Home Literacy Practices of Three Ethno-Cultural Groups in the U.S.: A Collective Case Study on Culture and Support for Early Reading

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to describe the home literacy beliefs and practices of eleven families and explore what discrepancies exist between their reading related behaviors depending on their ethno-cultural self-identification. American families of Haitian, Jamaican, and Cuban descent with a first grade child were sought. The focus of this study was the home as an educational context and shared activity surrounding storybook reading and other literacy related events, based on sociocultural theory and cultural discontinuity theories. A collective case study design was utilized for this descriptive and exploratory qualitative study. Interviews, participant observation, and photography were used to collect data from 24 family members. Themes were identified across the three ethno-cultural groups examined in this study. Families represented in this study revealed their belief that maintaining a strong school-home connection would increase their children's academic achievement. Further, their practices give us a glimpse as to how to bridge this home-school connection to support their children's early literacy skills.

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Introduction

Home literacy practices contribute to literacy learning and have a positive effect on children's cognitive development (Purcell-Gates, 2000; Senechal & Young, 2008; Shumow, 2010). Further, early reading acquisition significantly affects the academic progress of a child. For example, Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) demonstrated that first grade reading ability is a strong predictor of outcomes in high school. Nevertheless, large-scale assessments consistently show significant score differences between "minority" and "non-minority" students in the U.S. (Camara & Schmidt, 1999; Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000; Gallant & Moore, 2008; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Sacks, 1997). Because data on student achievement are disaggregated by race and ethnicity, the variance is referred to as the 'achievement gap'. Poor quality of education (Tikly & Barrett, 2011), tracking (Ansalone, 2010), and negative teacher expectations (Oakes, 1985; Rist, 1970) may explain continued educational failure for some children, but do not address achievement differences that exist early on or before formal schooling begins (Lee & Burkam, 2002). For example, Hale and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that language-based bedtime routines with preschoolers at age 3 were associated with cognitive outcomes at age 5. Another study of reading and math performance of 314 low income children ages 4 ½ years to grade 5 concluded that reducing the achievement gap "may require early intervention to reduce gaps in home and school experiences" (Burchinal et al., 2011, pp. 1404).

The purpose of this research is to describe the home literacy beliefs and practices of eleven families and explore what discrepancies exist between their practices depending on their ethno-cultural self-identification. American families of Haitian, Jamaican, and Cuban descent with a first grade child were sought. The research questions are (1) How do families view and support early reading acquisition? (2) How do families' child rearing beliefs and socialization practices influence their children's early reading experiences? (3) How do families' perceptions and interactions concerning early reading acquisition differ from each other within the ethno-cultural groups? and (4) How do families' perceptions and interactions

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about early reading acquisition differ from each other across ethno-cultural groups? This paper focuses on results related to the last research question, comparing families' perceptions and interactions across groups.

Theoretical Foundations

Sociocultural theory, as applied to education as well as other domains, holds that interpersonal relationships and shared activity are developed in a given context and contribute to the construction of knowledge (Forman, Minick, & Stone, 1996; Pop, Popoviciu, & Popoviciu, 2010). The strong sense of community within some ethno-cultural groups, particularly those that are multi-lingual and recent immigrants, results in collective communities of practice. Literacy learning in general, and learning to read, specifically, are deemed cultural transmission. Attributes are shared and communicated by a group of people from one generation to the next. The focus of this study is the home as an educational context and shared activity surrounding storybook reading and other literacy related events.

The concept of literacy changes over time and is distinct among cultures (Heath, 1984; Westby, 1995). Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, and Mazzeo (1999) found that children's reading skills differ by ethnicity and race upon entering kindergarten. Cultural differences are thought to be explanatory (Coleman, 1988), in that, home literacy practices and beliefs that impact how families support early reading acquisition may differ (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Nieto, 1999). These differences however, are not considered to be deficits but strengths that can be built upon to enhance home-school partnerships (Cooper, Riehl, & Hasan, 2010; Howard, 2010). This mismatch between home and school practices is referred to as the cultural discontinuity theory. If culture-laden practices are significantly tied to achievement, then the nature of these practices must be examined for various ethno-cultural groups to inform culturally relevant educational curricula and instruction (Gay, 2010; Roche, Ghazarian, & Fernandez-Esquer, 2012; Shi, 2012).

