The Role of Community Book Club in Changing Literacy Practices

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ABSTRACT

Community Book Club began as an experimental approach intended to combine professional development for teachers and family literacy for the parents of the preschoolers involved in an Early Reading First project. We collected data on 11 book club meetings over a 2-year time period. Meetings were held at local churches and at each meeting, participants discussed two books: an adolescent/adult book and a similarly themed children's book. We interviewed participants, videotaped meetings, collected field notes, and kept attendance sheets. Data analysis began at the first meeting and continued throughout the project.

　　We coded data from all sources and identified four major themes:
　　1. Changes in the membership of book club
　　2. Changes in reported home literacy practices of the participants
　　3. Sharing the "lived experience" of reading
　　4. Changes in manner of participation that led to the emergence of new, situated literacy practices

We found that over time teachers, parents, and community members as participants in Community Book Club developed new literacy practices during book club meetings that influenced members' reported home literacy practices. Our experience demonstrated that book clubs have the potential to promote increased enjoyment of books and changes in literacy practices among teachers, families, and members of the broader community.

It's Thursday evening, and 90 children, women, and men are entering Mt. Pilgrim Church. This group is larger than most evening church gatherings, which in this community rarely attract over 40 members. Tonight, instead of Bibles and song-books, members are carrying Bud Not Buddy *(Curtis, 2004) and* Brown Angels *(Myers, 2005); they are attending the tenth Project CORE Community Book Club.*

INTRODUCTION

The Community Book Club was an activity originally proposed as part of a 2004 Early Reading First (ERF) grant. The goal of ERF grants is to "transform existing early education programs" into "centers of early learning excellence" (USDE, 2003, p. 5). Grantees are expected to provide professional development for teachers and family literacy activities for parents that will insure that children are ready to enter kindergarten with high levels of language and literacy development.

Initial conversations between Stella, a lifelong resident and local daycare owner, and co-article author Lea McGee, led to Lea's involvement in the grant as the project director and to the development of Community Book Club. Early in the conception of Project CORE, Stella shared her knowledge of the community, its families, and their literacy practices with Lea. Ninety nine percent of the residents were African American, and 99% of the school-age children qualified for free or reduced-price meals. Stella indicated that reading was not typically stressed in the community. "People (parents, teachers, and community members) in our town, including me, don't read," she said and provided two reasons for the lack of reading: Some lacked an interest in reading; others were not highly skilled in reading. However, she believed that reading was important and should be stressed. Further, she asserted that parents cared deeply about their children's education and would participate in short, interesting evening meetings to support their children's education. Stella and Lea noted that teachers and assistants who were targeted for the project had varying levels of education ranging from a GED to educational specialist (ES) degrees. Thus, early on, a goal for Project CORE was to increase the interest and engagement in reading for all participants including teachers and parents. In addition, Stella expressed her strong belief that parents needed to play a larger role in their children's education.

Both Stella and Lea were well aware of the impact of *family literacy* on young children's overall education and specifically school literacy learning (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Taylor first used the term family literacy, the reading and writing that occurred in the homes of young White middle-class children, who were successfully learning to read and write in school. She found continuity between the family literacy practices and later school literacy learning. Heath observed the reading and writing of

families in three distinct communities. She found a range of literacy events in each community. She also found varied levels of continuity between adult-child interactions of each community and later school literacy learning. In the African American and White working class communities, children's home literacy experiences led to limited success in school. Similarly, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines found that although a range of reading and writing occurred in the homes of inner-city African American children whose families lived in poverty, discontinuity existed between the home and school literacy experiences of these children.

Therefore, early in the project two concerns were identified: the need to involve parents more meaningfully in their children's education to reduce the possible discontinuity between home and school literacy practices and the need to increase reading in the community including its teachers and parents. Three converging bodies of literature led to our approach of using a book club with community members, parents, and teachers as the solution to these two prominent concerns: ideological perspectives of literacy, family literacy research, and research on community book clubs.

THE NATURE OF READING AND FAMILY LITERACY: IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Literacy can be viewed as an autonomous, skilled activity (Street, 1995). Based on an autonomous view, literacy is defined as neutral, technical skills broadly defined as decoding and comprehending that easily transfer from one context to another. According to this view, in order to meet the need to have families more involved in their children's education, parents would be involved in activities to increase their skill in reading. In fact, many family literacy approaches have this aim and have faced controversy (Paratore, 2001; Taylor, 1997). For example, Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (2005) criticized family literacy programs that focus solely on school-like literacy practices. Instead, they advocated for programs that recognize the value of the legitimate literacy practices that families utilize in their homes and communities.

These critics embrace a contrasting ideological perspective wherein literacy is conceptualized as social practices (Street, 1995). From this perspective, New Literacy Studies researchers reject a monolithic view of literacy, as is found in the autonomous view. Instead, they argue that readers have multiple literacies which are shaped by the social institution in which it is embedded. For example, Sheridan, Street, and Bloome (2000) defined literacy as embedded in, shaping and shaped by, social activities:

> One implication of the New Literacy Studies is that one can never just study literacy, one is always studying literacy and social life. . . the study of social life cannot be reduced to

abstract structures, but must lie close to what people do, what
social meanings it has for them, and what social consequences
it has for them. (p. 3)

This study of social life has led to research, not only of children within
homes and schools (Hull & Schultz, 2002), but also to the study of adults' lit-
eracy practices. (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Sheridan, Street, & Bloome,
2000). These studies have taken into account individuals' literacy practices
within the broader context of community.

COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB

We decided that a book club might allow us to capitalize on the literacy prac-
tices of both the teachers and parents within the larger community. We felt a
book club might be especially appealing — they have become so popular (e.g.,
Oprah's Book Club) that bookstores provide discussion guides for hundreds
of book titles and sell books describing ways to initiate and sustain clubs (e.g.,
Heft & O'Brien, 1999; Jacobsohn, 1998; McGinley, Conley, & White, 2000).
After examining many book club guides, we discovered that guides encourage
academic discussions that focus on character analyses, summarization of rela-
tionships among characters, and interpretation of characters' actions, thoughts,
or experiences. Yet, book clubs have served other purposes: Geraci (2003) initi-
ated a multicultural book club in a state prison to encourage culturally diverse
inmates to interact together. Book clubs have also been used for professional
development of teachers (Flood & Lapp, 1994; Kooy, 2003), and some have
included both teachers and parents (Zaleski, 1999). Thus, it seemed that a
book club might provide a context where parents and teachers could jointly
engage in literacy practices. To connect our book club to the broader com-
munity, we invited community members beyond participants in our project.
We decided to select books of interest to our African American population.
We purposefully decided to read a children's book that would be more reader-
friendly to everyone, and a young adult or adult selection to challenge our
more-expert readers. We also decided to meet in local churches, a more-neutral
setting for everyone than the local schools.

Participants and Format

Community Book Club participants included the 15 project teachers and assis-
tants, parents of preschoolers, four project staff members (site director, reading
coach, and two intervention teachers), and individuals from the community. As
a part of their professional development, teachers, assistants, and project staff
members were required to attend. However, they were not censured if they did
not attend. In early meetings, each preschool teacher was expected to invite

one parent to each meeting. Stella invited members of the host church and other community members. Because participants received books for free and were paid a modest stipend for attending, the preschool teachers invited different parents to each meeting. With the exception of the first two book clubs, a minimum of 10 parents and community members were present at all sessions. While not all teachers, assistants, and invited guests attended all meetings, all groups were represented at each meeting. In addition to Lea, two other university professors, Patricia and Rochelle, attended the book club meetings serving as book leader for Community Book Club. With the exception of the project director, all book club participants were African American.

During 2 years of our project, we conducted 11 book clubs. Meetings occurred approximately every 2 months, i.e., five times during each school year. At each meeting, the book leader facilitated the discussion of two books that were selected because of their similar themes (Figure 1 on the following pages presents the titles and a synopsis of the books discussed at each meeting). We used grant funds to purchase books for 60 participants (who shared them with friends or family members). Stella distributed books to the community members at least 3 weeks prior to the scheduled meeting. We made initial book selections based on recommendations of excellent literature for African Americans (for example, using Oprah's list). Later, we made book selections based on participants' responses during Community Book Club and in their comments during subsequent interviews. Participants wanted shorter books, books about characters they could relate to, and funny books. We also wanted to extend the kinds of books that we asked our participants to read so we included essays, poetry, and nonfiction as well as romance stories.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers acted as participant observers (Spradley, 1980). Patricia or Rochelle acted as book leader, while the other researchers participated along with the others in attendance. As researchers, we collected (a) field notes written after the meetings, (b) videotapes of each meeting (using two video cameras to capture all participants), (c) interviews with selected book club members, and (d) attendance sheets.

We purposefully selected a range of members for interviews (e.g., project staff, assistants, researchers, teachers, parents, and community members; first-time and repeat attendees) who both spoke and did not speak at the meetings. We collected over 10 hours of 15–45 minute interviews with more than 30 participants. Specifically, we interviewed 2 researchers, 4 project staff members, 8 teachers, 7 assistants, 8 parents, and 8 community members. Initially, our interviews focused on participants' literacy practices (Street, 1995). Thus, we asked members to describe their own and their families' reading habits and

Figure 1-1. Book Selections by Week

Week	Title and Brief Description
1	*Mirandy and Brother Wind* (McKissack, 1988) To win the cake walk, Mirandy must dance with Brother Wind; however, her initial attempts to catch him fail. *Cane River* (Tademy, 2001) Based on one family's history, this novel recounts the lives of four generations of African American women.
2	*Chicken Sunday* (Polacco, 1992) Patricia becomes "family" with two African American boys and their grandmother, Miss Eula. Although they are short of money, the children decide to purchase an Easter hat for Miss Eula because each Sunday she takes them to church and prepares a special meal. *The Secret Lives of Bees* (Kidd, 2002) Set in South Carolina in 1964, Lily, a 14-year-old White girl, runs away from her unloving father to search for secrets of her dead mother's past. Her housekeeper is her sole companion until they find refuge in the home of three unique African American women.
3	*The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) Clover wonders why a fence separates the Black side of town from the White side. When Annie, a White girl from the other side, begins to sit on the fence, Clover joins her, and they become friends. *The Watsons go to Birmingham–1963* (Curtis, 1995) Kenny Watson and his family travel from Michigan to Alabama, where they witness the racial tensions and prejudice of the segregated south.
4	*The Story of George Washington Carver* (Moore, 1971) The biographical story describes how Carver, who is born a slave, becomes a world-famous scientist. *Carver: A Life in Poems* (Nelson, 2001) This collection of poems provides a compelling and revealing portrait of Carver's life.
5	*This Little Light of Mine* (Lewis, 2005) This book illustrates the traditional song with the joyful actions of one boy who greets all with kindness and warmth. *Dancing on the Edge of the Roof: A Novel* (Williams, 2002) At 42, Juanita Lewis leaves home in search of a life of romance and adventure and arrives in Paper Moon, Montana, where she meets Jess Gardiner and begins her new life.

