the data above, it is apparent that Andrea has "inside" knowledge of how children acquire new skills and concepts when engaged in the learning process. Andrea indirectly socializes Lucy and Ellie to school-based literacy learning practices while in the context of their home. Andrea uses a questioning strategy to guide Lucy through her learning of how to write an e-mail message or other reading and writing tasks.

In Heath's (1983) ethnography in Southeastern United States she went into homes of teachers and of Trackton children to fully understand the relationship between the school and the community literacy practices. Heath (1982) documented that, "Questions teachers used in their homes with their own pre-schoolers were very similar to those they and their colleagues used in school with their students" (p. 120). In the Walker home, I observed cultural congruence between home-based and school-based literacy practices.
Andrea talks and questions Lucy and Ellie at home using the same school-based discourse she uses with her Homestead elementary students. Lucy is in afternoon kindergarten this school year. She has experienced a successful, seamless transition to school-based literacy. Her success may be directly related to the fact that she has become accustomed to the school-based language at home for several years prior to attending kindergarten. Scott has adopted some of the same questioning patterns as Andrea.

During this firsthand observation of Scott as he was engaged in a family storybook reading routine I witnessed his verbal interactions with the children. I also witnessed that Lucy is familiar with the expectations of behavior during read aloud at school. Lucy is used to children listening to the teacher read and remaining quiet. Lucy is also accustomed to looking at the book while the teacher is reading. Ellie, on the other hand, has not been socialized to these school-based reading practices and has trouble remaining quiet, sitting still, and looking at the text being read.

S: *Big Max*, I thought we were tired if this one, we read it last night?

L: No, *Big Max*

S: *Big Max* (pause) *The World's Greatest Detective*

OC: Scott reads several pages using an animated voice. Lucy interrupts his reading to ask about the words Polka, Polka.

L: Where is Polka, Polka?
S: Oh, it's an island up...

L: No, where is the word?

S: Right there!

OC: Scott points to the requested word on the printed page. Scott reads several more pages when Ellie walks in the room and has decided that she wants to lay in bed with Lucy and her dad to listen to the story. Ellie, age three, has trouble sitting still for the read aloud. After awhile, Lucy tells her she needs to stop playing around and listen to the story quietly.

L: SHH! Ellie if you don't want to listen quietly you need to leave.

S: Scott reads several more pages.

OC: Lucy is familiar with school-based read aloud routines. She understands the rules of listening quietly and looking at the book. Lucy is getting disturbed with what she perceives as "misbehavior" during read aloud time.

L: Ellie! Look at the book!

OC: Scott keeps on reading throughout the disagreement between the sisters.

Lucy is applying her knowledge of school-based knowledge of literacy practice to the home context. Andrea and Scott value academics and they hope that their children will be successful in school. Andrea explained to me how her own parents emphasized the importance of school and how they supported her academically:

A: I think it was a combination of...I think I received a good education. I went to good schools when I was younger all the way through high school and college. Overall, I think that I had good
teachers. I had a well rounded education as far as learning how to read and write. Learning about the world, then I also think my parents really encouraged education and really, really put education as a high priority in our life. But they never pressured us, they made us realize that education was important and that they always wanted us to do our best. (#1, p.2).

Scott and Andrea also recognize that valuable socialization skills are also critical for success in society and they believe those skills can be gained in the school-context. Andrea explained her opinions about the importance of socialization at school:

M: What were the main reasons for sending Lucy to preschool?

A: Socialization, she went when she was 3. I just wanted her to have the experience of playing with other children. All of the things like sharing, taking turns, things like that. At the time and looking back still, I didn't really want a lot of focusing on academics. I think as a teacher I knew she would have enough schooling. I wanted it to be more fun and play-oriented. (#1, p.1)

School Entry

Lucy is in kindergarten and Ellie is in preschool two days a week. Unlike the other families in the dissertation study, Scott and Andrea are at the beginning of a formal “school-based” experience with a child. They have participated in all of the school sponsored activities offered so far and Amy has offered to volunteer in Lucy’s kindergarten classroom on the days that she is off from her teaching position at (Highland) Elementary school.

M: Have you been involved in her kindergarten experience?
A: They have had two field trips and one of them was on a day when I was working. I did go on a trip to the zoo with them. I have talked to the teacher a couple of times about volunteering in the classroom, she hasn’t put together the schedule yet. I am hoping and looking forward to go into her room. So far we (she and Scott) have gone to all of the things they have had, curriculum night and meet the teacher. As involved as I can be.

Scott and Andrea are very supportive of the school. After the first parent teacher conference Scott recognized that Lucy was really interested in writing in her writer’s notebook at school, so he bought a special Barbie notebook for her at home.

S: We had a parent-teacher conference and the teacher said that she really liked her journal so I got her a Barbie notebook for home. So every night for about two weeks she wrote sentences and stuff like that in there. (#1, p. 4)

The Role of State Mandated Testing in Middle-Class Family Literacy

Andrea and Scott have no firsthand experience with either of their children taking state mandated tests for school. Andrea has experienced administering state mandated tests as a educator in Homestead City School District. Andrea and I had a conversation about state mandated testing:

M: What role do you think politicians, parents, teachers, community members, and business play in determining what children should know and learn?

A: I think it is important for politicians to...one thing I have always wished is that people where ever it is, the national level, state level, or the local level, I wish they could be in the classroom when they are setting guidelines. I think it is important for them to realize what
the classroom is like. They need to see the classroom, the children, everything, in order to set and determine what is expected of teachers. As far as the community, I definitely think they have an important role, what it should be, I am not certain.

M: Do you think that it is important for all school districts to have the same measurements and standards that students can be evaluated by?

A: Yes, somewhat, I think there needs to be consistency. However, I don’t know this from experience but I have heard from other teachers how hard it is for some schools to do well with lack of behavior and support and other concerns. So I don’t know how schools could keep up their test scores for those reasons.

M: Do you think the scores of the state proficiency tests thoroughly measures what is being taught or learned in the schools?

A: Yes, I would say to a point but there are exceptions because some students test better than others, or some students have a bad test day or a good test day for some reason.

M: Do you think that standardized tests results reflect a quality school? So if a school performs poorly on a standardized test or if a school does extremely well on a test, should that be a reflection of a quality school?

A: I think it is just one part of the whole picture. I think there are other things that also reflect whether a school is a quality school or not. Things such as how many children receive awards for positive behavior. Parent support within the school is a reflection of a quality school. There are some events or experiences that students are involved in.

M: Do you think the state proficiency tests improve student’s motivation?

A: I think some students would experience motivation because they thrive under pressure, they want to do well. There are other students who may not do well because they stress and worry about the tests. (#1, p.3-4)
Scott is not an employee of the Homestead School District, he is a graphic
designer. However, since he is married to Andrea, on occasion, she will talk to
him about her job. Scott was well informed when we spoke of the shortcomings
of the educational system.

A: What do you think the shortcomings of the schools or educational
systems might be in terms of meeting the needs of children?

S: Just all of the bureaucracy, especially since Andrea is a teacher, I
probably get a close hand look at it than a lot of things. The
politically correctness that you have to have, I mean you can’t do
Christmas things because of one or two people who don’t celebrate
it and all that kind of stuff. I think it really confuses kids.

M: Does Lucy ask about why she celebrates Christmas at home and
not at school?

S: At this age no, I think in a couple of years. And I think that it
affects the teachers. And all of these proficiency tests and stuff like
that. They (teachers) start teaching to the tests rather than doing
what they need to be doing to make children progress. And the lack
of parent involvement.

M: Do you think that it is important for all districts to have the
same measurements and standards to be compared to other districts?

S: I think it is hard because you are educating people for well. I mean
growing up in a small farming community, there were only a handful
of kids out of my class that went to college.

M: So those kids from your hometown are taking the same
proficiency test as these kids form Homestead.

S: Right, and children from Homestead or (children from another
upper-middle class school district he mentioned) will have a higher
percentage of kids, I would put money on it, that will go to college
than the kids in my high school class. I mean a lot of kids that I went
to high school with were going to work on the farm or work in some
kind of trade or something like that. They weren’t going to go to college. I think you are trying to accomplish two different types of things because you have two different types of people. I mean I don’t know what the answer is, I think they need to be held accountable to the same standards. You know coming from a guy standpoint, you may have a question on that test that is a chemistry formulas but on the farm test the guy may know how to set out rafters on a roof. You know you ask the other students and they have no concept of that. They both apply the same concept type of principles but coming from a different background it’s hard to ask general questions that is fair to both.

M: I think what you are saying is that there is local knowledge or values.

S: Exactly!

M: So do you think what parents in Homestead value or what they want their children to achieve at school may be somewhat different than what parents in a small town or rural community value?

S: Correct, because they knew they didn’t have the finances to send their kids to college and they just said you are going to work in a factory, which there is nothing wrong with that. I mean we need those type of people and they are just as intelligent as other people but that is just the way they were brought up.

M: Do you think that state proficiency tests scores are a good reflection of the quality of learning in those schools?

S: I don’t think a good one. I think they are a reflection of the quality of the community than the school. Because to make a school a success you have to have parents that are involved and that care.