A limitation of many studies that use ethnicity or race as a variable is that the peoples within the group designations are extremely heterogeneous (Okazaki & Sue, 1995). While these designations are admittedly problematic, all information on reading levels and average standardized test scores is reported using the designations "White", "Black", and "Hispanic". Cuban American students are usually included in the Hispanic designation, while Haitian American and Jamaican American students are generally identified under the Black category. Cultural discontinuity and structural theorists have focused their research on Hispanic, mostly Mexican-American, families in the southwestern United States, African American families, and Native Hawaiian families. Some descriptions of cultural norms within a group even contradict each other (compare Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Goldenberg, 1989; Goldenberg, Reese, & Gallimore, 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). The literature calls for more investigations on culture and education (Ladson-Billings, 1993), with an emphasis on comparative studies (Horner, 2001; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1985; Shi, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, 1987). This study sought to focus on more specific ethno-cultural groups in the southeastern U.S. for which minimal data exists on the topic.

Method

A collective case study design was utilized for this descriptive and exploratory qualitative study. Contemporary behaviors that cannot be manipulated and research that underscores the generation or refinement of theory are best suited for the case study method conducted in accordance with Robert Stake (1994).

Participants

A multi-step, purposive selection process ensures that participants represent the most salient examples of what is being studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Okazaki & Sue, 1995; Stake, 1995). Participants exemplified the factors of interest (Patton, 1980) and best opportunities to learn about those factors (Stake, 1994, 1995) and were recruited from public elementary schools located in southeastern U.S. Since culture-based interactions and perceptions are of interest, a relatively large concentration of families from the same ethno-cultural group whose children attend the same school was assumed to be evidence of families' relative immersion in that culture. Notably, Jamaican American families were more geographically dispersed than the other two groups.

Ethnicity as a variable was considered because this study involves cultural premises (Okazaki & Sue, 1995). Ethno-cultural group classifications are specified because broad ethnic grouping increases heterogeneity. Nominated participants verified their own ethno-cultural group distinctions as part of the selection process (Eisenhower, Suyemoto, Lucchese, & Canenguez, 2013; Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

The selected schools met the following criteria: (a) Estimated over 50% Haitian American students or Cuban American students; and (b) Over 50% of students on free and reduced lunch. Schools averaged 78.13% of students on free or reduced lunch, confirming that they predominantly serve low-income populations (Table 1).

Table 1
School Demographic Information

	Free or reduced lunch	White Non-Hispanic	Black Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Total minority
School A1	99.2	1	87	12	100
School B1	73.6	8	60	16	91
School B2	76.7	2	92	5	98
School C1	85.3	4	2	94	96
School C2	53.2	18	5	76	82
School C3	80.8	2	1	96	98

The selected participants met the following criteria: (a) Families of children in first grade; (b) Child on free and reduced lunch; (c) General education student; (d) Families and students relatively English proficient as determined by principal and teacher; (e) Child with documented average ability and achievement as determined by principal and teacher; and (f) Family with typical involvement with the school relative to other families of the same ethno-cultural group, as determined by principal and teacher. Principals nominated first grade teachers who, jointly with the principal, nominated families that fulfilled the preceding criteria. Nominated families were contacted personally by the researcher. Eleven case families, consisting of a total of 24 family members participated. Each family was paid fifty dollars and provided with copies of digital photographs taken for participation in the study, at the end of the last field visit.

Instrumentation

Multiple modes of data collection including interviews, observations, and photography were utilized. Since each single source of evidence has its weaknesses, such triangulation strengthens the study by developing converging lines of inquiry (Denzin, 1989; Stake, 1995). The following qualitative instruments were used.

The Early Reading Beliefs and Practices Interview. This semi-structured form included questions geared towards gaining an understanding of families' perceptions of the way in which children learn to read, effective support of their child's early reading acquisition, and their child-rearing and socialization practices associated with reading activities. The interview was created based on a literature review of early reading-related, culture-specific views and practices of Hispanic American, African American, Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Haitian American families. The semi-structured interview, requiring open-ended responses and conducted in two sessions, is appropriate for the limited time in the setting and specific research questions posed (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990).

