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Socioeconomic Factors That Affect

Children's Literacy Experiences

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Socioeconomic factors that affect literacy encompass an intricate field of literature. In the course to determine how literacy is affecting children's academic performance, researchers have focused on several specific variables. The variables are connected to the finding that literacy is a social practice (Compton-Lilly, 2008). The variables include the individual, home, culture and school. The objective of this study is to determine through an in depth analytical review of research literature, what educators over the last fifteen years have documented regarding the effects of individual, home, culture and school on the literary success of students. The purpose of the research is to expand my funds of knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of what educators have learned through their experiences and studies.

My teaching experiences have enabled me to work in schools of struggling, middle class and wealthy areas. I have worked in a classroom where twenty-eight Kindergarten students were confined to a small room with one teacher. Three of the students were refugees having had little to no English exposure. Many of the students could not tell the difference between a letter and number. The school held many students whose families were struggling. The sidewalks surrounding the school held broken glass, while the playground looked like a ghost town of last night's gang brawl, leaving behind drugs, paraphernalia and trash.

On the opposite side of the same city, I worked at a private early childhood school. The students in my Kindergarten class were children of doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, dentists, an educated field of two parent families. The Kindergarten students all read above grade level, while just down the hall, the two-year-old classroom held students sitting in morning circle

discussing the calendar. Each child knew the current month and the days of the week. Even the

preschool classroom next door held a class of busy students always eager to count and write.

Some of the Pre-K children were already reading at a first grade level. It is sad and frustrating as

an educator, to see such a difference in educational experiences in the same city.

I currently work for a charter school that holds a building full of students with families

stuck in the cycle of poverty. The mission of the school is every child goes to college. All

students are referred to as scholars, with each classroom named after a college or university. The

school day is extended, with homework packets each night. Through long hours and constant

repetition, the students are achieving suburban scores while growing up in the toughest parts of

the city.

My rationale for focusing on the socioeconomic factors that affect literacy is to generate a

better understanding of what areas directly concern children's literacy learning experiences and

what we can do as educators to ensure that our literacy practices reflect those factors. Classrooms

today are a melting pot of cultural heritages and social class. I myself grew up in a low-income,

rural area, where I went to the same school from Kindergarten through senior year. I graduated

with a class of 75 students. Many of my peers came from struggling homes and over fifty

percent of the student body received free or reduced lunches. Today, the struggling cycle

continues as my peers' children enter school with an even higher rate of children receiving free

or reduced lunch. The ways educators teach and the ways children understand is affected by the

struggles students are facing in today's world. In order to better prepare our students to be deeper

thinkers for tomorrow, we need to consider what is affecting children's literacy experiences

today.

The main content of this study is an analysis of the writing of two authors: Shirley Brice

Heath and Catherine Compton-Lilly. Each author has focused her research in the field of socioeconomic factors that affect children's literacy experiences. Compton-Lilly has focused her research interests on literacy learning in urban communities. Health has developed research on the ways in which speakers learn the structures and uses of language in learning environments of all types. Compton-Lilly taught in the public schools of New York State for over 15 years. She worked as a reading teacher and a Reading Recovery teacher. She received her doctorate in Curriculum and Human Development from the University of Rochester. Compton-Lilly is currently an Associate Professor in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a family literacy researcher. Her research interests have focused primarily on the literacy learning practices of urban communities, the importance of attending to local culture and the value of listening to the voices of families. She is the author of many books such as *Reading Time*, *Reading Families: The Literate Lives of Urban Children, Bedtime Stories and Book Reports* and *Rereading Families.*

Compton-Lilly looks at research differently by engaging in longitudinal research projects. She believes that there are too many short-term studies that do not suffice in developing meaningful information that can be used in the future of a study. For example, in one study, she followed a group of eight inner-city students from first grade through eleventh grade. By conducting a long-term study, Compton-Lilly was able to see factors that affected and hindered literary growth over time (Compton-Lilly, 2007). Compton-Lilly (2007, 2008, 2009) also focuses on the ways literacy events have drawn upon the experiences of family members and the interwoven complex relationships that exist in race, class, access and power. Compton-Lilly (2012) and her research highlight the importance of understanding family involvement and home literacy.

Heath (2012) is a linguistic anthropologist. She is a professor of English and dramatic literature, linguistics and anthropology at Stanford University. Her research is centered on language acquisition with those in elementary school up to high school. Heaths' (2004) research also focuses on youth centered learning environments. Compton-Lilly identified Heath as the "quintessential" example of long-term qualitative research. Heath (2012) not only worked alongside children and families but lived with them too. She examined the literacy practices of the families and oral language traditions, documenting the changes.