(#1, p.6-7)

In the last section of Chapter 4, I will provide a summary of each family, describing the multiplicity of literacy learning experiences which are embedded in the fabric of their families’ lives.
Summary of the Smith Family's Literacy Practices

The parents have read to the children since they were infants and continue to encourage the children to become engaged in recreational reading. For instance, Mary noticed that Rachel was assigned a *Little House on the Prairie* book by her teacher and Rachel was reluctant to read it because it did not seem relevant or interesting since the setting of the story took place so long ago. Mary went to the library and checked out the *Little House on the Prairie* television videos for Rachel to watch so she would understand the context of the book and hopefully become more motivated to read the assigned book. As a result, Rachel read her assigned book and chose to read two more books in the *Little House on the Prairie* series. As shown in Table 4.2, the parents and children are engaged in a variety of different types of reading (see Table 4.2).
Table 4.2: The Parents’ and Children’s Reading Practices in the Smith Family

In the den in their home, Mary keeps a collection of notebooks, folders, and writing tools for the children to use at their leisure. I observed notebooks in various places throughout their home. Seth even hid one of his notebooks so that his older sisters would not use it. Rachel likes to write notes to her mom if her mom is not at home when she goes to bed. Rachel writes a note in her notebook and leaves it at her parents door for Mary to read when she returns.
As shown in Table 4.3, the parents and children are engaged in a variety of different types of writing (see Table 4.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent: Mary Smith</th>
<th>Parent: Rick Smith</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Greeting cards</td>
<td>*Daily E-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Daily E-mail</td>
<td>*Greeting cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Occasional Letters</td>
<td>*Work-Related Writing/Typing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child: Allison Smith (age 11)</th>
<th>Child: Seth Smith (age 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Daily E-mail</td>
<td>*Drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Home-School Journal</td>
<td>*E-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Letter Writing</td>
<td>*Computer Typing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Narrative (story) Writing</td>
<td>(Practices his letters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Letter Writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child: Rachel Smith (age 9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*E-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Letter Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Narrative (story) Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*School-Based Writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: The Parents’ and Children’s Writing Practices in the Smith Family
In the Smith family, the parents, Mary and Rick, value and use technology on a daily basis and encourage their children to use technology as a tool to enhance their literacy learning at home. As shown in Table 4.4, the parents and children use a variety of technology practices in their home (see Table 4.4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent: Mary Smith</th>
<th>Parent: Rick Smith</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Daily E-mail</td>
<td>*Daily E-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Online Reading</td>
<td>*Online Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Renews Books at Local Library</td>
<td>*Digital Camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Digital Camera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Child: Allison Smith (age 11)**

*Daily E-mail
*Daily Computer Game
*1 Day a Week Plays Video Game
*2 or 3 Days a Week Watch a Movie Video

**Child: Seth Smith (age 6)**

*Daily Computer Typing
*Daly Computer Games
*Daly Electronic Learning Games
*2 or 3 Days a Week Watch a Movie Video

**Child: Rachel Smith (age 9)**

*2 or 3 Days a Week Use E-mail
*2 or 3 Days a Week Play Computer games
*2 or 3 Days a Week Watch a Movie Video

Table 4.4: The Parents’ and Children’s Technology Practices in the Smith Family

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Summary of the Sanders Family’s Literacy Practices

The parents, Leah and Jay, value traditional print literacy practices more than non-print technology-related literacy practices. Both parents have taken an active role in establishing a reading routine with their children from infancy and beyond. They pay close attention to Nate and Jenny’s reading comprehension strategies.

They recognize as classroom teachers the importance of these comprehension skills to success in school-based literacy. Leah and Jay are both avid readers and are often reading the newspaper, magazines or novels in the presence of their family. As shown in Table 4.5, the parents and children are engaged in a variety of types of reading (see Table 4.5).
Parent: Leah Sanders

* Novels
* Magazines
* Occasionally Reads the Newspaper
* Children’s Picture Books

Parent: Jay Sanders

* Daily Newspaper
* Magazines
* Novels
* Children’s Picture Books

Child: Nate Sanders (age 11)

* Chapter Books
* Picture Books
* Magazines
* Computer Games
* Video Games
* Occasionally Reads the Newspaper

Child: Jenny Sanders (age 8)

* Chapter Books
* Picture Books
* Magazines
* Computer Games
* Video Games
* Occasionally Reads the

Table 4.5: The Parents and Children’s Reading Practices in the Sanders Family

In the Sander’s family letter writing occurs around special occasions and holidays. For daily communication the phone is used more often than letter writing or e-mail writing. During the three months I observed in their home Nate engaged in writing only for school-related homework. Jenny also engaged in writing for school-related purposes, however, Jenny also enjoys practices cursive writing.

Jenny requested that her mom purchase a cursive handwriting book for her. She chooses practices her cursive writing a one or two days a week.

Leah uses writing as a means of social organization. Her children often see her writing in her “Family Schedule” (see Appendix G)
Leah is a very sentimental person, therefore, she is frequently sending greeting cards and notes to friends and family members. Jay writes letters on special occasions, for instance he wrote several letters to his new daughter Margaret before and after her birth. As shown in Table 4.6, the parents and children use writing more for school related needs, however, they will occasionally use writing for recreational purposes (see Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6: The Parents’ and Children’s Writing Practices in the Sander’s Family**
Leah and Jay rarely use the computer at home and their children are not frequent users of the computer either. Leah tries to remember to check her e-mail a couple of times a week, on the days she is at work. Jay checks his e-mail approximately every other day.

Jenny, once a week, will get on the computer and use the Kid Pix writing and drawing program. I did not observe Nate on the computer during my visits to the home. Some families show excitement and value technology while others are uneasy about using it or they find it less useful. As shown in Figure 6, the parents and children are not actively using the computer in their home. The children, especially Nate, enjoy playing video games. Nate shared with me that he plays video games more often during the winter months when he can not play sports outside as often (see Table 4. 7).
Parent: Leah Sanders

*Occasional E-mail

Child: Nate Sanders (age 11)
*2 or 3 Days a Week Play Video Games
*1 Day a Week Watch a Movie Video

Parent: Jay Sanders

*Every Other Day E-mail

Child: Jenny Sanders (age 8)
*1 Day a Week Play Video
*2 Days a Week Watch Movie

Table 4.7: The Parents’ and Children’s Technology Practices in the Sanders’ Family

Summary of the Nguyen Family’s Literacy Practices

The reading and writing practices in the Nguyen family are centered around work-related or school-related literacy practices. Andrew was introduced to reading at school not at home, this is a unique characteristic to his family literacy experience in comparison to the other families I studied. Nilesh reads work-related material at home and online. I have not observed Lee reading at home. As shown in Table 4.8, Andrew reads some recreational books at home (see Table 4.8).
Parent: Nilesh Nguyen

*Work-Related Magazines
*Work-Related E-mail

Child: Andrew Nguyen

*Chapter Books
*Computer Games

Parent: Lee Nguyen

*Occasional Letters

Table 4.8: The Parents' and Children's Reading Practices in the Nguyen family

Nilesh has established a reading-writing journal that is unique to their family in the collective case study. Nilesh requires that Andrew read one chapter a night and afterwards he writes the words in the chapter verbatim into his notebook. Nilesh checks Andrew's works for accuracy when he completes his daily assignment.

Nilesh explained to me that he thinks the daily reading-writing journal helps Andrew reading comprehension. As shown in Table 4. 9, Nilesh and Lee engage in very little recreational writing. During the holidays and on special occasions, Lee and Nilesh will write greeting cards to relatives (see Table 4. 9).
Table 4.9: The Parent’s and Children’s Writing Practices in the Nguyen Family

Nilesh values the computer as a learning tool and as a precious commodity, therefore, he has strict rules about how and when Andrew can use it. Andrew must be supervised by Nilesh when using it. Nilesh uses the computer the most in their family. There is a separate television in the formal living room that Andrew can use when he is not doing his schoolwork. As shown in Table 4.10, Andrew values video games they one of Andrew’s favorite recreational activities (see Table 4.10).
Parent: Nilesh Nguyen
*Occasional Work-Related E-mail
*Online Reading
*2 or 3 Days a Week Watch a Movie Video

Parent: Lee Nguyen
*Daily Movie Video

Child: Andrew Nguyen
*Daily Video Games
*2 or 3 Days a Week Watch a Movie Video

Table 4.10: The Parent's and Children's Technology Practices in the Nguyen's Family

Summary of the Walker Family's Literacy Practices

The parents, Scott and Andrea, value traditional print and non-print literacy. Scott and Andrea have established a storybook reading routine each night. They strive to make learning fun for their two young girls, ages three and six years old. They have shared with me that they do not want to explicitly teach “school-related” learning because they know they will get plenty of exposure to school later. As shown in Table 4.11, Andrea and Scott enjoy recreational magazine reading that is related to their personal interests (see Table 4.11).
Parent: Andrea Walker

* Daily E-mail
* Online Reading
* Magazines

Child: Lucy Walker (age 6)
* Picture Books
* E-mail
* Online reading (www.pbskids.com)

Parent: Scott Walker

* Daily E-mail
* Daily Online Reading
* Magazines

Child: Ellie Walker (age 3)
* Picture Books

Table 4.11: The Parents’ and Children’s Reading Practices in the Walker’s Home

The children have a playroom on the first floor with paper, pencils, markers, and crayons that are readily available for immediate writing and drawing. On many visits to the home Lucy and Ellie were engaged in drawing, sponge painting, writing their name or family member’s names. They both write during their “playing school” episodes that I described in detail previously in this chapter. Andrea uses writing as a means of social organization. She writes in her calendar and on Post It notes that she leaves on the kitchen counter as memory aids. As shown in Table 4.12, Scott uses the computer for writing e-mail to friends, family, and for work (see Table 4.12).
Parent: Andrea Walker

* Post It Notes
* Daily Calendar
* Daily E-mail
* Greeting Cards

Child: Lucy Walker (age 6)