Participant-observations. Participant-observations allowed for a systematic description of events within a context. Because little is known about the phenomena of interest, there may be important differences between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders, and the phenomena are often obscured from the view of outsiders (Jorgensen, 1989). The researcher's role may be described as observer-as-participant due to its

peripheral and brief nature. This also allowed for the researcher to ask for clarification of that which was observed. Participation increased understanding and decreased inaccurate interpretations, essential for studies on culture (Hall, 1976; Jorgensen, 1989).

Participants were asked to engage in both a reading and homework activity representative of what they would normally do. Detailed field notes were recorded including a record of temporal elements, specific interactions, and social organization (Denzin, 1989). Both corroboratory and contradictory evidence was sought between interviews and observations. Participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback in terms of accuracy of interpretation on the last visit when they were briefed on some of the main themes underscored by the researcher.

Research assistants of the same ethno-cultural background as the case study families were chosen. Such an arrangement is hypothesized to be beneficial in establishing initial rapport with families, given that the researcher does not identify with any of the particular ethno-cultural groups (Jorgensen, 1989). The research assistants cross-checked interpretations decreasing the likelihood of bias (Denzin, 1989; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973), and improving the quality of data collected (Adler & Adler, 1987; Denzin, 1989; Phillips, 1985).

Photography. Photography was used to capture visual details associated with the observations (Jorgensen, 1989). Physical environment and placement of family members during reading sessions was better assessed through this method than through a verbal description alone (Bateson & Mead, 1942; Becker, 1981; Collier, 1967; Hall, 1976; Hocking, 1975). Taking pictures is also said to be effective in initiating rapport.

Informal conversations. Informal conversations were documented by the researcher in field notes written immediately after the interactions occurred. Casual exchanges between the researchers and participants were sought to develop rapport. Phone conversations were also documented.

Early Reading Instruction Teacher Interview. This 20 minute interview assessed teachers' preferred mode of reading instruction.

Data collection and analysis

Fieldwork was conducted for each of eleven cases over two days, as detailed in a case study protocol (Yin, 1994). Interviews will family members were segmented over the two visits and totaled about two hours each. Observation segments varied in length from ten minutes to a half hour each.

All semi-structured interviews with family members were transcribed and analyzed, as were field notes from observations and informal conversations and photographs. A preliminary list of codes was developed prior to data collection directly tied to the research questions. Codes were attached to phrases, sentences, or paragraphs of the audio-taped transcripts of the interviews, process fragments in the observations, and visual cues in the photographs. After initial coding, themes were used to identify broader, more inferential concepts. Themes were coded (1) for each case (2) for each set of cases and (3) across all three sets of cases.

Results

Themes were identified across the three ethno-cultural groups examined in this study. Commonalities and discrepancies within categorizations are detailed in Tables 2 and 3.

Background

Ethno-cultural identification.   Parent participants were all first generation immigrants to the U.S. Unfailingly, families indicated a strong identification with their respective cultural heritage. Passing on their native language to the children was described by parents as an important issue of practicality and cultural pride.

> I am a citizen but I feel Jamaican…And I try to maintain my accent…They want to be a Jamaican…I speak Patois with my kids because you are supposed to let your kids know where you're from. – *Jamaican American Mother*

Family characteristics. Jamaican American and Haitian American families tended to consist of more children than the Cuban American families, averaging 3.6, 3.25, and 2.25 children respectively. There existed at least one single parent family in each group.

Differences were apparent in education level and occupation status of parents. Haitian American mothers had the least number of years of formal schooling while Jamaican American mothers had the most. Only one Haitian American mother had earned a high school diploma, whereas all the mothers of the other two groups had high school degrees or more. Similarly, none of the Haitian American fathers had earned a high school diploma while all of the fathers of the remaining two groups had. In fact, two Haitian American fathers and one mother were illiterate. Jamaican American mothers were all employed outside the home in contrast to only one of the Cuban American mothers. All fathers were employed.

Perceptions and Interactions Concerning Early Reading Acquisition

Positive perception of school. All families expressed a positive perception of the child's school and teacher. Haitian American and Jamaican American families cited home-school communication as a major factor contributing to their discernment of the school, while the Cuban American families focused on teachers' classroom behavior management style.