Figure 1-2. Book Selections by Week CONTINUED

Week	Title and Brief Description
6	*God Bless the Child* (Holiday & Pinkney, 2003) Pinkney creates images of an African American family moving from the rural south to the urban north during the Great Migration of the 1930s. *On the Right Side of a Dream: A Novel* (Williams, 2005) Juanita has found adventure and romance with Jess Gardiner, but she leaves the safety of her life in Paper Moon, Montana, to become a chef.
7	*Ellington is Not a Street* (Shange & Nelson, 2004) As a child growing up during the Harlem Renaissance, Shange describes the many individuals who visited her family's home. *Just Plain Folks: Original tales of living, loving, longing, and learning as told by a perfectly ordinary, quite commonly sensible, and absolutely awe-inspiring, colored* (Johnson-Coleman, 1998) The author provides a series of essays describing everyday life experiences of African American women in the rural south.
8	*Bark and Tim: A True Story of Friendship Based on the Paintings of Tim Brown* (Vernick, Glassman, & Brown, 2003) Based on the childhood of a Mississippi folk artist, the story depicts the traditional tale of a boy and his dog and their life together. *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years* (Delany, Delany, & Hearth, 1994) Bessie and Sadie Delany recall growing up in a distinguished middle-class Black family in Raleigh, North Carolina, and their adult life in Harlem, New York — where one became a noted dentist and the other the first African American science teacher in the New York schools.
9	*Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1998) Grace loves to act out stories. When her class performs Peter Pan, she tries out for the lead role. *A Virtuous Woman* (Gibbons, 1997) Ruby Stokes marries an abusive man who forces her to become a migrant worker. After he dies, she remarries and settles into a good life with a man who deeply loves her.

Figure 1-3. Book Selections by Week CONTINUED

Week	Title and Brief Description
10	*Brown Angels* (Myers, 1996) This collection of poems about young children is accompanied by a series of photographs of African American children taken during the early 1900s. *Bud, not Buddy* (Curtis, 2004) Bud, an orphaned African American boy living in Flint, Michigan, during the Great Depression, hitchhikes to Grand Rapids in search of Herman E. Calloway, the man he believes to be his father.
11	*Pink and Say* (Polacco, 1994) A true Civil War story about the short but intimate friendship of two young boys during the Civil War and the horrors they face. *Yolanda's Genius* (Fenner, 1997) Yolanda's younger brother, Andrew, does not talk much and cannot read but makes music with his harmonica. When bullies break his harmonica, Yolanda must find a way to demonstrate that Andrew is a genius.

interests, how they participated in book club, and the value of book club for themselves and their community. In later interviews, we also asked participants to share how they became affiliated with Community Book Club and its impact on their home literacy practices and their children's school reading experiences.

Data analysis began at the first meeting and continued throughout the project. Immediately after each book club, the researchers discussed various aspects of the meeting noting how participants responded to specific changes. For example, we reviewed our field notes and identified participants to interview. We coded data from all sources. Emerging themes were identified and the videos were reviewed again and episodes were coded by the emerging themes. Early emerging themes included demonstrations of enjoyment of reading and talking about books, shifts in the ways members participated during book club, changes in home literacy practices, and increasing membership. This activity led to refining our coding until we identified four major themes:

1. Changes in the membership of book club
2. Changes in reported home literacy practices of the participants

3. Sharing the "lived experience" of reading
4. Changes in manner of participation that led to the emergence of new, situated literacy practices

Changes in membership of book club

Over the 11 book sessions, 191 individuals attended Community Book Club. Participants included teaching staff, parents of preschoolers, and community members, and university professors who acted as participant observers. Teaching staff members included the site director, reading coach, intervention teachers, 15 preschool teachers and assistants, and the 5 kindergarten teachers from the local elementary school who participated in transition to kindergarten activities with the preschool teachers. Although teaching staff were required to attend, there was no penalty applied for missing sessions. Initially the preschool teachers and the site director recruited parents and other community members to book club. Each preschool teacher invited, on a rotating basis, a parent to each meeting. Similarly, the site director invited, on a rotating basis, a few members of the host church and two community members to each meeting. Unfortunately, this meant that most parent and community participants were newcomers. Prior to the fourth book club meeting, we realized that having so many new participants was a deterrent to the active participation that some members were beginning to adopt. Therefore, at the fourth meeting, we invited all 31 participants present to return for the next community book club accompanied by a family member or friend. Many did, and attendance at the next meeting increased to 55. Thus, while the preschool teachers continued to invite new parents to the meeting, parents who had previously attended were also welcomed.