* Daily Writing/Drawing
* E-mail Writing

Parent: Scott Walker

* Daily E-mail
* Work Related Typing/E-mail

Child: Ellie Walker (age 3)

* Daily Writing/Drawing

Table 4.12: The Parent’s and Children’s Writing Practices in the Walker Family

In the Walker family, Andrea and Scott, value and use technology for a multitude of reasons. Through their personal interest in the computer, their young children are equally enthusiastic about using the computer. As shown in Table 4.13, the parents and children use a variety of technology practices in their home (see Table 4.13).
**Parent: Andrea Walker**

- Daily E-mail
- Online Reading
- Digital Camera

**Parent: Scott Walker**

- Daily E-mail
- Daily Online Reading
- Digital Camera
- Web Page Design
- Computer Advertisements

**Child: Lucy Walker (age 6)**

(age 3)

- E-mail
- Daily Computer Programs
  (*Jump Start Second Grade*)
- 2 or 3 Days a Week Watch Movie Videos

**Child: Ellie Walker**

- 2 or 3 Days a Week Watch Movie Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.13: The Parents’ and Children’s Technology Practices in the Walker’s Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In this chapter, I answered the central research questions and sub-questions by presenting findings from four categories: the multiple contexts for literacy for middle-class families, the role of increased technology in middle-class family literacy, the relationship between family-based and school-based literacy, and the role of state mandated testing in middle-class family literacy. The next chapter positions the findings from this study within the existing research literature, recommends areas for further research, and suggests policy implications of this study.
Comparative Summaries of Themes that Emerged Across Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Walkers</strong>:</td>
<td>Prominent technology use; emphasis on play and story; awareness but lack of concern about state-mandated testing yet. Access to school as a volunteer and a teacher in the school district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sanders</strong>:</td>
<td>Value traditional literacy practices; limited technology-based literacy; broad-based reading; less text-based writing; prominent school-based work. Lack of confidence with state-mandated testing. Access to school as a volunteer and as teachers in the school district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smith</strong>:</td>
<td>A focus on incorporating school-based literacy into the home; prominent technology based literacy; avid newspaper readers, including children; traditional and non-traditional writing; aware of importance of state-mandated testing and provide explicit test preparation. Access to school as a volunteer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nguyen</strong>:</td>
<td>Traditional literacy practices but school-based literacy practices are dominant; focus on parent as teacher; technology in home but no child participation on computer; not aware of state-mandated testing. Access to school is limited.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR FURTHER RESEARCH, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I addressed the central research questions and sub-
questions of the study. This chapter also contains a summary of the study and
its major findings, a discussion of the study's contributions to five bodies of
the research literature and substantive recommendations for further research,
methodological recommendations for further research, and implications for
professional development design.

Summary

The current dissertation study explores the literacy practices of four
middle-class families, and investigates the relationship between school-based
and family-based literacy. I became interested in the relationship between the
school and students' homes during my eight year teaching tenure in the
Homestead City School District when I observed both discontinuity and
continuity of communication between families and the school.

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I begin with the following research questions: What are the multiple context for family-based literacy? What influence does the school have on the multiple contexts for family-based literacy? Borrowing from the qualitative research traditions, I employed five forms of data collection: interviews, observations, field notes, collection of documents and artifacts, and collective case study. I use purposeful sampling to select the four families for participation in the collective case study. The purposeful sampling strategy draws participants who: 1) lived in the Homestead community; 2) had a child in elementary school; and 3) were willing to participate in the collective case study.

Summary of the Major Findings

There are four significant findings that can be reported about the four middle-class families in this study: 1) variability in family literacy practices is a characteristic within and across families at all socioeconomic levels; 2) middle-class children who are engaged in technology-based literacy at home might choose to write more in their home-based contexts; 3) literacy is shaped by access to the cultural capital of the classroom through volunteerism in the school setting; and 4) variability in opinions and stances towards state-mandated testing and variability in the influence of state-mandated tests on family literacy practices was apparent in the four families in the study.
There was a multitude of literacy practices, routines and rituals embedded into all four family’s homes. Data analysis for each family began with the first visit to each family’s home.

I selected data that focused on my research questions and I used Spradley’s (1980) qualitative research technique of domain analysis to determine the “cultural domains” present in each family. Spradley (1980) explains, “Cultural domains are categories of meaning” (p. 88). I examined the transcribed participant interviews and field notes in order to generate cultural domains. Then, I selected the semantic relationships that emerged from the interview data and field notes. As shown in Tables 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, & 5.5, I prepared a comparison of data across the four families to compare and contrast their reasons for using print and non-print literacy practices. I also looked carefully at the ways print and non-print literacy are used in the home, the ways that parents communicate with the school, and the ways that parents prepare their children for school.

**Salient findings as they relate to research questions**

I review salient findings of this study which address the central research questions and sub-questions for this study:

**Questions:**

1. What are the multiple contexts for literacy for suburban families?
2. What influence does the school have on the multiple contexts of family-based literacy?
Sub-Questions:
A. What do parents value in terms of literacy activities?
B. What do children value in terms of literacy activities?
C. How are print and non-traditional literacies used in the home?

Variability in Middle-Class Family Literacy—Findings Relate to Questions

What do parents value in terms of literacy activities?

The interview data, field notes, and observations showed that parents' literacy decision making depend on convenience, social, and cultural purposes. It is imperative for family literacy research to be conducted within families for an extensive length of time in order for the researcher to become privy to the social and cultural knowledge and beliefs that are embedded in each family. According to Gearing and Epstein (1982), research participants do not talk directly about the tacit assumptions that influence their behavior. Therefore, researchers must uncover the participants' tacit assumptions by spending a significant amount of time with them in their homes. Some members of the families I have known for several years, while others I met when the study began. During the study I became fully aware of the parents' and children's literacy practices and values through their conversations and parent-child interactions. For example, I learned about Jay Sander's interest in reading the newspaper through his children and his wife Leah long before I even spoke to Jay about his daily reading practices.
I learned how Nilesh retrieves school-related work for Andrew on the Internet because I saw the web site listed on Andrew’s paper. I asked Nilesh about it and he explained how he paid a fee to the web site and can acquire worksheets that are established for certain grade levels.

It makes sense that Nilesh would pursue additional work for Andrew outside of school because in conversations with Nilesh as Andrew’s second grade teacher, I understood his interest in helping Andrew obtain academic success. However, through this dissertation study I gained more insight about Nilesh’s cultural values regarding the importance of a parent as a role model and a teacher. In fact, Nilesh clearly explained his parental values to me; some of our conversation is recorded below:

N: In my country it is a little different. A child has to learn from the parent, the parent is the example for everything. That is why I tell him, he has to be a good person. Not make crime on the outside on the street and on the inside. respect the people, most of the old people need respect. (#2,p.1)

What do children value in terms of literacy activities?

Evidence from the interview data, field notes, and observations showed that children in each family spend time reading on a daily basis. Some children read with their parents, while others read to their parents. Several factors determined the parental role in the reading routine, including: the age of the child, the child’s reading ability, and the English proficiency of the parent.
The children’s writing practices differed in each family. In some families children wrote daily e-mails and chapter summaries of books they read at home. In other families children occasionally wrote narrative stories. The children’s reading and writing practices across all four families are shown in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 (see Tables 5.3 and 5.4).
REASONS ADULTS READ IN THE HOME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Smith</th>
<th>Walker</th>
<th>Sanders</th>
<th>Nguyen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of current events</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the Bible</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-related reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social book club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading e-mail messages</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Comparison of Data Across Families
**REASONS CHILDREN READ IN THE HOME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Smith</th>
<th>Walker</th>
<th>Sanders</th>
<th>Nguyen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of current events</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the Bible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School assigned reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading e-mail messages</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Comparison of Data Across Families

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### REASONS CHILDREN WRITE IN THE HOME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Smith</th>
<th>Walker</th>
<th>Sanders</th>
<th>Nguyen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responding to e-mail</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational writing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School assigned writing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent assigned writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4: Comparison of Data Across Families

By carefully analyzing the observations, field notes, and interview data an indisputable relationship between parental literacy values and their children's literacy knowledge and values is apparent. Children's literacy knowledge is influenced by two factors: his or her experience using print and non-print literacy skills and the values placed on the different forms of print and non-print literacy by the children's sociocultural communities (Heath, 1982; Purcell-Gates, 1992; Scheiffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

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For example, if children observe their parents write e-mail correspondence and read material online and they are given opportunities to spend time on the computer with parental support, children are more likely to value similar non-print literacy practices.

**How are non-traditional literacies used in the home?**

The interview data, field notes, and observations revealed that the amount of time parents and children spend using non-traditional literacies varied within each home. As illustrated in Table 5, a non-traditional literacy pattern that emerged in the data is when parents value and use non-traditional literacy practices, the children value and use the same practices (see Table 5). The exception to this pattern is apparent in the Nguyen family, due to Nilesh’s distrust of Andrew’s behavior on a valued piece of equipment such as the computer.

In two of the families, the Smith family and the Walker family, the parents have adopted a “utilitarian stance” towards computer technology. In short, the computer is understood as a valuable learning tool that enhances adult work and the personal lives of both adults and children (Bruce, 1997).
In this study, children from families who embrace a “utilitarian stance” towards the computer have access to the computer and choose to become engaged in computer-related activities more often than families who do not find the computer as useful.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, technology is a new form of literacy for both adults and children. There are advantages and disadvantages to children’s involvement with the computer. Bruce (1997) raises the following questions regarding adopting a stance toward technology, “What should be the stance of literacy educators and researchers towards technology? Where does technology fit with respect to other concerns about reading and writing processes, learning multiculturalism, texts, assessments, and sociocultural contexts? Will new technologies fundamentally alter the nature of literacy or are they a passing fad?” (p.290). In this dissertation study each family adopted a different stance toward technology. The two stances that individuals adopted toward technology were either a “neutrality” stance or a “utilitarian” stance.

