Literacy Stories: Attitudes Toward Literacy and Motivation to Read Among African-American Males in an Urban Community.

Donna Parham Washington

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LITERACY STORIES: ATTITUDES TOWARD LITERACY AND MOTIVATION TO READ AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN AN URBAN COMMUNITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

By
Donna Parham Washington
B.S., Southern University, 1977
M.A., Southern University, 1982
December 1998

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my father, the late Mr. William Parham, who worked at Louisiana State University to support his family, believed in education, and read the newspaper from cover to cover every night.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have come this far without the support of my husband, Mr. Leo Washington, who believed in my dream. I am grateful for my daughter, Erica Washington, who inspired me to do my best. God blessed me with a loving and kind family, who supported me through these years of work. I could not have done this without the constant guidance and prayers of my mother, Mrs. Thelma Parham, and my sisters, Miss Rita Parham and Mrs. Lana Parham Lathan.

A project of this size could not be done without help from a number of people. The enthusiastic support of those who read and double checked my work was invaluable. In addition to standing behind me and supporting my idea for this project, you were a very necessary part of the research process. My sincere thanks go to the parents of young men and the men who consented to participate in the interview process. You made me feel welcome and comfortable in your homes as you shared information about yourselves, your family, and community.

To my committee members: Dr. Earl Cheek, Jr., Dr. Eugene Kennedy, Dr. Byron Launey, Dr., Thomasine Mencer, and Dr. Beth Paskoff, thanks for believing in this work. Your input and suggestions make this study a readable one that identifies a bit of the past and lends hope for the future. Special thanks are due to Mrs. Dorothy Early Davis, Dr. Janice Stuhlmann, Dr. Petra Munro, and Dr. Pamela Dean, Dr. Kofi Lomotey, Dr. Gary Rice, and the late Dr. Peter Soderberg. Your valuable advice and support were essential to the success of this dissertation.
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ABSTRACT

Through methods of ethnographic research, this study explores the attitudes toward literacy and the motivation to read of African American male secondary school students in an urban community. This study includes historical inquiry obtained through the gathering of oral histories from men who experienced their youth and adolescence in the same geographic area as the secondary school students. Over the past fifty years, the neighborhood focused on in this study has undergone tremendous societal and structural change. Information obtained through the interviews of the older men and the younger students was compared to determine changes in literacy attitudes, beliefs, and practices. The information gained from this study allows educators to examine the role of attitudes toward literacy within a specific cultural group. Historical background for future research into the role literacy plays in school, church, home, and community life for African American males was gained from the interviews of the older men. Insights into the importance of and the value placed on literacy among African American males, a group largely labeled at risk of failure, were gained from the interviews of the secondary school students. These insights may lead to greater cultural awareness and understanding of students by educators.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Nobody wants to be caught with a book, or seen with a book."
"M.", African American male, eleventh grade student.
(Personal communication, March 6, 1997)

This statement, made by a high school student in a casual discussion of recent movies and the books they are based on, was the inspiration for this study. During classroom observations at a local public high school in March, 1997, I participated in casual discussions to gain insight into the general state of literacy attitudes among secondary school students. The discussions were revealing and profound. High school students have very strong beliefs about school, their teachers, and life in general. In respect to literacy, the ideas of the students were thought provoking and meaningful. Statements like the one made by “M.”, were not the only negative perspective on school and literacy, but indications were that the students knew the importance of literacy.

During one discussion of reading habits, students indicated the majority of their reading was done at school. Teacher directed in-class reading assignments were cited by each of “M.’s” classmates as the only participation in the activity of reading. The ability to gain information from textbooks, taking notes in class, listening to lectures, and participation in class discussions (the literacy acts of reading, writing, listening, and speaking), offered the students opportunities to participate in literacy engagement. When given the chance to choose activities such as reading a book, magazine, or newspaper, the students indicated their choice was to watch television or rent a video instead.
Paul Thompson (1988) states that, "All history depends ultimately on its social purpose." The purpose of the oral histories in the form of "literacy stories" to be accounted in this ethnographic study of literacy attitudes among African American men and youth, will be to provide an historical account of literacy within an urban community. As a social purpose the information gained from this study of personal literacy stories will serve to enhance the literacy instruction of students commonly labeled as at risk of failure. Teachers will be able to use the information gained in this study to approach the literacy and content area instruction of African American males with greater insight into specific cultural attitudes and beliefs.

Attitude and motivation are essential components of what is described by Au (1993) as the surface manifestation of the more subtle and invisible culture of literacy. Au sees culture as a collection of values, beliefs, and standards which influence how students think, feel, and behave. The behavior of learning and the processes associated with literacy learning can be affected by culture. The ability to incorporate culturally compatible strategies is according to Readance, Bean, and Baldwin (1995) an effective connection to appropriate design of lessons for the instructor. To provide this appropriate instruction, teachers must be informed and responsive to the needs of the divergent cultures found in today's classrooms. An awareness of certain cultural universals, which may be applied to teaching is pertinent knowledge for today's educator.

This study will provide awareness of some cultural universals, such as those defined by Liebow (1967). In Tally's Corner, Liebow defined these universals as categories of behaviors and roles commonly recognized in society. Determining
whether the cultural universals of attitudes, beliefs, and motivations concerning literacy are comprehensible for the researcher who seeks information through oral histories, and is able to apply those universals to contemporary literacy learners will be a fundamental purpose for the research done in this study. If information gained from the past can be applied to future curriculum development, educational policy, and instructional strategies, then the material accumulated in this work will make a substantial contribution to education, thus fulfilling a social purpose. The education of those who teach in culturally diverse classrooms in urban settings is not complete until knowledge of attitudes and motivations that are inherent in the represented cultures is gained. To impart such knowledge of the culture of African American males is the social purpose of this study.

Many terms are associated with the description of one’s culture. Culture is defined by Readance, Bean, and Baldwin (1995) as a collection of values, beliefs, and standards influencing how students think, feel, and behave in various social settings. Behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs derived from one’s own culture are a component of the culture of literacy learners and students in the social setting of secondary school classrooms. It is part of what they bring to the classroom setting.

Knowledge of cultural attitudes may be used to provide classroom instruction that is designed to suit the students’ idea of what literacy is and means, creating a positive influence on the attitudes, beliefs, and motivation to read and succeed. Attitudes and beliefs concerning literacy are related to reading achievement and success in school (Singer, 1979). The changing of a student’s motivation to read is an important step to positive influence of literacy and reading achievement. To create
positive changes in the reading achievement and literacy status of students, the potential of these elements of culture should be considered. Any attempt to change an individual's literacy status means changing not only test scores and measurements of achievement, but according to Wagner, change must take place, "...also in the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that define each individual...", (1995, p. 300). In the community of secondary school learners that are African American and male, the attitudes toward literacy should be considered to provide instruction that is sensitive to the social, cultural, and linguistic dimensions that are intrinsic to this group.

The Problem Statement

Historically, literacy has been a problem in the education of African Americans (Woodson, 1968). From the days of slavery to the present, a struggle has persisted within the African American community to achieve full participation in the educational system. Within the educational system and society in general, literacy acquisition and the achievement of success in society are indelibly linked. The problems associated with literacy for African American youth and for black males specifically, have persisted and resulted in an increased concern for the educational future of this segment of the population (Slaughter-Defoe and Richards, 1995). Literacy skills are the most marketable tool used in the gain of employment. They are a valuable commodity, strongly determining success in American society. Black males lag behind white males and females in both high school completion and employment (Berlin & Sum, 1988). For African American males, the lack of literacy skills and the failure to utilize literacy may be the first step to educational, and societal failure.
To provide information that gives greater understanding of the cultural differences that affect attitudes toward and the acquisition of literacy skills for African American males, it was necessary to select a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach to the study of attitudes of African American males as literacy learners can lead to the deeper meanings and implications of culture as a factor of school success. A study of the history and development of attitudes toward literacy among African American males within the social structure of an urban community can provide direction for curriculum development and educational policy to increase the reading achievement and educational success of this group, for whom achievement and success within the educational system has been elusive.

Through qualitative methods employed in this study, the attitudes and perceptions of literacy, as well as the motivations to read among African American male literacy learners was investigated. The information gained from the study reveals past and current attitudes among these literacy learners and the changes that occurred over time, to provide insight into current patterns and reveal ways to implement strategies that may improve attitudes toward literacy among African American males.

The questions of this study are:

How did a sense of community and community support for literacy affect the development of African American males from a once vibrant, but now deteriorated neighborhood in southern Baton Rouge?

What is the current attitude and motivation to read among African American males currently enrolled in secondary schools in Baton Rouge?
What, if any changes in attitude toward reading and reading motivation have occurred among African American males from predominantly African American communities in southern Baton Rouge?

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and interpret the attitudes and motivation to read of African American males from two different generations. The study is an analysis of information gained from oral histories of men who experienced their youth and adolescent formative years in the geographical area of Baton Rouge before drastic structural and societal changes occurred. The idea of "community", attitudes toward literacy, and motivation to read of these men were compared to those same concepts and ideas of young African American males from the same geographical area who currently attend local middle and high schools.

Through interviews collected using the interview guide approach (Patton, 1990), interviewer notes, interview transcripts, and analysis of historical documents and artifacts, this study analyzes and compares the changes in the ideal of community and the way a supportive community aids in the development of literacy. The study provides historical background for further study into the way all aspects of community life, including home, school, church, and neighborhoods, play a role in development of literacy attitudes, beliefs, and motivation to read. By analyzing the responses of African American males from the same geographic area but of different generations, insight may be obtained into how community changes affect the current perceptions of literacy among a group largely labeled as at risk of failure. By educating those who incorporate educational policy and instruct African Americans in diverse urban...
settings and rural classrooms, this research fulfills the social purpose for conducting educational research.

**The Significance of the Study**

The process of historical inquiry using oral histories collected from the older African American males provides a view to the past of a community that has changed drastically over the past fifty years. One question that these oral histories will address is how the changes, demographic, structural, and societal, that occurred over time relate to changes in literacy practices and beliefs of African American males from this community. The community changes include the movement of families and homes for an expanding interstate highway system, a world war, migratory life styles, and over the years the decline in the number of families with male heads of household.

This neighborhood of Baton Rouge, bordered by Government Street on the north, South Boulevard on the south, East Boulevard on the west, and South 16th Street on the east, has drastically changed. Where there were once houses, an interstate highway system curves to connect a widely spreading metropolis. The area that once contained many homes on quiet two-way streets where cars parked and children played with parents and grandparents watching from front porch rockers has been replaced by weeded lots where homes used to be, and in many cases boarded empty homes. A visual memory obtained from the oral histories, of the way the neighborhood used to be, would be an important perspective. This perspective lends an historical background for this study, and may be a valuable bit of information for future researchers.
The demographic changes of the neighborhood and area described here were implemented along with the highway plan for the Baton Rouge area. In June of 1947, the highway plan was submitted by H.W. Lochner and Company. The primary concern described in the introductory letter to the report was to help a city suffering from traffic congestion. Harry Lochner further stated an awareness of the belief that the city and region faced a “far more critical problem in the near future.” The plans called for an imperative that “definite and vigorous action be taken to bring this plan into realization” (Lochner, 1947, p. 3).

The plan describes the expressway as a sound financial investment which would “retain for all time its traffic carrying capacity”. The Sanborn Insurance maps show in the 1923-1963 volume one, the removal plan for houses included blocks 2, 4, 5, and 8 of South 11th Street as well as parts of the 600th and 700th blocks of South 10th Street. The removal of homes for the construction of the highway began in 1958. The older African American men interviewed for the literacy stories described in this study were able to lend a perspective to the influence this had on community life.

Another important focus of the interview questioning of the older African American men, was to examine the experiences of literacy and the observations and memories of men who grew up in this neighborhood. What was the role literacy played in their lives at home, at school, at church, and other aspects and segments of community life during their formative years? What are their perceptions of the importance of literacy in their lives today? What did they gain from a neighborhood, stage of life, and community that essentially does not exist anymore?
Background

Background information for the study was gained from interviews conducted as part of the McKinley High School Oral History Project. Transcripts of interviews conducted in 1995, 1996, and 1997 include several statements which focus on the use of literacy within the African American community. The tape recorded interviews and transcripts are part of the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History of Louisiana State University.

The T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History was established in 1991 to collect and preserve, through the use of audio tape-recorded interviews, unique and valuable information about Louisiana that exists only in people’s memories. The research collection contains the archived tapes of the McKinley High School Project which documents the lives of students who attended the historically black high school located in Baton Rouge just north of Louisiana State University’s campus.

Background information obtained for this study includes recollections of African American males and their perceptions of community life including church, school, and home.

The interviews of men and women who attended McKinley High School in Baton Rouge, are part of an ongoing project that documents the historical value of this all black high school and its significance in the African American community. The participants in this study, interviewees who are older African American men, would have been students at this school during their high school years. The second phase of the McKinley High School project completed in the summer of 1997, includes documentation of information related to predominantly African American churches in
the south Baton Rouge area. Information gained from these interviews and transcripts will give significant background information for this study of literacy attitudes and beliefs.

Literacy played an important part in the lives of African Americans in the community. The community elements described in this study include home, church, and school. An African American man interviewed as part of the collected oral histories of the McKinley High School Oral History Project (1997), described the emphasis of literacy on church life and the participation of members in the administrative functions of church life:

"...getting back to whether or why I wasn’t a deacon, maybe I wasn’t smart enough but at 18 years old, because at that time we had seven members of the trustee board and about five or six of them could not read and write, I could read and write, so my father suggested, with the approval of his grandfather, that I could become secretary treasurer of the trustee board at age 18. That was in 1923."

Literacy was required to be designated as a person who made decisions that affected the church community. The importance of literacy is emphasized through the fact that it was a requirement for participation. Age did not affect the placement of the interviewee in a position of authority, his literacy skills did.

The role of school and literacy leadership was also emphasized by the interviewees and participants in the McKinley High School Project. Role models selected by the interviewees when asked to select someone who had influenced their life, included principals and teachers who were cited for their abilities in the classroom as well as the ability to "lift" just by talking to students. One coach would emphasize the motivation to succeed by stating that students should not look down,
but always look up and reach for the stars, even though they may be "...up to their knees in mud, or even to the shoulders...". The interviewee emphasized that his success today went back to "those little words" that went a long way toward motivating him.

Societal changes such as World War II also affected the men to be interviewed as representatives of older community members. One interviewee participant in the McKinley High School Project (1995) describes how the war affected his choice to attend college:

"I came from what most of you look at as a one-parent family. It was just my mother and me. I had no idea where I would even think about finding money to go to college, so I said to myself...the best thing I could do would be to try to get myself a job. Now I was a little fortunate in that World War II came along and I was sent into the Army. Undoubtedly, I had the grades that caused them to look because I was sent to about five schools while I was in the Army, Chemical Warfare, Camouflage School, NCO school...".

This interviewee further describes the fact that schooling he received in the early grades from McKinley High School enhanced his abilities as a soldier. He believed the quality of his education provided a foundation for his successful tour of duty in the armed forces.

This interviewee describes through his experience in the military, another aspect of community which was anticipated to play a role in the literacy development of the older African American men who were interviewed. The role of the military was noted by Janowitz (1971) who describes the military as offering a second chance to youth from lower class backgrounds by providing opportunities and access to education and personal development. Janowitz notes that within the separate large
society of the military, African American veterans were able to earn more than non-veterans. Over the years, the military has been a provider of a sense of economic stability for Black families.

The “community as a village” concept of the African American community is attributed to an ancient African proverb that states: It takes an entire village to raise a child. This concept is described by one subject of the McKinley High School Oral History Project, part of the T. Harry Williams’s Oral History Collection of Louisiana State University. The interviewee, states that the sense of community that existed long ago during his earlier life in south Baton Rouge has deteriorated. In describing the major role of the church he states that:

“...we all have to accept each other as part of a big family and the church we say is the real community center and everything we do should be church centered for the people and the benefit of the people. That’s what the church is all about. People. People without people...”.

In contrast to the emphasis on community described in these transcript excerpts, what does the role of community play in the lives of young African American men from this same geographical area, that looks and feels very different from its past? This study examines the role of literacy in their lives as well as the differences in the meanings of literacy for the younger study subjects. The contrasts between the beliefs about literacy of the past, and the attitudes of those persons currently living in south Baton Rouge should provide some interesting parallels and relationships. The information gained from this study will provide insight into the way young African American males feel about literacy, and what motivates them to
read and learn. The value of the information is for the educator who seeks greater cultural awareness and understanding.

Definitions of Vital Terms

Aliteracy-lack of the reading habit in capable readers. (Harris and Hodges, 1995).

Attitude-those feelings that cause a reader to approach or avoid a reading situation. (Readance, Bean, and Baldwin, 1995)

At risk-The at risk student is defined as one who is currently not achieving the success that is promised through the public education system. The term at risk is used to refer to a person or group whose prospects for success are marginal or worse (Harris and Hodges, 1995).

Community-the area where one lives, neighborhood or environment. The term community will be examined as it relates to the environment in the home, school, and church life.

Community literacy-reading other than that done in school, associated with participation in neighborhood activities and in government, church, and social organizations. (Harris and Hodges, 1995)

Concept Index- A technique for organizing information. A graphic organization of themes and concepts to show their relationship. Excerpts of oral histories that are related to recurring themes will be organized in this manner.

Culture-a collection of values, beliefs, and standards which influences how students think, feel, and behave in social settings. (Readance, Bean, and Baldwin, 1995).
Debriefing - process which occurs at the end of interview sessions to focus the research process by using writing and discussing to cross-check information collected in the interview session.

Ethnography - in anthropology, the scientific study of individual cultures. (Harris and Hodges, 1995).

Ethnographic research - the naturalistic study of situations and culture, observational research. (Harris and Hodges, 1995).

Interview Guide - a list or questioning guide that assures the collection of the same general information from a group of interviewees (Patton, 1990). This technique of interviewing increases the comprehensiveness of the information collected.

Literacy - the ability and willingness to use reading and writing to construct meaning from printed text based on the particular social context. (Readance, Bean, and Baldwin, 1990).

Motivation to Read - the activity of generating literacy learning opportunities, thus determining one's own destination as a literacy learner. This is a characteristic of active readers and highly motivated readers. (Guthrie, 1996).

Oral Histories - are "spoken memories" (Hoopes, 1979, p. 9). The use of oral histories to provide knowledge of inner feelings is used by social scientists in ethnographic research. For this study, recorded interviews are the oral histories or literacy stories.

Urban community - an inner-city neighborhood. The area of south Baton Rouge is considered an urban community. The environment of the interviewees is considered an urban community.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Approach and Organization

This literature review begins with research that focuses on the importance of "community" to literacy development. The term community will be examined as it relates to the environment in the home, school, and church life. This will be followed by an examination of aliteracy as a choice among African American males and the relationship of low literacy to reading achievement.

The African American male is often labeled as at risk of failure. The use of the term 'at risk' as it relates to literacy achievement is an issue that has been extensively used in research associated with the students in this cultural group. An immense category of research is comprised by the at risk literature, including studies of the group which is comprised largely by the African American male student. The affect of at risk factors on students could be determined from the literature according to school participation and societal or community participation. The review of literature found that attitude and motivation to read and succeed underscores the positive experiences of youth for all cultural groups. This review of literature focuses on these factors and their importance to achievement for the at risk African American male student.

The next segment of this literature review focuses on the literacy instruction that is experienced by the at risk student. The school as a community of learners is examined in several of these articles. The focus is on making all students comfortable in the classroom environment and the creation of a classroom community where all
students can achieve success. Also focusing on the classroom community are reviews related to individual differences and learning styles, and the teacher's role as the leader of the classroom community.

The current status of African American males will be discussed through the statistical data of national reports, with emphasis on the significance of this information to educators. The importance of the information from these reports is based on how the current data relates to the future education of African American males. The impact on the future education of this group involves increasing knowledge about change in attitudes toward literacy and motivation to read. The final portion of this literature review discusses information about the best ways to increase reading achievement and the effect of the social situation of the classroom on literacy learning.

**The Importance of Community to Literacy: Home, School, and Church**

The community and home environment account for an important factor of the educational success and literacy of children. Slaughter and Epps (1987) gave an overview of the literature on the relationship between home environment and school achievement, concluding that there are significant effects on the achievement of children. Student self-motivation and self-concept was found to be greatly influenced by home environment, particularly during the elementary school years. By secondary school the self-concept and self-perception is influenced more by the external environment, Slaughter and Epps conclude this is directly related to the onset of adolescence.
The influences of the home environment were explored by Gadsden (1992), in a look at the beliefs of elderly African Americans. The intergenerational beliefs of African Americans were found through analysis of discussions with 25 elderly adults. The discussions led to discoveries about how beliefs shaping educational legacies are found. These educational legacies are often enacted through interpretations and translations of what literacy means. These translations are often determined by the beliefs and experiences of the generation.

The book, *Family Literacy: Community and School Connections*, contains a chapter written by Gadsden (1995) about “Literacy Connections”. In the chapter Gadsden looks at family literacy again with an essay that explores the multiple perspectives of the varied definitions of family literacy. It provides a look at the cultural communities of African Americans and European Americans to compare the differences and similarities of beliefs, motivations, and definitions of literacy. The use of literacy and the ideas of the parents, interviewed by Gadsden, are able to provide insight into the cultural definitions and pluralisms that educators hold pertaining to the education of the at risk child. The value of community experiences and their relation to the values of the home are an underlying theme of the chapter.

If one examines “community “as the experiences one has in life, the learning experiences of school are part of the concept of one’s community. Literacy among African American youth, like most young people in American society, is developed through learning experiences at school. Schools have failed miserably in providing even basic literacy skills to far too many of the students they serve, especially children and youth of color (Venezsky, Wagner, and Ciliberti, 1990). At all three
grade-age levels included in the National Assessment of Educational Progress studies, African American and Latino students performed worse than white students (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1985, 1990). Six percent of all nine-year-olds in the United States lack basic reading skills. Forty percent of thirteen-year-olds cannot perform at acceptable levels in middle school because of poor reading skills. Sixteen percent of seventeen-year-olds cannot make connections between their own ideas and ideas presented in a textbook.

An historical example of the way schools supported African American communities is found in Walker's (1996) work focusing on the Caswell County Training School in Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South. As part of a segregated environment, the school was a highly valued entity in the community. Respect for teachers was an expectation fostered by parents, and a partnership between school and home was nurtured and fostered. Parents gave financial support to school sponsored events and provided impetus for students through their belief in the importance of education. Within the segregated society surrounding the school, the enforcement of community became evident. This was reinforced through the fact that, "...the parents had gone to school with some of the teachers. Therefore many school personnel were not strangers, but rather people who were already part of a community structure within which they felt comfortable" (p. 82).

The many problems of urban communities and poor neighborhoods are described in television news reports of violence, illegal drugs, and generally unsafe living conditions. Living in such neighborhoods may affect adolescent behavior,
aspirations, motivations, and school achievement as well as future life. Urban African American communities are often discussed in relationship to these negative effects. Earlier studies (Billingsley, 1968), have found that the community played an important role in assisting efforts of families to lead children toward achievement. African American community members in formal roles as teachers and ministers provided role models for adolescents in the community. The church was determined by Billingsley to have an especially positive impact on African American family life, even if the church was not physically located in the community. If we define community as organizations chosen by the family, the church and all extensions of the church and its activities are an important part of adolescent development.

Historically the Black church has, according to Myrdal (1944) and Dubois (1980), served all the basic needs of the Black community, providing an outlet for creative performances in the arts, politics, and sports. Dubois described the church in African American communities as serving not only the religious function, but also meeting the social, political, and economic needs of the community. Myrdal describes the Black church as a unique institution, created and maintained with little outside interference. He argued that: "The Negro church fundamentally is an expression of the Negro community itself" (Volume 2, p.877).

Participation in other parts of community life also play an important role in the development of literacy. In a study of African American young adults, age 20-25 years old, Winfield (1988) found that involvement in community organizations was associated with high levels of literacy. Those that scored high on literacy proficiency
tests were more likely than those who scored lower to be involved in community organizations.

Community organizations have become a vital source of innovations to aid the student in crisis. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the community has come together to form an alliance to review current attitudes and educational strategies by which schools could better address the needs of African American males. The African American Male Task Force (AAMTF). (1990) recommendations include a variety of means for the school and community to work along with the families to create an exceptional balance between learning and community. Some recommendations of the alliance are: multicultural curricula; enhanced homework policies; parent involvement; and African American male academies. The academies recommended as a restructuring of schools on a system-wide basis are described as a method of obtaining and developing strong self-concepts among African American males.

In many areas of the country, projects are being implemented to galvanize support for the disadvantaged child in need of aid to achieve success. A project of the Center for Research on the Education of Disadvantaged Students addresses areas of needed research. The areas of research addressed include: new data on attitudes and behaviors that affect school, family, and community connections; analysis and synthesis of existing data on school and community connections; and new evaluations on critical topics for school and community connections for disadvantaged students. The project conducted under the direction of Nettles (1990) reviews the practices and policies that influence school and community connections, and has produced
guidelines and materials to promote community development of effective programs for disadvantaged youth.

The Comer School Development Program started more than 25 years ago by child psychiatrist James Comer and his colleagues at Yale University is one of the premier programs for the improvement of the education experience for poor and minority children. Through observation, Mr. Comer concluded that children's experiences at home and in school deeply affected their psychosocial development, which in turn affects their academic achievement. The basis for the development of the program is that the poor academic performance of disadvantaged and at risk students is in large part a function of the failure to bridge the societal and cultural gaps between home and school. The goals of the program include the building of positive attitudes toward school and the creation of an emotional bond between school staff, parents, and students. Schools that become involved in the Comer plan must institute the principle of development of collaborative working relationships among parents, principals, teachers, community leaders, superintendents, and health care workers. Through the institution of the Comer Plan, schools create an inclusive community that encompasses all areas of the child's life.