As attendance increased, the range of participants broadened. During early meetings, most participants were teaching staff who ranged in age from 25 to 55 years old; however, later book clubs included teenagers and senior adults. By the last meeting, participants included project teachers, parents, and church members, as well as other teachers, retired teachers, school board members, a central office staff member, politician, librarian, business owners, a social worker, and a family from a neighboring county.

Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 provide a list of all participants across the 11 meetings. The original members are identified as teaching staff, parents, and community members, and they are indicated by the letter O. Listed below each original member are all individuals invited by that member.

Teaching staff consisted of 23 individuals who participated in Community Book Club as professional development for Project CORE. Collectively, these individuals invited 39 family members and friends to meetings. For example, Stella, the site director, invited her mother, sister, and sister-in-law, nephew,

Table 1-1. Teaching Staff Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Site director	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Mother						X	X	X	X	X	X
Sister									X	X	X
Sister-in-law								X	X	X	X
Nephew									X		
Son*										X	
Friend of mother											X
Friend of sister								X	X	X	X
Friend of sister								X	X	X	X
Reading coach	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Friend							X	X	X	X	X
Friend										X	
Intervention teacher	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Son											X
Mother									X	X	X
Sister										X	X
Sister									X	X	X
Brother									X	X	X
Daughter								X	X	X	X
Son										X	X
Sister-in-law										X	X

Table 1-2. Teaching Staff Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week CONTINUED

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Intervention teacher			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Mother							X	X	X	X	X
Son*							X	X	X	X	X
Son*							X	X	X	X	X
Son*							X	X	X	X	X
Friend											X
Friend											X
Friend											X
Teacher	O	O	O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O
Husband								X	X	X	X
Assistant	O	O	O								
Teacher	O	O	O				O	O			
Assistant	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Sister					X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Friend					X						
Friend					X						
Friend of sister								X	X	X	X
Reading coach	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Friend							X	X	X	X	X
Friend										X	X

Table 1-3. Teaching Staff Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week CONTINUED

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Intervention teacher	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Son											X
Mother									X	X	X
Sister										X	X
Sister									X	X	X
Brother									X	X	X
Daughter								X	X	X	X
Son							X				
Sister-in-law										X	X
Intervention teacher			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Mother							X	X	X	X	X
Son*							X	X	X	X	X
Son*							X	X	X	X	X
Son*							X	X	X	X	X
Friend											X
Friend											X
Friend											X
Teacher	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Husband								X	X	X	X
Assistant	O	O	O								
Teacher	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Table 1-4. Teaching Staff Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week CONTINUED

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Assistant	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Sister					X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Friend					X						
Friend					X						
Teacher	O	O	O				O			O	
Assistant	O	O	O							O	
Teacher	O	O	O	O	O		O				
Father-in-law	X										
Teacher	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Assistant			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Friend											X
Friend											X
Friend											X
Teacher	O	O	O		O			O	O	O	O

O = Original member; X = Invited guest; * = Middle school child who accompanied parent

Table 2-1. Parent Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Parent 1	O			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Husband											X
Daughter*				X							
Preschool son*				X							
Parent 2						O	O	O	O	O	
Parent 3	O										
Parent 4										O	
Parent 5										O	
Parent 6		O	O	O							O
Sister				X							
Parent 7						O	O				
Mother							X				
Son*							X				
Preschool daughter*							X				
Parent 8			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	
Parent 9			O								
Parent 10								O	O		
Parent 11			O	O							
Mother				X							
Parent 12					O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Table 2-2. Parent Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week CONTINUED

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Parent 13						O					
Mother						X					
Parent 14									O		O
Parent 15									O		O
Parent 16								O	O		O
Parent									X		
Parent 17									X		
Parent 18		O	O								
Parent 19											O
Parent 20											O
Parent 21											O
Parent 22									O		
Parent 23							O				
Parent 24					O						
Parent 25	O										
Parent 26									O		

O = Original member; X = Invited guest; * = Middle school child who accompanied parent

Table 3-1. Community Member Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Community member 1						O	O	O		O	
Son										X	
Community member 2						O	O				
Husband						X	X				
Community member 3			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Sister				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community member 4			O	O	O	O	O	O	O		
Sister				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Son					X	X					
Friend									X	X	
Community member 5									O		
Community member 6				O	O	O	O		O	O	
Community member 7			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	
Community member 8			O	O			O	O	O	O	O
Community member 9			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Husband					X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community member 10					O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Sister-in-law					X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Daughter								X	X	X	X
Niece*								X			
Grandchild*					X						

Table 3-2. Community Member Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week CONTINUED

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Grandchild*											
Grandchild*					X			X			
Community member 11				O	O	O	O	O	O		O
Daughter*							X	O	X	X	
Daughter*							X	X	X	X	
Community member 12					O	O	O		O	O	O
Daughter											X
Community member 13			O		O	O			O		O
Community member 14			O	O	O						
Community member 15	O	O	O	O							
Community member 16				O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Community member 17	O	O		O	O	O	O	O			O
Community member 18					O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Cousin							X				X
Community member 19				O	O	O	O	O			
Community member 20					O	O	O	O	O		O
Community member 21		O			O			O	O		O

