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"We Keep the Education Goin' at Home All the Time": Family Literacy in Low-Income African American Families of Preschoolers

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have examined the impact of family on child literacy among low-income African American families and preschoolers considered to be at risk for not being ready for kindergarten. Quantitative studies identify family-parental variables associated with poorer literacy outcomes, whereas qualitative studies detail family practices that promote child literacy development. Addressing the limitations of social address variables in quantitative research, and the paucity of research on preschoolers in qualitative research, this study examines the home-based literacy practices of 20 low-income, African American families with preschoolers in Head Start transitioning to kindergarten. Using qualitative interviews informed by a resilience framework, we found that home-based literacy activities were carried out within teams of diverse kin who worked together to promote children's school readiness. Family literacy teams expanded the literacy resources available to preschoolers, providing a rich literacy environment for children's development. These findings contribute to our substantive understanding of literacy practices within low-income African American families, resilience theory, and culturally relevant home-school collaborations.

Researchers studying the role of the family in child literacy have long recognized that young children's literacy development begins before formal school entry and takes place in the home (Wasik & Hermann, 2004; Wasik & Van Horn, 2012). One aspect of research on family literacy examines how families use oral and written communication in their daily lives to promote children's literacy (Lonigan & Wasik, 2004; Purcell-Gates, 2000). Family activities support emergent literacy, or early skills developed in oral language and code-related skills, before the development of formal reading (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 2004). The emergent literacy skills children bring to kindergarten predict their future reading and writing success and later academic achievement (Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012). In particular, researchers have focused on low-income African American families with preschoolers. These children have been identified as being at risk for not being prepared for kindergarten because they lack literacy skills deemed relevant for academic success (Cristofaro & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011; Scott, Brown, Jean-Baptiste, & Barbarin, 2012).

Our understanding of the role of family in promoting child literacy derives from quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative studies focus on the relationship between family and parental variables and child outcomes, identifying variables associated with poor literacy outcomes. Qualitative research concentrates on the dynamics of daily family life that positively influence development of child literacy within the home context.

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Quantitative studies

Key family and parental demographic variables, including social class (socioeconomic status [SES], income), race, household structure (one-parent, two-parent, married, unmarried), education, and family size have been associated with child-literacy outcomes. Being African American (Hammer, Farkas, & Maczuga, 2010; Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011; Yarosz & Barnett, 2001); having a lower income or SES (Bracken & Fischel, 2008; Coley, 2002; Hart & Risley, 1995); completing only high school or less (C. E. Baker, Cameron, Rimm-Kaufman, & Grissmer, 2012; Bracken & Fischel, 2008; Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, & Cabrera, 2012; Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011); parenting as an unmarried single parent (Leavell et al., 2012; Qi, Kaiser, Milan, & Hancock, 2006); and having multiple children (Yarosz & Barnett, 2001) have all been associated with poor child-literacy outcomes.

Highlighting the role of family social class and maternal education, Hart and Risley (1995) assessed children's vocabularies. They reported that children from lower SES families, relative to children from higher SES families, had smaller vocabularies: The vocabulary count for preschool-aged children in professional families was 1,100 words, working-class families 750, and welfare-recipient families 500. Reflecting parenting practices, mothers with lower levels of education spoke less to their children and used fewer different words, compared to more educated peers who talked more and used a greater variety of words. Qi and colleagues (2006) similarly assessed the language performance of low-income African American and White preschoolers. The researchers reported that although African American children's scores were slightly lower than their White peers, there was no significant difference in the mean scores. The researchers found a significant relationship between language performance and demographic variables. Children of mothers with only a high school education had lower scores than peers whose mothers had some college. Children of single mothers had lower scores than children of married mothers. Further, children in families with at least three children had lower scores than peers in families with one or two children. However, researchers reported small effect sizes, suggesting that differences in language performance were due to other factors.

Education, race, and household composition variables were examined in the nationally representative Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey study (Hammer et al., 2010). Focusing on language development and emergent literacy, researchers found that, relative to children of mothers with fewer years of formal education, children of mothers with more years of formal education had larger vocabularies and better letter-word identification skills. White children scored higher on standardized assessments than African American children. Further, African American children of mothers at all educational levels had lower reading scores than White children. Living in a single-parent household was not found to affect child outcomes. The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project examined the quality of mothers' engagement in child literacy activities and documented the significance of maternal race, education, and income (Rodriquez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011). Being African American, having less than 12 years of education, and having an income below the poverty line were related to lower-quality learning environments over time and poorer vocabulary and early literacy outcomes. Also using data from the Early Head Start Research Evaluation Project, Leavell and colleagues (2012) examined African American, Latino, and White fathers' engagement in literacy activities. Education and marital status were significant. The researchers reported that fathers who completed high school and who were married, relative to unmarried fathers who had not completed high school, participated more in child-literacy activities. With respect to race, African American fathers of boys, relative to White and Latino peers, had the highest levels of engaging in caregiving, visiting, and play.

Other studies focused on reading. Yarosz and Barnett (2001) identified family characteristics predicting family reading activities for young children. At every educational level, African American families read less frequently than White families. In African American families, increases in the number of children were related to decreases in parental reading time. Larger increases were found as the number of children increased from zero to two, but smaller decreases were found as the number of children increased to three or more. Family income was not significant. Using data from the Early

Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort, researchers found children from higher SES backgrounds were more proficient in reading than lower SES peers. Asian and White children were more proficient in reading than African American children. However, Racial and ethnic differences disappeared when controlling for SES. Similar findings were reported for the frequency of parents reading to children: Racial and ethnic differences disappeared when controlling for SES (Coley, 2002). Bracken and Fischel (2008) cited the importance of education in a Head Start sample. Higher educational levels were associated with greater parental interest in reading, greater child interest in reading, and higher scores on language assessments. Although researchers document the importance of parenting style and home learning stimulation, they also report that for African American boys, lower levels of maternal education, lower family incomes, and more siblings were associated with lower reading scores in kindergarten (C. E. Baker et al., 2012).

Qualitative studies

Qualitative research provides insights on home-based family activities that promote low-income African American children's literacy development. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) found multiple print items in families' homes, including children's books. Children listened to stories from family members, in turn, reciting what was read. Families also provided pens, markers, and paper to support children's writing development. Purcell-Gates (1996) examined children' oral and written language development through participation in home activities. She observed adults reading Bible stories to children and helping them to print letters. Children watched adults engaging with print materials as part of entertainment and school-related and church activities.

Other studies described in-home literacy activities. In an interview study that included African American mothers of preschoolers, researchers found that children were learning orientation to print, phonological awareness, and narrative competence through storybook reading, singing, and meal time conversations (L. Baker, Sonnenschein, Serpell, Fernandez-Fein, & Scher, 1994). Case study research of an African American single mother detailed activities that promoted literacy development: "I help them count. … I live on the fourth floor. So we would count going up the stairs" (Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers-Piérola, 1995, p. 458). Interviews and observations revealed that reading was an important activity among African American Head Start mothers. Mothers used shared reading as bonding time with their preschoolers and utilized diverse reading styles (Hammer, Nimmo, Cohen, Draheim, & Johnson, 2005).