Heaths' (2012) pursuit of linguistics and anthropology is a direct reflection of her childhood experiences. She grew up in Virginia on her grandmother's farm during the civil rights movement. Her nearest neighbors were black, there was a black church across the road and the first teachers Heath ever knew were black. She grew up a "white girl, listening and looking, fitting in, feeling no difference" (p. 177). Heath stated that she "had played and worked my individual life without questioning patterns of separation for black and white" (p. 180). According to Heaths' autobiography, she continued to devote her life working in black schools. She even attended protests and meetings. Eventually Heath (2012) devoted her time to learning about child language socialization. Her research centered on two neighboring towns, a black working-class neighborhood and its white counterpart. Heaths' work can be found in many journals, articles and books. She published and co-edited several books such as *Words at Work and Play, Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms,* and *The Braid of Literature: Children's Worlds of Reading.*

Questions that will guide this literature research:

- How is literacy a social practice?

- What specific economic variables are the most concerning in children's literacy

experiences?

- How do home life and school affect children's literary experiences?

- What practices can educators consider using in the classroom to expand upon literacy as a social practice?

This research study will be accomplished by synthesizing the works of each of the two main authors as well as several other author's articles. Each of the authors focuses on the social aspects of literacy that influence children's literary experiences. Heath focuses on how home life and culture can have an effect on children's learning experiences, while Compton- Lilly's longitudinal work with families provides many insights into the reading practices, attitudes of families, and how identity operates as a contextual factor in the lives of children in and out of school. The research of Compton-Lilly, Heath and the studies of several other authors, provides for a well-rounded study that synthesizes how educators can use their knowledge of literacy practices to better fit the needs of today's students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the course to determine what factors are affecting children's literary performance, researchers such as Compton-Lilly and Heath have focused their work on how literacy is a social practice. Literacy is a social practice that stems from the fact that learning is a social process (Compton-Lilly, 2008). According to Vygotsky, one learns through interaction with others, not just by working independently (Mooney, 2000). Compton-Lilly and Heath have found several key groupings where literacy as a social practice is easily seen. Many researchers have found similar significant findings to that of Heath and Compton-Lilly, on the direct relationship between literacy and social practices (Foster, 2005; Krashen, 2011; Ming, 2010; Wamba, 2010). The social practices are interwoven within the individuals' identity, home, culture and school. Each socio-economic factor either helps or detracts from literacy learning (Compton-Lilly, 2008; Heath, 1992).

Individual Identity

Compton-Lilly authored many books, articles and journals, which focused her studies and readings on how literacy is a social practice directly tied to the socioeconomic factors of an individuals' identity, home, culture and school. Each factor has a strong impact on the literacy learning process of students. Compton-Lilly discovered several significant findings that affect literacy in her research. The most significant of the findings is that literacy is a social practice, interwoven into ones identity. A child's individuality can be associated with what a child enjoys doing. For example, in today's world, video games are a popular choice for a preferred activity. The favorite video games that a child loves to play can actually have a positive effect on his or

her literacy development. The determination and drive a child needs to succeed in video games are the same skills that drive them to succeed in school. For example, her 2007 article regarding connections between video games and literacy uniquely focuses on how the popular home life activity of video games can help teachers connect with students to influence reading and writing skills. According to Compton-Lilly (2009), "literacy learning does not occur separately from other aspects of our lives" (p.718). Literacy development is directly tied to how an individual feels. How they feel about themselves stems from the relationships they have at home and school. In video games children can take risks and evade death, creating a sense of security. Most games require extended commitment which children become immersed into. In the classroom most children need "encouragement and reassurance before they are willing to put their pens to papers" (p.720). In order for children to take those same risks in the classroom they need to feel that same sense of security. Educators need to provide that same security element in the classroom. Each classroom is a melting pot of experiences and interests. Compton Lilly (2009) acknowledges that struggling readers need more than just a reading process to follow, but also connections that align with their way of being. In order for students to be successful they need to feel successful. Compton-Lilly (2008) found that because literacy is a social practice, students need to be able to make connections between their interests, home and school and to who they are as an individual.

Compton-Lilly (2006) published a case study in the *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*. The significant findings in the case study also support Compton-Lilly's belief that literacy is a social practice that is tied to the individual. Compton-Lilly (2006) illustrates that "school literacy learning experiences are contextualized within larger social and cultural contexts that include issues related to race and gender" (p. 58). A strong reader must first develop a reading identity.