According to Bruce (1997) the first stance, neutrality, is founded upon the belief that “literacy is about feelings and ideas and technology is about things” (p. 290). The second stance, utilitarian, is grounded in the belief, “technology provides marvelous new tools for teaching and learning that can improve literacy education” (p. 290).
Utilitarian Stance Towards Computer Technology

All five members of the Smith family use the computer, read, write, and e-mail on a regular basis. Each member of the family has adopted the “utilitarian stance” towards computer technology. In short, the computer is understood as a valuable learning tool that enhances the adult work and personal lives and the children’s school and personal lives. Mary and Rick allow their children to work on the computer while they are in a nearby room such as the kitchen or family room. The computer is located in the den, a room located on the first floor next to the front door of the home. Mary and Rick check their e-mail twice a day. Mary gets online to renew and reserve library books because it is more efficient. Rick uses the computer at work and he shared with me that it has helped him with a variety of work-related tasks. Allison, age 11, reads and writes daily e-mail correspondence. Her younger brother Seth, age 5, uses the computer for adult-assisted letter typing. He and Rachel, age 9, play computer games together several days a week. Rachel also reads and writes e-mail correspondence several days a week.

Neutrality Stance Toward Computer Technology

One stance that individuals can take toward computer technology is a neutrality stance. This stance is founded upon the belief that “literacy is about feelings and ideas and technology is about things” (Bruce 1997, p. 290).
The Sanders family holds a neutrality stance towards computer technology. Leah and Jay rarely use the computer at home and their children are not frequent users of the computer either. Leah tries to check her e-mail each day at work, but sometimes she does not get around to it. Leah mentioned that she will e-mail out-of-town friends every couple of months in lieu of calling them by the phone. Leah and Jay are very busy in their personal lives and they believe the computer is a time consuming tool and they would prefer to use the telephone. Leah described her computer habits to me:

L: I don’t do anything online. I am very guilty about using the computer very much. I just don’t do it. Because once I get on there I just never get off and I feel like my time is too precious and I just don’t get off there. (#2, p. 2)

Jay described his computer habits to me:

J: We just got our school e-mail back on our home computer. So if I don’t catch it at work, I may catch it after I put the kids to bed or something like that. Then our personal e-mail I check it about every two or three days. My friends and people I know don’t e-mail me something if they need an answer right now because I am not one of those people who checks it every ten minutes. (#1, p. 5)

As a researcher who spent an extensive amount of time with the middle-class families, it is apparent that some families show excitement and value computer technology while others are uneasy about using it or they find it more cumbersome. The Sanders family prefers using traditional print literacy for communication rather than non-print literacy.
What are the multiple contexts for literacy for suburban families?

In academic literature, middle-class students and their families have been portrayed to have all experienced a singular family literacy experience in their suburban homes. For question 1, through the interview data, field notes, and observations I documented in this dissertation study that each family's literacy experiences were unique and diverse. As shown in Tables 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 & 5.5, there are some literacy practices that each family had in common, while other literacy practices were unique and only present in one or two of the families (see Tables 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 & 5.5).

**Literacy Practices Common to the Four Families**

All children came from homes where the adults are reading as a leisure activity, for work, or for both. All children come from homes where the adults are writing in a variety of forms: 1) e-mail communication; 2) greeting cards or letters; and 3) calendar or to do lists. Literacy practices are apparently valued by each of the four families.
Literacy Practices that are Uncommon to the Four Families

In three of the families, children had early exposure to print and access to books prior to kindergarten. In the Walker, Sanders, and Smith families the parents read to their children as infants and have continued a daily reading practice ever since that time.

In the Nguyen family, Andrew was first exposed to children's books during his kindergarten year. In first grade, Andrew's teacher sent home an assigned book to read with parents each night. Nilesh started taking Andrew to the library during first grade to get additional books like those the first grade teacher sent home.

In three of the families, the Smith family, the Sanders family, and the Walker family, the children are allowed to get on the computer with permission, whenever they want access to it. In the Nguyen family, Andrew is not allowed on the computer unless Nilesh is with him on the computer and this happens infrequently.

In the Smith family, the children choose to become engaged in narrative and expository writing at home. In the Walker family the children draw pictures, write names of people and places, and are beginning to write short stories at home.
In the Sanders family, the children write when engaged in word games, puzzles, or to practice cursive handwriting. In the Nguyen family, Andrew writes summaries of each chapter that he reads in a notebook on a daily basis.

**What influence does the school have on the multiple contexts of family-based literacy?**

For question 2, I have documented from the interviews, observations, and field notes in this collective study, that there are power considerations that take place in the relationship between teachers and parents who volunteer in their classrooms.

In three of the four families the mothers were active volunteers in their child’s classroom or activities related to their child’s school because it was “understood” that it would provide more communication with their children’s teachers. Mary Smith, Leah Sanders, and Andrea Walker held the same tacit assumption, a kind of hidden agenda, about the important role of the parent volunteer to the classroom teacher and how valuable communication could be acquired by volunteering in his or her child’s classroom. From the voices of the participants, it is apparent that communication is expanded and the parent-teacher relationship is enhanced when parents take an active role in their child’s classroom. Parent volunteers also become knowledgeable about the kinds of school-based literacy practices while in the classroom.
In the following statement by Leah Sanders, she explains how her involvement in her children’s classroom has promoted communication with her children’s teachers.

L: I have always had a lot of communication, either the teachers have chosen to e-mail me but since I have been volunteering in the classrooms the last three years they keep me updated about what is going on. So I probably know more than the typical parent just because of my involvement in the classroom. They choose to tell me things all the time. Like in his (Nate’s) progress note, this year’s teacher, she said that because Mrs. Sanders comes in on a weekly basis, I will keep her in contact with what is going on with Nate in the classroom and how he is doing. On a weekly basis, I never asked for that. I was like wow, when I go in I purposely don’t want to ask about how they are doing because I feel like that distracts the teacher for why I am in there to help. So I have never chosen that but the teacher is just willing to do that. (#2, p. 5)

As Leah discussed in this data segment, her child’s teacher chose to give her verbal academic updates when she volunteered each week. Based on the knowledge gained from the parent and teacher participants in this study and from my personal knowledge as a former teacher in the Homestead City School District, there is a subtle understanding between parents and teachers regarding increased communication about their children’s academic progress that occurs spontaneously when parents are volunteering in the classroom or at school.
Parents learn what Delpit (1988) has described as the "rules of power." Delpit (1988) explains, "The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power. The upper and middle classes send their children to school with all the accoutrements of the culture of power; children from other kinds of families operate within perfectly wonderful and viable cultures but not cultures that carry the codes or rules of power" (p.25).

Leah and Jay do not expect teachers, principals, and administrators to give their children preferential treatment because they are employees within the same school district that their children attend school. However, they both shared in conversations with me that they believe they have received seemingly preferential treatment, and teachers have been more "honest" and forthright about their children's academic progress because of their respective occupations as teachers in the district. This notion of teachers socializing children differently based on the occupation and social class of the parent was the focal point of Wilcox's (1982) ethnographic research study.

I will briefly review how her findings relate to my dissertation case study of the Sanders family. In an ideal world, educational personnel are expected to behave in an unbiased manner and they should treat all children equally regardless of the parent's occupation, teacher-parent relationship or the social
class of the parents. However, Wilcox (1982) documented in her research study that a hidden curriculum in two different first grade classrooms existed.

One first grade classroom was located in a lower-middle class area while the other was located in an all-white upper-middle-class area. Wilcox further explained that “there is considerable evidence that teachers label and form expectations of children with regard to their individual ability on the basis of the child’s membership in particular groups, the most obvious of which are social class, sex, and ethnicity” (p. 272). Another valuable finding that Wilcox (1982) uncovered in her research dealt with the image of who the child will become. Wilcox explains (1982) the children at the upper-class school “learned that they had positive futures ahead of them” (p.293). While at the lower-class school the teacher rarely mentioned or emphasized the importance of future consequences of present activities. In other words, the teachers had certain expectations for students based on the parent’s socio-economic status or occupation. Wilcox (1982) documented that the teaching staff at the upper-class school, “Seemed to generalize from the characteristics of the parents’ achievements to a set of expectations for the children” (p. 297). Whereas, at the lower-class school the teaching staff believed the parents had a less ambitious set of expectations for their children.
In conversations with Leah and Jay and as a former teacher in Homestead City School District for eight years, a “hidden curriculum” exists for students whose parents are actively involved in supporting or volunteering in their child’s classroom.

While educators strive to remain as neutral as possible, some parent-teacher relationships have the potential to influence the amount of attention a teacher will give to a student.

In the Smith family, Mary is also knowledgeable about the kinds of school-based literacy practices because she volunteers in the classroom. Mary observes the teacher as the teacher works with children at school and “adopts” similar practices in her home. Mary talks to her neighbor who is a teacher in the Homestead community and to her children’s teachers for references or suggestions of work she can do with her children at home. She described this to me in a conversation at her home. I have included this extensive data segment, as it effectively illustrates the innovative ways that Mary has implemented the “tacit” school-based knowledge through a variety of sources: as a parent volunteer, through a neighbor who is a teacher, and in conversation with her child’s teachers.

Mary: I have workbooks galore.