> *Creole* – I think parents and teachers should work together to help the child. Communication is necessary to help the child progress. – Haitian American Mother

> We communicate. I have their phone numbers and they have mine…They have a voice mail too at the school now. That way you could call and leave a message and they call you right back. So, the lines of communication are open. – Jamaican American Mother

> *Spanish* - There's a lot of communication. She [teacher] is strict but flexible. I am content. – Cuban American Mother

Involvement with school. Differences relative to the culture were found in the time commitment of mothers' involvement in their child's school. Jamaican American mothers were all employed outside the home, while Cuban American mothers tended not to be employed and had fewer children. Therefore, it followed that they had more time home-school involvement. Participation among Haitian American and Jamaican American families ranged from high to minimal. Nonetheless, all said they came to school when directly contacted about an issue pertaining to their child. Jamaican American families reported the least frequent contact with their child's teacher. Haitian American families said they focus on behavior while Cuban American families said they focused their inquiry on academic progress.

> I like the teacher… They always call you…When I get in the morning I pass and always go there in the class. I always talk to the teacher and say 'How they behave?' – Haitian American Mother

> I go sometimes but not all the time. Sometime if I can't make it, I send…my daughter…If they call me I always be there. – Jamaican American Mother

Beliefs about reading. Haitian American and Jamaican American cases considered families primarily responsible for their child's early reading acquisition while Cuban American families considered it a joint responsibility of family and school. All families regarded reading at home with children to be a worthwhile activity they prioritized. Across groups it was found that mothers read with the child regularly. Siblings read with the child in all Haitian American cases, one of the Jamaican American cases, and none of the Cuban American cases. Fathers tended to be involved with reading with the child in Jamaican American families only. Consensus across cases was that children should be taught to read in pre-kindergarten at age four and that their child would pursue a college degree.

No pattern was found as to families' views on the most important reading support a school could provide or suggestions for improving reading instruction. In general, all families placed more value on book knowledge than knowledge gained through experience.

Creole - Because as a parent, I have to help my child. It is not only the school who has a responsibility…It's not only the teacher's job to educate children. I would like parents to know that. – Haitian American Mother

At school there are a lot of children and they can't spend time one on one. The one on one is much better. – Jamaican American Father

It's part of the Cuban culture…That we dedicate time to reading with our kids. Because often we don't have that much time but we do it anyway. – Cuban American Mother

Structure of reading activities. The first grade child tended to read to the parents much more often than the parents read to the child. Parents were observed reading a book in its entirety to the child in only two of the Cuban American cases overall. All Haitian American siblings engaged in choral reading with their younger sibling, whereas, the first grader read to siblings in the Jamaican American families.

Other patterns were identified in reading activities observed as follows. Cuban American and Jamaican American families were much more involved with helping the child with homework activities while Haitian American families concentrated on reading storybooks. Some Jamaican American and Cuban American families acknowledged playing educational computer games with the child while none of the Haitian American families did. Only two cases (one Cuban American and one Haitian American) were observed reading a book in a language other than English. The Jamaican American group was the only one observed that did not have the tendency to point to the words as the child read. Turn taking while reading was frequently observed with the Haitian American group, sometimes observed with the Jamaican American group, and almost never observed with the Cuban American group. Haitian American, Jamaican American and Cuban American families reported an average of four, five, and seven days per week spent on reading activities with the child respectively.

I read him part of the book and he has to continue. We take turns. My teacher taught me to partner read. – Haitian American Sister
I do partner reading too. – Haitian American Brother
I come from work and she want to read a book…I will sit in the den and she will read to me…If she make a mistake, or stuff, then I correct her. – Jamaican American Father

Mother and son worked on his homework assignment for the day. It consisted of a list of words and a fill-in-the-blank exercise…The mother directs her son to read the word list and clarify the meaning of the words before attempting to do the fill-in activity. They read the cloze sentence then the mother goes through the choices with him…After filling in all the blanks, the mother asks the child to read all the sentences. – Cuban American case field notes, homework with mother and child

Reading materials. Families said they preferred books with cartoon characters and all had a collection of children's books at home. Among the Haitian American families, older siblings tended to borrow books from the library while the other groups were inclined to purchase them.