Aliteracy, and Low Literacy: A Growing Problem

A current issue of reading and reading education is the rising rate of aliteracy. Aliteracy is defined by Harris & Hodges (1995) in the Literacy Dictionary, as the conscious choice not to use one's literacy skills. The term aliteracy is used to refer to the growing number of those in today's society who do not feel the importance of literacy and its effects on their daily lives. The phenomena of students choosing to
ignore the importance of literacy is one that should be studied to determine the influences of culture and community.

A recent study completed by Yazdani (1997) showed the reading habits of students in a high school as limited to work required for school. The survey responses indicated a lack of leisure reading. The responses were from students of an urban population of ninth through eleventh grade students. The subjects were 106 female and 124 male African American students. When questioned about reading habits not related to the educational setting such as newspaper reading, comic books, or other favorite books the findings showed less than 40 percent of the students read on a regular basis, daily or weekly, any material other than in class assigned reading. Comparisons between male and female students in this group show significant differences between the choices to read made by the males. In all survey question responses, females were making more choices to read outside of school than their male classmates. The choice of aliteracy is being made among the African American males surveyed in this group.

Another study by Moffitt and Wartella (1992) surveyed the leisure reading pursuits of female and male adolescents. The survey particularly explored the adolescent reading of books along with other types of media. The findings of the study ranked and measured the popularity of reading as compared to other leisure options. The findings showed that sports and being with friends outranked reading as an activity choice among males. Other choices included watching television, music, and talking on the phone. Reading was also ranked third among the female
respondents, but the percentage of females making the choice was higher than for the males who responded to the survey.

African American males: At risk students

The at risk student is defined as one who is currently not achieving the success that is promised through the public education system. One of the greatest problems in education today is how to reach those currently not being served through the current pedagogical means. The group of students designated as at risk, includes a large portion of students who are male, and African American.

The characteristics of at risk students were determined in the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, which surveyed 25,000 eighth graders attending public and private schools in the U. S., and re-surveyed the students in 1990. The study focused on the variables of basic demographic characteristics, such as where students lived; family and personal background; the amount of parental involvement in education; the student's academic history; the students behavioral factors; teacher perceptions of the students; and characteristics of the students' schools. The study found that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds who were Black, Hispanic-American, and Native American, were more likely to be at risk, with males within the three groups more likely to perform below basic proficiency levels on standardized tests.

Students considered at risk are those who are said to have an improbable chance for success in today's society. Students at risk, have been defined by characteristics that make their prospects for success marginal or worse. An ERIC descriptor since 1980, the term is used to designate social groups as well as
individuals. At risk students were defined by Swanson and Willis (1979), to include youth whose experienced environmental, cultural, and economic societal conditions consistently prevent them from realizing their potential within the dominant educational, vocational, and societal structures of today’s society.

Two forms of at risk, general and academic, are distinguished by Bateman and Kidwell (1995). When it is said that a student is generally at risk, the factors could include drugs, AIDS, dysfunctional family situations, poverty, and factors associated with these social ills. The academically at risk student is one who is one or more years behind his or her age or grade level in mathematics or reading skills, according to these researchers.

The At Risk Student and Literacy Instruction

At risk students in a study by Greenwood (1991), of the instructional time for literacy tasks, were found to increase their level of literacy achievement when the time in an instructional setting was increased. Favorable enhancement of literacy skills and learning, proven by this study denotes the engagement time of instruction as a critical factor for the at risk reader. The key to unlocking learning for the at risk literacy learner is the inclusion in and participation in a literate classroom environment or community where they are allowed to engage in activities that promote growth in language, reading, writing, and thinking (Collins & Cheek, 1993). The engagement of students in cooperative learning groups and classroom discussion is an important means of connecting the literacy learner with text, enhancing comprehension.

Studies related to literacy and the at risk student are important to the development of theories that drive effective programs. The most common response
of schools and school systems for the aid of academic status of the child who does not acquire literacy early, is to place them in remedial classes or special educational services (Slavin, 1989). In a 1992 project of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on the education of Disadvantaged Children, Slavin found the prevention of school failure through the elementary grades for most disadvantaged children can be assured through the implementation of birth-to-three interventions, effective preschool and kindergarten programs, and effective curriculum and instruction in the elementary grades combined with support services for those students who need them.

Bateman and Kidwell (1995), compiled a list of programs for at-risk students in middle and high school, with essential components and recommendations for teachers and administrators. This paper provides an extensive literature review concerning at-risk students and their needs, identifies the essential components necessary for effective at-risk programming, and describes successful at-risk programs and recommendations for administrators and teachers at the middle- and high-school levels. The literature review for the study presents research findings on parenting styles, students' perceptions of change, school attendance, grade retention, and evaluation of programs for at-risk learners. Essential components of programs for at-risk students include a recognition of the importance of school climate, a comprehensive and balanced curriculum, an effective and caring staff, energetic and experienced teachers trained in various counseling skills, using a preventative and remedial approach to enhance the at-risk students' self-esteem, and an inclusive decision-making process. Appendices contain samples of various at-risk programs' objectives, activities, and curricula.
The academic work done by "good" and "poor" readers in the same classroom groups is not similar or commensurate. Corresponding primary differences are evident in the distribution of allocated time for oral reading, with the good readers being given time for silent reading, for comprehension, and the poor readers being assigned group oral reading activities (Allington, 1977). The study describes how the teacher interrupted the poor readers more often, asked fewer comprehension questions, and assigned more skill-in-isolation work in the form of puzzles, and fill-in-the-blank type activities.

The use of cooperative learning and literacy discourse to motivate African-American male literacy learners is an important instructional tool that can impact literacy learning positively, and consequently, the overall scholastic success of this disproportionately at risk group. Studies have shown the positive impact of the use of peer and group discourse as a method of negotiating meaning in the classroom among readers and teachers, with the changing of knowledge being impacted by the interaction between text, teacher, and peer readers. Within the classroom social circle, meaning can be expected to change, as a result of ongoing dialogue, and interpretations are evolving due to the interactions of the text, reader, teacher, and peers.

**Literacy Instruction and Learning Styles**

The learning style preferences of African Americans was considered and adapted to accommodate literacy learners in a prison writing class by Glasgow (1994). The adaptation to these learning styles was found to have a positive impact on the prisoners as students in a writing class. Glasgow used direct, explicit, modeling of the
reading and writing processes to accommodate the need for guidance and
demonstration, a humanized curriculum, to encourage expressive writing about
positive experiences, graphic and advanced organizers to give a global view of the
lessons, and buddy assignments and student models to accommodate the personal and
social orientation of the learners. By use of these accommodations, Glasgow made
use of the inherent learning styles of the largely African American male literacy
learners involved in the study.

Other research views of the relationships that occur in the classroom during the
interactions among peers in group situations are discussed from the view of the teacher
and the motivation of the student. Meanings in a classroom are negotiated between
the readers and the teachers as well as among the readers. Classrooms form
interpretive communities that may share common understandings; however those
understandings are not fixed. As the reader interacts with other readers, and with the
teacher in a social context, constructed meanings can be expected to change. In a
sense while a text may be fixed, meaning for the reader is always evolving.

Research into the discourse patterns of students in the secondary school
classroom, are delineated according to learning styles by Gooden (1993), who
describes the learning styles of African American youth as more global than analytical
in the preferred thinking mode, viewing the information presented as an overall
picture, instead of in bits and pieces. The African American youth, according to
Gooden, is more attuned to cooperative learning situations, as compared to
competitive relationships, with personality preferences oriented more toward persons
than objects. They are more responsive to human interest and socially oriented,
responding to text that relates to this curriculum content, and are more externally oriented. The effect of these forces on the human context of the in class group discussion of text is an important consideration for the instructor. Gooden states that the classroom context for discussion is driven by the elements of the participants learning styles.

An important part of the dynamics of a group, is the individual perceptions of the members. The interactions of persons within any given group depends on their own personal interpretation of the situation, and the meaning they give to it, Blumer (1969) states in his book called Symbolic Interactionism: Perspectives and Methods. The effect of culture and cultural differences are found to play a profound role in the social forces of group dynamics and the acquisition of literacy.

The social and cultural differences of language patterns was studied in a doctoral dissertation by Campbell (1993). In the dissertation, Campbell explored the use of and role of Black English Vernacular (BEV) in the acquisition of and use of academic literacy. Black English has in the last three decades been described by linguists in minute detail, and has been a topic of research into the difficulties speakers of this dialect have in learning to read and write standard American English. The major question of the study addressed the use of BEV in social and academic situations. Writing samples of the students were examined to determine whether discourse practices of students influenced their academic writing. The study findings based on the analysis of discourse determined the presence of an intricate system of rhetoric, with differences from mainstream discursive patterns.
The Classroom Community: Teachers, Students, and Learning Styles

The epistemological views of the teacher are an important part of the social configurations in the classroom. The teacher's role as a leader, is based on the viewpoint held by Jackson (1968), who identifies a culturally relevant scenario, versus one of assimilation. Assimilation (McNally, 1974), according to Piagetan theory is a mental activity that incorporates new experience into cognitive structure, altering the experience in the process but preserving the structure; changing one's representations of the world to fit one's way of thinking. The social relations framework, described for the culturally relevant methodology, sustains teacher-student relationships that are equitable and fluid, with the extension of the interactions beyond the classroom and into the community. The teacher also displays a connection with the students, encouraging a community of learners. The students are encouraged to learn collaboratively, and are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other. The assimilation methodology, compared to this requires a fixed, hierarchical, and limited focus of classroom roles, where the teacher demonstrates connections and encourages competitive achievement. In this classroom structure, the teacher encourages students to learn individually, in isolation from their classmates.

The hierarchical, top-down relationship in the classroom setting, considers the students as the "know-nothings (or at least as know-very-little)", according to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), in her book, The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children. Ladson-Billings states that teachers may assume that because of poverty, language, or culture, the students know little that is of value in a classroom setting. By failing to incorporate the African American students into the
community of learners, the alienation that the potential at risk student is likely to experience as their school careers progress is fostered.

The importance of the learning style of the student and the teacher was also discussed by Ladson-Billings. The difference in learning styles between students and teachers causes a disadvantage for the African American students. This mismatch of learning styles was described by Delpit (1995) as something that should be accommodated as a difference in learning, not as a difference in ability. To aid teachers in understanding the basic differences, Michaels and Cazden (1986) prescribe preservice and inservice training for teachers concerning methods of observation to identify the various learning styles.

The consideration of the learning style is important to the incorporation of a child into a learning community and social structure of a classroom. Akbar, (1975), proposed a description of the African American child, which gives insight into the learning styles that would be important to classroom instruction. Akbar’s description includes many factors of the current societies view of a student at risk. The African American child, as described by Akbar is highly affective, using language requiring a wide use of many coined interjections (sometimes including profanity), relying on words that depend on context for meaning, and that have little meaning in themselves, often preferring the use of expressions that have meaning connotations. For learning communication, the preferred modality is oral-aural, with a high sensitivity to other’s nonverbal cues. Social structures of the African American child tend to be highly people oriented, and social centered. The child may like spontaneity, adapt rapidly to novel stimuli, and use internal cues for problem solving. The implications of these
descriptive factors for classroom activities may be viewed as negative behavior by one not understanding the differences in culture, especially one who adopts an assimilation centered instructional style. These differences in the learning styles, as described here may be part of the reasons there is often an exclusion of the African American child from the classroom discourse community.

Current Status of the African American Male Secondary Student

As part of a social profile of Black males, Gary (1981) compared the educational status of African American males to that of white males, using statistical data of the late 1970’s. Three conclusions were made from this comparison. The first was that African American males lack opportunities for jobs above menial level without the completion of college. The second conclusion stated that white males at similar educational and occupational levels showed a marked difference in income. Third, labor force participation for black males age 16 and above decreased almost 13 percent from 1959 to 1979. The comparable statistic for white males showed a drop of only 5.2 percent.

In the late 1980’s, educational status of black males made moderate improvement but still lagged behind their white counterparts. In 1987, the median level of grade completion for black males was 12.4 years, compared to 12.8 years for white males (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1992). During the same period, 36.9 percent of black males, age 25 years and older had completed less than four years of high school, compared to 22 percent for the same age group among white males. The percentage of black males with four or more years of college in this age group was 11 percent compared to 24.5 percent for white males. If
according to Gary, college completion is essential for success for occupational success among African American males, then the small gains shown by this data from the U.S. Census shows there is some improvement, but not enough to change the quality of life drastically.

Some data represents facts that indicate an 'at risk' level as equivalent among African American females and males. Data reported in 1985 by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) lend further support to the lack of progress to educational, occupational, and general quality of life associated with literacy. The data reports on three types of literacy-prose, document, and quantitative. The data was assessed on a nationwide sample. The results indicated that prose literacy, such as the ability to locate information in an almanac or newspaper article was found to be 21.3 percent among blacks as compared to 63 percent among whites. Document literacy, such as the reading of a map was found to be at a level of 2.2 percent among African Americans as compared to 24.9 percent among whites. In the area of quantitative literacy only 21.4 percent of blacks compared to 62.9 percent of whites were capable of entering deposits and checks to balance a checkbook.

Reed (1988) conducted a thorough review of literature on literacy among African American young adults and stated that the mean scores for black students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data showed levels far below other groups at ages 9, 13, and 17. These observations were supported by the findings of the National Commission on Education Statistics (NCES).
Braddock (1996) reports in a study of African American males participating in sports in middle school, that the participation is beneficial to the academic achievement and attendance of these students. The education and achievement was examined according to broad-based school achievement and occupational achievement. The analysis activities focused on describing trends and developments in the status of African American male educational and occupational achievement, and examining educational and labor market pipeline factors that contribute to the continuing patterns of African American male under achievement.

The plight of African American male under achievement was discussed in an article written in response to the Negro Education Review's focus on the Black male. Alice Scales (1992) addressed the plight of the Black male in America in an article highlighting the importance of literacy to this population. Scales highlights the need for literacy as a means of full participation in the economy. The article describes specific techniques to focus on high literacy for this cultural group to address the crisis of education and incarceration of the African American male. Scales promotes literacy as the most important strategy for the solution to the problems associated with low literacy highlighted in the article.

**Lack of Scholastic Success and Community Experiences**

The low literacy levels within the population of African American males is a factor which can be further traced to the growing problems that have carried over to the community, such as adolescent criminal behavior, and the growing drop out rate. The National Adult Literacy Survey (1993), found that the overall literacy levels of prison inmates, a population that is disproportionately Hispanic and African American
in the United States tends to be low. The lack of success achieved by students has a negative effect on society as a whole, with the caring over of this lack of success to community experiences.

The need for linking all aspects of one’s community to achieve success is a fundamental part of the studies of the Harvard Family Research Project (1995). The project reports on the effectiveness of family and community support programs. In the 1995 report entitled Raising Our Future: Families, schools, and communities joining together, the project describes and profiles 73 school affiliated family support and educational programs throughout the United States. The 495 page handbook serves as a response guide and overview of the factors contributing to the success of the programs. As communities seek resources to enable students to succeed, this report includes many ways to implement programs. The programs address issues related to the linking of support from home with the school and community. The introduction to the report indicates the need for community effort to provide success for all students.

"Success for All", (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, and Wasik, 1991) is an example of a school-based achievement oriented program that provides a link with the effective family support and instructional resources in the classroom. The partnership between the Baltimore Public Schools and the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools of Johns Hopkins University was implemented to meet the goal of enabling every child at an inner-city Baltimore school to perform at grade level by the end of third grade. The principals this program is based on are the beliefs that: Every child can learn; success in the early grades is critical to future success; and that through early intervention and support to families, learning deficits
can be prevented. In a description of the program and its goals, Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, and Wasik emphasize the importance between the link to community and school through full support of learning within the home. The elements of support provided through a facilitator, teacher, and a special family support team work together to achieve the program goals. The goals of the program are: reduced referrals to special education classes and grade repetition; all students performing at grade level in reading by the end of third grade; and increased school attendance.

The added support provided by linking the school, community and family can provide positive advantage to African American males by improving school attendance and prevent school drop out. The key points of a poll conducted by Louis Harris and Associates (Taylor, 1993-1994) list the reasons why young African American males stay in school, as well as why they may drop out. The poll conducted through face-to-face interviews with 360 young Black men, ages 17-22, includes residents from randomly drawn census tracts in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. By design one-half of the interviewees had dropped out of school. The other half graduated and went on to college. For those who stayed in school the key points indicate the importance of good support from parents and teachers, positive school experiences, and the knowledge of the importance of schooling as major contributions to these men staying in school. For those surveyed who had dropped out of school, the challenges and problems faced were much greater. These young men were more likely to have been arrested and incarcerated, used drugs, and were more likely to be depressed or suicidal. They were also less likely to be employed.
Literacy levels are critical to one's overall school success, as Greenwald and Wolfe (1981) reported, reading was involved in instruction about 60 percent of all class time, and is incorporated into well integrated systems of communication. Doyle (1990), found that the literacy operations of reading, writing, listening, and speaking were involved in the introduction of classroom content which is presented using a combination of lecturing, questions, and oral exercises or examples. The importance of literacy related learning is confirmed to be a principal segment of basic education for all individuals (Venezky, 1995). Literacy related learning involves all aspects of one's education. These studies imply that low reading achievement and ability may correlate to low achievement and success rates in one's overall education.

**Changing Attitudes for Increasing Reading Achievement**

To involve the adolescent African American male literacy learner in the classroom community, to preclude the classification of at risk, there must be a renewed interest in affective factors and their influence on academic achievement and behavior. The powerful impact of attitudes, values, beliefs, desires, and motivations on literacy has become evident (Alvermann and Guthrie, 1993). The positive associations of these elements, influences students to read more, for longer periods of time and with greater intensity, leading to superior reading achievement. Negative feelings in any of these areas noted by Alvermann and Guthrie, lead to the avoidance of reading and little or no involvement in reading. Ciccone (1981), defined a reading attitude as a system of feelings related to reading, influencing a student to approach or avoid a literacy situation. Attitude, an important element of literacy and literacy
learning, is only observable through the behavior of a student, with the motivation to read, and learn, being dependent on the participation in the learning process.

Attitude has long been an essential factor of the research into the development of reading achievement. Epstein, (1980), theorized the three domains of attitude as cognitive, the development of intellect; affective, the development of emotions or attitudes; and the development of volition (behavioral). In 1911, McDougall stated that attitude is a condition that is the striving side of our nature, the equivalent of will, which, "supplies the motivational power to all activities that are means to the attainment of the desired end“ (p. 17). The making of positive changes in attitude to achieve positive effects in reading achievement for students has been proven a successful method to increase reading achievement, (Roswell, 1967; Ciccone, 1981; Epstein, 1980; Turner and Alexander, 1980). The use of such strategies to realize more positive attitudes in the classroom, can greatly impact the reading achievement of the at risk literacy learner.

Attitude includes feelings of self efficacy, and value, which may be greatly influenced by general classroom climate. Bandura, (1982), defines self efficacy as a person's judgments of her or his ability to perform an activity, and the effect this perception has on future and on-going conduct of the activity. Self perceptions are likely to influence learning by inhibiting or motivating, (Zimmerman and Ringle, 1981). Henk and Melnick, (1995), developed the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS), to measure how children feel about themselves as readers. The development of the Henk and Melnick scale is based on the Bandura (1977) Reader Self-Perception Scale which describes a psychological construct, reader self-efficacy, as an
aspect of literacy which will allow teachers to adjust classroom learning climates to foster maximum literacy growth. The capability for reader self perception is socially situated, with the observations of positive social feedback, and comparisons of progress to classmates, being highly influential to the internal comfort of the literacy learner.

The Impact of the Social Situation on Literacy Learning

Akbar (1975) describes the African American male’s learning style as social. Students in classroom settings are often not allowed the interaction that is necessary to support this learning style. The active and social learner is more often labeled as “too talkative”, or “hyper”. This spotlighting often leads to other interpretations of classroom problems and the solutions of the incorporation of special education. The child who does not fit the mold of the average learner, or does not learn in the same style as the classroom majority is often removed from the classroom, either as disciplinary actions are set in motion, or evaluation activities eventually leading to special education placement. The mismatch of the classroom social setting and the student being educated is often a compounding of problems for African American males in diverse classrooms.

The classroom social situation is highly evident in the dynamics of group text-based discussions studied by Alvermann, Weaver, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, Thrash, and Zalewski (1995). This multi-access study suggests through its findings that students are aware of conditions that are conducive to good discussions, knowledgeable about different tasks and topics that influence their participation, and are cognizant of how classroom discussions help them understand what they read.
Alvermann, et al, used a conceptual framework based on the Dewey (1933) argument that the proper interpretation of students' educational experiences rests on one's ability to understand their thoughts, actions, and motives as they interact with others in social situations. Further building on the ideas of Dewey, the choice of social constructionism was used to shape the research into how classroom talk about texts was observed to lead adolescents to a negotiation of their own understanding.

The verbal interaction, patterns, and styles of discourse that are used in the classroom should be researched, in light of the differences that are apparent in the text genres, teaching styles, and the wide ranging abilities of students in today's classrooms, to lend an equitable educational foundation for all literacy learners. The implications for the future use of research into attitudes and motivations of literacy learners, studies of self efficacy, social dynamics of in class discussions, and the effects of these on motivation and attitude toward reading can be important to the solution of the current crisis of education today, the inability to reach the at risk literacy learner. African American males, as high risk students, are in urgent need of research based instructional designs to strengthen the literacy development through which they can achieve greater scholastic success. Learning from students experiences in text-based discussions is an important research focus for this disproportionately at risk group. An understanding must be gained to properly interpret the educational experiences of the at risk student, to shape positive student experiences.

The influences of the classroom environment outlined in these studies conclude the essential factor of teacher support and the classroom as a community of
learners. Kunjufu (1985, 1988) describes a "fourth-grade syndrome", stating that African American boys at this age are especially vulnerable to becoming at risk if they are not on a school athletic team or come from a nonacademic household. Other influences outlined by Kunjufu, affecting risk include being a member of a lower economic level family, non-religious family, the onset of demonstration of "macho" behavior, exposure to influential peers, low teacher expectations, and the lack of significant role models. The need for influence to become a responsible classroom citizen is stated by Kunjufu as a shared responsibility by parents and teachers. Since the laying of a strong literacy foundation in the early grades is primary to the ability to take responsibility for learning in the secondary classroom, it is essential to focus on early academic progress as a team including home, school, and community.

**Parental Involvement in the Educational Process**

The involvement of parents in schooling can lead to real academic benefits for children (Finns, 1998), with some parent behaviors found as more effective than others. The continued partnership of home and school life is being energized from groups such as parent organizations, district school systems, as well as the federal government. Documents are being issued by the US government to help organize parent organizations in their participation at schools (for example, Rutherford, Anderson, and Billig, 1997). Major reform efforts and educational interventions list parental involvement as an important ingredient.

Empirical data show that specific parenting practices are related to students' academic achievement. The behaviors described by Finns as "parental engagement behaviors" are those which indicate techniques and methods of participating or...
engaging in the process of education. It is important to understand how, and to what extent, "parental engagement behaviors" bolster student learning.

The Importance of the Home Environment

The parent’s importance as a role model for language development, their press for achievement, and the provisions provided in the home for education have been documented by researchers (Dave, 1963; and Wolf, 1964). Until the early 1960s, sociologists believed that school performance and intelligence were connected with socioeconomic status and family structure. These researchers demonstrated that differences in children's performance could be explained by specific conditions and parental behaviors.

Clark (1983) added significantly to understanding through an intensive study of 10 African American students from poor homes, half of whom were successful academically and half of whom were not. The researchers discovered that parents of high-achieving students had distinct styles of interacting with their children. They created emotionally supportive home environments and provided reassurance when the youngsters encountered failure. These parents viewed school performance as being accomplished through regular practice and work. They accepted responsibility for assisting their children to acquire learning strategies, as well as a general fund of knowledge.

Parental Engagement at Home

Research reveals that parental engagement at home and engagement at school are not equally important to children's learning. At the same time, extensive research reviews find that the home environment is among the most important influences on
academic performance (Wang, Haertel, and Walberg, 1993). Researchers have identified three types of parental engagement at home that are consistently associated with school performance. These behaviors of engagement include the process of actively organizing and monitoring the child's time. This means that the participation of the parents is accountable for the knowledge of how the child's time is spent. This also includes an accountability for the active helping with homework; and the discussion of school matters with the child.

A fourth set of activities that is appropriate for proper engagement as a parent, particularly for younger children, involves parents reading to and being read to by their children. Researchers studying the effectiveness of this as a tool for aiding children (Edwards, 1992 and 1995; Finns, 1993; and Gadsden, 1995), have found it to be a major factor in the development of literacy habits that lead to positive school achievement.

The exact structure and form that each of these activities takes may differ from one family to another, but research shows that each is important. In fact, studies of students indicate that many of these same behaviors explain why some students achieve academic success despite the adversities posed by poverty, minority status, or native language (Finns, 1993; Masten, 1994; Peng and Lee, 1992).

Managing and organizing time.

Clark's original study found that parents of successful students actively helped them organize their daily and weekly schedules and checked regularly to see whether they were following the routines. Other studies have shown that
children who are involved in regular routines at home tend to have better school performance (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Taylor 1996). Monitoring children's use of time is identified as important in all studies of parental engagement (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Ho and Williams, 1996; Crouter, MacDermid, McHale, and Perry-Jenkins, 1990; Lamborn, Brown, Mounts, and Steinberg, 1992). Research shows that parents of academically successful students make sure they are informed about their youngsters' activities in school, their school performance, and whether or not they have been assigned homework; and they make certain that a place and time are allocated for homework. In addition, school performance is better among students whose parents know where they are, who they are with, and when they plan to come home. These parents also exercise reasonable control over non-school activities such as television viewing.

**Parent Involvement with Homework.**

The most important example of home and school partnership in the aiding of academic success is the interest of parents in the homework of their children. Homework offers an opportunity for parents to show an interest and to take a direct role in their youngster's schooling. Making certain that homework is completed, discussing the specifics of assignments and papers, explaining the assignments, checking accuracy, and actively helping children complete assignments have all been found to be related to children's academic performance (Ho and Williams, 1996; Clark, 1983; Finns, 1993; and Lamborn, et al. 1992). If a parent is not familiar with the content of the schoolwork, the acts of asking questions about an assignment and
examining completed work still underscore the importance they feel is attached to skill development and education.