Melissa: How did you know what kind to get for them?
Mary: I went and I got some that were just reading or just math. But these are good, I have got these every year for them.

Melissa: So it is test prep?

Mary: We'll start this summer. They think it is really cool
And they will sit down and work on these. They are just incredible.
Allison, I bought this 4th grade proficiency book for her to go
through the summer before the test and I threw it away. But I even
have workbooks for his age. (Seth is working on the computer as we talk)

Melissa: When do they work on these workbooks?

Mary: Weekends and after school if they don't have homework.
It is also our summer work.

Melissa: So you are using the McGraw Hill Grade Four Test
Preparation, McGraw Hill Grade Three Test Preparation, and
McGraw Hill Grade Two Test Preparation workbooks. Did you get
all of these from a teacher's store?

Mary: No, Borders. I also bought a map and geography workbook
for them and a mazes workbook. When you were doing all of those
mazes with Rachel in second grade she loved that so I bought one for
her to do here at home. I went in on this website and found
worksheets that they could do.

Melissa: So you got these worksheets at this website here on the
bottom of the page www.mathtestprep.com. So how did you learn
about the website?

Mary: Two summers ago, when I decided that we needed to work
over the summer. I went in under Yahoo and typed arithmetic
worksheet and there were several websites but I have found the ones
that I think are the most useful. Now I print off timed tests for
Rachel to do at home. When she started to take timed tests at school,
I wanted to prepare her for them so the tests on the website were
useful.

Melissa: Do you know of other parents who use this website?
Mary: My neighbor, who is a former teacher, she told me about some websites, this website is the best. You can enter in any grade and it will give you sample test questions. Allison was having problems with fractions when they were first introduced. I was able to get work for her to help her with fractions.

Melissa: So do they ever act like they don’t want to do this work?

Mary: Oh my gosh! They love this stuff. I don’t know if you were like this as a kid, maybe I was weird, but I loved paperwork, school stuff. If you buy them a fresh workbook they like let’s go! I make a folder for them each summer and they like that.

Melissa: How do you feel about the learning that they are both getting at school this year?

Mary: Mrs. Thomas said to me, “I can tell that you work with Rachel outside of school.” So that’s good because then I think, well, that’s good. I struggled with their ways of teaching at the beginning of the year.

Melissa: With both Allison’s teacher and Rachel’s teacher?

Mary: Yes, with both. I have been very pleased with Allison’s teacher, Mrs. Johnson. As the year progressed, she really challenged Allison, she helped her grow as a writer.

In the Walker, Smith, and Sanders families the parents are aware of the literacy practices at school due to their volunteer work in their children’s classrooms. Andrea Walker and Leah Sanders are classroom teachers in Homestead so they know more about school-based practices. Whereas, Nilesh and Lee do not volunteer in the classroom due to their work schedules and they are at a distinct disadvantage.
They are not privy to the “insider” knowledge about the teaching practices or the school-based learning that takes place in Andrew’s classrooms on a daily basis.

In the following section regarding the contributions to the research literature, I will discuss in more depth the power relationships embedded in social institutions and society, and the implications for school-home communication.

What influence does the school have on the multiple contexts of family-based literacy?

The collective study data indicates that based on the four families in the study, some middle-class parents lack confidence in state-mandated testing. The impetus for national standards and assessments rigidly confines literacy learning and teaching in the primary grades.

Due to state-mandated testing, some families provide specific teaching and learning within the home to help their children perform better on state-mandated tests. Parents, teachers, and students need to negotiate the constraints of state-mandated testing and begin to build bridges between school-based and family-based learning. Educators need to gain a better understanding of the complex issues surrounding families’ literacy practices and state-mandated testing.
In the past ten years students, parents, and educators have experienced an increase in the amount of state-mandated standardized testing. State mandated assessments can be useful in identifying the needs of students who encounter difficulty in school if the tests are interpreted carefully. The tests need to be understood as one aspect in the entire realm of the students' school experiences.

Standardized tests and the assessment process can be reductionistic in nature, and they can deny children from the school experiences they deserve (Taylor, 1991). Educators can benefit from learning about the impact of state-mandated testing on family literacy practices. In Taylor's (1991) book *Learning Denied* she describes the impact of standardized testing from one child’s and family’s perspective.

In this dissertation study, I talked to the four families, parents and children, about their beliefs about standardized testing and the usefulness of standardized testing. In all four families the parents had different beliefs about the usefulness or lack of usefulness of standardized tests. In the Sanders family, Leah and Jay, have firsthand experiences with the state-mandated testing in the schools as parents and as educators. Leah and Jay believe that state-mandated tests are not as valuable or important to the teaching and learning process as are daily, familiar teaching and learning endeavors.
In short, students perform differently in familiar contexts than they do in unfamiliar, laboratory contexts. Barbara Rogoff’s (1984) research supports Leah and Jay’s perspective towards state-mandated testing. As parents and teachers they are not confident that proficiency tests are valuable in measuring academic achievement.

Rogoff (1984) explains, “Skills that children seem not to possess in laboratory tasks thus appear well-developed when these same children meet similar problems in familiar contexts” (p.2). Leah explained her perspective to me:

M: Do you think standardized tests are valuable in comparing schools or children?

L: I guess that is all that they compare though. To me as a teacher, I don’t use testing as a main focus for teaching. I mean daily teaching has more of an impact than those tests. I mean some students test well and some don’t. (#2, p.8)

In the Walker family, Andrea and Scott do not have any firsthand experience with either of their children taking state-mandated tests for school. Andrea has experienced administering state-mandated tests as a educator in Homestead City School District. Andrea believes that it is important that state mandated testing reflects only “one part of the whole picture.” In short, standardized testing can provide useful information, however, many additional factors need to be considered when determining a child’s complete academic
profile. Scott, who is a graphic designer, looks at state-mandated testing from a
different perspective. Scott thinks it is inappropriate to test students and to
compare test scores among different school districts. He indicated that the
comparisons are meaningless because the test scores are really comparing the
local values and local knowledge of each community.

M: Do you think that state proficiency test scores are a good
reflection of the quality of learning in those schools?

S: I don’t think a good one. I think they are a reflection of the quality
of the community than the school. Because to make a school a
success you have to have parents that are involved and that care.
(#1, p.6-7)

In the Nguyen family, Nilesh was completely unaware of state-
mandated testing commonly called “proficiency testing.” Andrew has not
experienced the Fourth Grade Proficiency tests since he is in the third grade.
However, he has taken other standardized tests in third grade. This lack of
knowledge of the tests reflects that Andrew’s second grade classroom teacher
did not inform the families about the testing at school, or Nilesh did not read
the communication that was sent home from the school about testing. Andrew
recalled the testing when I talked to him about it:

M: Did you recently take the Stanford Tests at school?
A: Yes
M: How did you feel about the Stanford tests?
A: It was kind of hard. (# 11, p. 1)
In the next section, the contributions to the literature, the lack of information about state mandated testing by the Nguyen family will be discussed in more depth. In the Smith family, Mary, a stay at home mother, is fully aware of the state-mandated tests that take place in the schools. Mary spends an extensive amount of time talking to other parents and teachers so that she can prepare her children for the tests.

She finds test preparation resources from educational web sites on the Internet, from a neighbor who is a teacher in the Homestead City School District, and from local bookstores. Mary spends time in the evening during the school year and during the summer months preparing her children so that they are successful on the tests.

Contributions to Five Bodies of Research Literature and Substantive Recommendations for Further Research

In Chapter Two, I review five bodies of research literature: diverse nature of literacy learning in families, literacy and language development, peer culture, school-based literacy, and family-based literacy. This section provides a discussion of the current study's contributions to each of the five bodies of literature. Throughout this section, I offer substantive recommendations for further research. I consider the similarities and differences in the data from all four families in the collective case study.
I explore why the similarities and differences occur in the four families. It is my intention to analyze the data across the four families in an attempt to understand why some families are successful with bridging family-based and school-based literacy practices, while other families are not as successful.

**Diverse Nature of Literacy Learning**

In this sub section, I highlight the contributions that the current study makes to the diverse nature of literacy learning literature in terms of families in the past, contemporary families, and parental roles. Given the diverse nature of literacy learning in the families in the last twenty years, this study documents how contemporary families live and practice literacy very differently than families twenty years ago.

In the past, families were not as mobile as they are today, families lived more settled lives, and middle-class mothers worked less outside of the home, standardized testing was not as prevalent in the schools, and technology was not used as often in the home and school contexts.

The relationship between home and school needs to be redefined. In this collective case study I have documented the diverse literacy practices present in the four families. Literacy learning has dramatically changed for all families, regardless of socio-economic status in the context of standards, testing, and technology. The educational community needs to re-think middle-class family
literacy. In the academic literature, middle-class students and their families have been portrayed as if they all experience a singular family literacy experience in their suburban homes. By looking in-depth at four middle-class families, it is apparent that they do not all have the same literacy experiences in their homes. I have learned through this collective case study that cultural diversity is a bigger issue among all families at all socioeconomic levels. Although middle-class and upper-middle class children have fewer challenges in the achievement of literacy, educators and researchers need to re-think how they define literacy within and across all families regardless of the student's culture or socioeconomic class. This dissertation study deconstructs the myth that a single, mainstream notion of family literacy exists in suburban families.

In this dissertation study I learned that the expectations for parental roles in middle-class families have changed. Parental roles have changed for middle-class families in two ways: 1) parents are expected to take a proactive role in their children's reading and writing development; 2) due to increased standardized testing in the schools, a heightened awareness and pressure for student success on standardized tests exists in many middle-class families, schools, and communities. In the following section, the impact of standardized testing for the four families in the dissertation study will be explored in more depth.
Understanding Standardized Testing in the Schools

State-mandated testing has increased dramatically in the last ten years. Standardized tests can provide limited academic information if the results are carefully interpreted. However, there are many additional factors that need to be considered when determining a child’s complete academic progress.