Qualitative research documented maternal literacy practices, as well as the role of family members. Using interviews and home observations of low-income African American mothers of children in Head Start, Rosier (2000) found mothers reading to their young children and garnering assistance from children's uncles and grandmothers. Similarly, Jarrett and Jefferson's (2003) ethnographic research with single African American mothers of Head Start children reported that mothers were teaching children their alphabets, numbers, and colors, and were engaged in shared book reading. Grandmothers, aunts, fathers, nieces, and siblings also provided assistance with these literacy tasks.

Both quantitative and qualitative research on family and child literacy among low-income African American families of preschoolers have key strengths. Quantitative studies document associations between family and parental variables and child-literacy outcomes. They specifically identify variables that are often associated with poor literacy outcomes (Hammer et al., 2010; Hart & Risley, 1995; Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011). Some studies use large-scale, representative samples that enhance the generalizability of the findings (C. E. Baker et al., 2012; Coley, 2002; Hammer et al., 2010). Many studies also use well-established assessment measures that allow for cross-study comparability (Bracken & Fischel, 2008; Hammer et al., 2010; Qi et al., 2006; Rodriguez & LeMonda, 2011). Qualitative studies describe the home context of child-literacy development. Using emic-oriented methods that emphasize participants' accounts, researchers detail family practices that promote children's emergent literacy skills (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Qualitative studies also identify the role of extended kin in children's literacy development, highlighting subcultural family patterns (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003; Rosier, 2000).

However, existing quantitative and qualitative research is also limited. Quantitative studies use social address variables that restrict the understanding of family literacy processes (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2008). It is likely that contradictory findings between some quantitative studies reflect unmeasured family processes (Hindman, Skibbe, Miller, & Zimmerman, 2010). Scholars have critiqued the deterministic use of race and social-class variables that equate the educational experiences of low-income African American families and children with deficit, disadvantage, and failure, thereby missing positive family contributions (Delpit, 2006; Lee, 1992). Further, definitions of family derive from White middle-class models that do not reflect diverse social-class and racial and ethnic group families (Compton-Lilly, 2009; Gadsden, 1998, 2004), and studies use standardized assessments that often disadvantage low-income and racial and ethnic group populations (Hammer et al., 2010). With respect to qualitative studies, there is a paucity of research on preschool-age children (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004). Many qualitative studies that focus on low-income African American families are decades old and may not address current social and economic contexts that affect home literacy activities and child literacy development (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Although studies have identified family members' involvement in children's literacy development, researchers know relatively little about the full literacy contributions of various extended kin, fathers, and siblings (Gadsden, 2003; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003).

To address the use of social address variables that miss family literacy processes, and the lack of recent qualitative research that considers the role of multiple family members in children's literacy development, we draw from our qualitative interview study of school readiness among 20 low-income African American mothers with children transitioning to kindergarten. Our study focused on low-income African American children who were at risk for not being prepared for kindergarten. This study was informed by a resilience perspective that considers active family coping strategies and insider perspectives (Lee, 2010; Walsh, 2002). We sought to better understand mothers' views about parenting practices that promoted children's transitions. Multiple topics were explored in the interviews, including questions about home-based literacy practices. In this article, we address the following questions: (a) Who are the family members involved in home-based literacy activities used to promote children's literacy development? (b) In what home-based activities do low-income African American families participate to promote the literacy development of preschoolers? (c) How do family members work together to promote children's literacy development? We argue that mothers engaged in multiple literacy-enhancing activities with their children. Mothers sought help from various family members and diverse literacy tasks were allocated among this group. By working together with family members, mothers expanded child-literacy resources, thereby creating an enriched context for children's literacy growth.

Theoretical framework

A family-resiliency framework (Walsh, 2002) guided the research project. Grounded in a systems perspective, a family-resiliency framework considers how the multigenerational family works together to survive and thrive despite adversity, including impoverishment. This particular view of resilience emphasizes the family unit and associated relationships within the unit. Family strengths, as opposed to deficits, are highlighted, with particular attention to family agency in using existing resources to promote collective well-being. The family-resilience framework recognizes that positive functioning can be achieved within diverse family arrangements (Walsh, 1996, see also McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998). As part of coping and thriving, families draw on subcultural traditions (Hollingsworth, 2013; McCubbin et al., 1998). Research highlights the strengths of African American families and the subcultural importance of extended kin (R. B. Hill, 2003; Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010). Mothers' reliance on kin provides social and economic support in response to poverty (Dickerson, 1995, Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). Researchers have also documented how various kin participate in parenting children (Stack, 1975; Zollar, 1985), including resident and nonresident fathers (Jarrett, Roy, & Burton, 2002). Given its focus on active coping, a family-resilience framework highlights how low-income African American mothers marshal family resources to promote children's literacy development.

Research design

In this section, we discuss the components of our qualitative research design. Key components include the methodological approach, the study setting, data collection procedures, data analysis strategies, and data quality. Our design highlights the value of participants' firsthand accounts.

Methodological approach

Our qualitative interviews were informed by an interpretive approach that explores the meaning-making processes and daily lived experiences of participants (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Cresswell, 2007). This approach privileges the life knowledge of groups that are often marginalized (Krumer-Nevo, 2005). Specifically, we used an interpretive approach that focused on mothers' firsthand accounts of home-based family-literacy activities.

School setting

Mothers were recruited from the Mariette Myers[1] Head Start Program in a Chicago inner-city community, Lincoln Heights.[2] Myers offers multiple services to families, including center- and home-based Head Start and Early Head Start for children from birth to age 6 and their caregivers. The center serves families from the impoverished Lincoln Heights community and surrounding areas. We recruited from Head Start because this federally funded program targets economically and socially disadvantaged families with preschoolers who are at risk for not being ready for kindergarten, with the goal of enhancing children's literacy development (Office of Head Start, 2015).

Sample and recruitment

An African American female research assistant recruited 20 mothers by introducing the study at parent meetings at the preschool. The University's Institutional Review Board approved all procedures. We used purposive sampling within the Head Start site (Patton, 1990). Mothers who met the following criteria were invited to participate: (a) identified as African American; (b) were at least 18 years old; (c) had a household income at or lower than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, and (d) had a child at the Myers Center who was transitioning to kindergarten. We specifically targeted mothers because they often assume major caregiving responsibility for young children (Barbarin et al., 2008). By sampling at a Head Start program, we were likely to find families that had multiple demographic risk factors associated with poor child-literacy outcomes, including race (African American), SES or income (low-income), and household composition (single-parent status).

