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The Home Literacy Environment:
A Qualitative Investigation of School-Aged Children

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Rachel Helen Zwass

2018
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Home Literacy Environment:
A Qualitative Investigation of School-Aged Children

by

Rachel Helen Zwass
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
University of California, Los Angeles, 2018
Professor Alison Bailey, Chair

As children become independent readers, they are expected to read, write, speak, and listen with increasing skill and complexity throughout the school years. Literacy is both an independent set of skills and what is used to access classroom content. Yet, less than half of California children in upper elementary grades are meeting or exceeding English language arts standards. In early childhood, the home literacy environment (HLE), generally defined as the interactions between parents and children concerning language and literacy development and the availability of literacy materials in the home, has been shown to be a reliable predictor of student achievement in literacy and an effective area for interventions. However, there is very little research into the HLE of school-aged children and a lack of a coherent definition of the construct for this age group. To gain a better understanding of the HLE for older children, and to develop better questions about how the HLE may impact contemporary child outcomes, an exploratory
approach to researching the HLE in middle childhood was necessary. This study explored, through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, the language and literacy activities and practices parents and children (in third to fifth grade) engaged in with each other and on their own outside of school. Interview findings showed ten components that made up the HLE of upper-elementary school-aged children: Homework or School Support; Child Non-School Literacy Behavior; Parent Literacy Behavior; Sibling Literacy Behavior; Family Home Literacy Activities; Family Literacy Outings; Technology; Foreign Language; Parent Beliefs; Child Characteristics. Observations confirmed these findings, while also highlighting the necessity to consider more than the number of books in the home when considering children’s access to text in the home. Overall, this study found that in creating an accurate and informative definition of the HLE construct for this age group to serve as a basis for continued and further research, as well as educational practice, a broader and more inclusive view of family practices and home environments must be considered. The HLE construct must be informative for use by families and education practitioners, and encourage culturally responsive research and classroom environments.
The dissertation of Rachel H. Zwass is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2018
DEDICATION

I want to thank everyone who made this piece of work, which at times seemed so impossible to complete, a reality. I have lived a lot of life during my years of graduate school: spending four years and two deployments apart from my now husband while he served in the US Army, our engagement and wedding, the deaths of my grandparents, and having our sweet lightning bug. While he has shared in my frustrations, he has never waivered in his support—thank you Chris. My family, in-laws, and “extended” family (Monica, Carlos, and Max) have always been ready with words of encouragement when I really needed them. And there is my beautiful daughter, who was in the same or next room through the majority of the writing of this document. She didn’t make it easy, but she sure gave me some motivation to get things done!

There are too many wonderful friends and colleagues to name here, but I could not imagine going through this journey without the shared hard work and hard laughter with the two ladies that round out the three musketeers—Cathy and Cristal, you may have beat me to the finish line, but you were with me the whole way. Thank you both for all of the encouragement!

I also could not have completed the work of this dissertation alone. Thank you to my incredible team of research assistants for their tireless efforts: Zoey, Kim, Kristen, Liz, Hannah, Miguel, and Yuchen, I hope I was able to express to you how amazing you all were. Thank you also to the people who participated in this study and shared a small slice of their lives with me.

Finally, I am so grateful to my advisor and mentor, Alison Bailey. Thank you for your encouragement and for believing in this study from its earliest incarnation as my Masters thesis. I don’t think I would have had the courage to push for this amount of data collection and foundational work without your unwavering support. Thank you also for not just your patience as the many phases of my life caused delays, but also your joy in my accomplishments.
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English Composition, Rhetoric, and Language

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PUBLICATIONS


RECENT PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS


Chapter One: Introduction and Review of the Literature

Once children enter formal schooling, the need to be able to learn and communicate information through both written and oral communication is imperative. Children are expected to be able to read, write, speak, and listen with increasing skill and complexity as they move through the school years, in addition to the content they learn in the classroom. Yet, in 2016, less than half of California students in grades three to five met or exceeded English language arts and literacy standards ("California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress," 2016). For those children who struggle with reading and writing as they grow older, learning in all subject areas can also be more difficult. Finding efficient and effective ways to foster literacy and language skills as children develop could help alleviate some of the difficulty of accessing and communicating about the subjects they learn in school. In early childhood, parents have been shown to have the potential to have a strong positive influence on literacy and language development (e.g., Chow, McBride-Chang, & Cheung, 2009; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006a). However, the ways parents may impact this development as children grow older and become independent readers has not been sufficiently examined. The current study investigated the ways in which parents or caregivers participate in language and literacy activities with, and foster this development in, their school-aged children.