In some instances, parents may serve as tutors to their children. This can assist students in the creation of a feeling of comfort associated with self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Peterson (1989) notes that the familiarity of the home environment, in contrast to the structure of the classroom, can become a comfortable setting for tutoring. Epstein (1983), in a survey of parents of elementary schoolchildren, found that more than 85 percent spent at least 15 minutes daily tutoring their children when it was requested by the teacher.

**Discussing School With Children**

Children whose parents converse regularly with them about school experiences perform better academically than children who rarely discuss school with their parents (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Ho and Williams, 1996; Finns, 1993). Other research suggests that the nature of parent-child discussions is also important. Parents should be willing to hear about difficulties, as well as successes, and play a supportive role, encouraging persistence when schoolwork or relationships at school are problematic (Clark, 1983; Lamborn, et al., 1992; and Steinberg, 1996). Research also supports joint parent-student decision making when the situation permits, such as choosing what project to undertake or, in later grades, what courses to take (Lamborn et al. 1992, and Taylor 1996). This level of interest is associated with higher student engagement and high academic achievement.
Literacy and Reading at Home.

Studies from Wolf (1964), and Dave (1963) and more current studies (Crouter, et al., 1990; Edwards, 1992; Slaughter-Defoe and Richards, 1995), have shown a positive relationship between a literacy-laden home, students, and school performance. The presence of newspapers, magazines, books, a dictionary, and a computer or word processor helps to create a positive home setting which enhances literacy skills. Even when these resources are in short supply, reading to a child and asking the child to read to the parent are crucial activities for the development of literacy. A great deal of research confirms a strong relationship between parents reading to their children and the development of reading proficiency. This was summarized in the landmark report, Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading, (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkins, 1985). According to Tracey (1995), there is an important connection between children's reading to their parents and reading achievement, especially if the parents guide and correct the young readers as they are reading.

In a survey of households among low-income or minority homes, it was found that few books in total are present within the home environment (Edwards, 1992). Edwards also found the types of reading materials included few children's books, and even fewer that are appropriate and interesting to children. Children from these homes arrive at school with little experience with books. Home book experience was cited by Collins and Check (1993), to be an important factor leading to school success.

Parent's Self-Efficacy and Literacy Experience at Home

At the same time, many parents feel they lack, or actually do lack, the skills to guide their children's reading or schoolwork (Edwards 1995; Hoover-Dempsey,
Bassler, and Burow, 1995). Some parents who attempt to read with their youngsters make beginners' mistakes, such as reading an entire story just to get through it when part of a story would suffice; focusing so much on mechanics that their child's motivation is diminished; and taking a punitive attitude when the child makes errors. School-sponsored programs have been highly successful in improving these situations. At least one program provided books for children to take home twice a week (Toomey 1992). A large number of school-parent reading programs have been reviewed by Topping (1986), Edwards (1992), and Tracey (1995). These researchers found the best of these programs have proactive, applicable, and relevant components to recruit parents, improve their literacy skills, help them develop a regular structure and pattern for including home-based literacy in their schedules, and help them overcome obstacles to literacy activities in the home.

Parental Engagement in School

Parental engagement in the school activities of children is a component of building positive home, school, and community relationships. The opportunity for parents to stay intensively involved in school diminishes as students become more independent. Another aspect of this diminishing involvement appears as peers come to have greater influence (Epstein, 1984; and Steinberg, 1996). At the same time, parents can continue to be participants in the education of their children and teens by visiting the school regularly. Regular attendance may include activities such as attending school events, performances, and athletics. There should also be a continued process of maintaining and initiating contact with teachers and administrators.
Research has not consistently documented links between parents' in-school engagement and student achievement as completely positive. Steinberg (1996) found a small but statistically significant correlation of achievement with parents' attendance at school programs, conferences, and extracurricular activities. Several studies found that the relationship between parent-teacher contacts and academic achievement is negative, but contacts increase when a student experiences academic or behavior problems (Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, and Ginsburg, 1986; Ho and Williams, 1996).

In a study of school programs and teacher practices regarding parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools, Epstein and Dauber (1991) compiled a list of basic responsibilities of parents and of schools. The responsibilities deemed highly appropriate and significant include parent volunteering and attendance at school functions. They also found that parental involvement in learning at home is recommended and supported by school staff. There has been an increase in the encouragement of involvement of parents in decision making related to schools with the formation of committees to fuse the two segments of school and community, and to support families and children's learning. Like other research, the data presented by Epstein and Dauber show that parents who are involved in some of these activities tend also to be involved in others, but not that these activities are totally related to children's school performance. These types of activities require real time commitments, time not always available to a single or working parent (Moles, 1987).

**The Opposite of Engagement**

In his work on child-rearing practices, Steinberg (1996), described parents who are "disengaged". Through the use of this term, Steinberg describes parents who are
the opposite of positively engaged in their children's education. These are the parents whose behavior is despotic, suppressive, and authoritarian. Another negative environment causing disengagement occurs when parents are failing to provide guidance or structure in the family setting. Parents who exhibit these behaviors are also most likely to fail to provide the emotional support needed when the child encounters problems. Steinberg found that children whose parents are disengaged have the poorest developmental patterns. The children are often found lacking in psychological maturity, social competence, and self-esteem. Other research points to specific attitudes and behaviors that, if implemented by parents, are associated with improved academic performance. These practices have been classified by Hoover-Dempsey and others (1995) as providing structure - structuring routines at home, and coordinating with school when problems arise and active involvement. This includes monitoring the youngster's expenditure of time, teaching and explaining concepts, reviewing homework, and providing support when the child experiences difficulties.

These authors and others give guidelines for parents who wish to increase their support for their children's academic work, and many effective programs are available for parents who would like assistance. Although the research evidence on participation in school is mixed, the evidence about parental engagement at home is positive. Disengagement on the other hand is incapacitating for the student and the school community relationship. Studies by Epstein (1983), and Toomey (1992), indicate that schools can foster the specific behaviors at home that promote student performance. In light of this, educators should pay particular attention to the outreach
ingredient of home and school partnerships. Educators should encourage this function of parent-school partnerships.

Current facts presented by the National Institute for Literacy (1998), indicate further the importance of the parent and school connection for the breaking of the cycle of low literacy, poverty, and hopelessness. The NIFL proposes the incorporation of comprehensive and holistic approaches to education for complete family education. Specific identified needs of society are based on NIFL reported knowledge that children’s literacy levels are strongly linked to the educational levels of their parents, especially that of their mothers. Parental income and marital status are both important predictors of success in school, but neither is as significant as having a mother or primary care giver who completed high school.

Children of parents who are unemployed and have not completed high school are five times more likely to drop out than children of employed parents. The importance of literacy for families is highlighted by the National Center for Family Literacy. The NCFL supports programs that include four essential components for family literacy. These components include early childhood education that focuses on pre-literacy skills such as vocabulary building and verbal expression. The second component consists of adult literacy education that helps parents enhance their own reading, math, and language skills. The third component stressed by the NCFL includes a program called Parent and Child Together.

These PACT programs work to bring parents and children together in the pre-school classroom. It is based on the researched knowledge that parents must be taught and supported in their efforts at home in order to teach the parents how to best fulfill
their role as their child's most important teacher. The fourth component, called Parent Time, offers topics for study and discussion, including child nurturing, managing and coping with child behavior, self-esteem, career options, and community resources.

The outcomes of the literacy programs are positive and found according to research to enhance attendance rates in adult education programs, gains made in development by children, improved self-confidence by parents and adults, and increased reading of library books. Follow-up studies done by the National Center for Family Literacy (1996) found that after entering family literacy programs fifty-one percent of adults participating in family literacy programs earned their GED or the equivalent. This led to an increase of forty-three percent becoming employed, compared with 14 percent before enrolling in the program. Thirteen percent enrolled in higher education or training programs and another 11 percent continued in GED programs after completion of the programs. An added testament to the success gained as parents completed the programs was found in the fact that twenty-three percent of those who were on public assistance when they enrolled are now self-sufficient.

To continue these improvements, the NIFL reports that the federal government provided $469 million dollars in 1997 for adult education. This funding enables millions of families to participate in basic education programs that help people help themselves. Continuing support for education from the federal government includes adult education funds of an additional $800 million dollars in private funding. This commitment from the federal government is essential for the continued improvement of family literacy and is the key to the development of citizens who are self-sufficient.
Literacy, Church, and the African American Male

African Americans had to wage a grim battle to obtain equal opportunity for education. According to Paris (1996), the availability of this equal opportunity resulted in the development of African American religious scholarship and new learning. African Americans had known the connection between literacy and freedom, even before the emancipation of slavery. Their struggle ended in a Supreme Court order in 1954, which allowed Euro-American education for blacks. Later, the emergence of Black Theology during the 1970s contributed to the development of African American religious scholarship, and new knowledge by both men and women.

Harris (1997), describes the emergence of a renewed interest in religion by young African American males in an article “Growing up in glory”, which describes the new phenomenon of huge churches or “megachurches”. Harris describes the changes in church attendance by African Americans in non traditional churches with huge congregations located in some of America’s poorest neighborhoods.

Describing a Sunday service in Atlanta’s Antioch Baptist Church, the presence of young African American males is lauded by Robert Franklin (1994). This gathering of young men, who assemble around a pulpit carved in the shape of an open Bible, has become a part of the Sunday ritual at Antioch Baptist where the congregation's 5,500 mostly middle-class black members have taken the young men of the inner city in a deliberate embrace. "It is extraordinary to see scores of young men sitting before the sacred book, hopeful symbols of morality, literacy and
responsibility," states Franklin, director of black church studies at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. "The presence of men attracts other men."

In an age of departure from the African American church, "megachurches", are providing a broad range of spiritual and economic uplifting in the inner city. The churches are focusing on urban society's disenfranchised men, as a focal point of renewal. At a time when the sons of the urban poor are increasingly disengaged from the Christian faith that sustained earlier generations, thriving congregations are an emblem of the new challenges that historically black congregations face as the rising black middle class and the urban poor are separated by an ever-widening gulf.

Franklin, a professor of ethics and an ordained minister of the Church of God in Christ, states that while many upwardly mobile black congregations are experiencing surges of membership, there has been a mass exodus of the urban poor from the church, particularly young men. A generation ago, Franklin stated that 80 percent of inner city males had some contact with church or Sunday school. But among the current generation of young men and boys an estimated 60 percent have had no contact whatsoever with Christianity.

Harris states that the reasons Some are children of those drawn to Islam by the preaching of Malcolm X. Others find the turn-the-other-cheek Christian pacifism that was a hallmark of the civil rights era irrelevant. Some, turned off by images of a white Jesus, reject Christianity as a faith imposed on slaves that replaced their original beliefs in animism or Islam. Others simply fall victim to the temptations of a consumerist popular culture or the violent ethos of the street. "The distractions from a
spiritual or moral life are profound in the inner city being a faithful, moral person is
against the odds and weight of the entire culture "(p. 49).

Image of Machismo and Prison

Franklin discovered just how heavy that weight is when he began visiting
inner-city barbershops, asking young men about their religious background, about
what aspects of the moral life excite them, and how they feel about religious leaders.
"The extraordinary prevalence of the prison experience has become a common ground
in building black identity in the inner city," Franklin noted. "Some young men told me
they wouldn't listen to any preacher or religious leader who hadn't done time or didn't
know first-hand about being locked up. And there was a profound distrust of
traditional black clergy" (p.50).

Time behind bars added luster to Malcolm X's appeal in the '60s, as he
preached the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. In Franklin's
view, Benjamin Chavis, executive director of the National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People, carries added weight with inner-city youth because
he served four years in prison in the '70s on charges of stirring up racial unrest. "The
African American male exodus from church is part of a larger crisis of institutional
participation that includes an exodus from the workplace, school and family life,"
according to Franklin (p.50).

In a June 8, 1996 issue of The Economist on Crime in America, the cover
story, One Third and Rising, revealed studies cited related to the criminal justice
system showed that though African Americans committed around forty-five percent of
serious crimes, they are more harshly treated. The article described studies showing
that the criminal-justice system is not color blind. With more unfounded arrests of African Americans and requirements to pay on average twice as much bail as whites. The Economist also found that African Americans are more likely to be jailed before trial and get heavier sentences for the same crime. A study of sentencing in the 1980s, which divided African Americans between "underclass" and "non-underclass", concluded that the biggest increase in the prison population was among "non-underclass" African Americans convicted for drug offences. According to the annual report of the Sentencing Project, Blacks in the Criminal Justice System (1996), one-third of 20-29-year-old black men are on probation, on parole or in prison. The Sentencing Group is a Washington-based penal-reform group, whose report covered trends in sentencing during the 1980's. This report and The Economist article cited examples of drug laws implicitly targeting African Americans. The inequitable sentencing for possession of crack cocaine, a drug which has infiltrated African American communities primarily was cited as another example in the article. The mandatory federal penalty for possessing five grams of crack (a couple of days' supply for an addict) is five years in jail. To get the same sentence a cocaine user has to have half a kilo in his possession. The implementation of anti-drug laws also affects blacks disproportionately. Blacks make up 12% of the American population, and, according to government surveys, 13% of those who say they have used drugs in the past month. Disproportionately African Americans account for 35% of arrests for drug possession, 55% of convictions and 74% of prison sentences.

The penalty of prison continues after release, with consequences which can affect an entire community. People who have been in prison have a slim chance of
regular employment on release. Their families are therefore poorer than others. Their children are fatherless while they are inside. And the attitudes which become a part of the circumstance of high incarceration rates among African American males is that prison life becomes the norm, and "normal" life abnormal.

**Reversing the Exodus from Traditional Churches**

Reversing that exodus demands that churches respond in the short term by sponsoring "male-friendly activities" such as one-on-one mentoring, sports activities and public discussions. Long-term solutions involve wide-scale nurturing of male self-esteem, Franklin said, as well as helping young males "view women as peers and equal partners in rebuilding African American families, churches and communities."

Gallman (1994), states that the hope for reversal of the exodus of black youths from Christianity, lies in a new generation of ministers, schooled in liberation theology and primed not only to preach the gospel but to put it to work solving the social problems that still plague the one-third of America's blacks who live in poverty and social disarray. "Today's generation wants to see a practical Christianity, one that allows them to be engaged in activities that make a difference," Gallman states. "The level of pain in our community is now so great. The advances we thought would come about have not. People are no longer content to sit around and sing 'We Shall Overcome.' We want to see change - not tomorrow, but today." Such changes are taking place in large, historically black congregations throughout the country.

Gallman referred to examples of churches nurturing of the communities which surround them. Large churches are expanding to meet the needs of the communities surrounding them. Churches given as examples are providing drug rehabilitation
programs for members, job placement programs broadening ministry, offering fellowship and fundamental assistance that ranged from soul food Sunday suppers to substance abuse programs and support groups. In one example the Antioch Baptist Church decided instead to remain in the inner city, erecting a $5 million sanctuary across from a public housing project. The church bought a downtown hotel and converted it to a homeless shelter. Antioch Baptist also ministers to the elderly, the imprisoned and people with AIDS.

Schooling and the African American Community

The history of education within the African American community was recounted by Ford (1991). He stated that African-Americans have had a reverence for education since the first communities of black slaves were established in this country. Slaves and their teachers assumed frightening risks when they created secret schools were a few blacks could learn to read; by the 1830s it was a criminal offense in most Southern states to teach a slave to read or write.

In Gunnar Myrdal’s 1944 study of race relations in America, the challenge to examine the living conditions and economic development of African Americans led to the argument for increased educational opportunity for all. From its very inception, the black quest for educational opportunity in America has been beset with obstacles: outright opposition through racism, well-meaning white paternalism, as well as internal ideological debates over the goals and purposes of education. The separate and unequal education system of the 1940’s was largely controlled by whites but performed by blacks. From the very beginning, the accountability of black schools to the community or population they served was a hotly contested issue. Myrdal’s
chapter on education, entitled "The Negro School," is largely focused on the existing conditions of black education in the South. In the South, racially separate schools were mandated by law under the doctrine of "separate but equal," gleaned from the Supreme Court ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). The schools for blacks that did exist were consistently shortchanged in terms of educational materials, building construction and maintenance, funding, and other resources. Schools in urban areas were often overcrowded, with one school serving a city's entire black population. No new high school facilities were made available to blacks despite the fact that in many areas they comprised a large proportion of the state population. In some counties, blacks were in the majority. (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1979).

Community control over the educational system was practically nonexistent at the time of Myrdal's study. Schools for blacks were, for the most part, unresponsive to the communities they served. These schools were ostensibly used as instruments of social control by the Southern white power structure. The curriculum was closely monitored by whites, if not controlled by them outright. Although segregated schools were entirely staffed by black teachers and administrators, they had little or no say in the way these schools were run. So long as their views and educational practices were in line with the beliefs and dictates of the local white power structure, black schools were left to themselves. The hiring and firing of teachers and staff, however, was a matter entirely under the control and/or supervision of white officials. This control extended to the post secondary level as well. White Southerners carefully monitored the curriculum of state-funded colleges. In most state colleges for blacks, pre-collegiate courses were offered along with
limited vocational and industrial education. Northern white philanthropy (e.g., Phelps-Stokes Fund, Rosenwald Fund, John H. Rockefeller) compensated for the lack of state funding by helping to establish and maintain schools, provide teachers, and fund building construction. Black instructors and administrators were, therefore, often beholden to those who supported their institutions. They were dependent upon the charity of whites not only for the education of their people but also for their livelihood.

The black struggle for educational parity with whites has a long history and continues to dominate the dialogue about American education. Since An American Dilemma was written, the ideological issues at stake in the quest for black educational parity differ very little from those that have always faced black institutions. Debates continue over the best strategy to pursue in the struggle for equality: admission into white institutions versus the development and maintenance of separate black institutions; integration versus group pluralism; assimilation versus separatism; self-determination versus external control. In An American Dilemma, Myrdal assessed the role of race prejudice in hampering the educational goals of blacks and explained the necessity of removing formal racial barriers to education.

Southern University professor of history, Charles Vincent describes the historical undertakings of African Americans in an interview with students of the McKinley High School Oral History Project (Hollins, Posey, and Jones, 1995). In the interview, Vincent describes the progress gained by former slaves and the aid which was often given to them by Whites. Vincent lauds the accomplishments of former slaves and gives an account of the beginning of founding of Black colleges during the
1800's. The progress of African Americans in education and gains in literacy is directly relative to the founding of institutions to serve the race.

In the three generations since their emancipation from slavery, African Americans made significant progress in all arenas of life. This progress was especially pronounced in education. W. E. B. Du Bois described the organized and successful efforts in pursuit of education and group advancement as "one of the marvelous occurrences of the modern world; almost without parallel in the history of civilization."

In his chapter on African American education, The Negro School, Myrdal acknowledged the great thirst for education that characterized African Americans after their formal bondage ended: "American Negroes have taken over the American faith in education" (page 8). Myrdal, quoting Booker T. Washington, makes this point:

Few people who were not right in the midst of the scenes can form any exact idea of the intense desire which the people of my race showed for education. It was a whole race trying to go to school. Few were too young and none were too old, to make the attempt to learn. As fast as any kind of teachers could be secured, not only were day-schools filled, but night schools as well.

The emphasis on education among African Americans in the post Civil War South was strategic. The determined efforts to institutionalize black education specifically, and to establish universal education generally, represented the demonstrated desire of African Americans to educate themselves and their children as a means of "defending and extending" their emancipation.

There is an unbroken historical link between the newly freed slaves who fought for universal state-supported public schools in the South and the black mothers...
and fathers who from the 1950s through the 1980s sent their children in search of a better education on foot and in school buses into the teeth of hostile and sometimes violent white resistance (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1979).

This determined battle for schooling has been fueled by a commitment to literacy and personal development not just as means to enhanced social mobility but as keys to inclusion in this society as full and equal citizens. In 1967 President Johnson commissioned an inquiry into the civil disorders that had occurred in predominantly black urban areas between 1964 and 1967. The resulting Kerner Commission Report was apparent. The reported conclusions were that education in a democratic society must equip children to develop their potential and to participate fully in American life. For the community at large, the schools have discharged this responsibility well. But for many minorities, and particularly for the children of the urban slum, the schools have failed to provide the educational experience which could overcome the effects of discrimination and deprivation (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1985).

Ford further states that the phenomenon of "white flight" was and is real. Inner-city school systems have lost significant numbers of white students, thereby increasing the number of predominantly minority schools. But it is equally clear that busing has been effective in reducing or ending school segregation in some communities. In small cities, some suburban areas and the rural South, racial isolation has been reduced (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1979).

How an Urban Community Changes

Skinner (1992) describes the changes in urban neighborhoods as a condition of "aging in place". This term can be understood generically as a phenomenon of long-
term residency. It is the result of cohort aging in the same place of residence. This is particularly apparent when housing not specifically planned for older persons becomes predominantly elder housing because of the aging of the long-term residents.

At first it may appear that aging in place is race or minority neutral; however, housing is a very volatile area of social relations in the United States, and the problems encountered by racial and ethnic minority elders are very real and uniquely different from those of the majority. The United States has placed high value on neighborhood living, and many neighborhoods have taken on racial and ethnic characteristics. The combination of discrimination and historically low incomes severely limits the choices available to these elders.

This study will include an examination of aspects of living arrangements from the perspective of the African American community. Circumstances peculiar to these minority elders will be discussed to clarify the concept of aging in place for this group. Aging in place will be viewed from a cohort, socioeconomic, and geographical perspective. This approach acknowledges that aging in place has personal, family, and community dimensions. Further, this implies that social contextual factors may influence aging in place as much as personal choices.

The Meaning of Shelter

Shelter is one of the primary needs of human beings; the assurance of adequate housing for the citizenry is one of the fundamental responsibilities of a society. Calmore (1989) cites Achtenberg and Marcuse (1986) who point out that "housing, after all, is much more than shelter: it provides social status, access to jobs, education, and other services, a framework for the conduct of household work, and a way of

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structuring economic, social, and political relationships." For the elderly, the provision of housing takes on additional dimensions. Simply providing a roof over one's head is not sufficient to handle the more complex needs associated with frailty and disability that accompany old age. They require solutions that provide for a variety of housing options to meet differing needs for shelter. This must range from the options for independent living, through supervised and assisted living, to limited and skilled nursing care.

**Importance of Location**

Any discussion of housing for African American elders must consider the geographic location. African American and minority elders predominate in inner city areas. Singelakis (1990) reports that the aged living in urban areas constitute more than 60 percent of all older persons in the United States, and 31 percent live in central cities. The elderly make up approximately 11 percent of the inner city population.

**The Role of Income**

The amount of income is also important to African American and other minority elders. Income may affect the value and repair of the housing as well as the neighborhood in which one is located. For minority elders, income may be a more important predictor of the value of housing than of neighborhood location. Ford (1990), found that 26.3 percent of white and 41.1 percent of black elders had incomes less than $3,000 a year. Kovar (1988) found that the low rate of income is continuing to decline. She found that black women are the most disadvantaged in terms of income, with 58.2 percent below $3,000 in 1975 and 59.4 percent below $5,000 in 1984. This extreme disparity in income between the races emphasizes the unique
differences facing African American and other minority elders, particularly in inner
city areas.

Angel (1991) compared living arrangements of rural and urban elderly and
found that African American and Hispanic elders were most highly represented in
urban areas. Inner city senior citizens had fewer living children and were more likely
to live alone and least likely to see their children daily than those living in rural areas.
Being African American increases the probability of the elderly living in shared
arrangements with persons other than their spouses (Soldo, Wolf and Agree, 1990).

Living Arrangements of Minority Senior Citizens

It appears that several factors associated with living arrangements may explain
different patterns for minorities. Lower incomes of African American and other
minority elders may deter admission to nursing homes (Kovar, 1988). There is a large
proportion of African American elders who live with spouses and with others, such as
relatives and friends (Ford, 1990). Choi (1990) found that nonwhite single women,
especially widows, are less likely to live alone and that those who do live alone are
less likely to be poor. These findings support the notion of the importance of the
neighborhood and "community" to minority elderly and the fragile relationship of
income, living alone, and aging in place.

The choice of living arrangement and race are not independent of functional
status. Soldo, Wolf and Agree (1990) found that severe disability and race were
related to living with a child or another person. Even after controlling for income,
impairment level, and the number and type of surviving children, African American
elders were more likely to rely on combined residence and informal care giving than
were whites. Worobey and Angel (1990) studying unmarried elderly found that African Americans who experienced functional declines were also more likely to remain at home alone than were whites. They also found that Hispanics were less likely to live alone than were non-Hispanic whites. This heavy reliance on informal supports implies a dependence on existing social networks that are more likely to be in place in older, more stable neighborhoods or communities.

Wister and Burch (1987) found that constraining forces influence the ability of a client to cope and make decisions regarding living arrangements. They reported that health status and domestic competence—along with economic feasibility and geographic availability of kin— influence the choice of living arrangement. Ford (1990) suggested that the low rate of institutionalization for African Americans is the result of available social support systems, poverty, and a greater predominance of males among the elderly. A greater proportion of elderly African American males than females have spouses to take care of them. Since these men are more likely than women to live with their spouses, they contribute disproportionately to those with available social supports.

**Aging in Place: The Phenomenon of Urban Areas**

The concept of aging in place is complex for the African American elderly. African Americans more than any other group in America have been systematically restricted in their choice of where they might live. This long history and persistent problem of housing segregation increases the possibility that African American elders will experience a unique form of aging in place. The combination of economic disadvantage from low incomes, racial segregation, and ageism join to create
formidable barriers to housing and the free choice or movement to other housing options.

The problems of housing segregation of other minority persons, while similar, are by no means equal. Calmore (1989), using an index of segregation, found that residential segregation of African Americans was so pervasive that it would take about six decades of average declines of five points per decade in the index of black-white segregation to fall to the current Asian-white or Hispanic white index ratios.