With respect to their demographic characteristics, the ages of the 20 participants ranged from 24 to 52 (see Table 1). Five mothers were married and 15 were unmarried. Two mothers had a high school or GED degree, 11 had some college, five had an Associate's degree, one had a Bachelor's degree, and one had a Master's degree. The relatively large number of mothers reporting college attendance and Associate's degrees ($n = 16$) is likely due to the presence of a nearby community college. Five mothers lived in married-couple households, six cohabitated with partners, four lived in female-headed households with their children only, and five lived with other extended kin, including parents.

Data collection

Digitally recorded interviews were conducted between June 2012 and December 2012. The African American female research assistant who recruited mothers also conducted all interviews. We conducted one interview with each mother. Interviews ranged in length from 60 to 90 min. We used a

[1]Pseudonym for Head Start program.
[2]Pseudonym for neighborhood.

Table 1. Maternal demographics ($N = 20$).

Participant (Target Child)	Age	Education	Marital Status
Aaliyah (Darryl)	25	SC	Single
Amira (Ahmad & Imani)	35	AD	Married
Anika (Ebony)	25	SC	Single
Ariel (Asia & Tierra)	34	SC	Single
Ashlie (Precious)	52	SC	Married
Brandy (DeAndre)	27	SC	Single
Courtny (Niara)	31	SC	Single
Crystal (Tyrone)	33	AD	Single
Dawn (Darius)	33	BA	Single
Destiny (Marquis)	25	SC	Married
Diamond (Shaneesha)	24	HS/GED	Single
Kalia (Ike)	31	AD	Single
Kim (Demetrius)	29	MS	Single
LaSenda (Marcus)	30	AD	Single
LaShawn (Jada)	28	SC	Married
Malliqua (Kennie)	43	SC	Single
Monique (Jamal)	36	HS/GED	Married
Nia (Jalen)	38	SC	Single
Tenisha (Malik)	24	SC	Single
Teyana (Raven)	28	AD	Single

Note. Pseudonyms are used for all participants. AD = Associate degree. BA = Bachelor's/4 years. SC = some college. HS = high school/GED, general educational development. MS = Master's degree.

semistructured interview protocol with open-ended questions (Patton, 1990). The interview protocol included questions about mothers' beliefs and practices related to school readiness. We drew on the strengths of semistructured, open-ended qualitative interviews. The open-ended nature of the questions was consistent with our interpretive approach, which emphasizes participants' perspectives. When used with multiple families, semistructured interviews highlight the maximum range of variability with respect to home-based literacy practices and make it easier to discern patterns (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013).

Focusing on home-based literacy practices, we asked three specific questions: (a) What are some of the things that you are doing to help your child get ready for kindergarten? (b) Who are some of the people helping you to get your child ready for kindergarten? (c) What are they doing to help you? To build rapport, the interviewer spent time at the site prior to the interviews: She chatted with parents in informal parent gatherings and attended formal parent meetings and workshops. The interviews were scheduled at participants' convenience and conducted in private at the preschool or at participants' homes. The interviewer was familiar with the protocol and able to present the questions in a conversational tone that indicated active listening. Her openness to all viewpoints encouraged mothers to speak with candor. The interviewer was familiar with the research literatures informing the protocol; thus, she knew when to follow up on important topics. Although posing the same questions to each participant, the interviewer sought detailed accounts through probing that allowed mothers to talk about the particularities of their children and families. As an experienced interviewer, she was able to keep effusive talkers on track, and to encourage shy participants. As a token of appreciation for their time, mothers received a $20.00 gift card.

Data analysis

We used an iterative approach to analysis that entailed the concurrent processes of coding, developing data displays, metaphorical analogizing, and memoing. The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and served as the data for coding. In preparation for the first coding and to become familiar with the data, the principal investigator (PI) and two research assistants individually immersed themselves in the data through active reading of several transcripts and then collectively discussed their initial insights. The research team began coding with a priori codes (e.g., literacy practices, child literacy skills) that derived from the research questions and substantive and theoretical literatures. The

data management program NVivo helped to organize the interview data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Tesch, 2013). The PI and two research assistants coded three detailed transcripts that they believed contained a large number of codes. The rest of the interviews were coded by the two research assistants, who each coded half of the remaining transcripts. As specific areas of interest emerged, such as home-based literacy activities, the PI and one research assistant returned to relevant sections of the transcripts and recoded those data (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005; Mayan, 2009).

We used data displays, or visual representations of the data, to aid in analysis. Organized in the form of tables and matrices, data displays help to summarize data, identify patterns, and develop interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Looking across cases (families), we developed matrix data displays with each participant's responses to our research questions. For example, these data displays allowed us to systematically identify family members engaged in home literacy practices and their literacy contributions. By using data displays, we were better able to discern similarities and differences in how literacy tasks were allocated across families, as well as similarities and differences related to the particular literacy skills that families focused on.

To further develop our interpretations, we used metaphorical analogies. A metaphor is a word or phrase that compares two things and suggests similarity. Using this linguistic device for inferring meaning, metaphors help the researcher move from simple description to higher analytical levels (Jarrett, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). In particular, metaphors helped us develop emergent codes. During analysis, we sought analogies that captured the idea that multiple family members were working together to promote children's literacy development. This search led us to the initial code, literacy team, which we further developed into a conceptual category. This metaphor also helped us to consider how teamwork entails the dispersal of labor or responsibilities, which led to the code, the division of literacy labor.

Once we created emergent codes, such as literacy teams and division of literacy labor, we moved them from descriptive codes to more analytic conceptual categories by developing thematic statements. For example, we explored the following two themes: (a) Low-income African American families are comprised of multiple members working together to facilitate their children's literacy development, and (b) in their organization as literacy teams, low-income African American family members engage in a division of literacy labor that expands the resources that are available to young children. We returned to the coded data and data displays to see if the metaphorically influenced themes were fully reflected in all of the data. These recursive activities led to deeper understandings of family literacy processes, including the membership of literacy teams, the role responsibilities assumed by kin members, how literacy tasks were assigned, and the literacy skills that families targeted.

Throughout the analysis process, we made use of memos, or written elaborations of the data to aid in interpretation (Charmaz, 2003). We used memos to develop descriptive codes into more abstract concepts and themes, summarize insights, and develop preliminary interpretations. For example, we wrote memos to flesh out the initial codes of literacy teams and division of literacy labor and, by defining them and identifying their characteristics, moved them to more conceptual categories. At the thematic level, we wrote memos describing the membership of various literacy teams and the assumption of role responsibilities among family members, which led us to develop more general ideas about family-literacy processes. Other memos described the literacy contributions of various family members, child-literacy skills that family members targeted, and the teaching materials used. We further combined various memos to sketch out emerging interpretations of the data.