Unfortunately, parents, teacher, schools, and communities are being judged based on students’ performances on standardized tests. If students in a school district perform well on the tests, the school district is deemed successful, while if the scores on the tests are low, the students and district are perceived as a failure.

Unfortunately, as Kohn (1999) explains, school evaluation involves more than mere number crunching. When Leah Sanders and I discussed the value of standardized tests, she explained her perspective as a teacher and as a parent whose children have taken standardized tests at school. Leah stated “To me as a teacher, I don’t use testing as my main focus for teaching. I mean daily teaching has more of an impact than those tests. I mean some students test well and some don’t”

Based on the data collected in this study, three of the four families were very knowledgeable and informed about state-mandated testing. In fact, in the Smith family, Mary spends a significant amount of time and effort locating
test-preparation materials at bookstores, online, through neighbors who work
in the school district, and from her children’s teachers. Mary’s neighbor, Ellen,
is a teacher at a different Homestead elementary school than where
Mary’s children attend. Ellen’s elementary school created a test-preparation
handbook for their student population and Mary copied it for her own
children.

In contrast, Nilesh and Lee Nguyen were completely unaware of any
standardized tests that Andrew took this year. He took two standardized tests:
The “off grade” proficiency tests and the Stanford Achievement tests which are
given to all third grade students.

The fact that the Nilesh and Lee Nguyen are minorities may be a factor in
their lack of knowledge of state-mandated testing. Researchers (Gee, 1990;
Lemke, 1995) argue that those born into dominant discourses are prepared to
feel comfortable throughout their whole lives with certain institutional genres,
like the schools, and they function in those institutions in very intuitive ways.

Mary Smith is an example of a parent who has learned how to effectively
acquire the tacit school-based knowledge that will be beneficial for her children.
In contrast, Nilesh Nguyen is marginalized by the school due to his difficulty
with English as a second language. In fact, his difficulty with English could
potentially damage the amount of school-based knowledge he can obtain.
The school-based, academic discourse is foreign and dislocating for the Nguyen family. In short, even though the Nguyen family has middle-class aspirations and push Andrew education strongly in their home, they are at a disadvantage because the school-based discourse and practices are alienating the Nguyen family from full participation in the school culture (Hicks, 2002).

I have learned by conducting this dissertation study that the educational community needs to rethink middle-class family literacy and the relationship between schools and homes needs to be redefined. This study unveiled that in the Nguyen family, due to their relationship with the school community and their ethnicity, they were not aware of the same school-based curricular knowledge as the other three families I studied. According to many curriculum scholars (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1979; Lather, 1986), the hidden curriculum, as it is often described, is synonymous with the perpetuation of unequal power relations based on race, gender, class, or ability in everyday school practices, curricula, texts, and technology. Educating teachers, principals, and school personnel through multicultural professional development is one essential step in addressing potential problems related to race, gender, and class issues. Educators need to learn how to serve children better by understanding how to look within and across their student’s families despite the ethnicity or socioeconomic status. This collective case study deconstructs the notion that a
singular family literacy experience exists in all suburban families. Ten years ago in the academic literature Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines’ (1988) presented their ethnographic research with urban families. The researchers uncovered that the parents and children were engaged in multiple literacy practices despite the stereotype that is pervasive about urban children and their lack of family literacy. I have learned that if educators can depart from the belief that all middle-class and urban families practice literacy in the same ways in their respective communities, and instead embrace the belief that each family must be understood as uniquely different from each other. In short, when educators develop an understanding of some of the complex issues surrounding families and how they acquire literacy, they will be able to establish better communication with each student and family in their classroom. Educators who also make an attempt to understand the context of individual values, family values, and community values (Gadsden, 1994; Purcell-Gates, 1993) may develop more family literacy knowledge and will be more capable of meeting a child’s literacy needs inside and outside of the classroom.

Moll (1992) is a researcher of culturally-relevant teaching who challenges educators to redefine the relationship between in-school and out-of-school contexts. Moll (1992) recommends that teachers invite community members into their classroom to share their funds of knowledge or areas of
expertise. The educational community in the Homestead City School District needs to embrace multicultural professional development that is focused on the research of Moll (1992) and Taylor-Dorsey-Gaines (1988) which demonstrate the positive attributes and resources that diverse families bring to predominately White Caucasian school communities. The first step in bridging home-based and school-based learning is to intimately understand both settings.

_Culturally Relevant School-Based Literacy Practice_

In this sub-section, I highlight contributions that the current study makes to school-based literacy in terms of cultural practices in the schools and testing. Based on field notes, observations, and interview data, knowledge of school-based literacy practices is potentially optimized or limited for individual students based on the parent-teacher relationship and communication between the home and school. Based on the data from this study, one method of communication between home and school is parent volunteer work in their child’s classroom. Over half of the parent participants used volunteer work to gain insight about school-based teaching and learning practices. While this method of communication opens up opportunities for some middle-class parents who are able to take time away from work to volunteer, it also prohibits the opportunity for some parents who are not able to volunteer due to work, daycare, or personal schedules. Some teachers have established
valuable methods of communication between home and school. For instance, Mrs. Johnson, one of the Homestead teachers that I interviewed for this study, implements a home-school journal to help provide meaningful communication between the teacher, parents and child. She accomplishes this task by requiring the students to write a letter to their parents every Friday, and in turn the parents respond by writing a letter to their child each week.

In Chapter Four samples of the journal were provided. I have included the extensive comments made by Mrs. Johnson because she clearly mentions how “hidden” knowledge of school-based practices get communicated to parents as they are helping in the classroom. She also states her observations about parents who are unresponsive to the school-home journal.

M: How do you communicate to parents about reading and writing?

J: A number of ways, most formally through report cards. More informally as parents stop by or when they are helping in the classroom. You know, they say, “How is my child doing?” Through telephone conversations if that is necessary, usually that is more with a struggling child. Friday folders, if there is something that the parent needs to know about or whatever. In the Friday folders there is a place for actually writing a letter. So it would be in note or letter format. The other way is that in the Friday folders they take their work home and I ask the parents to look through their child’s work, and to read the comments that I have written on their child’s work.

M: In the Friday folder, do you write a note to each child’s parent every Friday?

J: In the Friday Folder I have several forms of communication. First I have the “Weekly-Teacher-Parent Report” for general behavior in the classroom. (See Appendix F) I have the “Friday Folder Parent
Signature Sheet," this is where I write a quick note to parents, if needed. The parents are required to sign this each week. The parents also write quick notes back to me in here. (See Appendix F) Then in the back of the Friday folder is all of the notebook paper, the students use the paper to write a letter to their parents each week. I give them instructions about what they need to write about each Friday. So they write a full-page letter to their parents each week. Then the parents are instructed to write a letter back to the child. So this is parent-child communication but I will occasionally write a brief note to the parents as well. More often, I tend to write more notes when there is something that needs attention, as opposed to when everything is going great.

M: This is an excellent idea!

J: I have found that you can tell the parents who don’t write back, their children are the ones who are not well supported at home. I can tell just by these letters. By the end of the year they have the entire record of their whole school year, documenting what they have done in math, science, social studies, reading and writing. Sometimes the parents write about personal things going on in their family. For instance, a parent might write, “We had a bad week this week, hopefully next week will be better.” The kids who get letters back are the ones that succeed in school. Even the kids who are struggling in school, when their parents are consistently writing encouraging notes back to them they become better students. They have improved more because of that parent-student contact.

The school-home journal is an effective form of communication for parents, the teacher, and the students; if the respective parties are willing to take the time to engage in the home-school communication tool. The Smith family spoke highly of the home-school journal. Allison and her parents feel that the journal provided a reason for the family to write to each other and they learned about classroom and school-related events.
through the journal. However, as a former teacher in the Homestead City School District, I question whether the journal is useful or culturally sensitive to families in the school district who are not as capable of writing in English. The Homestead City School District is a predominately White Caucasian middle-class student population.

However, there is a growing Hispanic population in the community for whom English is a second language. For instance, if Andrew is placed in Mrs. Johnson’s classroom, it would be very challenging for Nilesh to write a letter that would resemble those written by the Smith family. Teachers do not have the opportunity to get to know families as intimately as I have while conducting my research. I question whether a teacher would realize how hard Nilesh tries to work with Andrew to support his school-based learning.

Teachers may inappropriately assume that if Nilesh and Lee do not respond to the letter writing in the home-school journal that they are “not well supported at home.” The home-school journal is a step in the right direction in terms of bridging home-school communication. However, being more culturally aware may help in communicating with families who are trying to help their children become successful in school-based learning. Parents, teachers, students, and families need to negotiate the constraints
of learning English as a second language and provide culturally appropriate opportunities for school-home communication that will optimize, not restrict, communication for the diverse community of students.

**Literacy and Language Development in the Age of Technology**

The current study contributes to the language and literacy development research by addressing factors that influence early language and literacy acquisition in terms of technology and the Internet. In this study, literacy and language development are grounded in the sociocultural perspective.