Aging in place can lead to naturally occurring retirement housing. As individuals age and continue to live in the same setting, that setting begins to take on the characteristics of retirement housing. The combination of aging cohorts and aging housing stock leads to neighborhoods and communities that take on the identity of retirement settings. This phenomenon is more likely in stable neighborhoods where the residents are likely to grow old along with their housing and neighborhoods. Inner city neighborhoods are less likely to assume retirement community characteristics. These neighborhoods are generally characterized by a duality of distribution of young persons at one extreme and older people at the other.

Naturally occurring retirement communities may encounter many problems because they were not designed for a retired elder population. Hunt and Ross (1990) summarized previous work on this phenomenon by noting that desired neighborhoods provide supportive living arrangements suitable to the needs and capabilities of older people. They also offer safety and proximity to services and elderly peers. This finding is based on the assumption that older persons have the ability to choose the type and
the location of their housing. Many African American and other minority elders do not have the economic capacity to be able to make these decisions.

Many of the qualities described by Hunt and Ross (1990) are missing in most inner city communities. These communities do not have the infrastructure to support the special needs of their evolved aging clientele. Inner city areas that have become naturally occurring retirement communities have the exaggerated shortcomings of the lack of security and protection, convenient shopping, and transportation. As a result, elders in such areas are isolated and often confined to their homes because of fear and frailty. The combination of surviving to an old age, aging in place, and vulnerability to a hostile environment produces a unique level of existence that is often overwhelming for African American and other minority elders. With few options available to them, they are not only aging in place, they are stuck in place, prisoners in their own homes, without the ability to move to more appropriate housing.

Many African American and other minority elders living in inner city areas are also victimized by forced displacement. Calmore (1989) reported that elders, poor people, and nonwhites were disproportionately affected by these displacements. Among the causes for displacement were evictions, mortgage foreclosures, property-tax, delinquency, and gentrification. Singelakis (1990) made the point that even before the advent of aging in place, 44 percent of elderly residents lived in their housing units for more than 20 years. He reported that the elderly comprise 13 percent of the population of renters in the Washington, D. C. area, but represented 45 percent of those who were displaced by condominium conversions. Singelakis also found that 65 percent of those displaced would not have other residential options.
African Americans and other minority persons face uniquely different experiences throughout their lives as compared to majority persons. These experiences do not disappear with old age; instead, they may become further exaggerated. The combination of years of disadvantage and increasing frailness may create obstacles to the choice of a living arrangement, place of residence, and decisions to relocate. These conditions can become compounded and create situations where minority persons are tied to a geographic area because of low incomes and heavy reliance on informal assistance from relatives, friends, and neighbors. When one cannot afford to purchase the required services or to relocate at will, aging in place may be the reflection of survival in an increasingly inhospitable world. Relocation, especially when forced, may disturb the delicate balance that took years of community living and sharing to establish, resulting in the potential loss of goodwill and social contacts that had been cultivated over many years.

Conclusion

This review of the literature covers each of the main aspects by which the oral histories to be collected will be examined. The information referring to education, community, church, and changes in an urban community, gave key information to use as I developed questions for the first round of interviews. Reading the information related to community change and the way a community of residences and residents ages was vital to the refining of the topic and interview guide. I feel the uniqueness of the responses of the older community members who gave recollections of how they perceived changes in the community gives focus and significance of this collection of literacy stories.
The changes which have taken place in the community and local church efforts, is significant and vital to the study of these literacy stories. The affect on the lives of these community members and present community members continues to drive the spirit of the community. Changes in education will be evident from the literacy stories told in this study.

A result of the plight of the African American male is the growing number of significant reports on how to make positive changes in the education of this cultural group. The studies, books, and articles reviewed here are an indication of the need for further work to pinpoint curricular changes and classroom practices to enhance the learning and achievement of these students. To familiarize the teacher with all aspects of a student’s life, it is necessary to incorporate all aspects of their community. Knowledge of these aspects may aid the teacher in making decisions about creating a classroom community that provides access to success for all students. Knowledge about the current attitudes toward literacy among African American males will help by providing answers to how educators may change the attitudes and lead this group of learners to success.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach for the study was ethnographic research in the form of “spoken memories” (Hoopes, 1979, p. 9) or oral histories. The use of oral histories to provide knowledge of inner feelings is used by social scientists in ethnographic research. This choice of methodology is important to this study which will provide useful documents for future study to build on. Oral histories are useful for collecting the inner feelings related to literacy. They are also the best method for collecting memories of how the community played a role in the development of literacy in the individuals interviewed. Data provided from the oral histories will form the basis for the comparison between the two generations of African American males.

The use of oral histories is described as a means of research and study to learn facts about other people (Hoopes, 1979). It is a method of research that allows us to understand the reasons for actions. Richardson (1990, p. 13) described the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee as “seeking knowledge” and “instructor”, respectively. In this study of attitudes and motivations, the researcher had to consider the three categories developed by social scientists to designate the influences upon individuals—society, culture, and personality. These three influences are important to the study of attitudes and motivations and are interrelated to the extent of helping to determine one another, as well as the resulting behavior such as attitude and motivation. The importance of and the great virtue of oral history as a method of research is its focus on the individual and on personality. In this study of attitudes and motivations among a cultural group, oral histories provide the unique and individual perspective of the changing phenomenon.

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In the process of the creation of the oral histories, the researcher used the interview guide approach as an interview technique. This technique required the interviewer to ask a series of questions which are common to all interviewees. An interview guide was prepared to make sure basically the same information was obtained from a number of people by covering the same material. The purpose for the choice of a controlled interview is the use of the oral histories as literacy stories for comparison to the data acquired from respondents in both generations. Patton’s (1990) interview guide technique also allowed for probing and exploring to illuminate the subject, while keeping the interaction focused. The interview guide technique served to focus interaction, but also allowed individual perspectives and experiences to emerge. Through this method the researcher was able to provide insight and perspective into the changes that have occurred in relation to literacy and motivation to read among African American males.

The use of oral histories as qualitative data provides for the use of reflective thought, described by Dewey (1933) as leading to a logical process that ends with an understanding of the references that lead to a conclusion. This study of perceptions related to literacy clearly indicates the use of such qualitative data for the interpretation of and understanding of lived experiences (Patton, 1990). The type of reflective thinking used in this study and the creation of oral histories provides a “focus on individuals” and their “perspectives and interpretations of their world” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 8).
The credibility and trustworthiness of the evidence of oral history is based on the fact that the information gained from interviews represents the “individual standpoint” (Thompson, p.106) and the “social perception of facts”. The evidence obtained from the interviews will be justifiably evidence of social meaning to the recorded beliefs, attitudes, and motivations to read among the African American males being questioned.

The evidence of oral history is the information provided as a reflection of physical facts and behavior. The information from which these oral histories are comprised of is both contemporary and historical. The contemporary information was gained from the interviews of six young African American males who are currently enrolled in secondary schools. The historical information was gained from the interviews and inquiry into past events and behaviors of the six older African American men. The comparison between these two generations of literacy provided a contemporary and historical basis for determining reasons changes in attitudes toward literacy and motivation to read have occurred and determining whether there has been any significant change.

Validity, Reliability, and Oral History

Blumer (1939) described the search for reliability of oral history as being essentially a search for validity. He states: “A half dozen individuals with such knowledge constitutes a far better ‘representative sample’ than a thousand individuals who may be involved in the action that is being formed but who are not knowledgeable about that formation (p.xxxiv). The oral historian’s method of selection based on knowledge rather than representation was applied to the selection
of the half dozen men and youths used in each round of the collection of these literacy stories. The selection process was based on the need for a representative sample within a selected group. The half dozen may be described as a small 'snowball' (Patton, 1990), of an enclosed group.

The group who 'knows best' in this case was selected from the focus neighborhood used for this work. The broader objective of reviewing the literacy stories gained from the interviews is to construct a picture of the social networks, attitudes, myths, and memories of the enclosed group. Knowledge gained from these memoirs are a measure of the concern for representation that is essential if oral history is to realize its potential. A balance must be made between the importance of the issue and substantive issues in developing methodology. According to Thompson (1988), one of the deepest lessons of oral history is the uniqueness, as well as the representation of every life story.

Data Collection

The collection of tape recorded interviews of twelve subjects were obtained for this study. Six older adults African American males who experienced the formative years in the once vibrant but now deteriorated neighborhood in southern Baton Rouge, and six younger African American males from the same geographical area who are currently students in secondary school in East Baton Rouge Parish. The oral histories are comprised of controlled interview questions, or interview guides, that reveal biographical information from open-ended questions and reveal a personal "literacy story". Informal conversational information was also gained and documented as part of the created literacy stories. Multi-level questions were authored
to aid in critical introspection and historical memory of the past for the older adult interviewees. All questioning focused on the creation of oral history and separate literacy stories providing focus for the determining of beliefs, practices, and motivations to read.

Documents that were examined to provide an historical backdrop to the interviews, included the insurance and historical maps of the area of southern Baton Rouge prior to the removal of houses for the building of the interstate highway. Baton Rouge City Directories (1927 and 1949), which include the names of residents of the area prior to the excavations of land to begin building the highway were studied. The highway plans prepared for the state of Louisiana in 1947 include maps of the home site removals and drafts of the proposed highway which were also studied prior to beginning the interviews. Photographs and artists' renditions of the proposed site, construction guidelines, and budgets are also included in the plan. Throughout the collection of interviews for the literacy stories, I used these and other documents located in the Hill Memorial Library as part of the Special Collections housed there.

Transcripts of the tape recorded interviews were also examined as documents. Notes made during interviews, phone calls, and during interview debriefing sessions were considered data. Artifacts such as photographs made available from the interviewees were requested as a means of clarification and elaboration. Yearbooks from McKinley High School were provided as documentation in the interview process. These yearbooks provided a visual documentation of the school years of the interviewees of round one of this interview process.
The protection of the rights of the informants included the gaining of informed consent from the older men to be interviewed. Parental consent was obtained for the minors participating in the study. Using guidelines prescribed the T. Harry Williams Center for the collection of Oral History, all subjects participated in regular debriefing sessions to allow for the review of prior interview sessions. The information gained in the interviews and used for interpretation was rendered anonymous, pseudonyms were used to indicate a first name of each interviewee in both rounds of collection. The truth of reporting the interviewee responses is used for distinguishing which group or generation is represented by the response or literacy story.

The collection of interviews began with the first round of data collection (January to March, 1998) from six older African American men who grew up in the urban community of southern Baton Rouge in the same general neighborhood. The audio equipment used to record the interviews included a borrowed audio tape recorder and microphone from the T. Harry Williams Center for the Collection of Oral History, Louisiana State University, high quality audio cassette tapes, notebooks, pencils, colored ink pens, and highlighters. Computer word processing will be used for the formulation of an index of themes for interpretation and analysis of the data. The data was transcribed from the audio cassette tapes and examined for recurring themes related to literacy, attitudes, motivation, and community. These responses were then categorized and formed into a concept index.

The concept index is a technique of categorizing information. This method of categorizing and organizing responses indicates responses that parallel the four dominant themes of the study; literacy, attitudes, motivation, and community.
This technique of organizing the responses from oral histories and interviews has been used by the Duke University sponsored oral history collection entitled American Communities: An Oral History Approach, (Duke University, 1995). The collection includes recounts of civil rights struggles by African Americans. Each theme recurring in the interviews is listed along with the responses from interviewees that are related to the theme. In this collection of literacy stories the themes are defined by the questions of the study. The index was used to organize the initial responses and guide the anticipation of future responses in the next round of interviews. It was also used to give a final analysis of the motivations and attitudes of the two groups being compared in this study.

The research process included systematic methods of auditing the findings. Peer editors were used to aid in the interpretation of the data for the concept index. Readers and auditors were asked to further interpret findings for organization, formatting, and inclusion in the concept index. At this point the categories were updated as needed, with the addition of more categories. As various themes arose they were added to the concept index.

During the second round of interviews, data from the six younger African American males was collected. The interview responses were transcribed, and analyzed for thematic content. Data was included in the concept index as the categories emerged. As new categories emerged from themes represented in this data, they were also added to the concept index. At this point the data was compared and triangulated using the first round responses, second round responses, and responses of the peer editors and the lead researcher.
The final analysis of the literacy stories was done by revisiting the collected interviews. The methods used in this revisiting process followed the guidelines described in *Qualitative Data Analysis* by Miles and Huberman (1984). The initial themes of attitude, motivation, literacy, and community were focused on with the identification of domains and parameters within the themes. Information included in the concept index, along with the reinterpretations and conclusions were presented to show differences and similarities between first and second round responses.

**Materials**

The electronic recording materials used in the research project included a standard audio tape cassette recorder, microphone, batteries, and 90 minute standard audio tape cassettes. Recordings were made of the interviews using the cassette recorder, cassettes, and microphone.

During each interview, notes were made using the interview guide and paper to highlight important information for subsequent interviews. Colored typing paper, colored pens, highlighters, colored pencils, and colored sticky note tabs were used to aid the correlation of notes and the note taking process.

Information researched from the LSU Special Collections, including maps from the 1930's and 1940's, and transcripts from previously recorded interviews of McKinley High School graduates were used to verify information and recreate a mental image of the urban community studied. In the interviews of round one, references were made to information gained from previous interviews and provided a focus for the questioning during the creation of the literacy stories.
Cassette Recorder

The electronic recording system used to tape the interviews used in this study was the two-track, one channel monaural system. The field recorder used was the Sony™ Cassette-Corder model TCM-5000EV. This high quality electronic unit was provided for use by the Williams Center for Oral History of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The recording system equipment borrowed from the center included a low impedance microphone, microphone stand, four batteries, size C, a Sony™ AC-D4L power adapter, recorder instruction manual, and carrying case.

Cassette Tapes

Sony™ cassette tapes were recommended by the manufacturer and were used for this research project. The specific model of cassette tape was the Sony™ C-90HFB “HiFi 90”, a standard sized Type I Normal Bias 120 ys EQ, designed for use with music and voice. The product description label includes information about the mechanism used within the cassette. The exclusive Sony™ SP II mechanism provides smoother winding for longer tape life. The use of the mechanism also provides highly uniform output which according to the company performance description out performs other conventional cassettes by an average of 300 hours. The use of these high quality, ninety minute tapes, was valuable to the interviewing process since the need for turning the tapes was stretched to at least forty-five minutes instead of the thirty minutes which would have been required if the thirty minute cassettes had been used.

Batteries

The power source used during the recording of interviews was four C size batteries instead of the alternating current adapter provided from the Williams Center.
for Oral History along with the equipment. Ives (1995), recommends using batteries whenever possible, (page 5). This eliminates the need for location of outlets, power fluctuations, and “surges” which can cause noticeable variations in tape speed. Throughout the interview process the Duracell™ Alkaline (manganese dioxide) Battery was the primary power source used. The product code MN 1400 is assigned to the 1.5 volt battery which includes a self contained tester panel. To provide for the best battery performance, a system of rotation was used with sixteen batteries all purchased on the same date.

The method of rotation described by Ives (page 6) involves the use of permanent markers to mark a stripe for each hour of use as well as the recording of purchase date. After each interview the batteries were removed from the battery compartment and marked according to the time used in the interview. Since batteries are meant for “intermittent occasional use” (page 6), each rotation of four batteries included a time of rest or recuperation. The sixteen batteries were rotated during the interviews done during rounds one and two of the research project. Power supply checks were made frequently during the process using the level/battery meter provided on the recording device control panel. The Sony™ TCM-5000EV includes a battery check button which when depressed indicates the recording level and power status of the batteries. Careful tracking of the battery use and remaining power was recorded in notes used as preparation for each interview and as a part of the debriefing process following each interview.
The Microphone

An external microphone and stand, provided by the Williams Center for Oral History was used during the recording process. The low impedance, omnidirectional microphone was used primarily to ensure the correct volume of the interviewees’ responses. The interviewee’s response voice level was checked occasionally throughout the interview using the VU meter provided on the control panel of the cassette recorder. The microphone was placed as close as possible to the interviewee where it could be easily seen by the interviewer but was out of the line of sight between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Note-Taking Materials

The use of an ethnographic notebook is recommended by qualitative researchers and oral historians (Patton, 1990; Ives, 1995; Thompson, 1988). The notebooks used in this collection of interviews for the literacy stories include a calendar with large spaces for marking information for each date, duplicated copies of the typed interview guides for each round of interviews, one five subject spiral bound note book, a single subject spiral bound notebook, loose leaf paper, and colored 8 ½” by 11” typing paper. The use of colored typing paper evolved into a technique used in the process of coding the information from the two rounds of interviews.

The method of note taking was also an important part of the research process. The use of margin notes and duplicated interview guides evolved into the use of the Cornell Method (Readance, Bean, and Baldwin, 1995) of note taking. This method was used especially during the debriefing process. During debriefing which followed each interview, it became necessary to make elaborate notes to help with the analysis.
of the responses. Using the Cornell Method, which calls for the division of note paper into three sections, one can write questions on one side and responses on the other, making two columns of information. The bottom section is used for the summary of information on the page. The analysis and correlation of the responses for the concept index was aided through the use of this note-taking method.

**Color Coding and Highlighting Materials**

Materials used for the coding of the information found in the interviews included the use of colored typing paper, highlighters, and colored pens and pencils. The use of two colors of typing paper helped distinguish the differences in responses and notes taken in the two rounds of interviews. The use of pencils to take notes was augmented with colored highlighters and colored ink pens for margin notes. The notes were used to indicate the need for further questioning on subsequent interviews, and to note in interesting revelations that related to the dominant themes, emerging categories and concepts.

The use of color-coded 3M™ brand Post It Note tabs were also used to organize the information from notes before typing the concept index. The tabs were helpful in the finding of information to include in the typed segments of the interviews that related to the emerging themes. As the notes were recorded during the word processing, the tabs were removed to prevent duplication of information. In some cases the reviewing and comparison during the final analysis called for the use of notes and the typed segments. The process had to be revised during the analysis of round two interviews. By keeping the tabs intact and noting page numbers from the word processing, I was able to readily access information for the process of
comparison of the interview responses. This was an example of the type of learning through the creative process that was described by Meloy (1994) in her book *Writing the qualitative dissertation: Understanding by doing*. Along with the emerging categories and concepts that became evident during the analysis of the tape recorded interviews, there was an emerging knowledge of the process of qualitative research which cannot compare with any of the preparatory courses and classroom activities. It truly became a process of learning by doing, with understanding coming through the connecting and focusing of the research project. The vision of the final product became clear during the creation of it.

Special Collections: Louisiana State University Libraries

The Special Collections archived in the Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, contains information in the form of rare books, manuscripts, and maps. These maps, used as background and documentation, helped recreate the image of the neighborhood prior to the excavation for the building of the interstate highway system. Maps of Baton Rouge from the 1930’s and 1940’s and previously created transcripts of interviews from the McKinley High School Oral History Project were used in the background data for this study. This information was used throughout the study to aid in the verification of street names, addresses, and community changes described by the interviewees in round one.

Data Analysis

Transcripts, notes and tape recorded data were analyzed according to the concepts and themes which recur within the interviews. Themes and concepts were clustered to form a concept index for each of the interviewees. The index lists the
categories, parallels, and similarities of responses to the various questions in different interviews. This index serves as a vehicle to compare the attitudes and beliefs among the subjects and aid the researcher in relating new concepts as they occur within the questioning and interviewing process.

Triangulation (Patton, 1990) is implemented through the analysis of interview notes, tape recordings, and documents, multiple sources for cross-checking of inferences and findings provided thorough analysis of the literacy stories. Categories, concepts, and themes were indexed as they are found to recur throughout the interviews, notes, and transcripts. Conversations not taped were reconstructed during debriefing and journal entries done by the interviewer and the interviewees as a means of focusing thoughts and memories for subsequent interview sessions were also analyzed for recurring themes.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study of perceptions, attitudes, and motivations to read among African American males is due to the change in population available for study. Many people who lived in the area before the demographic and physical changes occurred are deceased. Effort has been made to find individuals with experiences that are diverse and representative of varying points of view and lifestyles within this cultural group.

Another limitation is the assumptions that one can make concerning the literacy beliefs and motivations among African American males. The image of the African American male in America has been colored by the media representations.
The separation of the perceived image from these representations is important to the maintaining of distance from the subject and participants.

The ability to think critically about the process of literacy and self-analysis of one's own personal belief system is an important factor of the study. The maintaining of objectivity on the part of the researcher will play a role in the analysis of information presented. Analysis of oral history used as research calls for objectivity of the researcher as one anticipates the uniqueness that each subjects' personal experience and unique situation.

Appropriate Specificity, Racial, and Ethnic Identity Consideration

The reporting of the information gained from a specific racial or ethnic group calls for the use of special considerations of preferences for designation. In the process of interviewing the respondents were asked about preferences for the designation of their race. Each of the respondents in both rounds of interviews was in accord with the designation of race as African American.

For this report, which uses the designation of African American in the title, and pertains to members of that group of people exclusively, the author and lead researcher used guidelines from the American Psychological Association (1994), fourth edition manual of publication. The manual suggests and encourages authors to ask participants about preferred designation. Raspberry (1989), suggests the indication of current designations and warns that some designations of race or ethnicity are now dated and inappropriate (e.g., Negro, Afro-American, and Colored). Keeping this in mind throughout the writing of this report, I have had to use some of the suggested but dated and inappropriate designations because they are part of titles

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of works, studies, or articles cited in the report. It has been a true and sincere effort to correctly designate and properly indicate the information that refers to various racial and ethnic groups. In stating the correct way to designate the group identity the APA manual suggests the following guidelines in a paragraph (p.52):

Racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized. Therefore, use Black and White instead of black and white (colors to refer to other human groups currently are considered pejorative and should not be used). Do not use hyphens in multiword names, even if the names act as unit modifiers (e.g., Asian American participants).

In an effort to be correct and true to the identity and preference of the participants I have used African American to designate the racial identity of the participants. In the references to research concerning the status of racial and ethnic groups in the literature review portion of this report, there are several references to the various groups using other designations such as color. To remain true to the proper recording of the information, when it was presented in another designation, I have reported the data in that same manner. There are several examples taken from U.S. government statistics in the literature review, the categories were reported as presented in the government reports. Every effort has been made by this author to use preferred racial designations and avoid terms perceived as negative.

The APA manual also offers guidelines to be followed in the defining of age and the description of the participants. In this report the main separation of the two rounds are a provision of specificity. The participants in round one are the older African American males, the participants in round two of interview collection are the younger African American males. The younger participants were each questioned

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about their age. In the reporting and description of each of these participants a specific age is given. Ages are given for the round two participants since the guidelines for the proposal of this study designated a specific range of age.

The older men interviewed in round one were not asked their age. Some of the participants volunteered this information and it was recorded and is part of the tape recorded interview. In the reporting of age and age ranges, the APA manual suggests the use of specificity and avoiding open-ended definitions. It also describes the use of adjectives to describe age groups as acceptable. By the definition of the group used in the collection for round one, a specific age range is identified or suggested. Many of these men were teenagers during the 1930’s and 40’s, according to the information given in the interviews. If all information given in regard to age and generation by these men is true, then the suggested age range for the older African American men is understood to be between 65 and 90.

The proper designation of gender, age, and race is suggested by the APA manual which states:

Comment: Human samples should be fully described with respect to gender, age, and when relevant to the study, race or ethnicity. Where appropriate, additional information should be presented (generation, linguistic background, socioeconomic status, national origin, sexual orientation, special group membership, etc.). Note that African American currently may be preferred. (p.58).

Transferability of the Research

Although the research has the potential of transferability, the ability to be applicable to similar situations (Patton, 1990), the distinct uniqueness of the changes that occurred in this community may be a factor that influences the transfer potential.
Each individual has their own unique perspective of self and environment. This qualitative research study seeks to explore the variety of those perceptions and provide for comparison to experiences of contemporary community members.

**Conclusion**

"Nobody wants to be caught with a book—or seen with a book."

"M.", African American male, eleventh grade student
(Personal communication, March 6, 1997)

If the statement by M. is any indication, the need for positive influence and the modification of current beliefs related to reading is necessary. Attitude and motivation to read are a substantial consideration for the educator in today’s diverse classroom. This study will provide an indication of the ways attitudes and motivation related to literacy have evolved among African American males. The value of a study of these factors: attitude, motivation to read, and community support for literacy, will be helpful to those who institute changes in curriculum and standards within school systems. By using oral histories of men who lived their formative years in the same geographic area as currently enrolled secondary school students, we can trace changes that have occurred. Through the comparison of the beliefs from two separate generations, comprehensibility and clarity of how to reach students most in need of aid may be gained. Educators may also obtain greater understanding of how and why certain attitudes have developed among Black males. By studying the evolution of beliefs related to literacy among this cultural group, we can provide better education for students labeled as at risk of failure.
The three study questions are: How did a sense of community and community support for literacy affect the development of African American males from a once vibrant, but now deteriorated neighborhood in southern Baton Rouge? What is the current attitude and motivation to read among African American males currently enrolled in secondary schools in Baton Rouge? What, if any changes in attitude toward reading and reading motivation have occurred among African American males from predominantly African American communities in southern Baton Rouge?

By utilizing these three study questions we can determine: the ways community support for literacy reinforced the schooling and literacy acquisition of the older African American men, and the importance of a sense of community among this cultural group; how to motivate students currently enrolled in secondary school; and determine the historical aspects of community change and their relation to literacy education.

The information gained from this study of past and current beliefs and attitudes toward literacy and reading motivation, may be used to determine future curriculum development. Teachers may use the information gained from this study to approach literacy and content area instruction of African American males with insight into specific cultural attitudes and beliefs. Through the use of culturally compatible strategies, teachers may become informed and responsive to the needs of divergent cultures in the classroom.
CHAPTER FOUR: ROUND ONE LITERACY STORIES

The first round of interviews was collected from six older African American males who lived in the area of Southern Baton Rouge before the start of World War II. The men whose literacy stories are summarized here are representative of the community and are greatly varied. These six men are still living in Baton Rouge. The names of all the men have been changed for the reporting of their responses to the interview questions.