Managing data quality

Multiple strategies were used to enhance data quality. A culturally relevant protocol based on the PI's long-term experience working with low-income African American families in inner-city communities, including Lincoln Heights, was used (Jarrett et al., 2010; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003; Jarrett, Sensoy Bahar, & Taylor, 2011). The semistructured interview protocol ensured that all participants were asked the same questions; the open-ended questions allowed participants to respond to questions in ways that reflected their unique family circumstances (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). The comparability of

questions in the semistructured interview guide also made it possible to use systematic analysis strategies, such as data displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). Further, the protocol followed the guidelines of good question development: The questions were relevant, clear, and nonleading (Patton, 1990).

A culturally competent African American interviewer, who was matched on race and gender with participants, conducted all of the interviews. She had worked with low-income African American families for many years, including families in Lincoln Heights (Jarrett et al., 2011; Jarrett, Hamilton, & Coba-Rodriguez, 2015). As previously noted, the interviewer was trained to conduct high-quality interviews characterized by rich descriptive detail. At the interpersonal level, she brought to the research a deep respect and valuing of mothers, which created a safe space for mothers to share their views and experiences.

To ensure the quality of the analysis process, several steps were taken. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a member of the research team, including the interviewer, and a second research assistant rechecked each interview for accuracy. The interviewer also provided written field notes from each interview, providing additional observations and insights about the context of the interview and the participants. To enhance the reliability of the coding process, each transcript was coded by at least two coders. The research assistants who coded the data were formally trained in ethnographic field methods and strategies for analysis. Further, the research team addressed the quality of the coding process through an established process of coding by consensus (C. E. Hill et al., 2005; Olesen, Droes, Hatton, Chico, & Schatzman, 1994; Willging, Waitzkin, & Nicdao, 2008). Coding by consensus involves multiple coders and requires agreement on the meaning of codes, concepts, themes, and interpretations. For example, multiple team members independently coded transcripts and met to compare their work. Resolution of disagreements entailed a return to the transcripts for further review and discussion. Regular team meetings that included the PI, research assistants, and the interviewer were ongoing opportunities to review analyses and interpretations. Data quality was further enhanced through peer debriefing (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). We shared with colleagues emerging conceptual categories and themes and the data they derived from. Presentation of the early findings at national conferences also generated feedback from other scholars. This critical scrutiny helped to ensure that our analyses and resulting interpretations were valid representations of mothers' views and experiences.

Findings

In this section, we provide case examples to illustrate our three key findings. First, mothers were actively engaged in literacy-enhancing activities to promote literacy skills they believed important for kindergarten. Second, literacy activities were carried out within *literacy teams*, groups of interdependent family members (adults and minors) who had the shared goal of enhancing preschoolers' literacy development (Table 2). Mothers enlisted adult and minor-age family members as *literacy assistants* to help in their home-based activities. Third, literacy teams were engaged in the *division of literacy labor*. That is, literacy responsibilities or tasks were allocated among the various family members who were helping mothers. Our use of case examples is consistent with our resilience framework, which emphasizes interdependent and interacting members in a family system.

The dynamics of literacy teams: The contributions of adult family members

The majority of literacy teams ($n = 16$) included varying categories of adult kin who assisted mothers. The number of adults helping mothers ranged from one to four. In the allocation of literacy tasks, adult assistants varied in the amount and type of support they provided to mothers. Each mother took part in one interview. We report on mothers' narratives below.

Literacy teams with one adult literacy assistant. Eleven literacy teams were comprised of one helping adult, many of whom were partners or husbands. Destiny's team included her husband. Destiny focused on multiple activities, including reading: "I have Marquis on starter reading books. So we're

Table 2. Literacy teams among low-income African American mothers ($N = 20$).

Mother (Target Child)	Literacy Assistants
Aaliyah (Darryl)	Grandmother (Jenny)
Amira (Ahmad & Imani)	Husband (Amahl) + Siblings (Shaquille—17 yrs., Karl—16 yrs., Nandi—14 yrs.)
Anika (Ebony)	Partner (Daniel) + Aunt (Lorraine)
Ariel (Asia & Tierra)	Partner (Keywon)
Ashlie (Precious)	Husband (Melvin)
Brandy (DeAndre)	Sibling (J.J. —7 yrs.)
Courtny (Niara)	Partner (Geo) + Siblings (Patrina—15 yrs., Helena—13 yrs.) + Grandmother (Shelly)
Crystal (Tyrone)	Partner (Dave) + Siblings (Shyrece—18 yrs., Julius—6 yrs.) + Grandmother (Nariah)
Dawn (Darius)	Partner (Clayton) + Siblings (Noah—15 yrs., Lebron—14 yrs.)
Destiny (Marquis)	Husband (Jasen)
Diamond (Shaneesha)	Aunt (Tatiana)
Kalia (Ike)	Siblings (Kareem—13 yrs., Glen—11 yrs.)
Kim (Demetrius)	Partner (Javion) + Siblings (Joya—9 yrs.)
LaSenda (Marcus)	Partner (Joahkim) + Grandmother (Anita)
LaShawn (Jada)	Husband (Shiloh) + Sibling (Anrea—6 yrs.)
Malliqua (Kennie)	Adult Siblings (Damian—21 yrs., Jamaica—19 yrs.)
Monique (Jamal)	Husband (Stefon) + Sibling (Braelin—17 yrs.)
Nia (Jalen)	Partner (Armel) + Siblings (Michael—19 yrs., Taccarra—14 yrs.)
Tenisha (Malik)	Partner (Niles) + Grandparents (LaVicia, Chrys) + Aunt (Malaya)
Teyana (Raven)	Grandmother (Bonnie)

working on that with him to learn to read." Destiny used guided conversations: "We did a lot of projects at home. Like we made a volcano … and I let Marquis go online to look up a volcano … and tell me what it does." Further, she used TV as a teaching tool, noting how "Marquis had got a great idea [from] … Sesame Street." Marquis's dad engaged him in guided conversations, overlapping with one of Destiny's literacy areas: "Jasen's always bringing Marquis home postcards from where he has been and then he tells Marquis, … 'Can you find it on the map?'" (Interview, October 2012).

Ariel and her resident partner, Keywon, formed a literacy team. Ariel detailed her literacy activities: "Tierra likes to bring out the poster board. … She starts pointing her letters out. … Asia brings [the poster board] to me. … I ask her to spell her name. … We do the workbooks; we read; we do the flashcards." Ariel described reading: "After the end of the book, [I] ask them questions, 'Who wrote the book? Who did this?'" Keywon's contributions highlight areas of overlap and difference:

> Keywon will go over the poster board with them. … They write their names. … Keywon don't really do the flashcards. I do the flashcards most of the time. As far as the poster boards, the workbooks, Keywon basically does that with them. I do most of the reading. (Interview, July 2012)

Kim's account suggests how some teams allocated responsibilities. Kim proclaimed, "We keep the education goin' at home all the time." Kim described her literacy activities: "We had kindergarten one and two [books]. … I made Demetrius … a game where he can find like words and three stickers if he got it correct." Javion, her resident partner, assumed tasks based on his temperament: "Javion does the homework stuff. He is actually way more patient than I am. Javion does the same stuff, sit and read with Demetrius." Their roles were complementary: "I am more educational, he is more disciplinarian. So, we kind of tag team Demetrius because if we don't he will run both of us crazy" (Interview, September 2012).