Much research has been conducted about the importance of the early childhood years in regard to their impact on literacy and language development over the long term. In particular, there is a large body of research that focuses on how the “home literacy environment” (HLE) contributes to positive early literacy outcomes for young children (e.g., Evans & Shaw, 2008; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Weigel et al., 2006a). The definition of the HLE can include both formal and informal interactions between parents and children concerning reading, such as
dialogic reading practices, availability of literacy materials in the home, discussions between adults and children about literature, and more. However, once children enter formal schooling—the time when they will leverage these early literacy skills in the classroom to learn to read and write, and eventually read to learn—discussion about and research into the HLE virtually disappears.

When children reach school-age, research on the impact of parents on learning does not actually disappear, but instead shifts to a focus on parent involvement (PI). While research on PI does often include some home activities, or community activities outside the school, the emphasis of PI research tends to be on the quality and quantity of communication between the family and school, the participation of the parent or family at the school site, and the socioeconomic standing of the family (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Continuing the HLE paradigm with this age group through a renewed focus on the interactions between parents (or other caregivers in the family) and their children could shed further light on how families could support important literacy and language development at home in a purposeful way.

Having command over oral and written language is critical for students’ success in school. In the United States, children are not only expected to enter Kindergarten with certain emergent literacy skills, but in just a few short years to be established in the literacy skills of reading, writing, and spelling such that they can employ them with increasing complexity across different subjects. Once children have built this foundation in literacy, they will need to rely on it to build analytic skills and tackle domain-specific content knowledge, as well as to continue to raise their reading and writing skill levels (Snow, 2006). These later, essential literacy skills build upon early literacy skills such that language ability in early childhood can predict reading comprehension as far as high school (Dickinson, 2011). Those children, then, who have a solid
foundation in areas such as vocabulary, syntax, and reading comprehension continue to build upon these skills and show increasingly positive literacy outcomes. In contrast, those children who do not have a good base in these skills perform increasingly worse than their more advanced peers, creating a “fan effect,” also known as the Mathew effect, of larger skill and achievement gap over time (e.g., Dickinson, 2011; McCardle, Scarborough, & Catts, 2001). It is imperative to find ways to mitigate these trajectories to lessen the skills and achievement gaps between these children.

Parent participation in literacy and language development in school-aged children is one under-researched area that could lessen those gaps. Viewing parents’ roles in their children’s language and literacy development through an ecocultural framework, they exert substantial influence by and through the routine activities they engage in with their children (Weisner, 2002). Through this influence, parents have the opportunity to leverage the resources available to them to impact their children’s outcomes both in the classroom and beyond it. As a result, as seen through a social capital perspective, more effectively leveraging these family resources can be seen as “information that provides a competitive advantage” for children when that information flows efficiently between the home and school settings (Crosnoe, 2009).

Preliminary findings from a qualitative investigation into the out-of-school interactions between parents and their school-aged children found that although parents did seem to be fostering literacy and language development for their children, they felt as though they were not doing enough in this area (Zwass, 2014). While parents valued literacy and language development, they were overwhelmed by the schoolwork and extracurricular activities their children were involved in and could not imagine how to fit more guided activity into their schedules. This suggests a disruption in the flow of information between researchers, educators,
and parents regarding how literacy and language development progresses as children become independent readers, as well as how to foster development in these areas. Considering the potential impact of parents on their children’s literacy and language outcomes, as seen in both the HLE and PI research literature, further investigation into closing this gap is warranted, with extending the HLE paradigm to middle childhood as a promising avenue of research. The current study utilized a qualitative, mixed methods approach to investigating the HLE of older children to build a better foundation for defining the HLE for this age group and for conducting more rigorous, informed, and inclusive research.

What is the Home Literacy Environment?

“Literacy skills are akin to a complex tapestry, woven together by threads of different dimensions. The intricate patterns that emerge are a function of the interactions between the dimensions.” (Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001, p. 86)

The HLE represents one dimension of the threads that are a part of the tapestry that is children’s achievement in literacy. Generally, the HLE is part of the domain of early childhood experiences that predict success at school entry and beyond (exceptions will be discussed later in this review). Broadly speaking, the HLE is defined as the parent characteristics, exposure to literacy materials, interactions with parents, and other resources that children may experience in the home or with family. However, the way that the HLE is operationally defined and measured varies greatly in the research literature. Regardless of how the HLE is defined, the quality of the HLE has been shown to repeatedly predict literacy and language outcomes for children.
Defining the HLE