Alex

“I have never lived outside of this part of Baton Rouge,” states Alex. The area where he grew up is only blocks from the house he calls home today. He lived as a youngster in a house that faced Peach street, and was a large three bedroom home, with one bathroom. “Our house was not a shotgun house,” he states proudly. “We were not rich, by any means, though.” The household included his mother, a grandmother, and him as an only child and only grandson.

The memories of his literacy story are centered on the importance of and need to do well in school. This was enforced by a strong grandmother, who accepted no excuses in the areas of school work. The main emphasis was on the completion of homework.

“I knew that a report from the school would come home some kind of way if I showed up at school without my homework. All the teachers knew my grandmother, and they would not send a note home, but somehow, by the time I reached home she always knew what had happened at school that day.”

The memories of childhood also include the memory of the grandmother as a literate figure, who guided him in his learning. Alex states:
“She read the Bible, a lot, and knew all about anything you needed to ask about the Bible. If someone had a question about the Bible, they knew she had the answer. “We never missed church or Sunday School,”

Because of this strong knowledge she was a highly respected Sunday School teacher at the church they attended.

The role of church and its importance to the community is evident as Alex describes the activities in which he participated. There was a similarity between all the elements of life in the community. Activities that were not related to school, were related to church. The program of The Boy Scouts of America was a prominent part of life for Alex. Through insights gained during this interview, the importance of scouting and the affect it had on him was evident. Scouting was also depicted as an important part of the community.

“Our scout troop was part of the church, the Mount Zion troop was large, with kids coming from all over south Baton Rouge. Other churches had troops, too, but ours was the largest.”

When there was activity available within the community, it was all within walking distance of home. It was not uncommon to walk to and from school, walk to church, or walk to scout meetings with friends. Sometimes a ride could be found from neighbors, but most of the time Alex and his family walked to activities. Walking to school was described by Alex as passing by schools in the same area, that they could not attend.

“We walked past schools that only whites could go to. I remember South Boulevard as a brand new school. It wasn’t called South Boulevard then though, it was the Asia Street school. We couldn’t go there.”
The need to compete with classmates is what Alex recalls as a pastime with friends. The memorization of different types of information related to sports figures and statistics of their games, facts related to history, and scientific information is remembered as a fun activity. He describes how information became an important pastime for him:

“My favorite subject was history, I liked to try to, I guess you could say stump, my friends. We would compete by memorizing all types of information and compare during recess time. Things like memorizing the names of states, state capitals, and other information was fun for us.”

Alex became a school teacher. He taught many years in East Baton Rouge Parish Schools. Three of his four daughters work in the local school system in administration and classroom teaching. Alex, now retired, is still involved in education through participation on school committees at the schools attended by his grandchildren. His experience as a teacher includes teaching of adult classes for Exxon refinery, teaching in vocational classrooms, and middle school mathematics.

Many days I have taught all day and then returned to the classroom to teach night classes. I might have taught children in the day and adults who were older than me at night.

The discussion of changes in the face of his neighborhood are a link to the past, especially how the interstate highway system changed life for him and other neighbors. These excerpts describe negative changes in escalated crime, loss of play areas for children, and the inconvenience of one way streets.

The interstate brought changes in schools, we lost a lot of businesses. Pretty much all we had left nearby was Service Meat Market. The interstate took away the playground so
there was no place to play. There used to be one where the Purple Circle Social Club is now.

The interstate brought other negative changes to this area. I think the crime rate escalated because at one time you had only one way in and out of the city, now you have a lot of venues and it has raised crime right along with the transportation. By cutting a path for some people, it made it harder for us to get around right in this area. Now we have to go around, it's changed by all those one way streets.

As a lifelong resident of the focus neighborhood, Alex is able to present a perspective of how the area where he now resides is different from the way it was in his youth.

Now here in this area there is no outside playing, it's odd to see kids outside playing like when I was young. There is no leaving doors open. The neighbors then seemed like they, well, everybody knew everybody else you could say. Now they come one day and leave the next. We have some cases in this neighborhood where people are in one week and out the next.

The neighborhood has changed racially, too. You remember at one time it was predominantly Black, now that's changing. Of course when I was young the neighborhood was mixed, too. And I still remember that all the Blacks in this area could not go to school right around the corner.

When asked about the schools that African Americans could attend, Alex recalls the process of walking to school and bypassing schools that were, at that time newer and prettier, to reach school attended by Black children only. His memories are a historic and bittersweet recollection of how schooling in East Baton Rouge was and how it has changed.

We lived right here but had to walk pretty far to get to school, but it was okay because we all walked together. The busses going to other schools would pass by us as we walked. There were at the time four Black schools, we walked to Reddy
Street. There was also Perkins Street School and Scott Street School.
As for the high schools, we could not go to Baton Rouge High or Istrouma. We went to McKinley, and later on they built Capitol High.

When asked about the differences in the schools today as they compare to schools when he was attending them as a student, and later as a teacher, he has strong opinions about the way things have changed.

School was very different in my time. The books we used when I was in elementary school were always at least three years old by the time we got them. I don't remember ever receiving a new book. We had good teachers who really cared a lot about us, it's just not like that anymore.

When asked if the schools were better now, the topic of discussion turns to integration of the public school system. Alex is able to answer based on his experience as a teacher in an integrated system and a separate system. His schooling in East Baton Rouge Parish was done during a time of complete segregation.

Integration did us in. I always did think that integration did us more harm it did good. I still believe that. I think we were better off as we were. The old time you may get things a little better. Our teachers were more concerned and better. More learning and more background for teaching. Now we have people who know nothing about the children. I firmly believe that in order to teach them you've got to know them.

The above excerpt includes the phrase, "you may get things better". When I followed up the initial interview to question some things that were discussed, I asked the meaning behind that phrase for clarification. Alex stated that the meaning was that if a child did not understand what went on in class, he or she was kept in by the teacher and it was a certainty that the child would learn from this extra one on one
work. The meaning for Alex was that if you did not “get it” before, then they, the teachers made sure you “got it”.

When discussing community change and the effect of change on the local school system, Alex speaks as a teacher, one who has taught in both segregated and integrated classrooms in East Baton Rouge Parish.

Yes, I do believe the community changes did affect the schools. The students that lived there went to one school, and the ones that did not went to another school. The lack of community in schools caused a lot of problems for the students and the teachers.

School as Alex knew it was compared to school for his grandchildren in our discussion. He stated that there are positive things that occurred with the passing of time and integration of schools that he is happy are available for the children now.

For one thing the books were a problem for us. They were handed down to us. Books that had been used two or three years. Things we did not even think about then are available now. A lot of the technology the kids have in classrooms really helps them learn better. They are a lot smarter about the world because of this.

Fred

Fred was born in Plaquemine, Louisiana and moved to Baton Rouge with his family at the age of 12. As the youngest child and only son, Fred was required to work hard and missed a large amount of the early education that he should have received. When he moved to the city with his father in 1930, there was a large adjustment to living in Baton Rouge. It was the first time Fred had come in contact with a public education system. He began the sixth grade and worked hard to keep his grades up while he worked evenings helping his father at a gravel pit.
Fred describes his early childhood education as private. He was taught in a home, sitting around a kitchen table with books and two teachers, who were paid to teach the rudiments of basic mathematics, writing, and literature. His teachers were paid by his mother, who felt the importance of education. They did not have much money, but she made sure the money for the children’s education was taken care of. He remembers the teachers were Mr. And Mrs. Thomas and later a Mr. Dawson. He stresses that the education they received in the Thomas home, was above and beyond any public education. His early education had been so well done that Fred was moved from the elementary classroom to the ninth grade.

I know I had received a good education. The one I got here was good, but the fact that I was able to test to a few grades above, let me know that my teachers up to this time had definitely known what they were doing.

At one point Fred remembers that he was able to handle the math classes very easily. He attributed this to the fact that a man named Mr. Keller, had been an excellent teacher of math.

That Mr. Keller was a real math wizard. He took up extra time when we needed it but it was hardly necessary because he could explain it so well. I really missed him. It was such a great beginning for me.

Fred’s father was a Baptist minister. He would travel to many areas around the city, going to various churches to preach sermons. Traveling with his father, he learned about the business side of church and the proper standards of the Baptist church.

It was a time during which I learned a lot about the business side of running a church.
I was sitting in on meetings with him a lot of the time. We would sometimes leave early to travel around the area to churches where he would preach.

His father eventually moved up in ranks of the Baptist Church. His leadership abilities led him to placement in positions of authority. A lot of the work that needed to be done was aided by the fact that Fred was a good mathematician. He was also from a family that believed sacrifices should be made to help the church. Because his father was so highly regarded, Fred was also. Through the years Fred moved through several top positions of the Baptist Church. Extensive work in the church has been a focal point in his life.

During his life in Baton Rouge, Fred has also been a part of many civic organizations. He feels it is important to be involved in the community around him. He remembers his teachers taking a role in the welfare of the children, in particular he remembers Mrs. Lawless and Mrs. Curry as teachers who were fond of their children and wanted them to do well.

They were the type of people who would do anything for their students. If you needed a shirt, Mrs. Lawless would make sure you had what you needed to go to school.

Following this theme, the one of helping and caring, I discussed the fact that the other interviewees had mentioned these same women as community leaders. I wondered if there were other people he could remember who were like these women and took part in helping those less fortunate.

In our neighborhood, there were a lot of people that would help you if you needed it. It was just that kind of neighborhood. I don’t remember there being a time when we — well, I don’t know who would let a child be hungry. But if you were there was any number of houses you could go to for a meal. Some of those women, I swear would cook all day.
In a discussion of the types of activities Fred remembers taking part in he recalls the activities that were fun for all in the close knit neighborhood.

I remember some evenings there were football or baseball games that everyone in the neighborhood would take part in. I even think some of the grandmothers would come down to the field to watch us. We would have a ball, and it was a time when the streets were so clear, it was completely safe for us. We didn’t have the one way streets, and the cars didn’t go speeding through.

The spirit of community and work for the good of the community was a similar theme which recurred throughout the interviews of round one. In recent years, Fred has worked extensively to better the community through clean up campaigns and restoration projects. He is a member of the McKinley High School Restoration Committee, a citizen’s group whose goal is to restore and refurbish the historic building where he attended school. The pride and “ownership” of buildings used exclusively by African Americans during the days of segregation in East Baton Rouge Parish is another recurring theme of the literacy stories of round one. I asked Fred to discuss his ideas about ‘our’ buildings and what they meant to him.

Well, when I think about it and if you even just say the word McKinley, well it was as if you were speaking about the very soul of this community. McKinley was a place we were so proud of. It was everything to us. Then of course you had your churches, church and school as physical places were the places that held us together, because times were so hard for us. McKinley and church was like glue for the Black community. Then too we had the Temple, and a lot of people from out of town would perform there, you see we couldn’t go anywhere else.

When the Baptist Convention would come to town, and my father worked very hard for it, we had to find places for those out of towns to sleep. We could not go to the Holiday Inn or
the Howard Johnson not the Capital House. So we had committees that would canvass the area, and we always had enough beds for people because they would open up their homes for people to live with them while they were at the convention. Would people do that today. And these were big meetings, we had to find places for over a thousand people sometimes.

The sentiment echoed through the other interviewees literacy stories was that the buildings belonging to the school and church were important for “our people”.

We didn’t have much, but the buildings we had were well cared for and we knew better than to put our feet up on the seats and such.

Leonard

Leonard was born in Baton Rouge in 1926. He has lived in the city all of his life and attended McKinley High School. We begin our discussion of literacy in the home. I asked Leonard to focus on literacy in his family. When Leonard is asked to describe what he feels makes people literate, he states:

I think people are literate when they can read and use books.

My father was a literate man, he used his literacy to help with some of the civic things that were needed in the community.

Leonard’s father was according to two of the other interviewees, a person who could be counted on in the neighborhood. Leonard’s father liked to make things happen in the community.

My father was a kind of grass roots organizer. He would make signs and push for the vote among our people. He liked to organize things like the toys for tots that they have now. He may have been the first one to have something like that.
When asked to describe himself or his father as person who played a role in the local Baptist Church committees, Leonard describes his father as a deacon of the church they attended.

He was the person who did the prayer before communion or the altar worship services. He did beautiful speeches and prayers. He was in demand around the state, at other Baptist churches to pray. He must have prayed and spoken at funerals for everyone that died over a period of time. If I were to describe myself as a literate person, I guess you could say that I do okay, but I'm trying to be as good as my father was. He had this deep voice that every one could hear, he never used a mike. He was definitely a role model for me.

The term 'role model' is a recurring theme the interviews of round one. I ask Leonard to describe other people who he looked up to as role models. He lists people whose names I have heard before in the other round one interviews and discussions of this topic.

Well the people who were community leaders were looked up to, we had lots of preachers in the Baptist Church who were excellent preachers and people, like Gardener Taylor. We had doctors and teachers in our midst who were good role models. Personally I was very in respect for my father, I still try to be as much like him as I can.

Leonard is a retired teacher who has worked for over thirty years in the local public school system. I discuss the way education has changed and asked him to describe the way the school system was for him as a student.

Well I guess we had a kind of separate system, they didn’t bother us and we didn’t bother them. We used the books they gave us, and then we passed them around the schools until they fell apart. It was okay because we didn’t have to worry about anything, I guess we just didn’t think about it as a bad thing.
Ideas about integration and what it has done for the local school system became a part of our discussion. The use of the interview guide technique is suspended through most of our interview because the topics of interest are relevant to the historical background of the neighborhood and historical social events of this study. Leonard’s memories of segregated society in Baton Rouge are an important part of the background of his personal literacy story. In the following excerpt, Leonard stresses several points related to education and social change prior to integration.

We were like in a really separate world before integration of schools. We were kind of our own society, we all knew each other and we traveled in our own circles. We had to get our education and it was a known fact that if you were at McKinley you were there to work. It was very, academic, I don’t know how it is now but our teachers did not play, they meant for you to learn because it was crucial for your welfare to be able to go on to do something with your life. That’s why I tell kids now, they better get their education, because without it you can be nothing. Even if you become a doctor, you see you have to specialize in something. A long time ago the doctors were all just what they call general practice doctors, they treated everything. Now if you’re not some kind of special doctor, you can’t even make it in medicine.

Horace

Horace was interviewed in his office located on the campus of Louisiana State University. The most prominent item in the office is the large book case that expands to cover the wall behind his desk. The spacious area contains a table with chairs where we proceed with his literacy story. The view through the window includes several large blooming trees.
Our preliminary discussion about the chosen topic for this dissertation reinforces his belief in the timeliness of the topic. He is a man who believes in education. When asked to discuss his parents and grandparents, Horace stated that he was named for his grandfather. As the second son born to his parents he described the approach parents took in naming sons. The first born son was usually named for the father, the second born was named for the mother's father.

Horace was born at home, delivered by a midwife. He grew up in Baton Rouge and after high school, attended Southern University. After leaving college for the service, he later returned to graduate and proceed to graduate school at Northwestern University, in Illinois. There he met his future wife and in the process of completing two advanced degrees married her. They have one married son and two young grand sons.

As a college administrator and leader in the humanities, he is a highly respected educator, sought after as a speaker on any number of topics and as a community resource who serves and represents the community on a number of boards and committees. After signing the required forms and discussing issues of importance related to the use of the material I will accumulate from this oral history we begin our interview.

The first series of questions related to the role models or people Horace looked up to as a person who grew up in south Baton Rouge. The first person he describes as a role model for him is his father. He does not hesitate in recalling the things that made him a role model. He describes his father as an educated man, who he feels was
respected mostly for the way he worked to better himself and his life through education:

He studied for the law, which during this time was really a big deal. He was actually a politician before it was popular to be a politician.

The fact that Horace looked up to his father as a role model of the neighborhood was echoed by other interviewees, who also respected him. Each of the other five interviewees of round one remembered Horace's father, referring to him as "Judge P." He was remembered as a person that they respected when they were growing up. Some remembered him sharing the radio with the neighborhood children, bringing it out to the porch so all could hear radio programs. Others remembered him as the one person who had a car in the neighborhood. He was spoken of by all in reverent terms, and seemed to be a larger than life character. On an interesting note, none of the interviewees before my meeting with Horace had mentioned the fact that his father had lost an arm in a laundry accident. Horace described the courageous spirit of his father throughout facing that added adversity. In describing his father's courage, especially for the type of community spirit he held during that time, Horace stated "he was very courageous, very community minded."

In our interview there was discussion of other African American community leaders. Horace said there were many people to look up to in the neighborhood.

Right down the street there was Dr. Huggins. He was a physician and he was a role model. He was from Jamaica I think. He lived on the end of the street. Gardener Taylor was a minister that grew up in the neighborhood. He was such a fine preacher, he had gone to Leland College and then went to Oberlin to get his Master's of divinity Degree. Dr. Butler was a physician. We looked up to doctors, lawyers, and ministers
and school teachers as well. Anybody who took time to develop their mind was looked up to. They were role models.

As I questioned Horace about the topic of literacy and his memories of literacy in his home, he pauses to think and states that not being able to read was largely unheard of then:

I really don’t remember anyone not being able to read, I just don’t. I think families took more interest in the intellectual development of their children. They were concerned.

The topic of books and literacy are exciting to him and as he discusses the effect of books on his life, it is evident that reading, books, and literacy have had a profound effect on Horace’s life:

Something happens when you read that doesn’t happen at any other time, not with any other activity. In reading if you miss something you can turn the page back and get it. If you miss something on television—it’s gone. You can’t turn back the television.

It’s been so important in my life. I hope I’m communicating how important it really is to families, children, to never give up on reading.

I have a friend who just refused to buy a television, he said, “I’m not buying it!” He believes one should be involved in families.

The interview with Horace revealed the cohesive spirit of the community that was echoed by each of the round one interviewees. He describes the physical boundaries of the neighborhood and the fun they had within those confines.

The neighborhood ended right at the end of Europe Street. We played football, we skated, we did everything right in that area. And we were not bothered by traffic so it was our little playground. And behind that was Holcombe field, a great stretch of land, it was behind Holcombe House. We used to pitch tents and play ball... we had a nice neighborhood.
The Baton Rouge City Map of Arc lights (1903), shows the large field nestled between East Boulevard, Government Street, South Boulevard, and Fannie Street. The Holcombe House described by Horace is listed (Baton Rouge City Directory, 1927) as the residence of Charles Holcombe, an attorney whose offices were located in the Roumain Building on Third Street. The land was later transferred and is listed in the Baton Rouge City Directory (1949), as Welsh Funeral Home. The field behind the house described by Horace is shown on the Baton Rouge Map (1903) as covering approximately eight city blocks. The home represented by a square shape faces the Government Street side of the lot.

Horace goes on to describe more community activities that brought neighbors together in their urban community. The community activities described by Horace were also blended into community activities. The references to church as an activity reveals a climate of the times as it was perceived by Horace in post Depression America.

There were always church events, everyone went to them. Church was very big for us growing up post Depression. My grandmother was especially big on church for us. There were dances, there was the bazaar at St. Francis Xavier that would bring a lot of people together. School activities. I remember McKinley used to be the site of what was called the March Rhetorical, where every elementary school would come over to perform.

Physical structures of the community were cherished as gathering places by each of the interviewees of round one. In the segregated society of Baton Rouge, these buildings were always referred to as “ours”. Each discussed the fact that these buildings of church and school were all “we” had as gathering spots. Horace describes the two main structures described by the interviewees.
I remember when McKinley’s gym was the largest thing we had in the city. It wasn’t a large auditorium at all but it was a gathering place. Whenever a speaker came to town, he spoke at McKinley. Whenever a dance group or any sort of performance came, it came to McKinley.

Did you see the article on the Temple Roof. That was the gathering place. Basketball, dances, any groups that came to town. I went up because they wanted a picture a few weeks ago. We thought it was so large in those days, and so fine, but it was neither. It was the best we had but it was a small place. I know we had basketball there but it was a joke because the balconies were there, but it was the best we had. Segregation was so rampant in the city. I remember passing the tennis courts when I was little, wishing I could play there. I can play there now and I do.

Horace goes on to describe the limits of segregation and the fact that the segregation was focused on social interaction, leaving housing patterns as mixed. The neighborhood focused on here was one such mixed area during Horace’s youth.

The city was segregated in terms of social interaction but not so segregated in housing patterns. Our neighborhood was mixed. I remember the grocery store your grandparents had was once owned by Italians. Tony Jerome, and he lived right in the neighborhood. And down the street were the Pruyns, and around the corner were white families. We were not totally segregated in the way of some cities, Whites living in one place and Blacks in another.

Changes that occurred in housing patterns were described by Horace as he discusses the places that people had to move to in order to make way for the interstate highway. Horace’s overall opinion of the highway was that it was necessary for the city which was growing rapidly.

The city had to grow, we were sorry to see the neighborhood change but for example, my in-laws were visiting from Bastrop. ... if we didn’t encounter twenty stop lights just to get through the city. Something had to be done. I applaud the
planners for making that happen, it made getting around the city so much easier.

We had to move. Our house was right in the center of the interstate, my brother and I sold it and divided the money. He brought a house in the city, I built in Southern Heights. This city has grown so much, I’m not sure I’m living in the same place.

As I begin to review my notes before finalizing our discussion of the neighborhood where Horace grew up, I notice the books that line the shelves in his office. The shelves are lined with innumerable volumes on a wide variety of subjects. I realize that the activity of reading must be a huge part of Horace’s life.

“I try to read everything I can get my hands on, but my passion is tennis. I relate tennis to literacy, it’s a game for literate people.”

We ended our interview with Horace remembering the passage from a poem he once knew...

“...things a man must learn to do, if he would make his record true, to...”

Isaiah

South Baton Rouge was served by three elementary schools which were attended by African American children exclusively. These three schools, Reddy Street, Scott Street, and Perkins Street were established in 1917, 1921, and 1923 respectively. Isaiah remembers attending Reddy Street Elementary School near his aunt’s residence. He explains in our interview, February 19, 1998, that the only schooling available for African American students was attendance at one of these three schools or private schooling at the local Catholic school, St. Francis Xavier.
Growing up on what was then called Day Street, Isaiah walked to school with other children in his neighborhood.

Special memories of elementary school include the people who led him to become the person he is today. Among those he counts women who changed his life course by demanding that he succeed at his goals. A fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Eliza Lawless was a teacher of spelling, reading and writing who essentially demanded that Isaiah be in attendance at school. In describing her affect on his education he states:

She made sure that I attended every day, she was an impeccable woman. Very forthright in demeanor and she meant for us all to succeed. She commanded the highest expectations for her student’s learning and abilities.

As a teacher and member of the community in which Isaiah lived, Mrs. Lawless was well aware of the fact that he would not attend school at times to help his mother, or would work odd jobs to help the household finances. This was unacceptable to her and she persisted in making sure he obtained his education. Isaiah counts her as a guiding adult who made a difference in his life.

Another teacher who demanded the best from him and others who attended the same elementary school was Mrs. Olga Curry. The leadership in literacy gained from these teachers was the basis for an outstanding foundation which aided in future English classes under a favorite eighth grade teacher, Mrs. Rozena Wright. Isaiah remembers her special attention to teaching her students to learn to speak, learn to punctuate, and her strong emphasis on proper grammar. He describes her as his favorite teacher.
Isaiah described himself as a competent student. With pride he reflected on his ability as a speller. A special source of pride is the spelling certificate he received for a school spelling bee. His favorite subjects listed in order of favor were math, followed by reading, writing, and spelling.

Early existence and home life for Isaiah was described by him as very poor. His mother worked long hours as a seamstress. He describes helping her as something he did early in life. The sewing machine she used had to be pedaled or pumped. This repeated motion used by his mother caused her to suffer greatly from leg cramps and sore tired feet. To give her some relief, Isaiah would sometimes have to pump the pedal for her as she guided the needle of the sewing machine.

In this poor existence, literacy skills gained in school took importance as in his first job of paper delivery, Isaiah describes using the ads to decide on the best place to purchase food for the family. Using reading and math to compare prices helped him to buy the best deal for a meal. He explains:

I would compare the ads for the A&P, the Community Store, and Capital Store to see who had the best buy on milk, eggs, or meat. I was planning meals and purchasing food, and cooking for our house. I had to use the papers that I would deliver and my reading skills to find out what was the best deal that week. I knew when certain things would go on sale, just like now when there are certain holidays you know you can find certain things on sale. I knew if my mother got say, a dollar sixty five for a dress, I would have to help that money go as far as I could.

In those days the local paper was printed twice a day, a morning and an evening edition. The paper selling earned him one and one half cents per paper sold.

You can do the math, it wasn’t a lot of money that we made and my mother and I depended on every cent. It was a good
thing I had the paper route, because by checking the paper, I didn't have to spend that money on purchasing a paper.

Other jobs included working as a shoe deliverer for Darensbourg’s shoes. When asked how literacy played a role in this job he stated:

Well, if you are a delivery person, you have to be able to read signs, as well as a map. To get to the right place and deliver shoes in the downtown area you had to be able to read, if not, you would not be able to get around. I had to go all over the city, I don’t know how I would have made it if I could not read where I was supposed to go.

The knowledge of the importance of literacy and education was found through the analysis of Isaiah’s interview and was linked to the emphasis placed on this by the adults in his life. A kind of reverence for females, who shaped his life is found in the responses about all aspects of his life. Without the intervention of a female teacher, he might have been largely uneducated. Her insistence that he get an education, in spite of the hardships placed on him by poverty are certainly an illustration of how community members took on the role of extended family to aid children in the community.

Isaiah also describes the role business leaders took in the form of aiding younger men who were in need of financial support. They provided work and small scholarships to help children attend school.

If they knew you were having trouble, there were some, like the doctors and teachers in the community who would help you and make sure you attended school. There weren’t any student loans and things like the kids have today, so they pitched in to help out. They really gave back to the community that way.
George

George was interviewed in the home where he now lives with his wife. It is the same structure where he grew up and lived with his brother and sister and parents. He remembers a great deal about the changes that have taken place in Baton Rouge. From time to time his wife is able to spark his memory of some events from the past. They were childhood sweethearts and attended school together, graduating in 1945 from McKinley High.