I get the books from the library and my mother orders books. I go to the library and get books to read with [child]. – Haitian American Brother

Usually what she goes for is cartoons, or Disney characters, or Dr. Seuss… Because it's fun…They need to be motivated to really get into it. I like all his books. – Cuban American Mother

Instructional style. Cuban American families said they requested detailed information about the teacher's reading instructional methods in order to complement the teachers' approach at home. Haitian American families reported no knowledge of the teacher's methods. Regardless, all expressed a positive perception of the reading instruction at school. Based on interview and observation data, Haitian American and Jamaican American cases had more of a preference for phonics-based instruction, matching their teacher's said style. Cuban American families were mixed as to their preferences.

Sound it out. P, p, p *Makes the 'p' sound*. Pi, pi. Say it with me, ppp-ic-nic. – Haitian American Brother

That phonetic foundation to me helps a lot…If you have the phonics there it's a little easier to me. – Jamaican American Mother

They are working on identification of the words…Because if she understands the word but she doesn't know how to identify it, she can do one but not vice versa. She can identify them but she doesn't know what the meaning of it is really, then she's lost too. So it has to be both. – Cuban American Mother

In terms of reading comprehension, two cases each from the Jamaican American and Cuban American groups reread sentences that the child had problems decoding in order to preserve meaning. Haitian American families clearly distinguished themselves as a group when it came to using visual cues, like the pictures in storybooks, to aid the child's comprehension of text. They were observed asking closed ended questions that required the child to point to the storybook pictures in response. Half the Cuban American families drew attention to visuals and none from the Jamaican American group used this strategy for comprehension. All cases in both the Jamaican American and Cuban American groups claimed they ask the child to retell the story. However, this was observed in only one case from each of the two groups. No Haitian American, one Jamaican American, and two Cuban American cases were observed entering into discussion about the text.

After reading a few pages the older brother asks, 'Where is the circle? Where is the triangle? Which one is the square?' The child points to the figures. – Haitian America case field notes

I just come home, make sure he does his homework, help him when he don't know…Now that I'm working overtime, we just come and do the homework and go. – Jamaican American Mother

She (mother) asked questions about the book at least every two pages. They were 'what' and 'where' questions that sometimes required that the child point to the pictures…'what is she looking for?' – Cuban American case field notes

When it came to helping the child identify words, sounding out words was a popular strategy across cases. Families also frequently supplied the child with a word he or she was struggling to read. Among the Jamaican American and Cuban American groups, family members pointed out to the child that they had misread a word and allowed them a few seconds to self-correct. Haitian American and Jamaican American cases tended to draw attention to pictures or use gestures.

No. What is 'O-N-G'? *Sounds it out.* Lllooonng. – Haitian American case field notes [Sister]

You could have looked at the picture to see what's going on down there too, you know. What's this coming down? *Points to picture in book.* Shooow-er. – Jamaican American Mother

She [mother] says, 'Look at that one good.' The child laughs and says 'wrong' having discovered her mistake. – Cuban American case field notes

Table 2
Common Themes Between Groups

Themes
Ethno-cultural identification
▪ **Strong identification with their respective cultural heritage**
Family characteristics
▪ **First generation immigrants**
Positive perception of school
▪ **Positive perception of school and teacher**
Beliefs about reading
▪ **Considered themselves at least partly responsible for child's early reading acquisition**
▪ Reported that child should learn to read in Pre-K at about age 4
▪ Expressed belief that children gain more important knowledge from books than from experience
▪ Considered child to be college bound
Structure of reading activity
▪ Child read to parents versus parent reading to child
Instructional style
▪ Did not ask open ended questions or discuss text
▪ Used sounding out and providing the word as word identification strategies
Reading materials
▪ **Had a collection of storybooks at home**
▪ **Read schoolbooks together**
▪ Preferred books with cartoon characters
Discipline practices
▪ **Emphasized respect and obedience of elders**
▪ Punished misbehavior by disallowing the child to do something desired
▪ Preferred school contact them about behavior problems
Reading-related behaviors
▪ Subtle verbal encouragers used to motivate
▪ Read at dining room/kitchen table

Note. Themes in bold were consistent across all eleven cases.