The HLE is sometimes conceived of as a single proxy, such as shared-book reading (see Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). More often, the HLE is comprised of either a simple combination of parental characteristics and child exposure to some specific literacy-related activity (e.g., Davidse, de Jong, Bus, Huijbregts, & Swaab, 2011), through parent characteristics only (e.g., Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002), or through multiple measures of parent and child attitudes, parent and child activities, family demographics, and home resources (e.g., Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Burgess, 2002). Parental characteristics may include parents’ attitudes about teaching literacy and the importance of literacy, parents’ own literacy habits, parents’ literacy abilities, and parents’ demographic characteristics (such as maternal education or other indicators of socioeconomic status). Literacy-related activities other than shared book reading may include language-based games, parent-child conversation, and visits to the library. Measures of home resources are common in HLE research and typically refer to the physical environment, most often measured by the number of books or other textual objects available to the child or in the home in general, and may also include measures of socioeconomic status (e.g., Boerma, Mol, & Jolles, 2017; Braten, Lie, Andreassen, & Olaussen, 1999; Katzir, Lesaux, & Kim, 2009; Phillips & Lonigan, 2009).

When the HLE is operationalized through multiple measures or complex single measures, investigators determine their items based on their own definition of what comprises the HLE. For example, the HLE is often equated with the terms “family literacy” or “family literacy environments,” which refer to the general literacy level of the family and programs designed to promote literacy with more than just the target child (Britto & Brooks-
In their study, Britto and Brooks-Gunn (2001) defined the family literacy environment as consisting of three dimensions: language and verbal interactions, the learning climate, and the social and emotional climate. The focus of the language and verbal interaction dimension was the amount of decontextualized oral language interaction, or oral discussion of abstract concepts, that took place with children. The learning climate measured the physical environment and was made up of the access children had to textual objects, such as books, and the interactions children had with these objects through their parents. The social and emotional climate was defined by the parents’ responsiveness to children’s needs, particularly during interactions such as shared book reading.

In another interpretation of the HLE, Burgess (2002) operationalized the HLE as consisting of the limiting environment and the literacy interface. The limiting environment included parental resources and status (such as socioeconomic status) and parental characteristics (such as their own attitudes and literacy abilities). The literacy interface included the ways parents convey to their children their values about literacy, and was further broken down into parental interest and parental motivation. Parental interest referred to the literacy activities parents participated in themselves that children may or may not have observed, while parental motivation referred to those literacy activities in which parents and children participated together.

While Britto and Brooks-Gunn’s (2001) and Burgess’s (2002) conceptualizations are quite different from one another, they both include important defining characteristics of the HLE. Both studies included measures of parent-child literacy interactions and children’s exposure to adult language behaviors or literacy practices. However, Britto and Brooks-Gunn took the perspective of the child, focusing on the experiences children have with their parents
and the quality of those interactions; Burgess instead took the viewpoint of the parent, concentrating on those parent factors that may influence the structure of the home environment and subsequent parent-child interactions.

**The HLE and Children’s Literacy and Language Outcomes**

The HLE has been shown repeatedly in the literature to contribute to children’s success in literacy and language in school and on other standardized measures of achievement. “Literacy” and “language abilities” are also multifaceted sets of skills, rather than single domains that are measured only one way, and the HLE has been shown to impact these skills in several dimensions. For example, elements of the HLE have been associated with preschoolers’ expressive language, morphological comprehension, rhyme detection, and school readiness (defined as knowledge of colors, shapes, and other general information) (e.g., Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Raz & Bryant, 1990; Sénéchal, Pagan, Lever, & Ouellette, 2008; Whitehurst et al., 1988). The HLE also contributes to phonological sensitivity, a significant predictor of early decoding skills (Burgess, 2002). The impact of the HLE is not limited to mainstream populations in the United States or to early literacy skills. Positive associations with literacy outcomes have been shown internationally (Niklas & Schneider, 2013; Park, 2008), longitudinally (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002), and in minority populations (Farver, Xu, Lonigan, & Eppe, 2013).

Studies have also found that specific aspects of the HLE are associated with different emergent literacy outcomes. For example, Bingham (2007) found that a measure of HLE that included information about the frequency and length of book reading interactions, number of books in the home, and frequency of library visits was positively related to children’s
receptive language skills and emergent reading behaviors. The study’s measure of instructional quality of book reading interactions was positively related to concepts of print and letter knowledge. A third measure of the affective quality of book reading interactions predicted emergent reading skills. Differentiating between the different aspects of the HLE and studying how they individually effect literacy and language outcomes allows researchers to gain some insight into the mechanisms of the HLE.

**How the Home Literacy Environment Improves Literacy Outcomes**

Since the HLE is such a strong predictor of children’s literacy outcomes, it is important to understand how the HLE “works.” What about the HLE, specifically, leads to children’s success in literacy at school entry and beyond? Answering this question could help guide parents in creating supportive environments for their children and focus their efforts on the activities and practices that will benefit their children the most, as well as provide clues for how what would define a positive HLE in older children.