The memories of the couple are focused on how time brought great changes to the landscape around them. I begin our discussion on the beginning of the greatest of the changes to the area, the interstate highway system.

What I remember most is the way the area looked so hollow. It was like somebody scooped it out after they moved so many of the houses down near Myrtle Street. The place just looked kind of empty. It made it kind of hard to get around.

When asked about other changes that George has noticed and he feels made a change in the area, he describes the difference in school since integration of public schools.

When I was in school the difference was that you knew you couldn’t play around and get away with it. You not only had to do your work, but you had to do it in an orderly manner. You know because you are a teacher, some of the kids will turn in anything to the teacher. The stuff I have seen kids turn in as work is a joke. There is also a lack of respect for the teachers. We couldn’t just do anything like the kids do today. People would whip you at school and then when you got home you got another whipping. Especially at my house, my mother was the one who whipped us, my father never laid a hand on me, just my mother, and when she finished you knew better than to mess up.
When discussing the home life and literacy of George’s parents, he stated that they been very interested in him and his siblings receiving a good education. They took pride in sending their children to McKinley High School. During his time in high school, two cousins came to live with his family during the week to attend school in Baton Rouge.

My cousins came from Prairieville to live with us and go to school. It was hard on my parents because they ran a grocery store and a yard business. My father did the grocery store and the yard business, my mother did the grocery store. So somebody always had to be available to run the store. Eventually my cousin started helping out in the store, that took some of the pressure off my mother.

George described working with his father as something he always did. His father finished eleventh grade in school before beginning work in business. George always knew that the life work he would choose would be some kind of business, because he looked up to his father who was a businessman.

I always worked with him, after school I would go with him to cut yards and sometimes we would be working at the store. That’s what I remember most about him, he had a what they call strong work ethic. We just worked all the time. But I do remember having fun.

George remembers time after school when the work was put aside for homework. The emphasis of his parents on education is evident as he describes his mother’s work and supervision of homework.

We had the little clean up type job at the store, my brother and me, but my mother always made us do our homework first. When we got there after school she made us spread out our books and she would be watching us work and waiting on people when they came in and watching us, too. She let us know that school was important as work.
George’s mother’s role as disciplinarian was also vital to the correcting of homework. She took an active role in her children’s schooling. She emphasized doing any work, especially writing, very neatly. If the work was not done to her satisfaction, then it would be done over, without a lot of erasures.

She didn’t believe in doing a lot of erasing. We would have to sort of sneak and erase if we had to because she was quick to make you just start over. We would be trying to finish in a hurry, so it was just a real pain to have to start over, but if she said it then we had to do it. She didn’t play with us. That’s why I would be so happy to go do yards with my father, I’d rather work out doors, even today.

With work being a large part of the time George spent in his youth, I asked about things done during time of leisure. Since the main focus of this study is literacy, I was interested in whether there was some literacy skill that was a part of time spent away from school and work. When George was asked whether reading was an activity done in his home, he replied...

I really don’t remember doing much reading when I was young. The only thing I remember my parents reading regularly was the newspaper. Of course they were able to, (read), but I guess just reading for fun, well they didn’t have time. All of us in the house just worked or went to school.

With further probing about literacy in the home, I became interested in whether the parents enforced any rules concerning reading. Especially whether there was material in the home to read. Material which was meant for pleasure reading, not just associated with school work. School work was definitely a focus for all the children in the household. George stated that he and his siblings were
college graduates. All three of them graduated from Southern University in Baton Rouge.

The only thing they really made us read was school work. We did have magazines come to the house though. If I think about it I can remember which ones. We got the paper, too. I can remember my brother having a little paper route too when we were young, but he didn’t keep it for long.

Literacy associated with community segments which took time away from home included a discussion of church and church related activities. Some of the interviewees had been associated with scouting. I asked George about outside activities such as scouting and church.

I didn’t play sports in school. I didn’t join the scouts. Wait, let me take that back, I was in cub scouts for a while. Then me and my brother stopped. We did go to church. Bethel was my church then but when I got married I just started going to church with my wife. She’s Baptist.

A description of community activities associated with literacy was given as we talked more about the way the school, church, and community were blended.

Activities associated with each were attended by George’s family.

If there was something going on at school, my mother always went. Not only to programs and musicals, but if we got in trouble, the teachers and the principal knew they could call her any time they needed her. She was a good disciplinarian. I can remember McKinley always had talent shows. That was the big thing then, we would always go to them and my mother would go with us, she enjoyed that stuff as much as we did.
Summary

The revelations of the interviewees in round one provided insight into the ways that community and the ideal of a supporting community provided focus and foundation for education. The importance of education, church, and community, in the post-depression households of the urban community focused on was evident in the responses. It was revealed that the community provided many outlets for the enrichment of community members. Church sponsored organizations and school sponsored programs were often conducted in association with each other. There was also evidence of the aspect of community ownership of the facilities that were meant specifically for African Americans in the segregated society of Baton Rouge.

The interviewees of round one were also able to provide insights into the way their early upbringing provided a foundation for their success in their lives. Each of the interviewees was able to tell of parents, community members, mentors, and teachers who guided them in their acquisition of knowledge and literacy skills. There was a sense of community that revealed itself in all parts of growth, even the proper street decorum during neighborhood play. There were adults to lead and guide the proper behavior and there were checks and balances provided throughout the community. As one interviewee stated, if he did not have schoolwork done properly, before he reached home his grandmother would have received information about the deficiency. The connection between church, home, school, and family life was strong, and provided a comfort zone for them as they grew up in a era of racial segregation.
CHAPTER FIVE: ROUND TWO LITERACY STORIES

The interviews done in this round were completed between March 5, 1998 and March 27, 1998. The interviews with these young men were done in their homes, Carver Branch Library, 1509 Highland Road, and in meeting rooms at Wesley United Methodist Church, 544 Government Street in Baton Rouge. The interviewees are presently living in the same area that the men in round one grew up in. Due to the busing of students in East Baton Rouge Parish, they attend two different middle schools (McKinley Middle Magnet school, and Kenilworth Middle school). Contacts were made through inquiry of friends, relatives, and acquaintances to find students who fit the profile for this study. The names of the interviewees have been changed for the reporting of their responses to the questions.

John

John is shorter in height than most thirteen-year-olds. He was born prematurely and is small and wiry in stature. He plays basketball on his school’s team and is proud of his ability at the sport. He was recently chosen as an award winner in his school’s Brotherhood/ Sisterhood Week observance. He prides himself on being able to get along with all kinds of people. “I am pretty popular at school”, he says when asked about how he gets along with his classmates, “I try to treat all people the same way”. The award he has won for the Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week observance is one that is elected by classmates and teachers. He says his parents are still very proud of that and he feels very good about winning the award.

John lives in his grandmother’s house with his mother and father. His grandmother, his mother’s mother, is deceased but left the house to her daughter, her
only child. Two older brothers are away at college. His room is small and cluttered with clothes and shoes that need putting away and are scattered throughout the space. He says his mother likes to clean it up for him. When asked if he had always lived in the same house he describes the place he lived before. “My mother says I am too young to remember but I do. We used to live in an apartment building near my aunt’s house. She says we moved here when I was only three, so I guess she doesn’t think I remember, but I do”

During the school year John says he likes to ride his bike in the evenings. His best friend lives two doors down, and they ride together to the nearby recreation center. Other after school activities include occasional participation in scouting and a Karate class on Tuesday evenings at a local recreation center. He is an orange belt and is anxious to move ahead to the next level. When asked about scouting as an activity he states: “I didn’t want to go at first, but my friend was going, so I went on.”

Questions related to reading as an activity were used to assess John’s motivation for reading. The questions used were meant to determine whether the literacy acts of reading and writing were ones John would choose for leisure activities. Questions used in the interview were adapted from the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, 1996), and the researcher created interview guide. The interview guide questions focus on biographical information, literacy attitudes related to home, school, and community life, and literacy attitudes in general.

When asked to describe a book or story that he has read, John discusses a book by Gary Paulsen, Hatchet, that his school librarian is reading to his class. “We go there twice a week and she reads parts of the book to us. It’s real exciting, this boy is
stuck in the woods with nothing but a hatchet to help him survive”, he says. John goes on to describe a time when he was in a similar situation.

“One time I went fishing with my uncle. He has a boat and we went out to fish on a pond on some land a friend of his has. We went out and the motor of the boat stopped. We were out in the middle and it just stopped. We had to wait until he could get it started again. I think that must be how the guy in the book must feel, stuck out in the middle of nowhere.”

When asked if he is excited about the book and how it will end he replies, “no, not really.”

Further probing questions were asked to elicit more descriptions about the book. The interviewee was then able to tell the entire plot, describing in detail how the boy in the book was able to get out of many situations. The conversational interview questions were meant to allow the interviewee to describe what interests them about something read, clearly this story is interesting to John. When asked why the story is interesting to him, John replies, “I think if I were in the same situation as the boy in the book, I would learn from what is happening to him. I would be able to live better in the woods than him because he makes a lot of mistakes. I think I would be scared, but I would think and be able to get out of the mess he is making.”

John describes books and magazines that he enjoys reading when he has free time. The top two magazines he enjoys are National Geographic World and Sports Illustrated for Kids. When asked if he gets those magazines delivered to his home he says, “No, my mother buys them for me if I see them in the grocery store, if I ask her, but I mostly get them in the library at school. Those are the two magazines all the kids...
want to read, at least all of my friends do”. The interviewee then described the way books or magazines are chosen by him and his friends.

We like anything related to sports and science. I was going to join the science club at school but my mother said that she wouldn’t be able to pick me up after school always at the right time if they met after school. I read the magazine and sometimes it helps me with my school work. I make pretty good grades. I also like sports and the magazine and sports section of the paper are good to help me keep up with the teams I follow. My friends like to read about those same things, too.

John’s literacy story is also an indication that reading serves a strong purpose for gaining knowledge. His main purpose for reading outside of the classroom is to gain knowledge about a particular topic. By reading about sports and science, particularly by choosing the type of material that gives information about these two topics, John is able to increase his knowledge and is able to participate in oral exchanges with his friend about favorite teams or about scientific discoveries. There seems to be a strong interest in these two topics as indicated by the response John gave to the question, What types of things do you and your friends talk about that you have also read?. John replied, “We like to talk about football and basketball. If you don’t know about what’s going on in sports, you can’t talk about it.” When asked by the interviewer, Is it important to know? John replied, “Of course.”

The next part of the interview, devoted to informational text, is used to gain response related to how a reader uses informational text such as school textbooks. John does not seem particularly interested in reading outside his areas of interest. When asked more about favorite subjects, he brightens and seems ready to continue discussion. When the topic turns to subjects he finds less interesting like English/
Language Arts or Reading, his answers become even more monosyllabic. I began questioning to find more about church involvement and participation in worship services or other church related work. John seems eager to discuss his participation in the services as an alternate drummer for the church choir. When asked about reading associated with his interest in music, John describes reading magazines about music.

The magazines have articles about people who play on the CD's I buy. The groups I like and the rap groups. The last one I brought had the words to some of the raps I like in them. When I buy a new one I usually look at the stuff inside.

Through this exchange, the evidence of reading related to a specific interest is given. The questioning of John at this point has revealed more information without the use of more probing. John’s answer reveals the knowledge of literacy and reading beyond the magazine print. By describing the information read or the process of "looking at the stuff inside" the CD’s he seems surprised that he is actually reading when looking at the print inside.

Knowledge of print media in the form of print awareness is considered a part of emergent literacy (Harris and Hodges, 1995). Emergent literacy is the development of the association of print with meaning that begins early in a child’s life and continues until the child reaches the stage of conventional reading and writing. Using the information given in this definition, an analysis of the behavior exhibited by the round two interviewees may be described as a kind of “re-emergent literacy”, a phrase which I think describes this rediscovery and self revelation of print awareness. Each of the younger men interviewed appeared surprised at their own instances of reading that were revealed through the questioning. The facial expression revealed what may have been the unspoken thought as “I did not realize I was reading then!” This re-
emergent literacy and print awareness was a common thread through each of the round two interviewees.

**Joseph**

As we begin our interview, March 12, 1998, Joseph proudly says that he is in eighth grade, a senior at his middle school. Our interview takes place in the small kitchen of the home he shares with his mother and sister. Joseph’s mother is a college student, returning to college after an absence of at least ten years, to finish a degree in education. His sister is in the fourth grade, she passes the door several times, making faces at her brother each time she passes. Becoming bored with her game she returns to look at television with her mother. Before beginning the interview, seated in the living room, I observed examples of print media in the form of magazines and college books. The magazine titles include *Ebony* and *Jet*, both magazines deal exclusively with African American culture. Back issues of these magazines are arranged in neat rows on a low coffee table. In a short conversation during which an explanation of the project was given and consent forms were read and signed, Joseph’s mother said she did not know much about his reading habits and was interested in finding out about the results of our talk.

My questions begin with a focus on literacy at home. When asked to describe what kind of reading material was in their home, Joseph listed the Bible first.

My mother likes to read just two things, the Bible and women’s magazines. I usually read my school stuff. My sister likes to read books from the library. My mother takes her there or she goes with friends. Further probing questions revealed the titles of some books he had read to his sister.

This activity seems to be one that he enjoys doing.
When my mother has to study, I read to my sister to keep her from bothering her. She reads on her own but I read to her to baby sit and keep her quiet. She likes the Ramona books. I remember reading those when I was in fourth grade.

The use of reading as a pleasure activity was explored through probing questions. Joseph's answers reveal a conscious choice to read magazines about sports when available. They are magazines that he gets from friends, reads in the school library, or gets from his uncle who visits from time to time. Newspaper reading is also tied into an interest in sports.

I like to find the names of my friends in the sports section. I have a cousin that plays for a soccer team in town and sometimes his name is in the paper. Some of my friends play football, I look for their names, too.

When asked who influences him to read more, his mother, friends, or teachers, Joseph quickly replies that his mother tries to get him to read more. She sometimes buys him what she thinks will help him like reading. An important role all parents play in literacy development is the encouragement of children in the activity of literacy engagement (National Institute for Literacy, 1998).

I like the USA Today paper. When she thinks of it, she buys me one. I end up having to share it with her, but I like it much better than the other paper.

Joseph's attitude and ideas related to reading are motivated by the wish to read more about topics that interest him, such as sports. He also serves as a role model for his younger sister by reading to her.
Trey

Trey was interviewed at the Carver Branch library after school March 19, 1998. His mother read at another table while we talked about what motivates him to read. I began the interview of Trey by asking about the types of literature he enjoys reading. His list of types of reading material include a lot of things that I expected and some unexpected inclusions. The list includes the expected comic books and books about sports. The type of books he has decided he likes most are biographies, especially those about sports figures. The surprise from this is that Trey has made a conscious choice of preference for a particular genre or category of literature. I feel the selection of this and his knowledge of this is an indication of a maturity as a reader that is beyond his age. Trey also makes a conscious choice to try to read about African Americans. I asked him why he makes this choice, and if someone influenced him in this.

I started reading African American books because I had a teacher who was always talking about Black history. She didn’t just do it in February, she talked about it some every day. She got me thinking about my people.

Trey said his favorite authors were James Baldwin and Maya Angelou.

Trey had just finished reading an interesting article about the President of the United States and said he wanted to read more about the presidents. One goal was the remembering the names of all the U.S. presidents. He set this goal on his own and wanted to do it on his own, not as one associated with school.

When I asked Trey about how he finds out about books he wants to read as a probe related to the African American books, Trey gave more focus related to motivation to read. His response was related to motivation from his peers.
My friends find good books to read and they tell me about them. I like to read the ones they tell me about because they are usually something I am interested in, too.

Using a suggested prompt from the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, 1996), I asked Trey about experiences in the home related to literacy and reading. I began the questioning by first describing my own reading preferences and the things my family likes. Trey paused an thought for a short time and then responded.

I like books by all black authors. I read a book my mother had by Bill Cosby. She said it was good but I didn’t like it too much. I thought it was boring.

When asked to give the title of the book read, Trey couldn’t remember the title. He also said that he had read a book he found in his mother’s room. The title of this one also could not be remembered.

We discussed current movies, one of the things I wanted to emphasize in our discussion was that literacy and books were a part of a lot of things in Trey’s life. My reason for this emphasis was to help spark any memories related to literacy that I may have overlooked. We discussed books being made into movies. I asked him to try to remember whether any books he had read had been made into movies.

I can’t remember, maybe Bambi from when I was little, maybe.

This led to a discussion of books being read to Trey in the home. When asked to give examples of when literacy and reading were part of his life at home, Trey discussed an enforced family reading period that his mother had implemented.

On Sunday evening she makes us turn off the TV and read. It can be anything we want as long as the TV is not on. We have to read for one hour. Usually when the time is up I want to read more.
An enforced reading time used by Trey’s mother sets aside a specific time period for literacy, causing more reading. From the answers I have received from him, I believe that reading is an activity Trey would choose on his own.

When I asked Trey about literacy experiences associated with church, there was a long pause as he thought about the question. I used examples of literacy in church settings and indicated that reading could be a part of reading scripture or reading in Sunday School. Trey was then able to associate the activity with things he does as part of his church youth group. He had been a part of a dramatic presentation recently and as he described his role, we discussed the things that he had to do to prepare for his part of the program. He describes his literacy activities and seems proud of the revelation he receives associated with the literacy activities of the program.

We had to read our parts to ourselves and then we could memorize them. We also had to speak loud enough for the people to hear us in the play.

The inclusion of reading and reciting in a description of literacy indicated a knowledge of what literacy is and through further analysis of the behaviors described and exhibited by him during our interview. When asked to describe something he has memorized, Trey is able to list such things as Bible verses and rap songs. As we continue the interview by revisiting some points I felt were important, Trey interrupted the process. He felt that he had forgotten something. Trey went on to revise his statement about who motivates him to read:

I guess it’s really my mother who motivates me because she makes me take time to read.
Reginald

Reginald is a fifteen year old eighth grade student. When I asked him about his favorite subjects at the start of our interview on the evening of March 5, 1998, he paused to think. He stated that his favorite subject is science and his least favorite subject is math. When asked to describe the last book he read he immediately is able to list the book, *Summer of my German Soldier*, by Greene. When asked to describe the action in the book, Reginald seems reluctant to disclose more information. Through probing, he later indicates that he did not finish the book and describes the book as a “girl’s book”.

A girl’s book is one with a girl as the main person in the book. She likes a boy and that makes it a girl’s book. I’m not interested in love stories, that’s what girl’s like.

Through further questioning I was able to determine from the responses that there were negative feelings toward this book. The main purpose for this negative feeling seemed to be related to the fact that it lacked interest for him and was not one that he was able to choose.

If I didn’t just have to read the book I wouldn’t pick this one. I sure wouldn’t pick this book.

The selection of this book was one that Reginald had no control over, the book is a required reading for his eighth grade reading class. The book assigned as part of a grade is according to his response is a requirement he strongly resents and resists.

Even though Reginald resists the reading of the book, our conversational interview later revealed that the book was one that helped him in another class. According to Reginald, the reading of this book had a positive impression on the grade he received in his social studies class. The cross curricular effect for Reginald was
that the book helped him understand the reasons for World War II better. Reginald also revealed that the story, aside from being a “girl’s book” contained a story that reminded him of the fact that his grandfather had fought in the war.

My PaPa was in World War II. He told me a lot about seeing places in Europe. He has a photo album with pictures of places he went to. One day I want to go there.

I asked Reginald if he could read other books about the topic, would he? He answered positively and went on to discuss how he finds out about books to read.

Sometimes the librarian helps us pick out books. Mostly I check out a book because they make us when the reading class goes there. Some people just get any book, then they don’t even read it. I like to get books I know I want to read so it’s not a waste of time.

The topic of the interview questions included literacy in the school setting. I followed a list of questions, but the best answers seemed to be from those responses to questions that were specifically worded to indicate a function I will call “reading to learn”. Reading to learn, could be described as a way of finding out more about a subject that is of interest. Learning from books was discussed when Reginald was asked to think about some things he had learned from a book outside of the school setting.

I learned about what I need to know to get into the Air Force. I plan to join after I graduate. I read about the places they will send you when you join up. I feel ready to be in the air force because of what I read. I also found out more about World War II and what happened. One book had pictures of planes from the war.

Another aspect of education was discussed by Reginald. He described the way literacy will help him reach his goals. College is something he says will be a part of his future.
I plan to join the Air Force. I know I’ve got to be a person who reads because they give them a test. If I do good on the test then that means I could move up faster. I want to go to Southern and major in engineering. My uncle did that, he is in the reserves.

Knowledge of literacy, personal literacy goals, and skills seemed to be important to Reginald as a person. He seemed to be fully aware of the importance of literacy to his future.

“Boney”

Boney was an interviewee whose attitude toward literacy was negative. He insisted on the nickname that I will use here to write about his interview. Boney enjoys playing basketball and wants to run track for his school. His mother told me the chances of his running track are very slim. She stated that mostly “he is not too good at school, getting in trouble at school at least once a week.” As a 14 year old 7th grade student, he is in danger of being held back as we discuss his development as a reader on the evening of March 19, 1998.

Boney is from a family of four children and a single mother. He remembers reading being promoted when he was younger.

My mother would make us read to each other. Mostly I remember her doing that when she got tired and turned off the TV. I think she was mad at us then. Or she was trying to see if we could read books.

During the interview with Boney, I felt that the answers were revealing the side of him that he does not show often. In particular as we discussed learning from reading. When the topic led to the reading experiences of school, Boney was adamant about his feelings toward some of the subjects he is taking. His favorite subject is
physical education. He feels that he is a good basketball player and is a fast runner.

He especially likes it when the coach let’s them play basketball at lunch but despises the required health segment of the physical education curriculum.

To tell the truth, I wish we didn’t have to take that stuff, it’s a waste of time. All they tell us is not to get high.

In another avenue of questioning about reading to learn, Boney was able to remember an incident when he did learn from reading, beyond his school textbook.

My social studies teacher keeps these books in her class, we can read them when we want to. I got one of them to read when I had finished every thing before the rest. I found this book about the Olympics and read about what happened in the old days when they had it. The book told about the reason we have it and the people who have won it. I tried to find all the Black people.

In other responses of this interviewee, there were times when he seemed unresponsive and reluctant to go on with the interview. His ideas related to literacy in the community where he lives are the most revealing about his own ideas related to his future. He describes people he sees in his community:

I see the old men who sit down at that old gas station and I see the guys at the car wash. None of them seem to care about anything. The one thing I need to tell you is that I don’t want to be like them. The way I want to be is the exact opposite of that. My mother is going to need my help, so if she wants me to work, I’ve got to be able to help her. I can’t do it if I can’t get a job, and I can’t get one if I can’t read.

In response to this I felt it important to discuss the way he perceives his future. The knowledge of the importance of literacy and reading was revealed. How did he feel this would affect his own future.

I really want to be able to get a pretty good job. I know I’ve got to graduate from high school so I better or should get my
education. I don't really like to read, but I know it's important.

Boney's answers to questions related to what he liked to read, fulfil the definition for aliteracy (Harris and Hodges, 1995). He makes a conscious choice to not read outside of required school work. He prefers and focuses on television and movies in his spare time. Reading is not an activity that he selects on his own, and he seems to resent being forced to read by the curriculum or the authority figures in the home or school. Debriefing and preliminary discussions with his mother reveal that behavior problems at school have caused her distress due to his lack of respect for authority. The only reading he does is related to school work, done at school. He does his homework at school he says. During debriefing after our interview his mother stated that he does not bring home books.

With the lack of motivation and poor attitude toward reading displayed by his behavior, Boney is an example of the segment of African American males who are labeled as at risk. It is hoped that the future for him will bring a change in attitude to help him reach his goals for the future.

Eric

Eric can be described as a high achiever. His attendance at the local middle magnet school and his grades are a testimony to that desire to succeed. Eric is an eighth grader whose grade point average is 3.82. He plans to continue his education by attending the local magnet high school. As we had our interview on March 20, 1998, he seems excited to discuss the move to high school.

I want to do well in high school because I want to get a scholarship for college. I do not want to stay in Baton Rouge. If I don't get a scholarship I'm going to have to go to Southern
or LSU, probably Southern because that’s where my mother went.

A surprising aspect of what I gained from the interview of Eric is that he is not an avid reader. His reading was all associated with school and his assigned homework. Being able to achieve high marks is what drives and motivates him to read. But the goal of his literacy is narrow in focus. Eric could not describe any aspect of his life that included reading beyond the achieving of grades.

Though his academic ability illustrates an ability and willingness to read, it is not an activity that he selects for pleasure. His major motivation remains grounded in achieving high grades and scores in school. Eric uses his literacy skills for a narrow, although positive, purpose.

In attempts to get him to focus on how literacy affected his life, Eric was open to discussion but did not reveal much in the interview responses that would allow me to believe that he was comfortable with the topic. In discussion of the importance of literacy to his life beyond school, Eric’s answers were terse. His attitude seemed laconic and the succinct answers were not especially revealing. For example, a discussion related to reading which was adapted from the conversational interview portion of the Motivation To Read Profile (Gambrell, 1996), proved to lead to a small bit of information. There seemed to be a lack of interest in reading in general.

Q: What can you tell me about the most interesting book, magazine, or story you have read lately?
A: I read the newspaper to find an article for class. We had to bring in a current event related to science.
Q: Did you read other parts of the paper while you looked for it, like the comics or the sports section?
A: No.
Q: Do you read the paper on a regular basis?
A: If you mean every day, No.
Through further probing it was revealed by the answers that Eric had no favorite book titles or authors. His most revealing answers were in association with the questioning about reading he observes in the home.

It was evident from the answers I received concerning the observing of literacy in the home that Eric's home was not a literature rich environment. The main focus of his parents, who both work, seemed to be mainly work. The local paper is the only example of literature that Eric could remember coming in contact with on a regular basis, other than his school textbooks. Further probing questions also revealed that the lack of books for pleasure was matched by the lack of current and interesting magazine titles. In fact little or no outside reading seemed to engaged in by Eric or his parents.