Child Rearing and Socialization Practices that Influence Early Reading Acquisition

The trend across cases was to punish a child's misbehavior by taking away a privilege, like watching television. Spanking was seen as a viable option for two Haitian American and two Jamaican American cases as a last resort, after multiple talks or for repeat offenses. Families preferred that the schoolteacher contact them about any behavior problems their child exhibits in class. Therefore, communication between the school and the home is highlighted yet again.

> *Creole* - I know that when you talk too much sometimes the child doesn't listen to you…You have to spank. – Haitian American Mother

> They have every game in their room… So, when you want them to, when they misbehaving you take it from them. It's worse than whooping them. – Jamaican American Mother

Spanish - Day to day in class she [teacher] should handle things but I want to know about it too. If we're not working together, it's to the detriment of the child. If she calls attention to something at school and she doesn't tell me, he'll do it again. I want to follow up. I talk to him. – Cuban American Mother

Reading-related behaviors. For the Haitian American and Cuban American groups it was found that other children, like a sibling, cousin, or neighbor, looked on while the child was engaged in a joint reading task. Among Haitian American cases, much affection was observed during the joint reading sessions.

The Jamaican American families emphasized polite and respectful behavior during joint reading tasks. The child took the lead in selecting books to read with others and parents reported that the child typically initiates reading activities as well. Decision-making was mixed among the other groups.

Across cases, family members used subtle verbal encouragers or nodded their heads in approval while reading with the child. Siblings not yet in their teens tended to refrain from offering the child any praise.

The children all gathered together and the youngest brother even brought one of his books along. – Haitian American case photo

Mother directed at [brother]. [Child] trying to read so, be quiet now. – Jamaican American case field notes

Child sat at the kitchen table. His mother stood leaning over him slightly. A boy in the child's class, their neighbor, and the child's sister sat near them and looked on. – Cuban American case field notes

Perceived cultural differences. Notably, the Jamaican American group expressed the belief that their faith prompted children to be more disciplined. They also mentioned that they like to closely supervise their children's activities. Haitian American and Jamaican American families agreed that children are socialized to be more polite in their respective cultures than in American culture. They also stated that they are less harsh in their discipline practices than people of their native countries.

Like in Haiti when you get a get home from school and you go home, you have to kiss everybody. Here they just say hello and pass by. No. They don't raise us like that. – Haitian American Mother

In the islands they love to, they tend to beat you even in school because we don't have this law like here…My grandfather… He beat me until my mom come home from work…I used to get some whooping. I think this is abuse. – Jamaican American Mother

They're always with me. And people would say to me, 'Don't you want a break?' No, I don't want a break. *Laughing.* If I want a break, I'm gonna send them to their room. That's my culture. I kind of need to see my kids and know what they're doing and where they are. – Jamaican American Mother

Table 3
Discrepant Themes between Groups

Themes
Family characteristics
▪ Differences in education level, occupation status of parents, and average number of children
Positive perception of school
▪ Haitian American and Jamaican American families cited home-school communication as a major factor contributing to this perception
Involvement with school
▪ Cuban American families were most highly involved, associated with time as a factor ▪ Haitian American families reported no knowledge of reading instruction at school ▪ Haitian American families reported asking teacher foremost about child's behavior ▪ Haitian American families reported that they do not always understand school assignments
Beliefs about reading
▪ Siblings took much responsibility in Haitian American families ▪ Cuban American families considered school and family to be jointly responsible for child's early reading acquisition
Structure of reading activity
▪ Siblings did not read with child in Cuban American families; Haitian American siblings read to child; Jamaican American children read to siblings ▪ Reported average days per week that family reads with child ranged from 4 (Haitian American) to 7 (Cuban American) ▪ Haitian American siblings engaged in choral reading
Instructional style
▪ Cuban American families reported requesting information from teachers to match instruction ▪ Cuban American group was mixed as to instruction style while the other two preferred phonics and matched with teacher's style ▪ Haitian American and Jamaican American families used visual cues to aid comprehension ▪ Jamaican American and Cuban American groups pointed out reading errors and allowed child to self-correct ▪ Jamaican American and Cuban American families reported that they ask child to retell stories read ▪ Jamaican American parents engaged in some turn taking during joint reading ▪ Cuban American families asked closed ended questions every couple of pages
Reading materials
▪ Haitian American families tended not to purchase storybooks but borrowed books from library ▪ Jamaican American families reported that child reads Bible related materials ▪ Siblings in Jamaican American families used technology
Reading-related behaviors
▪ Other children did not look on during reading tasks in Jamaican American families
Perceived cultural differences
▪ Jamaican American families said Bible teachings contribute to child's disciplined behavior ▪ Haitian American and Jamaican American families agreed mainstream American children are less polite and respectful than children of their cultures ▪ Haitian American and Jamaican American families perceived mainstream Americans to be less harsh in their discipline practices than they