Some “mechanisms” of the HLE are easy to understand. For example, Sénéchal et al. (1998) found that storybook exposure predicted oral language skills but not written language skills, while parent teaching predicted written skills and not oral skills. The authors concluded that these associations were logical, in that exposure to written language alone may be able to improve oral language outcomes, but written language skills require more guidance and teaching to develop. Also, because emergent literacy is characterized and enhanced by children’s curiosity and willingness to experiment with books, Britto and Brooks-Gunn (2001) described a “naturalness to emergent literacy that gives importance to out-of-school literacy experiences” (p. 74); which means, as a first step toward becoming
readers, children benefit from an environment at a young age that encourages interacting with and enjoying books. This reasoning can help explain why HLE measures that simply use one or two proxy variables to indicate the physical HLE (such as the number of books in the home) and another active component (such as number of visits to the library) are able to find significant connections to early literacy outcomes (e.g., Raz & Bryant, 1990). In other words, there is an inherent logic as to why the HLE positively impacts children’s literacy outcomes.

Digging deeper into how specific dimensions of the HLE effect particular literacy or language outcomes allows us to provide insight for parents and targeted programming and interventions for children. Studies that measure several aspects of the HLE (separately or through creating composite variables (Bingham, 2007)) and look for correlations between these aspects and different parts of emergent literacy, or later literacy outcomes, shed light on how the HLE contributes to literacy success for children. Once the relationships are documented, many of the relationships between the HLE and literacy outcomes are quite logical. For example Bingham (2007) noted that the positive correlation between frequent interaction with books and development of language skills such as receptive language skills makes sense because children are exposed to more rare words in books than they are in casual conversation. The instructional quality of joint book reading (as opposed to frequency or quantity) positively correlated to concepts of print and letter knowledge, which indicates that explicit teaching predicts more academic skills. A third measure, one of affective quality, predicted emergent reading behaviors, suggesting that the nature of the joint reading interaction effected the children’s motivation to explore reading on their own.
Britto and Brooks-Gunn (2001) also examined the relationships between each dimension of their definition of the family literacy environment and children’s verbal and school readiness outcomes in a low-income population. The authors found positive associations between: maternal decontextualized and expressive language use during shared book reading with preschoolers’ expressive language; the learning environment, made up of the quality of maternal assistance in engaging children in shared book reading (more strongly associated) and academic stimulation in the home, with expressive language and school readiness; and maternal warmth during shared book reading with children’s school readiness skills. The authors did not find strong associations with their measures and children’s receptive vocabulary, which they attribute to the limited observations of the study. In other words, parents likely expose their children to decontextualized language or other kinds of academic stimulation outside of shared book reading, but these interactions were not observed for this study and may not have been sufficiently documented (or as strongly documented in comparison to the observed activities) to show associations with all verbal outcomes.

The framework provided by Burgess et al. (2002) to assess the relative impact of different conceptualizations of the HLE is particularly useful in understanding the mechanisms that allow a rich HLE to translate to positive early literacy outcomes. In an extension of previous work, Burgess and colleagues present six conceptualizations: Overall HLE, Limiting Environment, Literacy Interface, Passive HLE, Active HLE, and Shared Reading. The Overall HLE was comprised of all of the other HLE composites, weighting them for measurement so that each would carry equal weight regardless of the number of items included. The Limiting Environment included measures of the parents’ resources,
including SES and parents’ literacy abilities. The Literacy Interface measured the activities in which parents may participate to expose their children to literacy, either directly through things like shared reading, or indirectly through the expression of their own views of the value of literacy (such as reading for pleasure). The Passive HLE took into account those practices that a parent might engage in that expose their children to literacy through modeling activities while not trying to explicitly teach a skill (such as reading regularly or watching TV). The Active HLE included activities aimed to foster development or teach skills (such as rhyming games). Shared Reading was the final conceptualization of HLE, as it is the most commonly measured dimension of the HLE.