The role of temperament in the division of literacy labor was also evident in LaShawn's team. LaShawn had help from her husband Shiloh. LaShawn described her tasks: "Jada does not know how to read. … I give her a word a week now. So she remembers a word … and try to spell it." LaShawn used a toy resource: "The [Leap Frog] reads the book to her. … They have games to help her spell and put letters together. It helps her with her reading and phonics." LaShawn used TV programs like *Dora the Explorer* [and] *Elmo*" because "I try to make it fun." Shiloh serenely approached reading: "Jada loves us to read to her all day. … Shiloh has a lot more patience." The couple worked together: "We'll write the words down on the flash card and we'll turn them over and try to get Jada to match it" (Interview, July 2012).

Monique's account further details how literacy tasks were divided up. Monique and her husband Stephon both focused on reading. Monique said, "I wanted Jamal to like start reading three sentences. … I'm ready for him to start reading like little short stories. So I read to him daily." She continued, "Stephon would do the reading portion of it." Temperament and ability informed the division of literacy labor. "I would get a little frustrated with Jamal trying to write with the left hand. … I told my husband, 'You're both left-handed; you deal with him on that'" (Interview, August 2012).

Ashlie relied on her husband. Gender informed their division of literacy labor. Ashlie assumed multiple literacy tasks. She read to Precious "in the afternoon" and "I read her a story at night." Further, "I do help her do her homework." Ashlie used teaching materials: "I buy different kinds of books, reading books, coloring books." Melvin held traditional gender views: "Melvin works with Precious sometime. It's not a lot 'cause it's mostly boys. Me and Precious are the only girls in the house. … He'll help her do her homework." Yet, Melvin took on a nontraditional role to support Ashlie's literacy activities: "Melvin does … the cooking, the cleaning. He basically stays at home with the kids" (Interview, November 2012).

Dawn's literacy team included her husband Clayton. She began, "I wanted Darius to actually kind of learn to read, like … two- and three-letter words. … I work with him on those." Dawn used "handouts" and "I had him trace his name." She used TV: "He was already saying his alphabets because he loved *Caillou* and all the learning cartoons." Clayton assisted with a specific literacy task: "He help Darius with his homework every day." Similar to his peer Melvin, Clayton assumed a nontraditional supporting role: "Clayton makes sure Darius's uniform is clean and he do the things that I should do…. He get him up for the morning. He give him a bowl of cereal" (Interview, September 2012).

Amira relied on her husband Amahl for help. Gender also influenced the division of literacy tasks. Amira focused on reading: "I've been reading books every day. I try to read books in the morning." Amira promoted comprehension: "If I question [Imani] after we read it, she can play back to me the characters, and what the characters were talking about." She continued:

> Amahl [is] reading comic books to Ahmad. … Every now and then he might read Imani a book. … Even if I just read a book to her, she'll say, "Daddy read me a book too." … She feel like she was in competition with Ahmad. (Interview, September 2012)

Some teams drew on extended kin. Aaliyah relied on her mother, Jenny. Aaliyah said, "I made sure [Darryl] knew how to spell some words. … I made sure he knew his sounds, sounds of the alphabet, sounds that some letters make combined." Aaliyah demanded excellence: "When I help Darryl with his homework, he doesn't like writing his name. … He has to write it perfect. If not, I'm gonna' erase it." Adult competencies informed assignments: "Jenny reads … [to Darryl]. She helps him write." Jenny did not help with computer tasks because "she's not really computer savvy" (Interview, November 2012).

Teyana also relied on her mother, with whom she did not live, and highlighted that coresidence was not necessarily associated with literacy assistance. Teyana focused on Raven's writing because "when it comes to writing her name … it's just not where it need to be." Teyana supported spelling: "I can pronounce a word and she'll spell it even if she hasn't seen it." Raven hadn't mastered reading, "but if you put a book in front of her, she can basically act out what's going on in the book." Teyana lived with her uncle Jimmy, who was not reported as a literacy assistant. Presumably, he provided indirect support through shared housing. However, Teyana's nonresident mother, Bonnie, helped her to "get Raven as ready as much as we can [for kindergarten]." Bonnie read to Teyana and assisted with spelling: "She'll write her name down and say, 'This [is] 'R,' 'a,' 'v,' 'e,' 'n'" (Interview, June 2012).

Diamond's team included her resident sister and suggests the flexible assignment of literacy tasks. Diamond focused on reading-related tasks: "[I] try to start [with] … the books with just a few words in it. … [I ask Shaneesha], 'What's this letter?'" Shaneesha practiced her writing at home because "it ain't really where it should be at her age." Diamond used TV to support Shaneesha's special needs: "One of her favorite persons on the Disney Channel is a dyslexic kid." Diamond highlighted her sister's adaptability: "[Tatiana helps with] just like random stuff. Tatiana like [says], 'Spell your name Shaneesha.'"

Both sisters collaborated on homework: "Whatever Shaneesha don't get in school, we can do at home, then practice for the next day" (Interview, June 2012).

Literacy teams with two adult literacy assistants. Five mothers had assistance from two adults. Their accounts identify the varying categories of kin who were part of mothers' literacy teams and the allocation of tasks among multiple adults. Nia's literacy team included her resident partner Armel and her adult son Michael (age 19). Nia, who purchased materials from the "teachers' store," said: "I got books for math, reading, sight words, puzzles." Nia then said, "Jalen writes [spelling words] down and then he go over it." Armel facilitated Jalen's oral language development through guided conversations: "If Jalen is watching TV or something and Jalen has a question, Armel answers his questions or if he sees something, then he will explain to him what it is, 'cause Jalen, he has a lot of questions." Michael "sometimes" contributed to the team's literacy efforts: "When he's here to visit he helps out. … [He] teach Jalen how to spell." (Interview, July 2012).

Malliqua's literacy team included her two resident adult children who, unlike Nia's adult son, played a substantial literacy role. Her account suggests the varying roles of adult siblings and how tasks were shared. Malliqua focused on multiple tasks: "Whenever I read stories to Kennie, he sees it as [a] treat. … [He] write on paper his name. … I'm working [with him] on [spelling]." She also described the team members' joint activities. "We would ask Kennie to say his ABCs. We all did basically like the same thing: Myself, my daughter Jamaica [age 19] and my son Damian [age 21] read stories to him" (Interview, November 2012).