Table 3-3. Community Member Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Community member 22		O		O	O			O			O
Community member 23		O									
Husband		X	O								
Community member 24		O	O	O							
Community member 25					O						
Community member 26									O	O	O
Community member 27							O				
Community member 28					O						
Community member 29					O						
Community member 30				O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Sister									X		
Niece*								X	X	X	X
Community member 31									O	O	O
Daughter										X	
Community member 32									O	O	O
Husband									X	X	X
Son*										X	X
Community member 33							O				
Community member 34					O						
Community member 35											O
Community member 36											O

Table 3-4. Community Member Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week CONTINUED

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Community member 37											O
Community member 38											O
Community member 39										O	O
Community member 40										O	O
Community member 41											O
Community member 42											O
Community member 43								O			
Community member 44									O		
Community member 45								O			
Community member 46							O				
Community member 47							O				
Community member 48										O	
Community member 49								O	O	O	O
Community member 50									O		
Community member 51									O	O	
Community member 52									O	O	O
Community member 53										O	O
Community member 54										O	O
Community member 55										O	O
Community member 56										O	O
Child*										X	X

Table 3-5. Community Member Participants Across All 11 Community Book Club Meetings by Week

Participant	1 5-26-05	2 10-28-05	3 1-27-06	4 2-27-06	5 5-22-06	6 9-21-06	7 10-19-06	8 12-7-06	9 1-25-07	10 5-3-07	11 6-26-07
Community member 57										O	
Community member 58										O	O
Community member 59										O	
Community member 60											O
Community member 61											O
Community member 62										O	O
Community member 63											O
Community member 64											O
Child*											X
Community member 65											O
Community member 66											O
Community member 67											O

O = Oiginal member; X = Invited guest; * = Middle school child who accompanied parent

and her own son. Stella's mother invited a friend, and her sister invited two friends.

Twenty-six parents were recruited by preschool teachers. Those parents invited 10 additional participants to book club meetings. For example, Parent 1 brought her husband, daughter, and son to meetings. Parent 16 invited another parent to meetings.

Ninety-three community members attended Community Book Club. Some were associated with Project CORE although not a part of the teaching staff. For example, Community Member 15 (Head Start Center director) and Community Member 17 (principal of the elementary school) were members of the Project CORE leadership team. Other community members included the assistant superintendent of schools; teachers from the local elementary, middle, and high schools; and a state representative.

Many members of the teaching staff attended most meetings, especially those who invited friends and family members to attend with them. More community members attended frequently (four or more meetings) than did parents. Only parents who brought other family members or friends attended multiple meetings. Thus, a close analysis of our participants caused us to expand our understanding of "family" within the Community Book Club. Initially, we only thought of family as the preschool parents who were family members for our preschool children. However, family grew to include the extended family members of the teachers and community members. These extended family groups were the strongest supporters of the book club, returning frequently to the meetings and spreading the word of its existence in the community.

Reported changes in home literacy practices

In the beginning, many participants described themselves as nonreaders. A classroom assistant stated, "Before [the first book club] I didn't like to read books at all. [At book club] I enjoyed the discussion from the woman that was teaching the book. She told us that you have to get involved in the book in order to enjoy it." A teacher reported, "[Before the book club] I would pick up the book, I would read the first pages and be through with it."

However, by the fifth Community Book Club, many members reported changed reading practices. One teacher said, "Since the different book clubs I've attended, I've started reading more. I will buy books for my son to read. I found you can't judge a book by its cover. You can't say, 'Oh this book is going to be boring.' When you read the book, it's interesting. I believe that at first, some of them [teachers required to and parents asked to attend the book club] thought that it was just some stuff that they wanted us to do. But I have talked to certain ones and they are like, 'I love the book club. I wonder, can I come all the time?' I say, 'Yes, you can,' and they are taking pride and value the

books." A community member reported, "I talked to a lady yesterday [whom he had seen at the Community Book Club meeting]. I said, 'I didn't know you were interested in reading. She said 'sure I am.'"

Many members indicated in their interviews that participation in book club had made them more interested in reading. They said they saw a need for preschool and elementary children to read more. Several middle school children accompanying their parents to book club (see participants with * on tables) joined in the book discussions, revealing they had read the books as well. Their parents reported these children used books read in book club to create storyboards for a school competition, and some took accelerated reading tests (Renaissance Learning, nd) on the books.

Thus, as participants described their involvement in Community Book Club, they also reported shifts in both their own and their children's literacy practices. Many discussed reading more, wanting their children to read more, and purchasing more books for their children — practices that can be expected to affect children's literacy learning in school. Community members reported that a new practice for them was discussing literature with coworkers, family members, and friends, who would often borrow and read the books. Teachers reported they used the book club books frequently in classroom activities.