An individuals past history as a reader and current struggles as a reader, have a direct affect on what type of reader they think of themselves. "Privilege, access, and opportunity, related to race, class and gender have influenced and continue to influence the experiences and relationships that contribute to the formation of reading identities for students" (p. 60). The identity that students form, shape the individuals' reading and writing skills.

The case study by Compton-Lilly (2006) focused on a particular student named Devon. Devon was an African American student who was struggling with reading. The traditional Reading Recovery did not work for Devon. He needed to find a connection to the texts he was reading and the words he was writing. Compton-Lilly (2006) found that the test scores are not what drive students learning processes; it is the use of student's cultural resources and personal interests. In order to understand the students needs Compton-Lilly recognized the importance of communicating with the student and parent/guardian. Compton-Lilly (2008) documented that "knowing the ways of being of individual students is critical" (p.670). She was able to connect the ways of being that children brought to the classroom with the literacy processes children were learning. Devon found that individual connection to school because of the communication that happened between education and guardian. In order to make those necessary connections, Compton-Lilly had direct communication with the family about interests and experiences that have formed the families' identity. In return, the children's different ways of being could be respected in the classroom. A child's way of being influences the type of literary success they will have.

Students need to feel confident in sharing and using the interests that inspire them outside of school as well as inspired to build off those interests in school. Compton-Lilly (2006) stated how Devon taught her valuable lessons " about the ways literacy and identity are connected and

how these connections are critical to literacy engagement and learning" (p. 66). Compton-Lilly

discovered that all children are learning to read within raced and gender contexts that often offer

children from different social groups various opportunities and options. Devon's cultural

resources readily "coincided, converged, and contributed to his literacy learning" (p.71).

Compton-Lilly found ways to honor his identity and interests. By honoring his identity and

interests Devon was able to be successful with his literacy experiences.

In Compton-Lilly's (2006) case study, Devon recognized himself as being in the video

game club. To him, playing video games did not coincide with being a reader and writer in the

classroom. When Devon was provided with opportunities to use his cultural resources to write he

was able to make powerful connections to the social situations that occupy his life. For example,

by allowing Devon to write about his individual passions, he was able to feel confident and

secure to put his pen freely to paper. Devon's passions of popular culture are "socially valued,

textual tools that children can explore and manipulate in the classroom" (p. 61). The passions of

children directly stem from the social experiences they encounter. "Be they video games,

television shows, music, or films, all of these resources can support us in our quest to help

children identify themselves as readers and writers and use their evolving literacy abilities to

continue to pursue their own dreams and interests" (p.75). Compton-Lilly (2006) exemplifies the

notion that literacy is a social practice directly tied to an individuals' way of being.

Compton-Lilly (2006) revealed within her case study that because literacy is a social

practice, childhood and cultural resources are dominant tools in literacy learning. "We must find

ways to honor Devon's identities and interests without turning a blind eye to the ways gender

roles and racial positioning's inhabit children's ways of understanding the world" (p. 74). Video

games, television shows, films and music have not always believed to be valuable means in

obtaining literacy attainment, but Compton-Lilly found that children's reading processing abilities are shaped and embedded in their sociocultural literary practices. Her studies highlight that a child's way of being directly aligns with reading processes.

Heath (1993) also found significant correlation between social practices and the development of the literary success. In this article Heath discusses how the use of drama enables students to retain their first language. Drama is an element of play. During play "the self is transformed from the vulnerable, inhibited central self that fears making mistakes into the demands of the character" (p. 189). Play opens up multiple versions of the world for the child. For students with no English knowledge, play is where language is learned. "They get their bodies to gesture anger, compassion, mistrust, and gradually they attach language" (p. 189). As students build confidence their experiences broaden. The language development that is constructed in play has an effect on the literary identity of the individual. The power of play and the drama of language hold great accountability in one's literary success. Literacy success and social experiences are interwoven throughout our lives.

Compton-Lilly's significant findings across her literary studies support her theory that literacy learning and socioeconomic factors do not have separate influences in a child's life. Children are not solely using the schema they obtain at school but much of how they learn is stemmed from their way of being. According to Compton-Lilly (2007), "Literacy learning and literacy practices are not separate from peoples identities; literacy is among the tools that we use to "play out" particular identities" (p. 719). A child often feels hesitant to be a risk taker when approaching literacy tasks. Being a reader does not always adequately fit with the identities children bring to school. They need to find a connection between school and what they value to be able to feel comfortable to take risks. Compton-Lilly's (2007) significant findings in her

research showed that the personal commitment that drives a child to play the same video game

for hours, is the same drive that fuels good readers into a state of total immersion and

concentration when absorbed in a text.