Anika's literacy team was comprised of her resident partner Daniel and sister Lorraine and illustrates the interchangeability of literacy tasks. Anika described her literacy activities with Ebony: "[I'm] helping [Ebony] at home as far as things she needs to learn. … [like] ABCs." The adults jointly helped with homework: "Her aunt Lorraine and her father Daniel [help]. … They gave out like little homework. So we would all help pitch in." Lorraine and Daniel filled in when Anika "had something else to do." Anika continued, "Lorraine, basically she'll help do the same [as I do] … make sure homework was done. … So Ebony was well prepared and her father did the same" (Interview, October 2012).

The adults in Courtny's literacy team included her resident partner Geo and her mother Shelly. These adults had shared and distinct tasks. Courtny said, "I'm working with Niara on basic sight words just to help her reading fluency." She also used a book that contained "things that every kindergarten [child] should know. So every day she has to do two pages out of that book." Reading was a priority: "I'm makin' sure I read to her at least one book a night." Highlighting the role of adult schedules in the division of literacy labor, Geo had ample time to engage in literacy activities: "He does a lot as far as like the reading and stuff because he has more time at home with Niara than I do." Geo engaged in distinct literacy activities when he was home: "[T]hey watch a lot of that Discovery Channel about animals. So they always have conversations about animals and all type of stuff." Shelly similarly focused on reading: "They read books. My mother has dedicated two bookshelves of her bookcase to Niara's books" (Interview, June 2012).

LaSenda's team also included her resident partner Joahkim and Marcus's grandmother Anita; their tasks overlapped. LaSenda described her literacy activities: "I write on the board. So I'm teaching him work like that. … Marcus is working on reading. I have Marcus [on] starter reading books." LaSenda said Joahkim assisted with reading and other areas: "[Joahkim] works with him with like blocks and puzzles and things like that." LaSenda continued, "Marcus's grandmother Anita does reading." Anita engendered enthusiasm for going to kindergarten: "They just have a long conversation, them two, about him being ready and excited for school" (Interview, June 2012).

Literacy teams with three or more adult literacy assistants. Two mothers described literacy teams with three and four adults, providing another illustration of team membership and the division of literacy labor among multiple adults. Crystal relied on her nonresident partner Dave, her mother Nariah, and adult daughter Shyrece (age 18). Crystal focused on multiple tasks:

> I would have Tyrone practice … his alphabets … his numbers … his colors. I read to him. I would have him try to help read with me. … He would have to do flashcards. We have the Einstein videos [and] I have the beginner's *Hooked on Phonics* system. … Tyrone does his writing. He does puzzles. … Oh my God, I almost feel like I'm a teacher some days!

Dave's tasks were focused: "Dave reads and he plays with Tyrone" and helps Tyrone with the "worksheets." Temperament informed literacy assignments. Crystal liked that her nonresident mother Nariah encouraged Tyrone to watch educational TV: "It will be Qubo, sometimes channel 121 [PBS]." However, she discouraged other tasks: "I tell her, 'You don't have to do homework with him' 'cause she gets frustrated." Shyrece supported one of her mother's literacy activities: "[She] reads to Tyrone" (Interview, July 2012).

Tenisha's literacy team comprised her coresiding parents, LaVicia and Chrys, and her adult sister Malaya, as well as her nonresident partner Niles. These four adults bolstered each other's activities. Tenisha described her activities: "I have a kindergarten workbook for Malik. So it has reading readiness [and] writing." She supervised homework: "They'll send home a paper one day and it's like fill in the missing alphabet." Tenisha's parents reinforced her homework activities. LaVicia gave Malik "a small daily quiz of just stuff Malik learned every day" at preschool. Further, "my father sits with Malik and he does the teacher thing. … He asks questions as if a student would." Malaya reinforced Tenisha's writing activities: "Malaya brought him one of those My First [toys] that teach you how to write the letters. … She kinda' does flashcards with Malik and like just writes little three-letter and four-letter words." Malik's father Niles made a creative contribution: "His father is more the musical side." Tenisha said "that the music is somewhat influential in Malik's learning abilities as far as like math" (Interview, November 2012).

The dynamics of literacy teams: The contributions of minors

Ten mothers had children ranging in age from 6 to 17 in their literacy teams. The number of minor-age children in literacy teams ranged from one to three. Minor children's contributions varied, in part, based on the availability of other adult family members in family literacy teams.

Minors in elementary school. Four mothers had assistance from siblings aged 6 to 9. Reading and related activities were common. LaShawn said that 6-year-old "Anrea will read to Jada, or she'll show her some words and tell her some words." Brandy, who had no adult help in her literacy team, enlisted her 7-year-old son J. J. in her literacy activities with DeAndre: "I bought them books for them to read together. … J. J. reads stories to DeAndre." DeAndre benefitted from his brother J. J., who exposed him to first-grade level school work: "DeAndre sit with his brother while his brother did work. … He shows DeAndre some of the work he has and explains to him what he have to do" (Interview, October 2012).

Like LaShawn, Crystal also had two young sons, preschooler Tyrone and 6-year-old Julius. Her account further highlights the multiple ways that even young children can support preschoolers' literacy development. Julius affected Tyrone's desire to read: "He wants to read with Julius. … He reads to Julius even though he don't know the words in the book." Julius was a role model for Tyrone: "Tyrone more so got more accepting of doin' the paper part of learning because he saw Julius doin' it."

Kim's literacy team included preschooler Demetrius's 9-year-old sister Joya. Her account illuminates the advantages and challenges of sibling literacy assistance. Joya received benefits while helping her brother. "We are building Joya's reading skills. So she actually reads to Demetrius all the time." Yet, Kim admitted that quarrels characterized some reading sessions and that the children sometimes drove "each other crazy." She further reported, "Sometimes Demetrius like it; sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes he is like, 'I don't want you to read to me,' and I am like, 'okay, leave him alone.'"

Preadolescent and adolescent minors. Six literacy teams enlisted siblings ranging in age from 11 to 17. Nia told us: "My daughter Taccarra [age 14] would read to Jalen or help him with his numbers or

ABCs." Monique had help from 17-year-old Braelin: "Jamal and Braelin would get together and do the flashcards. … She'll hold the flashcard up and ask him to say what it is and he'll say it." Amira had three teens, Shaquille (17), Karl (16), and Nandi (14), in addition to preschoolers, Ahmad and Imani. The teens assumed multiple tasks: "What they do is they read to them. … They do little activities in the [work] book. … They do the worksheets with them."

Kalia's literacy team included her two teen sons only. As a lone parent, she delegated key literacy tasks to her sons: "Kareem [13] does a lot of reading with Ike. … He uses those notebooks and he's kind of [tough] on writing." Kareem had high standards: "He's tryin' to keep Ike in the lines [when he's writing]. I have to explain to him sometimes that he's just startin' out. … He's not gonna' get it. But he's like, 'No, [not] if you do it every day.'" Glen (11) was also active: "Glen does my spellin' tests to go over words. He gives Ike like a spellin' test. He gets his little red pen and he gets my sticker books" (Interview, October 2012).