Sharing the lived experience of reading

Initially we conceived of Community Book Club's purpose as involving parents, community members, and teachers in "deep thinking," what McGinley, Conley, and White (2000) called *academic reading practices* that are characterized as "text intensive, ideational, and analytical" (p. 212). However, the kind of reading that the participants described in interviews was much more akin to the "lived experience" discussed by Rosenblatt (1995). For the Community Book Club participants, books seemed to extend their experiences (Mills, Stephens, O'Keefe, & Waugh, 2004).

> They lived "in the world of the work" and entered "into new potentialities of [their] own nature" where "the literary work is a unique model of experience, an expansion of the boundaries of [their] own temperaments and worlds, lived through in [their] own persons (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 68). For example, one parent described her reading as "soothing. I find it put me in my own little world … I'm like Juanita [character in *Dancing on the Edge of the Roof*], that's where I am, when I get to it [reading], and I am into that book, I am stirring spaghetti [with Juanita in the diner] and reading that book." Alternatively, Gloria said, "I was listening to her [Juanita]. I was feeling her pain."

Participants reported that this lived experience extended beyond the reading of the book at home and into the actual discussions during Community Book Club. Participants discussed their feelings of joy, excitement, and connection to others as a result of the participation in the book club activities. One of the assistants remarked about the leader of book club, "She made me feel something inside." The project reading coach said, "You know, discussing the book, you get excited. You relate to each other on a different level."

Changes in the manner in which members engaged in book discussions

For the first book club meeting we selected *Mirandy and Brother Wind* (McKissack, 1988) as the picture book and *Cane River* (Tademy, 2001) as the challenging book. Many members reported they did not read the adult selection: "I'd pick it up and then put it down." During initial interviews, participants described their involvement during the first book club meeting as "listening to the leader and others during the meeting." One teacher shared, "I didn't know what to expect [at the book club] and I didn't know what to say." Even the book club leader recognized that most participants were just "sittin' and gettin'."

Therefore, we changed the format of book club for the second meeting to encourage more interaction from the members. We began with discussion with the shorter text, usually a picture book, which almost all participants had read. Our leaders created PowerPoints that posed discussion questions. To encourage more discussion among group members, our leaders incorporated what the first leader, Patricia, called 'all call.' All call questions were asked to the group in such a way as to invite anyone to answer. For example, a few members provided responses, in choral fashion, but most members only nodded their heads, verbally saying, "Yes, that's true."

Viewing the tapes, it was obvious that this all call initiated a particular discourse pattern, *call and response* (Smitherman, 1995). Call and response is an African American oral tradition defined as "spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker's statements (calls) are punctuated by expressions (responses) from the listener" (p. 316).

The book leader initiated the call, a question. The participants responded. For example, referring to the event in *Chicken Sunday* (Polacco, 1992) where the children attempted to secretly purchase a hat for their grandmother, the leader said, "Those children knew they would be in trouble, but they had to keep quiet." Members smiled, laughed, and some nodded in agreement. Next, the leader threw out a question in the form of all call, "As a child, didn't you hate it when adults didn't believe you? It was not fair." Participants responded by shaking their heads in agreement, and chiming in, "Yes, I did."

Over time, the participants themselves led the call and response. During the fifth meeting, when Rochelle, the second book leader, invited participants

to discuss their favorite illustrations from *This Little Light of Mine* (Lewis, 2005), a parent shared the following.

"I don't know if anybody else noticed this."

She showed a page with an illustration of two young boys, one sitting with his head down as the other has just walked past. "But what did the boy do here?"

In a slightly raised voice, she continued, "He [the main character] helped eeeeverryone, but he passed by this boy." Pointing to picture, the parent threw out a call: "Then, he thought about it, and what did he do?"

Some spoke, but on our videotapes their comments were inaudible

The parent offered, "He went back to see what was wrong with the other boy."

Now some individuals responded by nodding their heads in agreement.

One member responded, "I didn't notice that. Did you?" She appeared to be speaking to her participant beside her.

Other members whispered among themselves.

The parent added, "For a child, that was pretty darn good!"

She threw out another call, "What would other children do?"

One book club participant responded by pointing her finger to indicate that the boy would have continued walking. Many participants said, "Go play ball." Others nodded in agreement. Some laughed.

 The parent extended the response, "They would go on." Changing her tone to imitate a boy's voice, "I don't care what is wrong, I'm going to play ball."

This parent used call and response to invite others to share her interpretation of an event. During later interviews, many participants confirmed that during this exchange they noticed for the first time the significance of this critical illustration to the story.

A third kind of participation in book discussion also emerged during the fifth book club, as participants shared insights they had either reading the book or during the discussion. For example, a parent made a connection between the unnamed boy and Juanita, the main characters of the picture book *This Little Light of Mine* (Lewis, 2005) and the romance novel *Dancing on the Edge of the Roof* (Williams, 2002). The parent said, "You know that little boy was letting his light shine, but you know what? I think Juanita was searching for her light." Many participants nodded, and others commented that Juanita was frustrated and looking for happiness. Most importantly, not only did this parent provide this insight, but she did so without any prompting from the leader.

The fifth meeting was a turning point for Community Book Club as we observed that participants appeared more confident about how to engage in and lead portions of the discussions. After the fifth book club there were numerous examples of participants willingly sharing their own insights about the books.