Compton-Lilly (2012) also discovered that "Understandings of self are constructed over

time, as people draw upon past experiences, and envision future possibilities" (p. 119). Identities

are revised over time as individuals are confronted with new beings and organizations. The

identities that we construct over time involve enactments such as performances, discourses,

relationships and literacy practices. Students and parents legislate identities through the books

they read and those they did not. For example, a student named David associated the types of

book read and enjoyment of the books, as an identity for the type of student he was: a serious

student. He often spoke of someday starting his own business and was always unfolding his

plans to get rich. Students draw upon their home experiences and the resources available to them,

to make sense of their world as they construct their identities as readers.

Heath also discovered in her significant findings, that a child's interests and identity have

a direct correlation with ones literary skills and the social practices they are exposed to.

According to Heath (2004) who focused her research on youth-centered learning environments,

"young people "at risk" who spent their time in arts focused settings acquired certain syntactic

and genre forms more rapidly than their counterparts in out-of-school learning environments

devoted to community service or sports" (p. 339). Heath found that the arts create a learning

environment that builds upon students' language development and thinking skills. Literacy is a

social practice that stems from communication. "Work within the arts requires multiple types of

verbal interactions repeated and reiterated in numerous ways" (p. 338). An individual who is

engaged in the performing arts field looks, listens, watches, reviews, rehearses and will redo it

again and again. Habits both physical and mental are created because of that engagement. Heath found that these are all ideals that teachers want for their students to innately do in school with their work. "Artists see learning as ways of solving problems that may arise, and because much of the work of art involves casting the self forward and needs to anticipate variables or circumstances that may affect that performance, anticipatory problem seeing, and problem solving have high appeal" (p. 340). Heath believes that educators and researchers need to "attend to those points where the arts and literacy meet" (p. 341). The identity of the individual created in the field of arts has a direct positive correlation with literacy development and his or her literary success.

Heath (1994) highlights the significant finding that literacy is a social practice, driven by an individuals' way of being. The study reflects, "practices and values that contrast or conflict with those of curriculum of formal schooling" (p. 102). Heath continues to point out that the arts play a significant role in literacy attainment. The article discusses a studio named Liberty Theatre, that houses young people who are African American, Latino, and European American. All of the students have rejected school in one way, some even by dropping out. According to Heath (1994), at the studio those same students' worked in collaboration together to produce scripts they performed for youth in parks and recreations over the summer. The young people responded daily to words, phrases and dialogue given to them by the director. By the end of the summer the "percentage of youth who said they would stay in school went up from the 50% in the early summer to 100%" (p. 101). Those students not only stayed in school, but also continued to pursue dance, drama, and the arts in connection with their schools. Heaths (1994) article recognizes the importance of acknowledging the activities and achievements outside of school. Heath (2004) continues to illustrate that coaches, artists and musicians provide contacts and

experiences unavailable through school. Those same role models/intimate strangers influence struggling youth by showing them self discipline, time management and language. The work within the arts outside of school "requires multiple types of verbal interactions repeated and reiterated in numerous ways" (p. 339). Those verbal interactions build mental and physical habits in the child's way of being that extend into the classroom.

Compton-Lilly (2008) stated that "When teachers align attention to reading processing with attending to student ways of being rich learning experiences can be provided that are effective in helping children to read and value themselves as readers and learners" (p. 669). Because literacy is a social practice, educators must organize the learning experiences so that they support learning by aligning the students' ways of being with the reading processes. Helping a child become a successful reader is not through letter and word data, but through understanding each child's literacy experiences, language background, and differences in personal passions and interests, that will instill the literary skills necessary to be more than just successful. Compton-Lilly (2008) found those literacy skills are in more than one language. They are found in the child's identity. Every child may not have been read storybooks, but they may know all the lyrics to many songs, dozens of jump-rope rhymes, or have watched episodes of television shows. Educators must capitalize on the range of differences that each student brings to the classroom. A child's reading processes are rooted within the identities and the sociocultural literacy practices they are exposed to.

Home

The literary identities we build are constructed within multifaceted social interactions connecting individuals' identity, home, culture and school. Compton-Lilly (2012) recognized that "peoples understanding of the world are constructed, refined, revised, and

abandoned over time" (p.118). People draw upon numerous timescales to make sense of their

world. A child's home life has a strong influence on how they construct his or her literary

identity. For example, parents reflect on their own school experiences as they make sense of their

child's progress in school. As Compton-Lilly (2012) states throughout the text, children apply

parent's insights to their own experiences. One challenges current learning based on past

understandings and prolonging existing ideas. If a parent had a negative experience in school and

constantly voices negative opinions about school, the child will construct their own insight

around what they see and hear. Compton-Lilly (2012) recognizes that what a person understands

and believes has significance to the futures that they visualize for themselves and others. If a

family does not value a college education, nor ever completed a program, the student has no

reason to think differently on the subject. A students' reason for reading is continuously

constructed and deconstructed as their understanding of the world is grounded. The construction

of an individual's literary identity is molded by the social experiences we encounter throughout

our lives. Our social experiences begin and are most influenced in the home.