The sociocultural perspective understands that social, cultural, and historical factors contribute to language and literacy development. Researchers have documented that children learn best through social collaboration with others, and by being responsible for managing their own learning (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996). In this study, I observed social collaboration taking place during literacy tasks. As shown in Table 5.5, I observed parent-child social interactions or social interactions amongst siblings taking place while engaged in print or non-print (technology-related) literacy tasks (see Table 5.5). A relevant finding from this study is that more social collaboration around literacy tasks takes place in homes that allow children to use the computer and video games than in homes that prohibit, limit, or do not find technology useful in their family lives.
A significant contribution of the current study to the research literature is the impact that technology is making on contemporary literacy development. Technology is a new form of literacy for both adults and children. Young children are growing up in an increasingly connected society and they feel comfortable with technology as a new form of literacy.

All of the participants, adults and children, in the collective case study use technology in some form at home. As shown in Table 5.5, the Smith and the Walker families are the most active technology users in comparison to the Sander’s and the Nguyen’s families. In Chapter 4, an extensive description and summary of each family’s print and non-print literacy (technology-related) practices was described. In the Smith and Walker families, the parents have adopted a “utilitarian stance” towards computer technology. As previously mentioned in this chapter, a “utilitarian stance” towards technology means that technology, specifically the computer, is a valuable learning tool that enhances adult work and the personal lives of both adults and children (Bruce, 1997). In contrast, the Nguyen and Sanders families use technology less frequently and they do not use as many different types of technology in their home as found in the Smith and Walker’s homes (see Table 5.5).
According to Bruce (1997) the "neutrality stance" is founded on the belief that "literacy is about feelings and ideas and technology is about things" (p. 290).

### REASONS FOR USING TECHNOLOGY IN THE HOME

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<th>Sanders</th>
<th>Nguyen</th>
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Table 5.5: Comparison of Data Across Families
By carefully analyzing the observations, field notes, and interview data, an unequivocal relationship exists between the amount of time a child spends using the computer in the home and the amount of writing they actively engage in at home. In the Smith and Walker homes, more time was spent engaged in writing tasks when children had more access to the computer (see Table 5.4).

In both of these homes where more writing was prevalent, the families implemented the seven writing principles that Atwell deems germane from her writing research. According to Atwell (1987), there are seven principles that support children's writing; if these principles are present, children will choose to write more often. Atwell explains, “Seven principles that constantly inform our teaching and our students' learning: 1) writers need regular chunks of time; 2) writer's need their own topics; 3) writers need response; 4) writers learn mechanics in process; 5) children need to know adults who write; 6) writers need to read; 7) writing teachers need to take responsibility for their knowledge and teaching” (1987, p. 17-18). In the Smith and Walker families, the children are given consistent time to write on the computer, they are given some freedom to choose what they write on the computer, and a responsible parent or “more knowledgeable sibling” is within close proximity to respond to their writing or help with mechanics or to respond to writing.
In short, the families in this collective case study that provided their children with the necessary writing conditions on the computer had children who were engaged in more writing on a regular basis. E-mail has revolutionized communication amongst adults and children. In Chapter Four, I provided examples of data segments to document the type of e-mail writing taking place amongst adults and children. Through e-mail, computers have enabled some of the participants in this study to become engaged in more writing than would have been accomplished without exposure to the computer.

**Peer Culture within the Context of Technology-Based Literacy Practices**

The current study contributes to the peer culture research literature by understanding the relationship between peer culture and increased technology-related literacy efforts amongst peers. In the Smith and Walker homes the adults and children are engaged in e-mail correspondence. According to Lewis (2000), “There are more children online than ever before and they are getting online at earlier ages. Lewis (2000) indicates from her research, “Twenty-five percent of the recently polled AOL parents say their children are coming online as early as age two, with that number climbing to 90% by age six” (pg. 125).

Based on the child participants in this study, Seth, age 5, has been using the computer since he was 3 and Lucy began e-mail at age 6. Seth types letters to his friends and grandparents.
I asked Allison and Rachel to forward her e-mail correspondence during the three month study so that I could become knowledgeable about the amount and type of correspondence they are engaged in on a daily basis. The majority of their e-mail correspondence occurs between their peers and they are most often chain letters (see Appendix I). However, both Allison and Rachel type e-mail messages to their friends, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and to me. Several examples are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

As Goodman (1980) explains, “Literacy is a cultural phenomenon. It develops as society has a need for language communication across time and space” (p.1). Middle-class children in this study are in a different historical time period than their parents. Children in this study, who are using written communication through e-mail correspondence, are experiencing an infusion of writing that was non-existent prior to e-mail. The computer is far more interactive than the television, and far more exciting than traditional letter writing.

During my time in the field, I observed children learning advanced word processing skills while using the computer. In the Smith family, Allison taught her mother how to “cut and paste” within a word processing document. According to Goodman (1980), “Written language is one expression of language, and is the major medium through which literacy is represented” (p.1).
Dyson (1993) discovered in her seminal research that children's writing in school is heavily influenced by their social, familial, and community experiences. According to Dyson (1993), children borrow knowledge from their unofficial worlds (home and community) to help engage in their official world (school). Based on the data in the collective case study, children who are actively engaged in writing, word processing, and e-mail practices in their out-of-school contexts will enhance their school-based literacy practices.

**Family-Based Literacy**

Due to the passage of the “No Child Left Behind” legislation in January of 2002 (S. Rep. NO. 107, 2001) which urges a coordinated effort between schools and families, now is the time to document literacy practices that occur in out-of-school contexts and to investigate potential relationships and collaborations between formal and informal learning, that occurs out-of-school (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

Education scholars agree that family literacy is an area worthy of study. However, recommendations regarding the most effective method of establishing partnerships amongst schools, families, and communities may differ. Family literacy programs must be established on solid scholarly research instead of misguided assumptions based on over-generalized, intuitive thinking.
In a deficit-driven family literacy program "homes of low-income and minority students and of students who speak English as a second language (ESL) are considered "literacy impoverished, " with limited reading materials and with parents who neither read themselves nor read to their own children, who do not provide models of literacy use, and do not value or support literacy development" (Auerbach, 1989,p. 169). However there are a compelling number of studies (Chall & Snow, 1982; Delgado-Gaitain, 1987; Diaz, Moll & Mehan, 1986; Goldenburg, 1984; Purcell-Gates, 1993; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) that have refuted the belief that low-income, minority, and immigrant families do not value or actively support literacy development. In some cases with immigrant families, the parents understand the value of school as a vehicle to change their children's status in society so they nurture and support their children's efforts to become successful in school. Some families even come to the United States primarily for a better education for their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987).

Delgado-Gaitan's (1987) research supports the family literacy values that Nilesh and Lee Nguyen have for their son Andrew. They both made incredible sacrifices that I described in detail in Chapter Four to come to the United States.
They have worked extremely hard to be able to live and work in the middle-class community of Homestead. Nilesh provides Andrew with academic support on a daily basis so that he can be successful in school.

I have learned from the qualitative research methods that I employed in this study and was able to make valid conclusions about understanding the multiple contexts of family literacy and its relationship to school-based literacy through the study of four middle-class families. Due to the increase of state-mandated testing and the increased use of technology, middle-class literacy has changed in the last ten years. In Taylor’s seminal study of middle-class family literacy almost twenty years ago, she documented the seamless transition experienced by most middle-class children. Since her study, most literacy research has been conducted in minority communities. However, literacy learning has changed dramatically for all families regardless of socio-economic status in the context of testing and technology. The current collective case study employed participant observation so that I could observe literacy events as they occurred. I worked in the community where I conducted the research for eight years.

I knew one of the families I studied for four years because I was their oldest child’s second grade teacher and two years later I was also their middle child’s second grade teacher.
In another family I had their child as a student in my classroom as well. Although this study lasted for one year, I have known some of the members of the families since I began working in the community eight years ago.

Gaining access to homes in communities in which the researcher is not an insider is a significant problem in family literacy research (Purcell-Gates, 1993). When researchers attempt to study minority, low-literate, or low-income families and communities, careful consideration of the participant's feelings must be made. Even though researchers have good intentions, insiders of the communities being studied have reported feelings of manipulation and misrepresentation of the reality experienced by community members (Purcell-Gates, 1993). Since research in family literacy practices is also considered cultural practice research, the researcher needs to adopt what Purcell-Gates calls a "...neutral, inquiring, nonjudgemental stance, resisting cultural arrogance and an "interventionist" attitude" (p. 67).
Policy Implications

In this dissertation study, I was able to document a modern understanding of the literacy practice in four middle-class homes. Implications of the study include: 1) educators and researchers need to re-think how they define literacy within and across all families regardless of the student’s culture or socioeconomic class; 2) middle-class families practice literacy in unique ways within their own homes and a single, mainstream notion of family literacy does not exist in suburban families; 3) parental roles have changed for some middle-class families due a heightened awareness of state-mandated testing in the schools; and 4) educators, administrators, and school personnel can benefit from culturally relevant professional development to better understand and provide space for non-mainstream families.

Educators, researchers, and politicians need to invest in family literacy education in three ways: 1) more ethnographic studies of family literacy; 2) focus groups comprised of families and educators who sit at the same table to discuss their diverse family literacy practices and ways to effectively meet their common goals; 3) multicultural education for teachers and principals to better understand the diverse funds of knowledge that students bring to school from their families and communities.
The long term implication of more ethnographic family literacy studies, multicultural education for teachers and principals, and focus groups with families and teachers will include greater understanding and sensitivity to the complexity of families, the diverse ways that literacy is embedded in families, and knowledge of changes and improvements to current educational practices. By inviting families into the discussion about family literacy, the efforts will be grounded in the needs of families and the families will gain effective ownership in the efforts.
LIST OF REFERENCE


APPENDIX A

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW
BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210

Research Involving Human Subjects
ACTION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

X Full Committee Review  X Original Review

X Expedited Review  

With regard to the employment of human subjects in the proposed research protocol:

0180235 UNDERSTANDING HOW LITERACY IS SITUATED IN FOUR FAMILIES, Rebecca M.
Kantor, Melissa M. Schulz, School of Teaching & Learning

THE BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES HUMAN SUBJECTS IRB HAS TAKEN THE FOLLOWING ACTION:

APPROVED  X DISAPPROVED

APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS *  WAIVER OF WRITTEN CONSENT GRANTED

* Conditions stated by the IRB have been met by the Investigator and, therefore, the protocol is APPROVED.