Discussion

Informing the Cultural Discontinuity Theories

This study concurs with others that found that minority families prioritize their children's education (Ballenger, 1999; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Harry, Allan, & McLaughlin, 1996; Perry, Kay, & Brown, 2008). This is evidenced by time spent reading with their first grade child, their communication with teachers, and availability of reading materials.

In respect to the general match in instructional styles, findings are inconsistent with claims by cultural discontinuity theorists who hold that schools exclude minority families because they cater to the majority culture (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Trueba, 1987). Although schools' practices predominantly corresponded with participants' practices, the assumption in this study was that schools reflect the majority culture (Friere, 1973; Ladson-Billings, 1993; Piestrup, 1973; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). Conversely, the general match in instructional styles may be considered coherent with the theory if these schools have adapted their practices to better suit the communities they serve. However, teachers' intentions cannot be determined by the findings of this study. It is unclear whether teachers' choice of instructional styles was due to an intentional attempt to adapt to the culture of students or merely a school-wide or teacher-specific programmatic choice.

Mismatch between home and school language is hypothesized to lead to educational failure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Yıldırım, 2013). All families gave the impression that they were keenly aware that their children must speak Standard English to succeed and taught their children to be bi-cultural. For example, Jamaican American parents distinguished between speaking Patois at home and speaking Standard English with others. They socialized their children to know when and where to speak each dialect, even correcting their speech in front of the researchers.

In conclusion, results show that discontinuity does not function as an "all or nothing". There are both matches and mismatches. However, the degree to which the commonalities between home and school culture influence positive academic achievement versus the degree to which discrepancies influence underachievement remains to be investigated.

Suggestions for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The systematic analyses conducted suggest specific accommodations for family literacy programs in order to better meet the needs of these families. They also provide insights as to diversity issues that should be explored in teacher education programs.

Home and school instructional style was commensurate in the Haitian American and Jamaican American groups who also expressed highly positive perceptions of their child's school. Therefore, assessing families' general preferences and beliefs concerning reading instruction then incorporating these preferences with instructional methods at school is recommended as a practice that would foster good home-school connections (Yıldırım, 2013).

However, matching families' interaction styles is a necessary but insufficient condition for validating their perceptions and promoting student success. Sometimes changing school practices to match home practices may be warranted. Nevertheless, if such a match would put children at a significant disadvantage relative to the mainstream culture, then this will only perpetuate differences. As an alternative, some initial match may act as a bridge between perspectives (Markose, Symes, & Hellstén, 2011; Perry, Kay, & Brown, 2008). This notion coincides with Lisa Delpit's (1990) concept of explicitly instructing students about "the culture of power", Luis Moll's view about building on communities' strengths by using their "funds of knowledge" as resources in the classroom (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), and Gloria Ladson-Billing's (1994) concept of pedagogy that uses "cultural referents".

Families considered parents partly or wholly responsible for their child's early reading acquisition. Therefore, these families read with their first grade child regularly and maintained literacy rich environments, contrary to studies that have found that low-income minority families have none or few books in the home and engage in far less shared reading (Heath, 1984) but consistent with more recent studies (Perry, Kay, & Brown, 2008; Saracho, 2007). Even with their limited schooling, Haitian American mothers prioritized education for their child and spent an average of four days a week on joint reading activities. Jamaican American mothers, despite their hectic work schedules, devoted time to joint reading. This information may serve to impact teacher expectations of these families. Expectations of teachers are

important because they may affect minority access to quality education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Moll & Gonzales, 1994). In addition, families had high expectations for their children both in terms of behavior and educational attainment. Of course, number and use of resources are not the same construct (Grieshaber, Shield, Luke, & Macdonald, 2012). Nevertheless, they may be highly motivated to participate in family literacy programs (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

An interesting finding was that parents typically did not read to their children. Rather, they had their children read to them. It has been documented that children who are read to at home consistently are more likely to have higher reading scores in the future in reading comprehension (Stephenson, Parrila, Georgiou, & Kirby, 2008) and vocabulary (Hood, Conlon, & Andrews, 2008). Perhaps future studies should detail the efficacy of children reading to parents consistently, as was found to be more frequent with these cases.