Compton-Lilly's (2012) study revealed intriguing networks between reading preferences,

practices of parents and those of their children. The primary artifacts in the study were books,

magazines, schoolbooks and media-related books. While each student is a unique reader, the

student's preferences reflect their familial, social and contextual worlds. Each student has a

unique background and taste. Books carry a range of meanings. The texts read referenced

cultural models related to being, acknowledging one as a good reader or a good student. If a

child's home has little to no print and texts are rarely to ever seen, then a child has no reason to

think or act differently about print. The home environment of a child is a strong factor in a

child's literacy skills (Foster, Lambert, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, and Franze 2005; Faitar 2011).

Foster et al. argue that socioeconomic status has for a long time been the predictor of a student's early language function, dictating their academic success with direct ties to their emotional and behavioral relations as well. Studies by Foster et al. (2005) consistently show that "the language environment in the home and the quality of the linguistic interaction and learning experiences with the parents, have direct significant associations with children's cognitive and language development, and literacy competence" (p. 14). The communication structure within the home can influence the child to have a wide range of vocabulary or enter school having been exposed to several hundred words less. A child that is read to on a regular basis, will be exposed to a far wider range of vocabulary words, then a child who is not exposed to print regularly. As heath states "the changing workplace needs raise educational problems for both mainstream and minority populations" (p.367). Some parents work nights never seeing their children during the week. Heath found that many families' parents do not have time to communicate and educate their children at home. The linguistic interactions children have with their families have a strong influence on their literary development.

Catherine Compton-Lilly (2012) identified that literacy is a social practice that can be directly tied to the home. She brings to attention that teachers and researchers must always remember that students come from very diverse backgrounds. In order to have a better understanding of the student it is necessary to put one's own history and experiences to the side, and consider other ways of knowing the world. Compton-Lilly's extensive evidence throughout the text shows that the home environment of a child is a strong factor in a child's literacy skills. Compton-Lilly (2012) highlights the important connection between literacy and the experiences in the home. In her study she found that change always occurs in families. The change that occurs evolves identities and meanings that accompany events of one's life. The events in our

lives either help or detract our literary success. According to Ming and Powell (2010) "parents are a child's first teacher, and the home environment provides children with their first literacy experiences" (p. 127). The study identified that children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds have limited access to experiences that allow them to acquire the emergent literacy skills key to their future literary success. The lack of literacy experiences for children from struggling homes leads to children entering elementary school "approximately two years behind their peers in literacy development" (p. 127). According to Ming and Powell "children born in a context where there are inadequate literacy experiences, do not see or feel print as significant in their lives, and as a result it will not be meaningful, and it will not be noticed" (p. 127). Some of the inadequate literacy experiences include few to no texts available in the home, lack of book sharing and limited verbal interactions between child and adult. Some of the main concerns for families are affordability and availability. The literacy experiences that happen in the home help mold the literacy success of children.

Current research shows how the factors of literacy can be directly related to literacy as a social practice tied to the home. Children suffering from poverty are more likely to experience less parental involvement, leading to a deficiency of literacy experiences both inside and outside the home, and then a consistent struggle to catch up academically to their peers for rest of their academic career. Poverty is a vicious cycle that continues until someone finally breaks it down. Recent studies such as Caspe (2009), Krashen (2011) and Ready (2010), support the evidence that the socioeconomic status of a child affects their literacy skills and future academic success. According to Krashen (2011) "more poverty means lower scores on all measures of school achievement" (p. 17). "When all children have the advantages that right now only middle-class children have, the "achievement gap" between children from high and low-income families will

be closed" (p. 17). Conflicting research shows that parental involvement and poverty have the most effect on a student's success, but the ever-expanding diverse cultures are also a factor.