In this study, all of these dimensions were measured through parent report on a comprehensive questionnaire. All six conceptualizations were significantly related to their outcome measures of phonological sensitivity, letter-name knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, and oral language. Additionally, SES was only significantly related to two outcomes, letter-name knowledge and phonological sensitivity, showing that features of a supportive HLE are not necessarily determined by SES. When placed in different regression models, the conceptualizations that included more active and interactive features (such as Literacy Interface) were more likely to remain statistically significant. These findings suggest that while implicit behaviors such as modeling do have an impact on child literacy outcomes, they can be overshadowed by more explicit or overt behaviors. Although more active or interactive practices have been found to have stronger associations with children’s literacy outcomes, less active dimensions of the HLE are also important because things such as parents’ beliefs in their role in contributing to literacy and language development are what can drive and inform the overall HLE (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006b).
In considering what an effective and supportive HLE might look like in older children, this research from early childhood suggests that there will be both active and passive components. While parent beliefs will likely continue to shape the overall HLE, it is also reasonable to assume that highly interactive literacy or language activities will have the biggest impact on children’s academic outcomes. However, as dialogic reading practices, rhyming games, and explicit teaching practices may not be as appropriate with older children, or may look very different, it is important to understand what kinds of age-appropriate literacy and language activities actually occur at home for older children. In addition, modeling activities and parent beliefs may hold a different salience for older children who are able to understand and differentiate between different activities (such as if parents read novels for pleasure or engage in writing activities for work) and discuss expectations and beliefs about literacy and academics in general with their parents. The physical environment needed to best support literacy and language development as children grow older may change as well, as children become more able to interact with text in a variety of ways both with their parents and independently.

**Socioeconomic Status and the Home Literacy Environment**

SES of families is a major predictive factor in the academic, social, and emotional outcomes of children. The construct of SES differs from study to study, including various combinations of indicators such as family income, maternal or parental education, and race or ethnicity. In general, these measures of SES are used by researchers as proxies for underlying differences between families that are assumed to be influenced by the resources (cultural, financial, or otherwise) available to them based on such factors. While research
may reveal that the most effective practices of the HLE are more in line with those practices of families of higher SES, it is still important to communicate these findings. Such findings can be more reflective of the expectations and values of the school, as opposed to “shortcomings” of the family practices of certain populations (Brice Heath, 1983/1996). Demystifying these expectations and values is a first step toward better aligning school and family support to aide in improved student literacy outcomes.

SES is sometimes used as a covariate in HLE studies, and is a part of the HLE measure in others. Burgess (2002) argues that SES should be included in HLE measures as characterizing the resources at a parent’s disposal. I disagree with Burgess’s argument, in part because of a conclusion that Burgess later draws in the same study. Burgess points out that of the many predictor variables associated with children’s literacy outcomes, HLE is one of the only variables that can be manipulated or changed through intervention. SES is not readily changed in an intervention, but elements of the HLE can be. By including SES within measures of the HLE instead of as a covariate of the HLE, we cloud the ability to see where reasonable suggestions can be made to improve the home environment.

For example, in their seminal study, Hart and Risley (1995, 1999) found that children of higher SES were exposed to more vocabulary than children of low SES. Knowing that this “word gap” exists, though, does not necessarily tell us how or why these differences come to be. Do parents of higher SES read to their children more, thereby exposing them to more of the less frequently used words that are more commonly found in books? Or do these parents use a greater repertoire of words in casual conversations, possibly because of their professions or educational backgrounds? Hart and Risley do tackle many of these questions of mechanism in their own work, but it is important to continue asking similar questions
about the other aspects of the HLE as children grow older. If we find that children who have highly educated mothers (a common SES indicator) tend to have better literacy outcomes, then it is more informative to have evidence of the differences of daily practices between these mothers, which can be used to reveal obstacles for less educated parents and design interventions, than to simply suggest that it is helpful for mothers to have more education.

In one Israeli study, investigators specifically examined how HLE varied by SES (Korat, Klein, & Segal-Drori, 2007). SES was used to divide the sample into two groups, high SES (HSES) and low SES (LSES), and the HLE was compared between the two groups. By dividing the two groups, the researchers were able to see how their SES impacted the HLE. The authors found that LSES families had significantly fewer educational resources in the home (such as games and books) and participated in significantly fewer literacy activities than HSES families. In addition, the SES divide uncovered a difference in how mothers interacted with print with their children during shared book reading. LSES mothers interacted with text and stories less deeply than HSES mothers. This study found SES to be the strongest predictor of emergent literacy outcomes, but the detailed investigation into how and why these differences occurred between SES groups is incredibly informative.

In addition to income and parent education, minority status impacts the HLE. There is evidence that language minority families can support literacy development in children in both the home language and the language of schooling through the HLE, but they experience some limitations. In a study with Head Start children (Farver et al., 2013), researchers measured both Spanish and English HLE activities and resources. Mothers completed surveys detailing practices with their children such as how much they read to their children, played rhyming games with their children, pointed out letters and words, and taught letters or
words, as well as parent practices such as how often parents read on their own. Mothers answered all of these questions for how often they occurred in each language. Researchers also measured English and Spanish home literacy resources by touring the homes of participants and measuring the physical environment through the amount of Spanish or English children’s reading books, alphabet books and toys, educational games, and print materials. Measures of reading with siblings were also included. Researchers found that the Spanish and English HLEs each were positively associated with within-language literacy outcomes, but were not always positively associated to literacy outcomes across languages. Parents’ literacy-related behaviors in Spanish were negatively associated with some of children’s English oral language skills, and there were no associations between aspects of the English HLE and Spanish pre-literacy skills. Since these families had low-incomes in addition to speaking Spanish at home, researchers interpreted that these findings may have been due to a lack of resources to have a sufficient amount of quality materials in both languages with which parents and children could interact.