Eric's answers to questions concerning church and community literacy were also revealing. The use of school literacy was thought of by Eric as a way to overcome or rise above what he perceived as a depressed lifestyle and environment.

I don't like to go out much, some of the kids in the neighborhood are able to stay out until late, after 10:00. I hear the cars with boom and stuff. I don't like to be outside because I'm scared. My cousin got shot when he was outside last summer. He was just sitting on a bike and somebody shot him. Somebody told my uncle who did it and he was going to shoot them but my grandmother talked him out of it. I really think he still is going to do it. He probably just told her that so she would leave him alone.

As we concluded our discussion, Eric asked if a book read in class counted as one he read outside of studying for tests. We resumed our discussion of literacy and he described a book he had liked in seventh grade.

We read two books that I liked. I can't remember who wrote them though. I know one was *The Hobbit* and the other was
I asked Eric if he would ever go back and read those books again. He said, “Yeah, probably.”

Summary

The focus on literacy of the six students interviewed in round two provides a look at the variety of the reasons for reading chosen by middle school age children. The perception of literacy and its importance was evident through the reading for gain of knowledge. It was also learned from these interviews that the students would read what interests them. If the material was relevant to what they wanted to learn about, they would read it.

There was also evidence of the need for a modeling of the behavior of reading within the home. In the process of debriefing, during which discussion of the results and interview transcripts were read with the parents, parents were interested in helping their children to become more interested in reading. According to many researchers, the modeling of reading behavior by parents often leads to literacy engagement among children (Readance, Bean, and Baldwin, 1995; Moles, 1987; Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, and Ginsburg, 1986). The parents of each of these interviewees pledged to begin or continue to influence their children to read more and focus on homework with their children. In the words of one parent, reading is “too important to miss out on.”

In the discussions that followed the interviews I perceived an enlightening of the interviewees. The knowledge that reading is important and is something that should be pursued in spare time away from school was revealed in the responses given.
during debriefing. There was also a revelation of the amount of reading that is actually done in relationship to outside interests. There was evidence that the interviewees were not aware of the amount of reading they were actually doing.
CHAPTER SIX: THE CONCEPT INDEX

In this chapter the use of an index of interviewee responses will serve as a format for the comparison of ideas, themes, and concepts which were gained from the responses. The insights given through interview excerpts will be categorized according to their relationship to the study questions. The responses of the interviewees were analyzed according to their association with community, family, social, and school literacy. Each section will begin with an explanation of current research data on the importance of these aspects of an individual's literacy skills and abilities. This will be followed by interview excerpts which define the individual's conceptualization of these themes.

Community Experiences and Literacy

"Community literacy" is defined as reading other than that done in school. It is associated with participation in neighborhood activities and in government, church, and social organizations (Harris and Hodges, 1995). This section of the concept index reveals the sense of community experienced by the interviewees. The responses detail particular beliefs associated with the importance of literacy apart from the traditional academic setting. In addition, the interview excerpts give meaning and definition to the term "community" according to the concepts of the individuals. The notion of community has roots in the work of Dewey (1916) who believed that community provided a sense of ability to achieve full potential. Through community, the support of a cohesive group enables growth and development in the setting of nurturing "organization" of social structure.
Round One Community Literacy Experiences

Beyond the bounds of a physical neighborhood, a community includes the feeling and sense of belonging. The physical space as well as the participation of individuals in common activities within those boundaries constitutes a sense of community. This was expressed in the interview of Horace as he described the neighborhood where he spent his boyhood:

The neighborhood ended right at the end of Europe Street. We played baseball, we skated, we did everything right in that area and we were not bothered by traffic and so it was our own little playground. And then behind there was Holcombe field, a great stretch of land, it was behind the Holcombe House. We used to pitch tents and play ball there. We had a nice neighborhood.

Alex described the sense of community as including the sense that all of the activities of the area were connected. This connection was felt through the link between church, school, and home life.

If you were going to church, a church program, or school program, then you knew that everyone in the neighborhood was going. If you needed a ride you could just wait and someone going in the same direction would offer you a ride. We didn’t have a car, so sometimes we would set out walking and we always were picked up on the way.

Participation in community events, especially those of the church was a part of the sense of community expressed by Alex. By participation in the social structure of church and scouting, young people were a part of activities that kept them busy on several days of the week.

We had Sunday School on Sunday, during the week we had Bible classes, on Saturdays there was scouting, and different fund raisers—we were allowed to take part in that.
This sense of community was felt in the knowledge of one’s neighbors. Alex gives a comparison of the way neighbors are different in the present. The lack of continuity of the people who live in the neighborhood has affected the climate of the community. Alex’s perspective of community is unique among the interviewees since his residence in the neighborhood has been constant.

Neighbors seemed like they were a little more close. Seemed like everybody knew everybody. Now they come one day and move out the next day. We have seen in some cases people are in one week and out the next.

George, another round one interviewee, described community as a sense of belonging. The boundaries of the neighborhood always felt safe as a place to be with friends.

We would play all day and not have to worry much. It didn’t even seem like you were bothered by mosquitoes much then. We didn’t have to worry much about cars and things. Everybody was out in the evenings.

A sense of belonging and safety is part of the concept of community. In addition the adult community members served as role models who led young people in how to behave. The sense of an extended family was part of this concept of community. Alex describes how older people were looked up to and the extension of caring for others and growth of children into young adulthood. This growth included learning a sense of decorum through examples set by role models. When asked about adults he looked up to in the community, Alex said there were many, and two in particular who set good examples:
Brother Smith, the first deacon at my church would come by and see that I got to Sunday School. During the week he would be with us down on Peach Street. Another man we called Mr. Peter Veal, he would take up time with us, play games, and what not. So they would make sure you would go to school, go to church, and Sunday School. One of the things Mr. Veal would make sure of was that we had good conduct in the street. That was really important to him.

Isaiah described community and the setting of good examples by discussing the father of Horace, who would show the through sharing of an electric radio with the neighborhood, a strong sense of community.

It was one of those neighborhoods that everyone lived together. Judge P. would come home in the afternoon after five o’clock, he had a car called a Stuts Bearcat, and when he drove it in the yard, he immediately went into his kitchen, picked up the radio and a long extension cord, set it down, turned up the volume so that all the kids that wanted to could come and listen to programs like The Shadow. Because they were the only ones in the neighborhood that had a radio, and we didn’t have to worry about getting run over by a car because the only car was in the garage.

Influence with city officials helped the community through Mr. Perkins. He was able to get permission for the streets to be blocked off for block dances and band concerts. Isaiah recalls the way these activities created fun and well being among the residents.

Judge P. had pull with the city officials. He could get permission to block off one of the streets and most of the time it was a street called St. Ann Street. And they’d get the band, one of the Roseland Six bands to play music and we would have a block dance, because we didn’t have any dance halls. The Temple was all we had, but children couldn’t go up there. The actual band would be out playing. St. Ann is the street that is now South 11th Street. The interstate took most of it.
Leonard, another round one interviewee, acknowledged the time of his youth in southern Baton Rouge as one of work with older men who took him under wing to allow him to learn. The inspiration to work and become a professional came from those in the area that set a good example for proper work ethic.

I have always worked. I worked with my father and then with other older men in the neighborhood. I learned from my father that a man is supposed to work, and I always looked up to him and my mother and tried to make them proud. My goal was always to be in business, because that’s what my father did.

He also included an example of the way the community was different in the time of his youth. In association with the differences in how youth have changed and how times have changed he gives this advice:

Get as much education as you can and try to learn from other people. People who you think don’t know a whole lot can surprise you and make a real difference in your life. Be open to change. These days you can’t get nothing without a higher education.

George, another round one respondent, was especially proud of the way people from his neighborhood went on to become such highly respected community members. He felt that they overcame tough odds to achieve success. When asked to what he attributed this he stated:

It was a time when things changed a lot, but because of that change, some people were forced to move forward. They may have stayed where they were forever if something had not happened to prod them along. We also had the potential that others saw in us and we had people that had overcome that we could use as examples. My friends were not the first to become doctors, lawyers, and teachers. We had them in the neighborhood to look up to and respect.
Round Two Community Literacy Experiences

In round two the sense of a neighborhood as a community was a more nebulous concept. The same questions were presented to the interviewees within the context of the interview. The order of questioning varied as probing was used extensively and emerging themes were followed in hopes of learning more on a topic. The sense of openness was not a part of these interviews. It seemed that the questions were understood at times, but thinking in the same terms as the men in round one seemed difficult for the younger interviewees. The lack of community experiences was at first what I attributed this to, but as interviewing progressed in this round, I began to see the lack of expansive answers as due to the differences in language use and language skills. The interviewees had ideas about their community, but were unable to express those ideas extensively. In some cases the questioning in any category during this round led to a dead end. As Gee (1992) noted, ideology, social need, and social practice are linked in many different ways. The use of probing questions with this age group led to interview responses which were more episodic (Harris and Hodges, 1995) memory based. Episodic memory is described as memory that is autobiographical and sensitive to the effects of context. By relating the concept of community to other situations I was better able to receive responses that “fit” the questioning. By creating examples based on the respondent’s real life experiences, the young interviewees seemed to understand the questions better. In the example that follows, the probing question leads to an episodic memory and allows the response to tailor and fit his experiences to fit the question asked.
Q: What is the community like where you live?
A: I live in a quiet neighborhood.
Q: What kinds of things do you do with others in the neighborhood?
A: I don’t really do much except when some friends come over.
Q: Do your friends live near you?
A: Not really, they live over on the other side of my neighborhood.

At this time the probing questions led into a discussion of the meaning of community and neighborhood:

Q: What do you consider as part of your neighborhood?
A: Being near someone is being a neighbor. If they live next door or across the street then they are a neighbor.
Q: Do you consider your friends from the other side of the neighborhood as close neighbors?
A: They are in the neighborhood but really are not my neighbors.

In the first interview excerpt, the interviewee demonstrated that he knew the two words “neighborhood” and “community” as interchangeable terms. He used one in answer to a question which specifically used the other term. The concept of community revealed in further questioning was different for each of the interviewees. When asked to define community the interviewees revealed knowledge of the term and their concepts of it as an aspect of their lives. The following excerpts from the interviews of round two, the younger African American males reveal knowledge of the importance of community.

Q: How do you define the term community?
John: I think community is the place where you live. It’s the people you know, too.
Q: Do you think it is important to have a community?
John: Yeah, if you don’t know where you live you can’t survive.
Q: What does community mean to you personally?
John: It means that the people around me know me and care about me.
Eric's experiences in the community are not especially positive because of fear associated with crime. He expresses the fact that he cannot be outside because of this fear. For him community does not contain the element of safety.

I don't like to go out much, some of the kids in the neighborhood are able to stay out until late, after 10:00. I hear the cars with boom and stuff. I don't like to be outside because I'm scared. My cousin got shot when he was outside last summer. He was just sitting on a bike and somebody shot him. Somebody told my uncle who did it and he was going to shoot them but my grandmother talked him out of it. I really think he still is going to do it. He probably just told her that so she would leave him alone.

Literacy Experiences At Home

By focusing on literacy beliefs and practices in the homes of the interviewees, this collection of literacy stories, through transference, leads to indications that go beyond family literacy. One of the most prevalent of these indications was the theme of "intergenerational literacy." Many aspects of intergenerational literacy are a part of the information gained from these oral histories. Intergenerational literacy describes the efforts of second and third generation adults in a family to help themselves or others in the family learn to read and write (Harris and Hodges). These literacy stories are memoirs of how families interacted. In the African American tradition of extended families, an even broader scope is revealed through the information in the literacy stories. In the stories a binding thread of the extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins, and other community members may be found in the analysis of development of literacy skills and attitudes toward literacy.

Alex relates how the school and home connection was made between teachers and grandparents:
“I knew that a report from the school would come home some kind of way if I showed up at school without my homework. All the teachers knew my grandmother, and they would not send a note home, but somehow, by the time I reached home she always knew what had happened at school that day.”

Comparisons: Literacy Experiences at Home and in the Community

An extension of the term functional literacy is given by Freire and Macedo (1987). A description of this concept as “reading the world” expands the meaning to include personal fulfillment, social progress, and economic development. It denotes a greater awareness of the importance of and uses of literacy. Using reading and math to compare prices helped Isaiah from round one of the collection process to buy the best deal for a meal. He explains:

I would compare the ads for the A&P, the Community Store, and Capital Store to see who had the best buy on milk, eggs, or meat. I was planning meals and purchasing food, and cooking for our house. I had to use the papers that I would deliver and my reading skills to find out what was the best deal that week.

As critical readers we begin to use reading as a tool for improvement and understanding. Newman and Beverstock (1990), related this notion to perception of self in relation to one’s own world and the world of others. Horace’s world view was evident in the responses he gave related to literacy and books. In an excerpt from Horace’s literacy story, he describes the way reading was relayed as an important part of life by Malcolm X. Horace had read an interview of Malcolm X and he described the exchange:

Someone was interviewing Malcolm X when he was in prison. I think it was somewhere or someone from England. He asked him, “What’s your Alma Mater? Where did you go to college?” Malcolm replied, “I did not go to college, my Alma
Mater is books. You will never catch me with 45 spare minutes that I'm not reading something to try to improve myself and help my people.”

Discoveries made concerning the interviewees’ world view and meaning construction are found in the comparison of themes from the concept index of family and community. There seemed to be a comfort zone of discussion when questions from these categories were asked. Across both rounds of interviews, information was revealed related to the personal observations of others and their literacy. It was expected that this would be one of the limitations of the study. On the contrary there was no apparent discomfort with discussion of the literacy levels of others.

In round one, the level of literacy of family members was a source of pride. A value for literacy ranked highly among the group. The family life of Horace revolved around reading, which was emphasized by his mother and grandmother. Special memories of his mother reading to him and his brother from the Sunday paper were a poignant part of his literacy story. He tries to instill that same love of reading in his own grandchildren.

I’ve got two grand sons. I don’t remember any important date that I didn’t give them a book as a gift. I don’t buy them toys, from me they get books.

Interviewees from round two also displayed evidence of a value of literacy, but these respondents were not as knowledgeable about the literacy levels of family and extended family. It became necessary to during questioning to aid the students’ understanding of what actually constituted literacy. Evidence of literacy among family members and the extended family seemed difficult for them to interpret. Through analysis of the responses of this group of young men, I concluded that though
literacy was valued, there had not been previous thought and personal analysis prior to the interview.

**Literacy Experiences at School**

“Reading to learn” is described by Harris and Hodges (1995) as the use of reading skills to acquire knowledge to broaden understandings and develop appreciation. A broader use of skills associated with reading to learn in the school setting was observed in both rounds of interviews.

Memoirs of the school setting and reading activities were a primary focus of discussion in round one. In Isaiah’s interview he expressed thankfulness to having teachers who stressed the importance of grammar and correct writing.

My favorite teacher in 8th grade was Mrs. Wright. She believed we were to read properly, enunciate properly, write properly, and she expected nothing less than the best from us. She had high expectations, and made us do right.

Isaiah was also able to pinpoint his ideas about the types of things he felt were negative changes in schools today.

In my time, the teacher told you what they wanted you to do, they had control over their school. They opened with prayer in the morning, they whipped when necessary, and in 60 years of whipping, not one has been killed and all that have blistered have been healed, and no lawsuits either. As a matter of fact, the teacher would almost have a lawsuit if you did not whip them.

Isaiah was also interested in the fact that the curriculum in schools today, do not reflect the emphasis on literacy that he experienced. His excerpt related to his own emphasis on increasing his knowledge and word power, reflect his ideas about the importance of literacy.

We need to go back to the formula of teaching words, word power. I thank Reader’s Digest, because every time I got on
the bus, I was turning to that page that says ‘increase your Word Power’, and I tested myself with it and for the little I have accomplished, I appreciate that I have learned through the Reader’s Digest. And I figure if the schools would go back and stop making so many excuses and stop trying to put so many alphabets on the cases of children, instead of ADD’s we have a lot of SAD’s, just pure sad that we don’t go back to basics.

Respect is one of the best things you can teach. If you teach respect and character, all those things will come back to you. Teach values like five letter words, above all learn another five letter word called faith.

The above excerpt was given at the end of the first interview with Isaiah. His ideas concerning the teaching of values is according to him based on his experiences in school as a young person.

**An Emerging Concept: Role Models**

In the final analysis of the information from the interviews, it became evident that the selection criteria for role models was different for the two different groups of interviewees. In round one, the label of role model was placed on those people who were perceived as community leaders. Education and the attempt to better oneself was highly respected among the men of the urban community.

Among the interviewees from round two, it was evident that those who were role models were the one’s who were seen on television or movie screens. Unlike the round one participants, there were no teachers, parents, doctors, lawyers, or ministers described as role models. All the role models described by these interviewees were sports figures. One most often mentioned, Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls, is seen on television and movie screens, as a basketball player and an actor. Although Michael Jordan is also respected by the interviewer as a fine human being, I felt there
was an important link to ‘knowing’ a person and thinking of them as a role model, not just ‘knowing of’ them.

An excerpt from the interview of Horace, whose father was listed as a role model among the other round one interviewees describes an example of the type of criteria for being a role model.

We looked up to the doctors, lawyers, and ministers, and school teachers as well. Anybody who took time to develop their mind was looked up to and upheld to a certain degree. They were our role models.

Alex was also very clear on the importance of role models. He looked up to the men in the community who stressed good behavior and decorum. Another reason these people were looked up to was that they took time to correct children in the neighborhood when they were wrong, and took up time to participate in fun activities like football and basketball games in the neighborhood.

Another name that was used in the same sentence regularly as a role model of the community males was Sam Johnson. Mr. Johnson owned and operated a shoe shop in Baton Rouge. He allowed many of the neighborhood youth to work in his shop shining shoes. He was highly regarded as a businessman and one who cared enough to give work to boys who needed a job.

It was more common to list parents as role models during the interviews of round one. In examples of households without a male presence, as in Alex and Isaiah, it was evident that a conscious choice of men in the neighborhood were chosen as role models. In this excerpt from Alex’s interview, he values the fact that male members of the community took up time with the boys in the neighborhood.
People who had businesses, like Mr. Johnson, were role models for us. They would help us by teaching us how to make it in the world. They were good citizens, and they made sure we were, too.

**Literacy Experiences Associated With Church.**

The memories of experiences related to religion and church for the round one participants was similar to that of the participants in round two. The events associated with church included church sponsored programs, during which recitation of memorized scripture and poetry was a focus, and participation in religious education such as Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. Church sponsored organizations such as Boy Scouts of America were part of the church experiences listed among both groups. Participation in these groups was more prevalent among the round one participants than the round two participants.

In round one, Horace described the church sponsored programs as a way the community uplifted literacy. In recalling such activities he stated:

> I recall little programs they had at Bethel. These people would put on programs so children could recite poems and children could read stories or passages. The church created opportunities for all those types of experiences-rewarded it, too. And too the Boy Scouts did it. So church, the Boy Scouts, and the schools did it too. The schools gave chances to show what you had learned.

Another example is given by George, who described the way he used the methods he learned for memorizing parts in programs, applying it to his educational activities in school:

> My grandmother would not let us get up at programs and read, she believed in us memorizing the parts we would say. I can remember begging for short speeches, because I knew she
would insist on me memorizing the entire thing. But that
turned out to be good practice for school. I think I developed
a photographic memory because I was forced to learn these
speeches, so in the long run it helped me.

In Alex’s interviews the importance of church to his family was expressed as
he described the amount of time spent in church during the week and on Sundays. The
activities all involved the use of literacy skills such as reading and listening. It was
important to his grandmother that he be attentive during services.

We had Sunday School and during the week we had classes-
different fund raisers. We were allowed to take part in that.
My grandmother saw that I went to church four times on
Sundays. In the morning there was Sunday School, that
involved reading the scriptures. Then there was church at
eleven o’clock, I would sit with her. At about three o’clock
there was BTU (Baptist Training Union). And then at night
more church.
I said, ‘when I get to be a man I’m not going to church,’ but I
never quit going.

The Element of Change: Interstate Highway System

In round one of the interviews, there was a focus on the way the community
changed. There is a tremendous difference in the area focused on in this study that is
largely due to societal change associated with the building of the interstate highway.
One of the areas that I as a researcher was interested in was the memoirs of the men
concerning the way the neighborhood changed. I was interested in gaining a
perspective of the upheaval of the life they knew when the highway work was begun.

Isaiah described the initial feelings associated with the change brought by the
building of the highway. His strong faith in God is evident in the discussion that
follows:
I'm one of those who believe there was a strong belief in the faith. I think God said if I put the problem there, they will proceed to do something differently, they will help themselves.

Many a person left that area and found that there were houses available to them other than the rent houses. That they could now purchase because this was after World War II, and you are getting a change in the thinking of the powers that be.

In describing the way the city grew, I wondered about restrictions that may have been placed on African Americans, in terms of the places where one could live. Isaiah described the restriction as being based on the challenge of the economics of the time:

It didn’t become a problem. You didn’t have to worry, there was a price tag that told you that you couldn’t move there because you didn’t have the job to meet the obligation. By common sense, you knew you couldn’t pay for an $18,000 house on a $10.00 salary.

Alex’s view on the differences made in the community by the interstate related to the overall quality of life. The increase of crime and the lack of play space for children concerned him. He saw a direct correlation to the interstate highway and the increase in crime then and in the present.

The crime rate escalated because at one time you only had one way in and out of the city, now you have a lot of venues, and it has raised crime directly because of the changes in transportation.

When discussing the changes related to the initial moving of housing and uprooting of families, Alex expressed thoughts that these had a negative impact on community life in other ways.
Now there was no more outside playing, no leaving doors open. Back then, before the changes in this area, neighbors seemed like they were a little more close. In some cases people are in and out the next week.

When describing the growth of the city of Baton Rouge associated with the new highway, Isaiah described the areas that opened up for more African Americans to purchase homes. His discussion of the way people had to move correlates to the answer that Alex gave related to how the changes and upheaval of the area and the need to go to new areas of the city.

People who had to move-Day Street (South 10th Street) in the other side of Government. A lot of people had to move to Valley Park. Where I was living on Peach Street, the interstate went right to the back door. Yes it cut a path for a lot of people, but now we have to go around because of a lot of one way streets.

Although the move of houses affected Horace, whose family home had to be sold, he still regarded the interstate as necessary to the growth of the city.

The city had to grow, we were sorry to see the neighborhood change but for example, my in-laws were visiting from Bastrop. …if we didn’t encounter twenty stop lights just to get through the city. Something had to be done. I applaud the planners for making that happen, it made getting around the city so much easier.

We had to move. Our house was right in the center of the interstate, my brother and I sold it and divided the money. He brought a house in the city, I built in Southern Heights. This city has grown so much, I’m not sure I’m living in the same place.

Summary

The responses from the round one interviewees showed that the era of the youth of the men was full of hard times. In post depression segregated Baton Rouge, life was a struggle for African Americans. The discussion of the importance of
literacy to acquisition of jobs and daily survival was enlightening. There was
evidence of changes in the community that the interviewees recognized as causing
differences in young people and the problems faced by the urban community today.
Each interviewee was able to relate the differences in the community today to the time
they spent living in the area.

It was evident after debriefing that there was agreement among the participants
that the greatest change in the community occurred through the removal of homes and
demographic redistribution of the population. The participants were able to give both
positive and negative reasons that this affected their lives and the community.

A recurring theme that became evident during the questioning of the round one
interviewees was that of the role model. Participants were able to relate stories of life
in the neighborhood to activities that included adults as models of good behavior.
These were the professionals, doctors and lawyers that lived in the neighborhood, and
the fathers of their friends, as well as their own fathers. As one of the interviewees
explained, the people they looked up to were a strong presence in the neighborhood.
There was a sense of pride that they felt for knowing these prominent citizens.

School, church, and home were places where education and literacy were
emphasized. There was a distinct theme of the connection between these three
elements. Living in a community where all who lived, worshipped and went to school
together was a binding thread for the men in round one.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The three questions of this study were addressed by the interview guide questions. The interviewees in round one and two were asked questions that were meant to help determine: (1) How did a sense of community and community support for literacy affect the development of African American males from a once vibrant, but now deteriorated neighborhood in southern Baton Rouge? (2) What is the current attitude and motivation to read among African American males currently enrolled in secondary schools in Baton Rouge? And (3) what, if any changes in attitude toward reading and reading motivation have occurred among African American males from predominantly African American communities in southern Baton Rouge?

The sense of community and community support for literacy was found in the interviewee responses in round one. In the responses of these men, the influence of older community members and community mentors was evident in the success of the men who were interviewed. The influence of parents and teachers on the men was told in the responses related to education. Mentors who lived in the neighborhood were people who had achieved success in their professions. The interviewees each expressed a sense of pride in their relation to people who had achieved and were a part of their neighborhood.

Round two interviewees were found to lack the concept of community and did not experience the cohesiveness of the parts of the community found in the lives of the round one interviewees. The parts of the community, school, home, and church, were not connected to each other in the experiences of these students. In preliminary
questioning and during debriefing there was a deficiency in the perception of what the ideal of a community is.

The current attitude and motivation to read among the interviewees was found based on the responses to interview guide questions about school and literacy motivation. It was found that the round two interviewees knew the importance of literacy and were able to describe themselves as readers and students. The debriefing process provided the parents with a view of the way reading is a part of the lives of their children. A positive influence of this research is the pledge made by the parents to influence the reading activities of their children.

The third question which attempts to determine the changes that have occurred in attitude and motivation to read over the years. The questions from the interview guide related to change resulted in responses that show the motivation to read and attitude toward literacy have changed due to changes in the surrounding community. The time when the older men lived in the urban community was affected by many historical elements. The moving of homes for the interstate highway, the start of World War II, and the racial segregation of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, each had a strong affect on the lives of the men interviewed. School, church, family, and community intertwined to uphold the importance of education and literacy.