Compton-Lilly (2012) recognizes that "people are temporal beings who are caught up within multiple dimensions of time- shared social histories, their personal pasts and ongoing experiences" (p. 120). Stories are shared from generation to generation, continually influenced by personal, familial and historic pasts. Compton-Lilly (2012) brings to attention that the enactments of the past are always part of the present. In many of her cases the voices of those who had passed long ago, still affect the students and their families' dimension of how they look at themselves in the present. Heath (1992) found that the social interaction of a read aloud at home can enhance a child's literary skills. Children's literature plays a leading role in the language development of a child. It not only builds children's vocabulary but Heath also found that the use of story language can "soften the harsh or disliked demands of everyday life" (p. 3). Memories are directly tied to emotional experiences. The literary experience that children have in the home influence not only their academics but also it is the footing for literary identity.

Culture

In the study by Compton-Lilly (2009) reading is identified as a social experience that is directly interwoven in the culture and identity of children. The culture that a child is exposed to is also another factor that has a direct affect on the literary experiences of a child. "Literacy practices are linked to people's lives, identities, and social affiliations" (p. 88). Compton-Lilly found in her studies that new literacy educators are recognizing the significance of children's' interactions with technology especially technological texts. Accessing the knowledge of media characters can enable students' to feel confident in classroom community discussions. For example, a child will feel more confident and will write more when the writing prompt has a

connection to his or her life. Writing about a fictional character will inspire a child to be more engaged in their writing as opposed to a writing prompt that that does not connect to his or her interests.

According to Compton-Lilly (2009), "Cultural understanding about reading and writing, the ways literary practices connect to identity and social affiliations, and the range of literacy practices we engage with, are intimately connected to race" (p. 89). Ignoring culture is ignoring an individual's way of thinking and learning. Recognizing race is crucial. Now more than ever it is important that educators get to know each child individually, recognizing their strengths so that we can provide each student with the opportunity to apply his or her strengths to literacy learning. Compton-Lilly (2007a) recognizes that educators must create "a classroom that is culturally relevant and responsive to students" (p. 1). Compton-Lilly stresses that planning a curriculum based on students culture, highlighting interests and experiences will put students on the path to literacy attainment. Students should be able to appreciate and connect texts to political and social issues that they encounter in their lives. Literacy is a social practice that also derives from an individual's culture.

Literacy experiences are highly influenced by the culture one is exposed to. In the study by Faitar (2011) cultural differences in the way children are spoken to by their families have a profound effect on children's language skills development. Working class African American mothers are less likely to ask questions that go beyond yes/no answers. Their children are not expected to give any further information. The European American mothers are more likely to develop questions that require more involved answers. By asking more detailed questions the child is exposed to a higher volume of vocabulary words and in return has to use more language to answer. The cultural differences in parenting styles are a possible explanation for gap in

language development processes. Literacy is a social part of life. Caspe (2009) acknowledged that literacy experiences have a strong influence on the literary success of a child. Caspe found that book sharing is one of the most important activities parents and children can do together. The study by Caspe (2009) examined the relationship between maternal book sharing styles and low-income Latino children's successive language and literacy development. The most powerful book sharing styles held more than just casual questions; they included conversations that push for deeper thinking. The study demonstrated that "families are foundational for their children's development" (p.324). Reading to children helps to build the necessary skills that will lead to literary success. Caspe identified that one's culture has a direct effect on the literary success of a child. The conversations and book sharing styles have a profound influence on the type of literary success the student will have.

The culture that one is exposed to has a deep impact on the literary achievement of the individual. According to Ladson-Billings (1995) culturally relevant teaching can help students from various backgrounds be successful in school. "For more than a decade, anthropologists have examined ways that teaching can better match the home and community cultures of students of color who have previously not had academic success in schools" (p.466). The education must have the ability to "develop students academically," "nurture and support cultural competence" and "the development of sociopolitical or critical consequences" (p. 483). Ladson-Billings recognized that using language patterns found within the home helped students achieve academic success. Successful schooling acknowledges students different communication patterns; both at school and home.

According to Delpit (1992) "when a significant difference exits between the students' culture and the school's culture, teachers can easily misread student's aptitudes, intent, or

abilities as a result of the differences in styles of language use and interactional patterns" (p.238). For example she found that African American children will most often respond better to more direct styles of teaching that display power because that is what they hear at home and is what they are most familiar with. European American teachers are more likely to give indirect commands. The cultural use of language needs to be congruent. "If we know the intellectual legacies of our students, we will gain insight into how to teach them" (p.248). Educators must understand their student's culture; "the brilliance student's bring with them in their blood" (p.248). Delpit recognized the importance of fostering inquiry of who our students really are. The culture of an individual has a profound effect on the academic success of a student. Heath (1989) also brings to attention how "the insistence of schools individualizing literacy and separating it from the social and oral roots, has ignored traditional oral and literate habits of Black Americans" (p. 372). Heath illustrates the significant finding that literacy is rooted in one's culture. When children learn language they are taking in more than words. The literate language learning experience constructs how a child makes sense of the world around them. It also determines their development of social interactions and understanding of role in life. Heath (1989) points out that schools and employers have "repeatedly pictured a majority of Black students and workers as victims of language poverty and called for increased emphasis on literacy skills for Black Americans young and old" (p. 367). Children are expected to adapt to changing contexts, speakers, and caregivers. Educators need to ensure that the teaching practices reflect material that is culturally relevant to the classroom community. The events in our lives either help or detract our literary success.