Low SES families are particularly vulnerable to having less enriching HLEs and lower child achievement scores (van Steensel, 2006). They often have less time to interact with their children because of less desirable work schedules or holding multiple jobs, as well as fewer financial resources to provide an abundance of literacy tools in the home. Designing interventions that target the improvement of shared reading interactions could be one way to improve the HLE of low SES families. Further investigations into the mechanisms of the HLE that improve child outcomes could inform these families how to best focus their resources to benefit their children, and how communities could better support low SES families in creating a more enriching HLE. Continuing this research for the HLE of older
children as well could help families with children who continue to struggle with literacy and language.

**Assessing the Home Literacy Environment in Older Children**

As shown thus far, the research literature on the HLE focuses on early childhood practices in the home and looks to emergent literacy, school readiness, and longitudinal verbal associations as outcomes. After the early childhood and primary years, the term HLE virtually disappears from the literature. It is possible that the characteristics of the HLE that are important for older children are subsumed in other research paradigms, such as parent involvement (PI), which is also referred to more recently as parent or family engagement. However, in light of findings that the HLE of school-aged children is still positively associated with their literacy behaviors and verbal skills in a variety of populations (e.g., Braten et al., 1999; Katzir et al., 2009; Rashid, Morris, & Sevcik, 2005; Yuet-Han Lau & McBride-Chang, 2005), I argue that investigating and broadening our understanding of the impact of the HLE should continue beyond these early years.

The home environment is often measured as part of investigations into PI in children’s education beyond the early childhood years. The attitudes, daily practices, cognitively stimulating activities, and resources of the home are included in conceptualizations of parent involvement such as home-based involvement, parenting, and socialization of children (Epstein, 1995; Hill & Tyson, 2009). However, these studies do not typically focus on the connections between environmental factors of the home and children’s literacy and language achievement.
Three studies have applied the concept of the concurrent HLE in their investigations with school-aged children. In their study of fourth-grade students, Katzir et al. (2009) investigated the impact of the HLE on reading comprehension scores through its effect on children’s reading self-concept. To assess the HLE, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire that included 20 items and represented these five composite parts of the overall HLE: home literacy environment (such as the number of print items in the home and when parents started reading to their children), family teaching and help with literacy (such as how often family members read to children currently and how often family members helped children with schoolwork), family members’ own engagement in literacy activities (such as how often family members read or wrote), child’s literacy activities (such as how often children read on their own and how much the child enjoyed reading), and frequency of child’s visits to the library. This study found that a supportive HLE was associated with children having a better reading self-concept on all three dimensions of the construct, which were positive attitudes towards reading, perception of ease with reading, and perception of reading competence. In particular, the HLE was associated most strongly with positive attitudes towards reading. Higher reading self-concept predicted better reading comprehension, indicating an indirect relationship between the HLE and success in reading comprehension.

In a Norwegian study of third- and fourth-grade students, researchers found that the HLE was indirectly associated with student literacy outcomes (Braten et al., 1999). The researchers viewed HLE as important for children in this age group through a model of informal literacy socialization. The HLE was defined as having three components: positive models, access to written language, and exposure to written language at home, and was
measured through a survey administered to students. In designing this survey, researchers were conscious to keep content in line with HLE questionnaires used with younger children while making sure the questions were relevant for the age group. They also only used items that could not be explained by the child’s own reading habits. In the 12-item survey, children were asked how much other people in their home read (including parents and siblings), how much they were read to before they could read independently, and how many books and other print materials were in the home. The study found that the HLE impacted literacy outcomes indirectly through leisure time reading by the children. That is, HLE scores predicted how much children read for pleasure, which in turn was predictive of their literacy outcomes. In this way, even after children became independent readers, having a home environment that supported reading continued to positively impact their literacy performance.