Although focusing on multiple literacy areas, some teens were especially computer-savvy. For example, Dawn shared how Noah (15) and Lebron (14) assisted Darius: "They help their brother with his homework. … They teach him the new technology type things, as far as with all the technology gadgets, as far as working on the computer." Courtny's teens played a similar role with their sibling Niara: "Patrina [15] and Helena [13] will assist Niara with her homework. … In order for Niara to play her girl games she has to do an educational game with her sisters" on the computer. Niara benefitted from having teen sisters:

> I take them on weeklong college tours for spring break and I take Niara too. So she's on a college campus, sittin' in the classroom just like the other kids. … She was really excited. So she's ready to go to college and she's only 5.

Discussion

The goal of this article was to explore the home-based literacy activities of low-income African American mothers of preschoolers at risk for not being prepared for kindergarten. Several key findings emerged. We found that low-income African American mothers were actively promoting their children's literacy development. Mothers also sought assistance from family members. We identified 43 assistants, including 14 fathers, partners, or husbands, seven grandparents, three aunts, and 19 adult and minor siblings. Literacy teams were characterized by a division of literacy labor. Among adults, some assistants focused on one specific literacy task, whereas others assumed multiple tasks. Some literacy assistants were equally engaged as mothers in literacy activities, whereas others were in secondary yet supportive roles. The particular literacy task assumed and the level of assistance reflected adult assistants' expertise, temperament, preferences, gender beliefs, and/or availability.

The membership of literacy teams and the number of adults in literacy teams varied. Some teams were comprised solely of adult literacy assistants; others included adults and minors. Still other teams included only minor literacy assistants. Adult-only teams were comprised solely of mothers with one child. These children may be especially favored due to the abundance of adult literacy resources. However, we are unclear if there are substantive differences related to the number of adults in mothers' literacy teams because we lack data on the full extent of literacy assistance. However, the allocation of literacy tasks appears to be similar, irrespective of team size. We hypothesize that the impact of team size is contingent on the frequency and type of adult literacy contributions.

Although the contributions of minor siblings varied by age, siblings of all ages enhanced preschoolers' literacy development, as well as their desire to learn. In households in which mothers had adult assistance, sibling contributions were secondary. However, in households in which mothers had no other adult help, suggesting the unavailability of extended kin, siblings, especially teens, appeared to play a more substantial role in supporting mothers.

Literacy teams focused on key literacy areas and child abilities associated with formal reading and writing success and future academic achievement (Murnane et al., 2012). All teams engaged in some type of reading activity with preschoolers. Mothers described storytelling and helping children to read independently (L. Baker et al., 1994; Hammer et al., 2005). Some families encouraged children's

comprehension during reading (Cristofaro & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011). Other prereading activities included word and letter recognition, and spelling and writing (tracing) letters, names, and words. Some families used guided conversations during TV watching that developed children's oral language skills. Homework supervision was another team activity. Further, literacy teams used diverse educational materials such as books, puzzles, blocks, flashcards, work sheets, boards, and word games (Serpell, Baker, & Sonnenschein, 2005), as well as computers and teaching curricula.

The research findings add to discussions of educational cultural capital, which consider how families' knowledge and related practices affect children's school success (Bojczyk, Rogers-Haverback, Pae, Davis, & Mason, 2015). Many discussions focus on the purportedly superior knowledge and practices of White middle-class nuclear families, who are often privileged by the mainstream culture of schools (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Our research is consistent with alternative models that recognize that nondominant families include diverse kinship structures and possess important cultural knowledge to support their children's literacy development (Yosso, 2005). In particular, African American families have strong intergenerational kin relationships that support family-literacy knowledge and practices (Chaney, 2014; Jarrett et al., 2015). Our data demonstrates that, irrespective of income, race, family structure, and inner-city residence, low-income African American families possess cultural capital. Members of intergenerational family literacy teams have at their disposal stores of knowledge about school-readiness expectations and instructional strategies. This valuable knowledge is activated through home-based literacy activities that promote children's early literacy development (see also Compton-Lilly, 2009).

Our research findings are relevant for quantitative studies. We identify literacy processes behind social address variables (Vernon-Feagans, Head-Reeves, & Kainz, 2004). The variables of race and social class are cited as major risk factors for children's literacy development. Critics note that being African American and having a low income are invariably associated with the academic failure of children and inadequate family-parenting practices (Ladson-Billings, 2007, 2012, 2013; Lee, 2009). Although some low-income African American families face barriers that constrain family-parental contributions to children's literacy development, deterministic and homogenous views of race and social class miss family heterogeneity. As our data indicate, some low-income African American families actively promote their children's literacy development despite the purported limitations associated with their race and social class.

Our sample included unmarried mothers who support their children's literacy development with the help of partners and other family members. Demographic studies often infer, based on nuclear family models, that single mothers are solely responsible for children's literacy development and, in the absence of a partner, are unable to fully support children's growth. We found that cohabitating fathers and nonresident fathers provided literacy assistance, as well as caregiving (Leavell et al., 2012). In some instances, other adult kin assisted mothers along with partners. The unmeasured contributions of unmarried fathers and other kin likely explain why some studies do not find a correlation between child outcomes and household composition (Hammer et al., 2010). Single mothers without help from fathers or other adults relied on literacy assistance from their young children's older siblings. Enlisting minor siblings in literacy assistance has been found in qualitative research on low-income African American single mothers with high-achieving adolescents (Clark, 1983).

Some studies report on the negative impact of having multiple children in the household (C. E. Baker et al., 2012). Researchers suggest that multiple children stretch parental resources (Qi et al., 2006). However, our data finds that multiple children can in some instances expand the literacy resources available to preschoolers. Families with multiple children enlisted siblings in their literacy activities. Older siblings promoted advanced academic skills, motivated preschoolers, and practiced their own academic skills.

Lower maternal education has been associated with poorer quality maternal literacy practices and poorer child outcomes (Hammer et al., 2010; Hart & Risley, 1995). The education levels of our sample varied, and many mothers had some college. Yet all the participants were actively engaged in child-literacy activities. We hypothesize that the source of mothers' literacy knowledge and skills may differ by education levels. In addition to the coaching they receive from Head Start, mothers with higher

education levels are likely exposed to other sources of child-development knowledge (e.g., college classes) and literacy practices. For mothers with lower education levels, Head Start may be the main source of child-development knowledge and literacy practices that puts them on par with mothers with higher education levels. We further hypothesize that assistance from adult family members who have higher education levels or greater experiential capital also enhances some mothers' literacy knowledge and skills.