School

Compton-Lilly (2010) continues to illustrate the significant findings throughout her studies on the importance of understanding a child's culture so that the educational practices in the classroom lead to a successful learning environment for all students. "Teachers who adopt the color blindness perspective do not affirm students of color but create the opposite effect: perceived color blindness is actually detrimental since students cultures are negated" (p. 1). Educators must understand their students beyond the surface familiarity of school. Through her long-term studies she has been able to discover how students of any socioeconomic background can achieve literary attainment by making the necessary connections between family, school and well being. Cultural resources are dominant tools in a child's literacy learning. Compton-Lilly (2012) stated that "Privilege, access, and opportunity, related to race, class and gender have influenced and continue to influence the experiences and relationships that contribute to the formation of reading identities for students" (p. 60). Helping our students succeed no matter what prior experiences they have had, directly stems from the connections we make between family and school.

The researchers Krashen (2011) and Wamba (2010) investigated the mutual dependence between poverty, literacy and school. Krashen (2011) highlights how poverty has a strong negative impact on children's school performance. Through many studies Krashen found that children growing up in a poverty stricken home are most likely suffering from lack of nutrition, which leads to language delays and behavioral problems. For some children the only meal they receive is at school. The lack of health care leads to continuing illnesses and absence from school. Absences from school cause children of poverty to continue to fall academically behind

their peers. Children of poverty also have little access to literacy materials. Books are limited or

nonexistent in homes, and their communities are lacking the quality resources in their libraries.

Researchers Ash and Meyers (2009) confirm through several studies that increased access to

books is related to an enhanced reading achievement. The achievement gap that exists between

low-income, middle class and upper class students, illustrates the power of socioeconomic

factors. If all children received the same advantages the achievement gap would be closed. The

school is where the gap can start to close instead of stretching farther. The home life of a student,

school and the culture that one is exposed to, either helps or detracts from literary success. The

literary success of a student is dependent upon those critical social literacy experiences.

Compton-Lilly (2012) identified that literacy is a social practice that stems not only from

the individual identity, home and culture but also from school. She found in her research that

there are three critical considerations tied to educators and students' literary experiences. The

first consideration is that teachers, "listen to stories and counter-stories told by children and their

family members" (p. 122). The stories are grounded to past generations that affect not only the

present, but also future evolving identities of students. Compton-Lilly believes that it is essential

that the stories, and differences must be respected, and recognized as being genuine and valid.

Educators need to highlight those unique identities within the classroom. Children need to see

the connection between school literary experiences and home.

The second consideration tied between educators and student's literary experiences given

by Compton-Lilly (2012) is "educators and researchers must attend to the types of literacy

experiences offered to students" (p. 122). The material presented to the students must have

relevance to their lives in order for them to become genuinely captivated in the literacy

experience. Educators must find ways to connect the material, and expand the students existing

range of literacy practices. Lessons should always build off of what the student knows and feels comfortable with, while also inviting students to try new types of texts and literacy practices to help guide them toward achieving their goals. There is always potential for growth when educators take the time to focus on student's abilities to take on new interests and identities. Educators must think about student's current paths to help plan more beneficial literacy experiences for them that will construct students' identities as readers and help achieve literary attainment.

The third consideration of Compton-Lilly (2012) is that "we must always remember that teachers and researchers assess ongoing experiences, as well as familial and historical resources as we continuously construct ourselves as readers and as people" (p. 122). The ability to work with students from different cultures around the world enables educators to expand their own experiences. Literate identities are reflected in the books we reject and enact in our lives. There are many families that struggle to provide their children with essential literacy experiences. As an educator, Compton-Lilly stresses that by providing meaning to the experiences and building off of known literacy experiences learned over time, helps to develop the literacy identity of a student.