Scaffolding of reading support differed among groups. Haitian American cases were more passive, less demanding of the child while reading. They used pictures and gestures to foster reading comprehension and word recognition, yet most frequently provided the child with words he or she had trouble decoding. Cuban American and Jamaican American families placed a bit more responsibility on the child for recognizing words, pointing out reading errors, and allowing for the child to decode on his or her own. Therefore, parent education programs with these families may consider teaching how to scaffold in manner that provides appropriate support, without frustrating the child's efforts.

All cases had little focus on comprehension strategies; directing their energy towards correcting the child's decoding errors. As an exception, the Haitian American group used visuals for the purpose of aiding or monitoring comprehension. Therefore, educators may consider informing parents about monitoring comprehension and modeling open ended questioning to develop students' critical thinking skills.

Most of the Cuban American and Jamaican American families had access to computers in their homes and, according to parents these technological items served an important purpose. As one Jamaican American mother remarked, her children were being lured outside the home by many tempting vices. She thought it her tactic to keep them in the safety of their home by making educational games available to them via technology. Therefore, these families were familiar and are likely to use technology to support their child's reading acquisition whereas the Haitian American families were not.

This study highlights the role of siblings in home literacy interactions, a finding that has been scarcely mentioned and insufficiently examined in the literature (Saracho, 2007). Notably, siblings rarely offered verbal praise during joint reading and tended to ignore misbehavior. Siblings close in age with the first grade child may have felt as if they had little authority to confront misbehavior or less reading expertise to offer praise compared to older family members. Family literacy programs should include siblings and with a sensitivity towards family dynamics like hierarchical relationships.

It is the researcher's contention that the home visits employed through the methodology of this study had a great impact on the families. Through informal conversations, family members stated that they were impressed by the importance and respect shown for their opinions and often asked how they could better help their child with reading. School programs that allow for teachers or other outreach professionals to make this personal contact with families are recommended as a strategy for improving family involvement.

Limitations

This investigation was limited, particularly in its generalizability, since it included few families. More in-depth study of the topic, with lengthier time in the field is needed to corroborate the findings and expand upon them. In addition, family members sometimes made claims about what they do that were not observed. It is, therefore, possible that they were observed performing activities in a manner that was atypical for them, in an attempt to impress the researcher. Finally, this study highlighted the diversity among three ethno-cultural groups in beliefs and practices concerning early reading. However, it is also important to remember that there are differences within as well as across cultural groups.

Conclusion

This investigation sought to describe the home literacy practices and reading-related beliefs of low-income Haitian American, Jamaican American, and Cuban American families. Based on interviews, observations, and photographic analyses, emergent themes shed light on specific perceptions and interactions that were common within these groups while cross-cultural comparisons were also conducted. This study

provided a context for the social interactions that surrounded the joint reading experience and an understanding of the cultural capital possessed by these diverse groups.

The function of education in society is, perhaps ideally, that of a great equalizer providing the same opportunities for all. Thus, it is often mistaken for a neutral vision, institution, and set of practices. Education, when viewed perhaps more realistically, is a great reflection pool where social inequalities are mirrored (Friere, 1973). Cochran-Smith (1999) stated that "Schools are not neutral grounds but contested sites where power struggles are played out. The structural inequalities embedded in the social, organizational, and financial arrangements of schools and schooling help to perpetuate dominance for dominant groups and oppression for oppressed groups" (p. 117). Children of white, middle-class families are thought to transition into the educational setting with relative ease because there exists a semblance between literacy styles at school and home (Hammer, 2001). Movement towards social justice and equity requires an understanding of the cultural capital possessed by diverse groups (McNeal, 1999). The eleven families represented in this study revealed their belief that maintaining a strong school-home connection would increase their children's academic achievement. Further, their practices give us a glimpse as to how to bridge this home-school connection to support their children's early literacy skills.

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