Our study adds to the small body of qualitative research that focuses on home-based literacy activities with preschoolers. We similarly found that mothers were engaged in a variety of home-based literacy activities to facilitate their children's literacy development. Mothers used a wide range of print materials in the home (Hammer et al., 2005; Purcell-Gates, 1996), focused on reading and writing activities (Holloway et al., 1995; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), and were teaching phonological awareness and narrative competence (L. Baker et al., 1994). We add to these earlier studies by accounting for the contributions of extended family. Although some qualitative studies briefly described various family members helping mothers (Gadsden, 1998; Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003), we extensively detail the literacy contributions of resident and nonresident fathers, grandmothers, and aunts. In particular, our study describes the significant role played by siblings.

Our study makes unique contributions to family-resilience theory. We demonstrate how resilient family processes operate in relation to children's literacy development and the strengths of different family structures. Competent mothers mobilize family members to develop literacy teams that expand the literacy resources available to children. We add to family-resilience theory inductively derived family concepts (literacy teams, literacy assistants, division of literacy labor) for studying family literacy among low-income African American families that are missing in other descriptive studies.

Implications

Our findings suggest the role that Head Start can play in supporting the literacy teams of low-income African American families with preschoolers. For resilient families like those in our study, who utilize Head Start and who are already organized as literacy teams, Head Start can support existing home-based literacy practices, as well as provide additional knowledge of instructional practices to support children's transition to kindergarten. Head Start can also play a critical role in supporting eligible families who do not utilize Head Start and who may lack the cultural capital of family-literacy teams.

We believe that nonenrolled families differ from our resilient-study families in key ways. The families in our study are embedded in kin networks characterized by high levels of cultural and social resources that provide ample literacy assistance to mothers of preschoolers (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; Jarrett et al., 2010). These families also exhibit role flexibility, thus explaining the effectiveness of families that incorporate siblings into literacy teams in the absence of extended kin assistance (Clark, 1983; R. B. Hill, 2003). More fundamentally, the study families have effective resource-seeking skills that allow them to identify institutional resources for their children's development like Head Start. We hypothesize that eligible families who do not utilize Head Start and who likely lack literacy teams are members of *survival-oriented* kin networks. While providing their members with basic resources (e.g., food, shelter), survival-oriented networks are unable to extend their support to family literacy activities (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). Moreover, families who are intensively focused on daily survival are likely to give lower priority to developing sibling-based literacy teams. We further hypothesize that eligible families who do not utilize Head Start lack strong resource-seeking skills and are unaware of Head Start as a child and family resource (Jarrett & Jefferson, 2003).

Our research offers recommendations on how Head Start can bring more unenrolled families into the program. Head Start mandates encourage local programs to actively recruit all families with eligible children within the recruitment area. First and foremost, Head Start will need to utilize neighborhood outreach efforts to identify eligible families who are not using their programs. In addition to outreach efforts that include collaborations with community organizations that likely serve low-income African American families with preschoolers, such as well-baby centers, and the Women, Infants, and Children's nutrition program, Head Start should do block-level canvassing to identify eligible families who

may have few institutional ties. Head Start recruitment efforts should include educating families about the wide array of services for both children and adults and assisting families with the application process.

Once families are enrolled, Head Start can help families to create or to unleash dormant cultural capital associated with family-literacy teams. Initially, Head Start can assist families with pressing survival needs (e.g., food insecurity, unstable housing). Once families are stabilized, Head Start can draw upon the cultural traditions of African American families by encouraging primary caregivers to mobilize a variety of available kin to support their children's literacy development. As part of Head Start's parent-engagement mandate, parent coordinators can develop family-literacy workshops that focus on topics such as the organization of family-literacy teams, how team members can work together, the contributions of adults and minors, and home-based instructional strategies. Such workshops can also include peer families who are already members of family-literacy teams. Experienced peers can be a resource for families who are developing family-literacy teams for the first time. Head Start teachers and staff members, and peer families will be particularly important for those families with little or no access to kin. They can help families to develop literacy teams that draw on nonfamily members (e.g., trusted neighbors) who can assist with child-literacy activities.

This study has implications for forging home-school connections as children transition to kindergarten. Using a resilience approach highlights what families are doing to promote the literacy development of their preschoolers. When family-literacy practices and child-literacy development are based only on standardized assessments and comparisons to White middle-class families, schools may negatively label children's abilities and miss the contributions of highly motivated African American families (Barbarin et al., 2008; Compton-Lilly, Rogers, & Lewis, 2012). As schools seek to promote family involvement, all families should be considered valued, respected, and contributing partners (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012; Gadsden, 1999). Schools should use broad definitions of family and engage all family members in school activities (Fuligni & Brooks-Gunn, 2004). Schools can reach out to low-income African American fathers who were found in this study to play a major role in child literacy-development (Gadsden, 2003; Leavell et al., 2012).

Schools can further enrich families' literacy knowledge and skills by building upon existing home activities (Gadsden, 1999). Our families are already reading to their preschoolers and schools can encourage families to use more dialogic reading that promotes oral language skills. Families can be encouraged to include more guided conversations during TV viewing to enhance decontextualized language skills. Effective collaborations that bring family worlds into the classroom include teachers' use of "tell me about your child" journals, daily story time with a focus on children's families, and sharing family drawings and portraits (Gadsden, 1994; Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995).

The research has implications for the teachers who work with low-income African American students. Teachers should not assume that these students are at risk for poor academic performance and unable to learn (Delpit, 2003). Effective teachers do not ask what's wrong with African American students, but what's right (Delpit, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2008). Moreover, effective teachers promote academic success by building on children's strengths and creating classrooms characterized by a familistic ethos of caring (Delpit, 2006). When teachers bring children's home experiences into the classroom, they develop bicultural children who can successfully move between home and school cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2008).

Limitations and future directions

This study has some limitations. The small sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Future quantitative research should use large random samples to explore the literacy processes and hypotheses described in this study, thereby providing more generalizable results. Quantitative studies should also gather demographic data on other adults who help mothers. Focused ethnographies characterized by clearly formulated study questions and key constructs (e.g., literacy teams, division of literacy labor), multiple data-collection strategies (interviews, photo documents, observations), and diverse network types can offer a detailed view of the family-literacy processes identified in this study.

Conclusion

This qualitative interview study described the intergenerational literacy teams of low-income African American families with preschoolers and the home-based literacy practices they use to positively support their children's development. The use of qualitative interviews and a resilience framework identified family processes behind demographic variables and expanded on family dynamics noted in past qualitative research. Our findings on engaged family-literacy practices suggest culturally informed home-school collaborations. Future qualitative and quantitative research that utilizes multiple data-collection strategies, includes large random samples, and employs strength-based approaches will greatly expand our knowledge of family-literacy practices among low-income African American families with preschoolers.

In closing, this study raises an important question: How will the children presented in this study fare as they make the transition to kindergarten and beyond? We found family members devoted to the academic success of their young children. We also found energetic preschoolers who were "just ready to go." A critical issue will be how to sustain family engagement and the positive anticipation of children whose futures are bright with promise.

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