According to Heath (2000), "schooling has to enable students to process and produce information more rapidly than ever and through simultaneous use of new forms and means" (p. 121). The electronic world is a mainstream tool in education today. The information available requires individuals to process multiple forms of media content. The electronic world is composed of visual images with mixtures of texts. As Heath has discussed in much of her work, the basics of education can be found in the arts. "The visual arts with accompanying focus of attention on details of features, such as colour, form and line, ensure attention to perception and

engagement of the 'visual brain', which, in turn, resonates with remembered experience and

linguistic representation" (p. 123). The electronic world provides students with meaningful

literary experiences that help to mold their thinking for this new electronic economy. It allows

for potential of advanced learning socially and individually. Literacy is a social practice that is

developed in multiple forms. Heath (2000) acknowledges that schools today must ensure that the

curriculum enables students to have extensive opportunities to develop literacy experiences in

multiple forms.

　　　Literacy is a social practice that is seen within an individual's identity, home, culture and

school. Compton-Lilly (2007) identified throughout her research "literacy learning and literacy

practices are not separate from people's identities" (p.719). Learning is a social nature that

intersects with the identities we create. Heath also recognizes throughout her research the

significant influence that social practices have on children's' linguistic experiences. Social

practices are found in more than the conversations we speak at home and at school, but the

activities we are involved in. Heath examined the role of "the arts as a factor within literacy

development across media and contexts" (p. 341). Literacy experiences are developed from the

social experiences of the arts, to the video games engrossed in for hours, to the books read to and

the language they hear.

Chapter 3: Summary and Conclusions

Catherine Compton-Lilly and Shirley Brice Heath discovered across their research, significant findings that recognize literacy as a social practice. Literacy learning and literacy practices are not separate from ones identity, home, culture or school. (Compton-Lilly, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009). "Learning is a social process that occurs through interaction with others rather than individual accomplishment" (p. 719). Heath also discovered in her significant findings, that the activities performed outside school have a direct correlation with ones literary skills. As stated earlier according to Heath (2004), "young people "at risk" who spent their time in arts focused settings acquired certain syntactic and genre forms more rapidly than their counterparts in out-of-school learning environments devoted to community service or sports" (p. 339). Heath found that the arts create a learning environment that builds upon student's language development and thinking skills. "Work within the arts requires multiple types of verbal interactions repeated and reiterated in numerous ways" (p. 338). An individual who is engaged in the performing arts field looks, listens, watches, reviews, rehearses, and will redo it again and again. Habits both physical and mental are created because of that engagement. The habits that are created are the same for successful literary experiences.

Compton-Lilly's significant findings across her literary studies support her theory that literacy learning and socioeconomic factors do not have separate influences in a child's life. Learning is a social process. Children are not solely using the schema they obtain at school but much of how they learn is stemmed from their way of being. According to Compton-Lilly (2007), "Literacy learning and literacy practices are not separate from peoples identities; literacy is among the tools that we use to "play out" particular identities" (p. 719). A child often feels

hesitant to be a risk taker when approaching literacy tasks. Being a reader does not always

adequately fit with the identities children bring to school. They need to find a connection

between school and what they value to be able to feel comfortable to take risks. Compton-Lilly's

(2007) significant findings in her research showed that the personal commitment that drives a

child to play the same video game for hours, is the same drive that fuels good readers into a state

of total immersion and concentration when absorbed in a text. Compton-Lilly and Heath found

that these are all ideals that teachers want for their students to innately do in school with their

work. Literacy learning occurs in a social nature where the ways of learning intersects with the

identities that we assume as individuals (Compton-Lilly, 2007).

     Other researchers such as Ready (2010) also focused on the socioeconomic factors that

are affecting the literacy skills of children. Overall, authors have found culture, home life,

school, and identity, to be some of the main causes of the developmental delays of students. The

effects of school exposure vary by children's socioeconomic backgrounds. Many people believe

in the readiness view of reading development, and the critical importance of early childhood

education. A universal pre-k and other social programs are being designed to prepare children

academically, so that they are entering elementary school with certain skills to ensure success

later on. (Foster et al., 2005). The variance in exposure is the underlying cause of the

achievement gap in schools today (Ready, 2010).

     It was interesting to learn that culture, home, school and identity have such a profound

impact on the literacy success of our children today. Krashen (2011) illustrates the study's

findings in that "there is no evidence that teachers these days are worse than they were in the

past, that parents these days are more irresponsible than they were in the past, or that students

these days are lazier than they were in the past" (p. 17). It is the ever-changing society that is

affecting our families today. We live in a very competitive world. According to Delpit (1992) "If we are to successfully educate all of our children, we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research, and racism" (p.248). In order for our future children to compete and be successful we need to continue to look at how each of the socioeconomic factors that affect literacy is correlated together, and how we can instill our findings in the classroom to create a culturally relevant environment for our students that will help to close the achievement gap.

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