A more recent study of Dutch third- and fourth-grade students found strong evidence that the HLE positively impacted reading comprehension, both directly and indirectly (Boerma et al., 2017). Boerma and colleagues defined the HLE through a composite made up of parental print exposure and number of parents’ and children’s books in the home (as estimated by the parent). Using path analysis, researchers found that HLE had positive associations with reading comprehension both directly and indirectly through mentalizing (which the authors defined as “the ability to infer other people’s mental state” (p. 181)) and child print exposure. HLE also showed positive relation to expressive verbal ability (including expressive vocabulary and narrative ability), but expressive verbal ability did not have a significant relation to reading comprehension in the final path model. Importantly, this path analysis shows that, along with other predictors, the HLE was a stronger predictor of reading comprehension for third- and fourth-grade Dutch students than expressive verbal
ability. In separate models for the older and younger children in the sample, researchers also found that the relation between print exposure and mentalizing disappeared, leading them to conclude that HLE may be a stronger predictor of mentalizing abilities in younger children than their exposure to print. Together, these findings support the notion that the HLE of children who can read independently is still important for student outcomes, particularly when examined through indicators of leisure time reading, such as child print exposure.

All of these studies found an indirect relationship between the HLE and literacy outcomes in older children. The HLE was more important for encouraging independent reading habits in children, which gives children more informal experience with text that is able to also improve their scholastic skills. The findings suggest that the HLE supports independent reading by cultivating better attitudes towards reading. However, all three studies also used the number of books in the home as part of the measurement of the HLE, a problematic proxy because of its potential to be confounded with socioeconomic status (Park, 2008).

The studies discussed in this section combined the concepts of the home environment measured in the PI literature in school-aged children (such as socializing children to enjoy literacy in the home or helping children with schoolwork) with concepts typically measured in the early childhood HLE literature (such as access to print material in the home) to create developmentally appropriate measures of the HLE. These investigations also extended the typical conceptualizations of the HLE and PI. First, two included the potential impact of siblings and other family members on the home environment. By measuring the HLE through child report, Braten et al. (1999) also highlighted the fact that children can be a source of information regarding their home environments as they grow older. Involving
children in research on the HLE could provide insight into how to support autonomy in older children, as well as highlight activities that children will enjoy and feel comfortable doing on their own or with their parents or other adults (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wiseman, 2011).

**Summary**

Through study of the HLE, families have been found to have the ability to positively influence the emergent and long-term literacy skills of their young children. While there has been some investigation into the HLE of school-aged children and its impact on student outcomes, much research is still needed in this area to determine what truly constitutes or represents the HLE of children as they become independent readers and move through the school years. While some of these home-based activities are studied in research on PI, continuing the HLE paradigm for older children could better highlight the ways direct and indirect influences of the home impact student outcomes.

As predicted by an ecocultural framework (Weisner, 2002) and confirmed in this review of the literature on the HLE, many different aspects of family practices and the home contribute to the impact of the HLE in young children. However, even in young children, researchers have found it difficult to decide which aspects of the HLE may have the greatest effect on achievement and would be the most important to measure (Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001). As children grow older, their possible sources for literacy and language development grow as well, to include school, peers, adult influences other than their primary caregivers, older and younger siblings, and more. Even with these influences, parents and caregivers have the opportunity to give their children advantages through the social capital they gain in their home environment (Crosnoe, 2009). For example, parents can encourage the specific
literary interests of their children, find the right kind of help for their children when they struggle with reading or writing, and incorporate new language experiences into their lives in fun and interesting ways through family connections. Instead of making assumptions about what aspects of a child’s environment outside of school may carry the most salience for the child in language development, it is important to first seek a better understanding of what these experiences are and how they may look different in various family situations influenced by family make-up, the child’s own interests, race and ethnicity, languages spoken in the home, and SES.

In order to gain a better understanding of the HLE for older children, and to develop better questions about how the HLE may impact contemporary child outcomes, a qualitative, exploratory approach to researching the HLE in middle childhood was necessary. Additionally, this type of approach allowed for the recognition of the many different kinds of family practices, including those from groups that are typically undervalued and underrepresented. To be as inclusive as possible, this study sought to recognize the many different ways families could engage with their children in language and literacy, as well as the range of values and expectations they may have for children, or the salience of these different practices based on their cultures and communities (Bailey & Osipova, 2016; Isik-Ercan, 2010).

To this end, the current study explored, through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, the language and literacy activities and practices parents and children engaged in with each other and on their own outside of school. Parent interviews were coded to identify what behaviors and activities in their family lives could be considered part of the HLE, and then those behaviors and activities were analyzed to present a coherent description
of the HLE of school-aged children. Observations of families provided illustrative examples of how the HLE was folded into children’s lives, and served to triangulate the interview findings in addition to contributing to the description of the HLE independently. The overarching aim of this study was to expand our understanding of how the home literacy environment should be defined for school-aged children to create a more robust foundation for future research and subsequent recommendations for families and educators. Specifically this study sought to: (1) Explore the language and literacy activities and practices that parents and children participate in, together and separately, outside of school. (2) Understand the processes that impact these practices and activities (such as familial socioeconomic status characteristics). The researcher used both existing data from previous investigations and collected new, complimentary data from new participants.
Chapter Two: Methods

Participants

Twenty families participated in this study. Participants were volunteer parents of upper elementary students (ages 8-11) from various areas throughout California who volunteered to take part in interviews. Of the 20 families who participated, five families volunteered to first participate in an in-depth observational study that focused on the target children (the families of Marie, Rebecca, Tara, Shawnda and Jose, and Maria in Table 1). The six target children from these five families (two were siblings who were close in age) gave assent to participate in the study.