For example, a community member explained the importance of Grace, the main character in *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1998), acting out folktales from all over the world: "Each of the characters is from a different continent. That means when you read, you can go anywhere. That's what the grandmother was teaching Grace." While many participants willingly began sharing their own insights about the books, their sharing often began as a part of a small-group discussion with family members. Participants sat with other family members and often discussed various aspects of the books in these small-group discussions before sharing with the entire group.

INSIDE COMMUNITY BOOK CLUB #10

At the 10th meeting, we discussed *Brown Angels* (Meyers, 2004) and *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis, 2005). *Brown Angels* is a collection of short poems about children. The illustrations are photographs of African American children taken during the early 1900s. *Bud, Not Buddy* is an adolescent novel about a young African American boy who, after the death of his mother, runs away to search for his father whom he has never met.

As Community Book Club began, the leader identified common themes between the selections: "These books both have small things and great things. We learn large lessons from little people. Children teach us faith, hope and charity." Quoting from the Bible (I Corinthians 13:13), she continued, "'Now abideth faith, hope, charity.' We are going to look at each book for examples of faith, hope, and charity. Let's start with *Brown Angels.*" She issued her first call, "What comes to mind when we say angels?" Knowing it is their turn to speak, participants called out various answers such as "protectors," "pure," and "precious." The leader directed the group back to the book, "When we say *Brown Angels*, who are we talking about?" The participants responded, "Children." The leader confirmed, "*Our* children."

Next, the leader shared a childhood photograph and biographical information on Walter Dean Meyers, the author of *Brown Angels*. She presented three guiding questions:

1. How does the author portray children?
2. Why did the author choose photos from this era?
3. How do these portraits relate to us as Community Book Club members?

"Talk to your neighbors about these questions," she said. "Pick out your favorite picture. Tell your neighbors why it's your favorite and why you think Mr. Meyers included it in his book."

A few minutes later, the leader called the group back together and shared her favorite picture and poem. Then she called, "What things in the poem speak of faith?" Several participants spoke simultaneously, "There is hope for these children," "Their ancestors loved them," "Faith of the father, uncle,

mother." Another participant commented, "I have another poem about faith" and she read aloud "Love That Boy." Participants commented about this poem: "Even though he is young, we see he will be a good man," "It's looking into the future," "Seeing good things ahead." The leader shared other poems she had selected to portray hope and charity, reading each aloud, and inviting participants to comment. The leader and participants continued to share their favorite poems, pointing out examples of 'faith, hope, and charity'.

Later, one participant stood, "Look at 'Pretty Little Black Girls.' Look at that. I'm thinking I never saw a dress like that. That bow in her hair. She is *beautiful.* I never saw a beautiful black girl like that back then. It is something to be proud of." The book leader elaborated on her comment, "Yes, so how is Mr. Meyers portraying children?" Another participant responded, "When I got to this picture (the school picture), I was proud." The book leader pushed this idea: "What does this book say about children?" Various participants called out "fun," "innocent," "carefree," "beautiful," and "strong."

Another added, "This showed me how children could be just happy with almost nothing. They weren't materialistic. They just made do and played." Participants nodded their heads in agreement and chimed in, "Not like children today" or "That's true." The leader summarized this discussion, "We are drawn to these photographs. They look like children we know and love. These children were loved. Their parents felt proud."

After 30 minutes of discussion, the book leader introduced the evening's second piece of literature. "In *Bud, Not Buddy,* there are also many examples of faith, hope, and charity. First, let's review the main characters. Talk among yourselves. Share anything you remember about them." For the next 5 minutes, the church was a buzz of overlapping voices with punctuations of laughter. A few participants shared their ideas about different characters with the group. Next, the leader commented about the beginning episode of the book when Bud offers helpful suggestions to another boy who is going to a foster home. "This was an example of faith." A participant agreed, "Holding on to his mother's possessions. Bud believed they [possessions] would lead him to his father." Another participant added, "There were people, Lefty, the pretend step family, and others helped Bud. He kept searching. He had faith."

Continuing the discussion, the leader added, "You know when Bud faced real dangers, they didn't seem to faze him. But he was really frightened by things that did not exist." Several participants call out "vampires." The leader replied, "There were many times he thought about vampires" and participants called out, "In the car with Lefty," and another, "He had a wild imagination." Others laughed and chimed in "Yeah." Then one participant offered, "When one door closes," and several participants joined in to finish the phrase, "another door opens up." Everyone laughed and agreed.=

A participant:	I want to say that I wanted to beat up the Amoses.
Several participants:	Yeah; Oh, yes; Uh-huh
Participant continued:	My heart was so tender. I was glad the other man pretended to be his stepdad. I said, 'Now that's love.' You don't treat children like those Amoses.
Another participant:	I just wanted to stomp them.
Leader:	You know they [the stepfamily] did it and didn't get their check [referring to checks received by foster parents, a practice familiar in this community].
Several participants:	That's right; you know it's so (accompanied with much laughter).
A new participant:	I like the way he stood up to the older boy. It was a good way to let him know Bud wasn't scared.
Leader:	You got to stand up on your own at some point. He really showed his innocence. He just took the gun. I thought, Oh boy, don't do this. This is bad. So, who represents family love for Bud? Who was fatherly love?
Participants:	Lefty
Leader:	Who was motherly love?
Participant:	Ms. Thomas.
Participant:	He had a whole lot of uncles, those band members.
Participant:	You know I think we should think about the relationship between our people at that time opposed to today. Lefty saw Bud walking down the road and he stopped and picked him up. He knew the dangers for the boy. He did it because he genuinely cared for the boy. Today if the same thing happened, would the outcome be the same?