Among the round two interviewees, the responses showed that community changes affected their schooling and education, thus their motivation and attitude toward literacy. Responses showed that the interviewees in round two lacked the background of knowledge about their community to respond to many of the questions related to community change. The responses during this round showed the motivation
to read and the attitude toward literacy of these young students was clearly influenced by the way reading behavior was modeled for them in all aspects of their lives. The greatest influence on reading and motivation was found to come from teachers and peers. The level of interest and motivation to read was found to be directly related to reading material that gives information about topics these students liked. Students interviewed were anxious to read about topics they wanted to learn more about. Topics that interested them were motivators for reading beyond the required reading of the classroom.

Comparison of Round One and Two: Concept Index Summarized

Key passages were selected from the interviewee responses to questions related to literacy at home, school, church, and community literacy. The following phrases and passages are those that best reflect varying viewpoints of the participants.

Round One: The Value of Literacy-Education and Parental Expectations

My parents did not play, you knew you had to do well in school.

I knew if I did not do well at school, the word of it would meet me when I got home.

I knew that would not 'play in Peoria', there was no way I could drop out of school.

The Purpose of Reading- Use for Survival During Lean Money Times

I often used the newspapers that I delivered in my first job by reading to get the best price on food. For example if there was a sale on potatoes at the A & P, I could compare the price to the same one at the Community grocery store. I would read them-use them for bargains, and then sell to get a profit. We were poor and it
was necessary to get the best buy for the $1.65 my mother would get for sewing a
dress.

**Reading to Learn**

In my home I remember mostly reading the newspapers and the Bible. I used
the World Almanac a lot because I was interested in learning facts to use at school. I
also became interested in the Reader's Digest, Time, and sports magazines, and I read
those regularly now.

**Reading As Activity- Togetherness and Quality Time**

My parents read to me, my mother would gather me and my brother and I can
remember her reading the funny papers to us on Sunday. She was an avid reader and
emphasized the importance of reading the Bible. There was always a special place
and time for reading in our home.

**Importance of Literacy- Maxims for life**

My father always told us-'a man who can beat you thinking will always be
your boss.'

**Round Two: Responses related to Reading at Home -Reading as a valued activity**

When my mother needs to study, I read to my little sister. She enjoys those
times.

I read the baby books to my brother, I try to teach him to read.

**Reading to Learn**

The things I needed to know about how to join up (the Army) after I get out of
school, was what I last read about.
Togetherness and Family Time

I remember some times going to the library with my mother and sister. Those were good times. When you go to the library during school, they just make you check out a book, but I like the time to look when we go together.

Maxims for Life

My uncle told me that if you don’t want to have anything in life, then you should just not try hard in school, that’s the way to not get ahead

Round One: Responses Related to Community and the Concept of Community

Problems with the present day community

If we had a problem with someone it was worked out, not shot out.

There is not enough emphasis on right and wrong. In some ways the laws are too lenient, the ACLU comes up with ways for people to get around the law.

We had a real community because everyone knew each other- now I hardly know who lives down the street, much less in the next block.

The community of the past

We were a real neighborhood.

We all played together out on Holcombe field, that was the area where the interstate took the houses behind South 10th Street.

Round Two: Community Experiences

The neighborhood where I live has a lot of noise on the weekend. I can’t stay out late like some of the kids on my block.
One boy in our neighborhood was caught breaking in houses while people were at work. I think he took my sister’s bike.

There are a lot of old people who live in this area.

**Round One: Church Experiences**

We had to memorize a lot of Bible verses.

If you were in a program at church, your part had to be memorized. They gave us homework just like regular school.

All our activities were associated with the church or school. You could walk to any activity because it was all right there. You could just start walking and someone would give you a ride.

The people I looked up to were associated with the church, of course there was my father, who I held in the highest regard and respect. Then there were the other people in the Baptist church-Dr. Levi, Dr. Billoups, and Dr. Jemison. Through work in the church, I was able to meet many men who were excellent role models.

**Round Two: Church Experiences**

I go to church across the river with my dad. I play the drums with the choir sometimes.

I went to Bible school with my friend, it was okay. Sometimes I ride with them to church.

I read in church, when we stand up and have to read the scriptures.

**Round One: School and Teachers**

Today with schools not being in the neighborhood where you live, it’s too difficult.
Miss Rozena Wright emphasized reading, writing, and spelling, but also good grammar. She had a strong belief that we must learn to speak well.

We used recess time to play games that had to do with memory. My friend Moody and I would try to memorize the states and state capitals. It was important for us to possess knowledge. We used games of skill to try and stump each other. We tried to beat each other memorizing things like the times tables. It was a really big deal for us.

When we were young, we didn’t have any classmates who could not read.

Round Two and School/Teachers

We have to get a book when we go to the library at school. I try to get some of the scary stories.

We had to read a paragraph for homework.

We had to read the book, but I did not enjoy it. If we hadn’t had to read it I wouldn’t have.

I like to read to learn more about something. If I’m interested in it. I will read it.

Conclusion

The information gained from the literacy stories of the older men and younger men is unique and revealing. Through the use of a concept index that compares thoughts and ideas in each category of questioning for each of the interviewees, the research done here may be used to trace changes in how societal changes have affected education.

In each category comparisons may be made between how the informants in the two rounds of interviews thought about literacy. The categories used for comparison
were: home, school, community, and church. Key phrases and interview excerpts from each of the interviewees led to the creation of the concept index and led to conclusions associated with each. Overall the process of creating the comparisons using the concept index was a method of analysis the researcher considered as valid and reliable. Through analysis of the interviewee’s comments related to literacy the determination of specific mediating influences was able to be determined.

The mediating influences of the church, school, home, and community were determined through the interview questions related to each of these aspects. The interviewees in round one of the collection process, were able to give specific instances of the empowerment and enabling they experienced as youth through participation in activities associated with education in each of the four environments. Recollections of these men who grew up in a different era were positively influenced by older adults, mentors, and role models. It was evident that those people who gave positive influence to these men were citizens of the community who were highly educated and possessed some profession.

A key element, according to the recollections of these people was that they took time to be a part of the lives of these men and the time they shared was geared toward development of character, education, and decorum. The cohesive community was stressed by each of the respondents as an important part of their youth, with change in the community through dispersing of homes and streets for the interstate highway playing a major role in the dissolution of the community as they knew it. The final analysis of the community involvement was summarized in one quote from an interviewee who used a paraphrase of “the best and worst of times”. Though
idyllic in nature, the time of the youth of these interviewees was a time of harsh oppression, with racial segregation playing a role in all aspects of their lives. Outside the boundaries of the neighborhood where they lived and played was a community in turmoil. In listening to their stories of life in the neighborhood, I sensed a calmness that surrounded them, as if they were wrapped and enveloped in a world apart from the rest of the world.

Descriptions of daily life include evidence that they knew of the segregation that ruled their lives. It is found in the descriptions of walking to school, passing ones they could not attend, and passing tennis courts where they could not play. A sense of pride was heard in the discussions of places that were “ours” (for example, the Temple Roof, McKinley High School, The Lincoln Hotel, etc.). Life in the segregated society of Baton Rouge was made easier by the people who cared that they succeeded.

A mentoring relationship between older men and younger males in the community was an important part of the sense of community that was felt among the men of round one. This mentoring placed an importance of education and pride in oneself. When comparing the ideas of the past, to the climate of change that the interviewees observed, there is a marked difference. As one interviewee, Horace, put it: “No one at home seems to care now. No one is emphasizing the importance of education.”

Round two participants were able to connect the elements of community that support them with the success they have. There was a difference in the kinds of people they looked up to. The people in the community who were successful were looked up to by the men in round one of the interview collections. In round two the
young men are looking to people who are famous, sports stars and entertainers as role models.

There was a wide range in the attitudes and motivations to read among the round two participants. The examples of reading engagement for specific purpose were found in the responses of John, and Eric. In particular, the narrow focus for the purpose of reading found in the response of Eric was interesting. His drive to succeed, without seeing a purpose for reading outside of the attainment of his goals was perceived as having positive and negative elements. I was saddened that the love of reading, simply for enjoyment was not a part of his life. On the other hand my analysis of the behavior he described as his reading habits, seemed very positive, in light of the drive for high achievement he possesses.

The element of the realization of reading as an activity became evident in the described ‘re-emergent’ literacy of the round two participants. The revelation of reading as an activity related to more aspects of their lives than they expected. The reading activity was found in their leisure activities and their search for information related to subjects they were interested in.

The element of ‘reading to learn’ was found in the responses of Reginald. He found out about the requirements for enlisting in the armed forces by reading about it. The learning of requirements was a part of the focus Reginald had on his future. By reading, he was able to refine the plans he currently had for a future profession.

Through the debriefing process, followed as part of the analysis of the oral histories, knowledge about reading and the self analysis of one’s literacy experience was gained. The information shared with the parents and guardians was enlightening.
for them. In some cases the need to make changes in attitude and motivation to read was noted by parents and interviewees. The knowledge shared from the interviews allowed the interviewees to reflect on their literacy experience, and decide on the personal changes they may make to improve, as well as make decisions about whether changes should be made.

Implications for Future Research

The importance of family and community to literacy development have been documented through the literacy stories presented here. Some implications for future research include the study of the feasibility of public policy to provide financial incentives to parent groups, neighborhood organizations, libraries, schools, and churches that can deliver kids from weak reading families to second grade as readers.

The use of similar methodology, the collection of oral histories as a study of changes within an urban area, could be extended to the study of suburban and rural areas to determine differences in attitude and motivation to read. Some comparison between attitudes and motivations in different areas could be compiled and documented to reflect educational experiences and the dynamics of social change.

In light of the types of role models held by the interviewees in round two, an interesting study might focus on attainable goals and realistic goals for young people. The main focus on fame and fortune as the selection of role models was evident in the choices they described for their future. Future goals included professional sports and entertainment industry, high paying fields which are nonetheless far from the reach of most people growing up today, yet their perception was that these were attainable, just because they wanted it.
Future research could focus on city and state-wide initiatives to create and sustain schools with the organizational culture and curriculum organized around the idea that reading is the skill that must be taught, and mastered, first. The strong investment in the creation of connections between communities and schools could be a part of the organization of the schools. The main objective of these schools would be to prepare children of all races and backgrounds from well-educated and barely educated families. Once in charge of the ability to read and become informed as citizens, they'll have the chance our generation owes them - the chance to build a safer, smarter, fairer, more harmonious world for their own children and grandchildren to live in.

Conclusion

The collection of oral histories created through interviews used in this study of literacy attitudes and motivation to read are literacy stories. They tell of a different era and provide a way to compare the past to the present. These literacy stories are a window to the past, and will hopefully provide a guide for the future.

The process of creating the qualitative dissertation in this format has been one through which the course work done in preparation for this became clear. A guide used in the writing process, Writing the qualitative dissertation: Understanding by doing (Meloy, 1994), consists of chapters describing the process of understanding by proposing, beginning, and focusing. These three aspects of the dissertation writing process led to introspection, analysis, and interpretation of the experiences leading to the final product.
Through summarizing the Literacy Stories, I found that I could not compartmentalize the “findings” of the “study” into a package that was a “normal” dissertation. The need for a creative vehicle for the analysis of the stories led to the use of the concept index which focuses the attention of the reader to interview excerpts related to various topics.

The interpretation of these comments related to literacy is created from a kind of “organized chaos” (Meloy, p.1). The organized chaos within these stories presents one with evidence for comparison and the observation of change. Throughout each of the interviews in round one, there was a reconstruction of a past era. An internal consistency threaded throughout each of the interview reports. The viewpoints expressed by the men in the first round of interviews was similarly inherent with a ‘social meaning’ (Thompson, 1978, p. 106) in opposition to the form of social perception one might gain from other forms of qualitative methodology.

Literacy Stories from interviews within this dissertation, like all testimonies, contain statements which can be weighed. They weave together perceptions and myths with information. They are as valid as any information gained from a human source. By tracing these individual life stories, connections may be documented between the general system of economics, class, sex, and age. These may be balanced between the development of personal character through the mediating influences of parents, brothers, sisters, extended family, and peer groups. Another tier of the balance extends beyond this group to include neighbors, school and religion. A global tier that includes newspapers, media, art, and culture is also a substantial segment of the research done here.
Thompson states that: "Oral history gives history back to the people in their own words" (p. 265). The objective of this dissertation relies on that as a foundation to create a document that explores the dynamics of social change. By analyzing the responses of African American males from the same geographic area but of different generations, knowledge was obtained concerning how community changes affect lifestyles and perceptions of literacy. The Literacy Stories reflecting and focusing on literacy attitudes and motivation to read describe the experiences of men and youths from two different eras. In a continuum of evolving societal change, the similarities and differences highlighted here are, I hope, going to lead to a positive and significant focus on an urgent dilemma of education.
REFERENCES


Akbar, Na'im. (1975, October). Development of our children. Address before the Annual Meeting of the Black Child Development Institute, San Francisco, California.


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**Baton Rouge City map showing location of street arc lamps, not to scale**. (1903). The Baton Rouge Room of Centrplex Branch Library, 4th floor. East Baton Rouge Parish Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.


APPENDIX A:
STATEMENT OF CONSENT

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

Title of Study: Literacy Stories: Attitudes Toward Literacy And Motivation To Read Among African-American Males In An Urban Community.

Project Director: Principal investigator-Donna P. Washington
phone Faculty supervisor-Dr. Earl Cheek, Jr.

Purpose of the Study: This study will examine the role of community in the formation of and sustaining of positive attitudes toward literacy among African-American males.

Potential Risks: There are no potential risks associated with this study. Any concerns may be discussed with the principal investigator, Donna Washington (phone- ).

Potential Benefits: The potential benefits of this study are the gaining of information related to the education of secondary students. Attitudes toward literacy, and the knowledge thereof, are extremely important to the improvement of education.

Note: Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

Statement of Confidentiality: The reporting of the findings of this study will be included in the above titled dissertation. Names and identities of the participants will be rendered anonymous to remain completely confidential. Tapes used for the collection of data used in this study will be available for review by the subjects.

Statement of Consent:

"I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks and I give permission for participation (or participation of my child) in the study."

Subject (or parent) signature Date

Subject (or parent) name (print)
STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: Literacy Stories: Attitudes Toward Literacy And Motivation To Read Among African-American Males In An Urban Community.

Project Director: Principal investigator-Donna P. Washington
phone Faculty supervisor-Dr. Earl Cheek, Jr.

Purpose of the Study: This study will examine the role of community in the formation of and sustaining of positive attitudes toward literacy among African-American males.

Potential Risks: There are no potential risks associated with this study.
Any concerns may be discussed with the principal investigator, Donna Washington (phone: ).

Potential Benefits: The potential benefits of this study are the gaining of information related to the education of secondary students. Attitudes toward literacy, and the knowledge thereof, are extremely important to the improvement of education.

Note: Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

Statement of Confidentiality: The reporting of the findings of this study will be included in the above titled dissertation. Names and identities of the participants will be rendered anonymous to remain completely confidential. Tapes used for the collection of data used in this study will be available for review by the subjects. Further interviews may be used for the verification of information and debriefing.

Statement of Consent:

"I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks and agree to participate in the study."
Parent Permission Letter
Date ___________________

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This letter is a request to allow your child, _______________________________, to participate in a study about how he feels about reading and literacy related activities. This study will allow educators to gain insight into how attitude and motivation affect learning in the classroom. As principal investigator of the study, I plan to use the information gained from the interviews in my dissertation, this will complete the requirements for the Ph.D. degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Louisiana State University.

The study will be conducted in the form of oral interviews. Participants will be asked questions related to literacy in the home, school, and community. The interview questions and responses will be tape recorded and transcribed for use in the study. Anonymity of the subjects in the study will be maintained, with no indication of the identity of the respondents. A list of the questions to be asked is available on request for your examination.

I am available for questioning about this project at (phone number) ___________.

Sincerely, Donna P. Washington

My child, ________________________________________, may be interviewed as part of the study about literacy attitudes and motivation to read. The information gained in the study will be rendered anonymous, with no indication of my child's identity.

Signed __________________________________________ Date ___________________
APPENDIX D:
INTERVIEW GUIDE-ROUND ONE

Biographical Information:
What is your full name? Where were you born? What name are you called by?
What were your parents named? How many brothers and sisters do you have?

School:
What was your address while you attended elementary school? Did you live at that same
address until you graduated from high school? What elementary school did you attend?
Which middle or junior high school?
How did you get to school each day? What are some special memories of that time in
your life?
Do you remember a special or favorite teacher from elementary school? Junior high?
High school?
What was your favorite subject in school?
Did you receive any special awards during your school years?
How would you describe yourself as a student?
What other activities did you participate in at school?
Did you participate in sports or scouting activities?

Reading and Literacy:
At what age do you remember learning to read?
Who taught you how to read? Were you able to read before you attended school?
Do you remember knowing anyone who could not read?
Did you have a special place at home where you were required to do school work or
homework?
Did you ever have to memorize a poem or part in a play to perform or recite before an
audience?
What kinds of things do you remember having to read outside of the classroom?
Did you have a favorite book, magazine, or newspaper section to read?
What are some things you read now?
Do you like to read? Has your feeling about reading changed since you have graduated
from school?
Who influenced you to read when you were young: parents, teachers, or peers?

Community:
Describe the neighborhood where you grew up?
Who were your neighbors? Were you friends with other children in your neighborhood?
What businesses were found in your neighborhood?
What churches were in your neighborhood? Did you attend church in your
neighborhood? Did you participate in worship services in a leadership role?
Who do you remember were leaders in your community when you were young? Was
there someone special that you looked up to? Was there someone who others in your
neighborhood looked up to?
What activities do you remember that were participated in by a number of people in the
community?
What changes do you remember occurring in the community when you were growing up?
APPENDIX E:
INTERVIEW GUIDE-ROUND TWO

Biographical Information:
What is your full name? Where were you born? What name are you called by?
Who lives in the house with you? How many brothers and sisters do you have?

School:
What elementary school did you attend? Which middle or junior high school?
How do you get to school each day? What are some special memories of your elementary school years?
Did you remember a special or favorite teacher in elementary school? Junior high? High school?
What is favorite subject in school?
Did you receive any special awards during your elementary school years?
How would you describe yourself as a student?
What other activities did you participate in at school during elementary school? What activities do you participate in now?
Do you participate in sports or scouting activities?

Reading and Literacy:
At what age do you remember learning to read?
Who taught you how to read? Were you able to read before you attended school?
Do you know anyone who cannot read?
Do you have a special place at home where you are required to do school work or homework?
Did you ever have to memorize a poem or part in a play to perform or recite before an audience?
What kinds of things do you read outside of the classroom?
Do you have a favorite book, magazine, or newspaper section to read?
What are some things you are reading now?
Do you like to read? Has your feeling about reading changed since you have graduated from elementary school?
Who influences you to read: parents, teachers, or peers?

Community:
Describe the neighborhood where you live?
Are you friends with other people your age in your neighborhood?
What businesses are found in your neighborhood?
What churches are in your neighborhood? Do you attend church in your neighborhood?
How do you participate in church services? Are you part of a youth choir or church reader at your church?
Who do you consider leaders in your community? Is there someone special that you look up to? Is there someone who others in your neighborhood looked up to?
What activities are participated in by a number of people in the community?
What changes if any have occurred in your community?
How did these changes affect you?
Do you feel the changes in the community had a positive or negative affect on your life?
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE PROBE QUESTIONS

Do you remember your grandparents discussing their lives?
Do you remember your great grandparents? Were they readers?
What was the occupation of your grandparents?
Who was the oldest person you remember living in your neighborhood?
What do your family members call you now?
What kinds of books do you like to read?
What kinds of magazines come to your house?
Do you get a daily newspaper?
Did your parents discuss world events?
How is the world different now than when you were younger?
What is the most important change you remember in your lifetime?
What were your schools like?
How did you get to school?
Who is your best friend?
What did you/do you want to be when you grew/grow up?
What was your first job?
What person changed your life?
Reading as a valued activity in the home

When my mother needs to study, I read to my little sister. She enjoys those times. I read the baby books to my baby brother, I try to teach him to read.

Reading to Learn:

The things I needed to know about how to join up (the Army) after I get out of school, was what I last read about.

Togetherness and Family Time:

I remember some times going to the library with my mother and sister. Those were good times. When you go during school, they just make you check out a book, but I like the time to look when we go together.

Maxims for Life:

My uncle told me that if you don’t want to have anything in life, then you should just not try hard in school, that’s the way to not get ahead

Round One Responses Related to Community and the Concept of Community

Problems with the present day community

If we had a problem with someone it was worked out, not shot out.

There is not enough emphasis on right and wrong. In some ways the laws are too lenient, the ACLU comes up with ways for people to get around the law.

We had a real community because everyone knew each other- now I hardly know who lives down the street, much less in the next block.

The community of the past

We were a real neighborhood.

We all played together out on Holcombe field, that was the area where the interstate took the houses behind South 10th Street.
APPENDIX I:
RECOMMENDED EXPRESSWAY LOCATION

IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENTS

**Expressway**

1. Acquire right-of-way and construct first section of expressway—Bayou Sara Road to North Boulevard ........................................... $5,720,000

**Major Streets**

2. Florida St. improvement—new one-way connection from Convention St. to Florida St. near Phillips St. ........................................... 63,000
3. North St. improvement—new one-way connection from Main St. to North St. near 33rd St. ...................................................... 48,000
4. North 3rd St. and Choctaw Rd. improvement—realignment and widening from North St. to Scenic Hwy., including access connections to industrial property north of the State capitol ....................... 268,000
5. North St. improvement—widening and repaving North St. from north 9th St. to Lafayette St. ......................................................... 88,000
6. North 19th St. improvement—extending north 19th St. from Fuqua St. to Plank Road ................................................................. 87,000
7. North 33rd St. improvement—widening and repaving north 33rd St. from Bogan Walk—Willow St. to Government St. ...................... 248,000
8. Port Allen improvement—relocation of State Route 168 from Airline Highway to connect with existing State Route 168 near southerly city limits ....................................................... 423,000
9. Street improvements near Capitol grounds—widening, repaving and new pavement between Lafayette St. and 5th St. and between North St. and the State capitol ........................................... 127,000

**Total immediate improvements** .......................................................... $7,072,000
## APPENDIX J:
### NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGES
#### FORMER COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Old Street Name</th>
<th>New Street Name</th>
<th>Presently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baham, V.</td>
<td>St. Anne St.-Europe St.</td>
<td>South 11th St.-Europe St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, D.</td>
<td>Allens Alley</td>
<td>South 11th St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis, J.</td>
<td>Day Street</td>
<td>South 10th St.</td>
<td>S. 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis, U.</td>
<td>Day Street</td>
<td>South 10th St.</td>
<td>S. 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, A.</td>
<td>Day Street</td>
<td>South 10th St.</td>
<td>S. 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emery, J.</td>
<td>Day Street</td>
<td>South 10th St.</td>
<td>S. 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emery, L.</td>
<td>Day Street</td>
<td>South 10th St.</td>
<td>S. 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris, E.</td>
<td>France St.</td>
<td>France St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard, F.</td>
<td>St. Anne St.</td>
<td>South 11th St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvine, C.</td>
<td>Europe St.</td>
<td>Europe St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, L.</td>
<td>McCalop St.</td>
<td>South 11th St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lockhart, W</td>
<td>Allens Alley-Day St.</td>
<td>South 11th St.-South 10th St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mencer, G.</td>
<td>Plum St.</td>
<td>South 12th St.</td>
<td>S. 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moore, E.</td>
<td>Allen's Alley</td>
<td>South 11th St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mc Kinley, E</td>
<td>St. Anne St.</td>
<td>South 11th St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moton, E.</td>
<td>Allen's Alley</td>
<td>South 11th St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perkins, H.</td>
<td>Europe St.</td>
<td>Europe St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perkins, J.</td>
<td>Europe St.</td>
<td>Europe St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson, E</td>
<td>St. Anne St.</td>
<td>South 11th St.</td>
<td>Expressway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart, H.</td>
<td>Livingston Alley-Europe St.</td>
<td>Halls-Marcellius Lane/ Europe St.</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tansil, I.</td>
<td>Day Street</td>
<td>South 10th St.</td>
<td>St. Agnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, G.</td>
<td>Europe St.</td>
<td>Europe St.</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalla, I.</td>
<td>Plum St.</td>
<td>South 12th St.</td>
<td>S. 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bashful, E.</td>
<td>Day Street</td>
<td>South 10th St.</td>
<td>St. Agnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROUND ONE</td>
<td>ROUND TWO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>Changes noted by these interviewees included the rise in crime and vacant houses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest Change in Community</td>
<td>Lack of concept of community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Removal of homes for the interstate highway system. Building of the interstate highway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role Models</strong></td>
<td>Role models were some family members and some celebrity sports players.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memories of community included the presence of role models within the community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools</strong></td>
<td>Round two participants attend schools that are outside the neighborhood where they live.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools were designated for use by “colored” as part of the segregated society of the parish school system. Located within the community.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Church</strong></td>
<td>Attendance is noted but not at any of the churches located in the community where they live. Participants travel outside the area where they live to go to church.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church was an integral part of most community activities, providing structures for gathering, programs, and outreach activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home</strong></td>
<td>Reading to learn, and reading for specific purpose was noted as an important part of the lives of these interviewees, school associated reading was the primary activity, followed by reading about topics of interest.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy in the home was emphasized and reading was done for many purposes. Reading was a necessity for the survival of families in many cases (for example: finding the best price on groceries, family time and reading)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Donna Parham Washington was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. A graduate of Southern University Laboratory School in 1974, Donna continued her education at Southern University in Baton Rouge. She received her bachelor of science degree in Art Education in 1977, and her master of arts degree in Mass Communications in 1981. After teaching for 17 years in East Baton Rouge Parish Schools, Donna began pursuit of the doctor of philosophy degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University. She anticipates graduation in December, 1998.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Donna Parham Washington

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Title of Dissertation: Literacy Stories: Attitudes Toward Literacy and Motivation to Read Among African-American Males in an Urban Community

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signature]
Thommasine H. Meece

[Signature]
Eyesen L. Harris

[Signature]
Eyesen Kems

[Signature]
Belle M. Parkal

Date of Examination: October 26, 1998