- It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to retain a copy of each signed consent form for at least three (3) years beyond the termination of the subject's participation in the proposed activity. Should the principal investigator leave the University, signed consent forms are to be transferred to the Human Subjects IRB for the required retention period.

- This application has been approved for the period of one year.

- You are reminded that you must promptly report any problems to the IRB and that no procedural changes may be made without prior review and approval.

- You are also reminded that the identity of the research participants must be kept confidential.

Date:    January 11, 2002    Signed:    

(Chairperson)

HS-0235 (Rev. 2/94)  278
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION
M: What kind of reading and writing do you do? What kind of reading do you do throughout the day?

L: At every day I do a read aloud with them. I take in the "Now" section of the newspaper that's written for children and I read that to them. So last week it was about holidays around the world. Then I post that in the room and they can read that during their independent reading time too. I want them to be exposed to the newspaper. I also, whenever Nate and Jerry bring home stuf from the Time magazine for kids and Newsweek magazine for kids I take these in and read these to my students. I always want them to read from other genres. I read magazines here in the evening sometimes. I'll tell you what I read the most is children's books, because I read to them almost every night. So I try to read to them.

M: So what kind of magazines do you read?

L: Right now it is all baby magazines because that is where I am in my life right now. Before I had a fitness magazine. Oh and I read this daily book it is like a calendar for each year you read a little bit, it is a woman's book. I can't think of the title right now, I would have to go get the title, The Joys of Life or something like that, it is an inspirational book. I read that each day.

M: Is it religious based?

L: No, it's not religious based. It's just inspirational, you know one day it will talk about cleaning your closet. Just different things about woman's issues, things that women ponder on. It isn't a specific year, it will say Feb 22nd but the year isn't included with it. I read a lot of cookbooks, I like cooking. Yesterday I cooked a lot and so I read cookbooks. Even Nate asked me what cookbook is that, it was an old Betty Crocker Cookbook like 1977 from my grandma. I use others for cooking but I use that one a lot. And I am in a book club so I read a book a month for that. And that is a variety, we just finished reading The Red Tent which is a biblical book and which I didn't care for.

M: So you meet once a month and do you alternate houses?

L: Yes, there are 8 of us in the group and we meet at someone's house each month and we exchange the book and we have a discussion about the book. It is neat because everyone has different opinions about the book. We have read some Oprah books and sometimes they have questions to discuss.

M: Do those Oprah books have questions in them?

L: No, not in them, you have to go on the Internet and get them for some of those in book club. Then we try to go out to a restaurant after everyone has hosted the book club once then we go out to dinner somewhere.

M: What about online reading?

L: I don't do anything online. I am very guilty about using the computer very much. I just don't do it. Because once I get on there I just never get off and I feel like my time is too precious and I just don't get on there. Now I have listened to books on audio tape. I did that with the last book club book because I was so busy with progress reports and everything. So when I was at the library they asked if I wanted to check the book out on audio tape or book. I said both. I started reading it then I would listen to it in the car, it had 6 or 7 tapes to it. I loved it, it was whole different perspective listening to it rather than reading it yourself. I really liked it a lot. Everytime I went somewhere, every time I ran errands I listened to it. That was another resource I used but as far as online, no.

M: So as far as work, do you do any reading on the computer?

L: Yes
APPENDIX C

SAMPLE OF FAMILY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Informal Interview Questions

Childhood Memories

1. Where were you born?

2. What are your earliest memories of family life?

3. Can you recall when you first became interested in reading or writing?

4. Were you encouraged to read and write at home?

5. Did your parents read or write at home?

6. Did your grandparents play a significant role in your learning to read or write?

Formal Schooling Experiences

7. Can you recall reading and writing for the first time at school?

8. Can you recall your parent’s attitude toward school?

9. Were there any interactions between your family and the school that were related to learning to read or write?

10. As you moved through the school years, what role did your parents play in your education?

11. What were the positive and negative aspects of your own educational experience?

12. What do you think is most important for children to learn in school?

13. What do you think is most important for children to learn about life?

14. What qualities or skills have served you best in your lifetime? Where did you acquire these skills?

15. Would you say the function of school is to help a child do better in school or to help a child do better in life?

16. What are some of the shortcomings of the American educational system?

17. What role do you think politicians, parents, teachers, the community and business play in determining what children should know and learn?

Your Children’s School Experiences

18. What were your expectations for kindergarten for your children?

19. Were you involved in your children’s kindergarten experience?

20. Can you describe some of the activities at home which helped your children with reading or writing during first grade?
21. Can you describe the communication with your children's teachers about your children's progress in school?

22. Over the years while your children have been in school, do you think there has been continuity between home and school?

23. Have there been any particular conflicts between the home and school that were related to reading or writing?

24. Would you change any aspect of how your children have learned to read and write in school?

Present Living

25. Describe what you read in a day?

26. Describe what you write in a day?

27. What are some of the reading and writing tasks you encounter in a day?

Your Children's Early Years

28. What kinds of activities do think helped or may help your children read?

29. When did your children become interested in printed words?

30. When did they become interested in writing?

31. Were there any family activities that involved reading and writing when your children were ages 3-5 years old?

32. Have you ever sat down with your children to teach them to read?

33. What reasons would you give to send or not to send your children to preschool?
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE OF TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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Teacher Interview Questions

1. What forms of parent communication do you use in your classroom?

2. How often do parents generally visit the school or classroom?

3. In general, what are the reasons that parents visit the school or classroom?
APPENDIX E

CASE STUDY INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

Protocol title: Understanding How Literacy is Situated in Four Families

Protocol number: 0100215

Principal Investigator: Dr. Rebecca Kantor

I consent to my participation in the research being conducted by Melissa Schultz of the Ohio State University and her assistants and associates.

The investigators have explained the purpose of the study, the procedures that will be followed, and the amount of time it will take. I understand the possible benefits to the field of education that may be accomplished through this research study.

I consent to the use of audiotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study.

I have had a chance to ask questions and to obtain answers to my questions. I can contact the investigators at (614) 292-1705.

I have read this form or have had it read to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print the name of the participant: ________________________________

Date: __________________ ______ Signed: ____________________________ (Participant)

Signed: __________________ ______ Signed: ____________________________ (Principal Investigator)

(Principal Investigator) (Authorized representative)

Witness: ____________________________ (When required)

Language Arts, Children's Literature, Reading 614-292-2411
English Education, Foreign Language Education, Social Studies Education, Drama Education 614-292-2412
APPENDIX F

WEEKLY TEACHER-PARENT COMMUNICATION
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<td>February 25</td>
<td>You're welcome! I told you would have their signatures!</td>
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<td>March 1</td>
<td>Thanks for helping with spirit! Your welcome!</td>
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### Weekly Teacher - Parent Communication:

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APPENDIX G

SANDERS’S FAMILY SCHEDULE
WEEK OF:

OUR CRAZY

FAMILY SCHEDULE

SUNDAY
11:30/ Mass (w/ 8 & father) (Have Aunt list)
1:00/ Baptism mtg.

MONDAY
Work; email bl/club
14:00/ Melissa here (homework) w/instrument
Shot
7:00/ Sports - get book

TUESDAY
Work
14:30-5:30/Mr. B's office
15:15/ Dance (w/homework) - extra lights (in van)

WEDNESDAY
Errands - see list
11:10/ Dr. Sullivan (ling)
12:00/ Haircut (6-7) gymnastics (2:30-3) BAP: money returned

THURSDAY
Calls - see list

FRIDAY
3:40/ I.D.D.S

SATURDAY
2:50/ BGG
7:00/ Staff party
APPENDIX H

DAILY AGENDA FOR THE NATE AND JENNY SANDERS
My Day

Morning:
7:30 a.m. - Wake-up
   Make bed
   Room picked-up: pj's, toys, books
   Get dressed: brush teeth, wash face, comb hair
8:00 a.m. - Eat breakfast
8:25 a.m. - Bus stop

Evening:
4:00 p.m. - Practice instrument 15 minutes per day
4:00 p.m. - Exercise
   Eat snack
   * Show mom homework!
      * Hamster care
5:00 p.m. - Homework
   Dinner Prep
   Set Table: Vincent or Jaclyn
7:30 p.m. - Bath/Shower - leave it picked-up
   Select tomorrow's clothes
   put dirty laundry away
8:00 p.m. - Healthy snack
8:30 p.m. - Brush teeth
   Pray
   Bedtime
   Read & Record
APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE OF A CHAIN LETTER SENT BY E-MAIL
HUG WAR!!
INSTANTLY, WHEN YOU RECEIVE THIS PAGE,
YOU MUST SEND IT TO AT LEAST 10 PEOPLE,
INCLUDING THE PERSON WHO SENT
IT TO YOU
*Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug*
*Hug*
*Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug*
*Hug*
*Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug*
*Hug* *Hug*
*Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug*
*Hug* *Hug*
*Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug*
*Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug*
*Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug*
*Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug* *Hug*

You

have just been hugged!!
That's right, there's no getting out of it this time!!