The conversations continued for the remainder of the time, leaving the leader with little time to draw together the evening's discussion: "We have seen great things in little packages. We saw that faith, hope, and charity do abide when adults reach out to children, who represent our bright futures."

Book Club Discussion as Situated Literacy Practices

Across time, particularly shown in our discussion of the 10th book club meeting, the participants demonstrated different kinds of literary insights, but more importantly, the actual literacy practices in Community Book Club changed. As we reviewed our videotapes, we came to recognize that the discussion in

our book club represented a unique, situated literacy practice shaped by and shaping participants (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Community Book Club was a specific observable literacy event (Heath, 1983) in which participants drew upon their existing literacy practices or cultural ways of reading and writing (Street, 1995). These literacy practices include both the actual behaviors and the ideologies and conceptualizations of reading and writing that individuals hold. Thus, literacy practices are inferred from observations of actual literacy events and from the ways that individuals discuss those events and their value.

Initially, members reported that they did not know what to expect or how to respond during early book club meetings. However, once the call and response discourse pattern was incorporated into discussions, many book club members readily took up this pattern of responding, even leading it in order to encourage others to respond. We found that our participants capitalized on this African American oral tradition as a powerful tool for sustaining their engagement and providing a means to enter the book discussion (Grace, 2004). In addition to the call and response discourse pattern, many participants shared their own insights and personal connections to books (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993); both types of comments were absent in the early book club meetings. We also noticed that parents, teachers, and other community members participated equally in the discussions, and all members extended their ways of participating to include extended explanations and literary interpretations of book events.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taylor (1997) suggested that family literacy must be robust enough to encompass mainstream and nonmainstream literacies of ever-changing family configurations. Our book club members represented a different conception of family in that teachers and community members included their husbands, mothers, children, sisters and brothers, and children. We found that Community Book Club influenced the literacy practices of a wide range of community members, teachers, and extended family members during meetings and in the community. At meetings, participants began talking more about books in a manner more analogous to school. We believe that one of the reasons for this change was that participants, especially community members and teachers, often attended and discussed books with nuclear and extended family members. As the number of family groups and the number of members within families grew, we noticed a new, shared excitement about the books and the meetings. Thus, we argue that a broader definition of family literacy is needed.

While our project focused on adults and an out-of-school literacy, our work has implications for classroom practice. Most teachers recognize that their students and their families possess valuable funds of knowledge (Gonzáles,

Moll, & Amanti, 2005), but many teachers are less secure in knowing what funds are available and how to access them for classroom instruction. To that end, Whitmore and Norton-Meier (2008) concluded: "Schools must recognize and validate that each family exists in an intellectually credible history, culture, and language and that families hold expertise" (p. 459). However, we would also argue that schools must also recognize and validate teachers' and other community members' literacy practices and funds of knowledge. We found that, in this community, those funds of knowledge included rich oral traditions and strong family connections. Similarly, classroom teachers can utilize their community's and students' funds of knowledge by incorporating the discourse patterns of their students into instruction. For example, Richardson (2003) has used call and response successfully to bridge home and school literacies for African American children

Like successful family literacy programs that allow participants to build upon family and community resources (Gonzáles, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), our Community Book club allowed participants to build on their own family resources. For us, those resources included the teachers' and community members' informal networks of friends and family and the local churches. Members recruited new participants for the Community Book Club mainly through their personal networks of family and friends. They shared books and tips about how to read books to be prepared for book club. Another resource seemed to be locating Community Book Club in local churches. Smithermann (1995) described the importance of church in the African American community as both the most powerful and oldest influential institution. By meeting at local churches, Community Book Club provided a neutral, nonthreatening setting for all participants with significance for the community.

A critical component of the success of Community Book Club was the selection of the book leader. We found that the leader needed to be skillful at engaging and encouraging the various participants to take on more roles and develop more interest in the books; the leader needed to be a cultural insider. Our book leaders were African American and familiar with the traditions of the African American church including call and response. The book leaders were skillful in selecting books that would appeal to the participants. We selected various genres, including but not limited to romance novels, collections of poems, and a book of essays. We used books whose characters and themes built upon and extended our participants' particular knowledge and experiences in the rural south (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Thus, while these African American characters and cultural themes were familiar to our participants, many members reported they read and enjoyed books that they would have never chosen themselves.

Our experience demonstrated that book clubs have the potential to promote increased enjoyment of books among teachers, families, and the

broader community as well as to expand personal and home literacy practices. Community Book Club allowed participants who had defined themselves as nonreaders at the beginning of the project with opportunities to engage in shared book readings and discussions in such a manner that redefined themselves as readers and reconstituted what counted as reading.

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