Participants were recruited through flyers and announcements at school sites, direct contact from a member of the research team, and recommendations through common acquaintances or other parents who had participated in the study. Participation was completely voluntary. The unit of analysis was the family, accounting for the possible participation of both parents in one interview or multiple school-aged children in a household. Parents completed a basic demographic questionnaire before taking part in the interview (See Table 1).

Income ranged from less than $30,000 a year to over $100,000 a year, with 14 of the 20 families earning over $100,000 a year. All but two of the parents interviewed had completed at least some college. An array of racial and ethnic backgrounds was represented\(^1\), including Middle Eastern, North African, Latino, Euro-American, African-American, Japanese, and Indian.

\(^1\) Information regarding race and ethnicity was gathered both from the demographic survey and through participant report in the interviews. All names are pseudonyms.
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<th>Race</th>
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<th>Gender of Target Child</th>
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*Starred families participated in observations as well as interviews.

Procedures

Demographic survey

Participants completed a survey to determine basic demographic information (race/ethnicity, household income, parental education, number of family members, gender of child) that was used to determine SES and ethnicity. For the purposes of this study, SES was determined by combining family income and parent education.

Interview protocols

Parent participants took part in semi-structured interviews designed to discover and discuss the literacy activities they engaged in with their children (see Appendix A). Twenty
interviews were conducted with 22 parents (in two interviews, both parents participated), with interviews ranging in length from approximately 45 minutes to 75 minutes. The interviews took place in locations that were convenient for the participant and were both quiet and private (e.g., the participants’ homes or offices). Interviews were audio-recorded and began with a general question asking the parent to explain a typical day or week, followed by specific questions focusing on the activities identified by the participant to elaborate further on their descriptions. Follow up questions also included asking the parent about possible activities not mentioned, such as conversations in the car, bedtime routines, dinner conversations, etc. If the participant did not identify any literacy or academic activities, follow up questions were asked to explicitly address any possible literacy or language related activities. Participants were also asked to identify their motivations for these activities and any perceived connections they made to their child’s academic outcomes. For those families that volunteered for the observational portion of the study, these interviews took place after the observational period had concluded to allow for the inclusion of questions to clarify practices observed in the home.

Child participants from families that volunteered for observation were also interviewed. They took part in a semi-structured interview that began by debriefing the observational period and then moved on to more general questions about language and literacy practices (e.g., what their favorite reading or writing activity was or what they thought their parents’ attitudes were about reading and writing).

**Researcher notes**

After parents consented to participate in the study, relevant comments made by the parents were noted by the researcher. These may have included notes during the interview as
well as notation of affect and comments made after the interview was finished, such as if a parent remembered a literacy activity after the audio recorder was turned off.

**Participant observation**

The researcher engaged in participant observation of the families that chose to participate in the observational portion of the study. The researcher also obtained assent from the target child before beginning observation. Observation centered around the target child, following the child on three separate days outside of school deemed convenient by the family, but meant to represent the variation in the family’s schedule from day to day (e.g., a Monday, a Thursday, and a weekend day). The researcher took field notes of activities and interactions the child took part in throughout the time, while also noting parent activities during the time period. For example, on a weekday, the researcher might accompany the parent to pick up the child from school, then stay with the child at an extracurricular activity, and come back home with the child to observe the rest of the evening, which could include dinner, time for homework, and the bedtime routine. While the focus of observation was the child, if the parents were in view their activities were also noted, such as if they were cooking, reading, or watching television, and if they were checking in on the child’s activities. On school days, observations typically lasted from about 3:00 p.m. until about 8:00 p.m. On non-school days, observations started in the morning at a time convenient for the family and lasted until late afternoon, totaling at least six hours for the day. Photographs, audio recordings, and video recordings were also used to capture events or activities of interest, such as recording conversations between parents and children while working on homework or photographing the location of age-appropriate books for the child in the house.

**Analysis**
Interviews were analyzed utilizing a grounded theory approach using inductive coding informed by existing characterizations of the HLE and based on the themes that arose from the data. The interviews were coded in a stepped process that was both inductive and comparative (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009).

First, all passages in the transcripts that contained references to or descriptions of active (i.e., activities and practices) or passive (i.e., beliefs and modeling behaviors) parts of the HLE were identified and assigned a code. Behaviors, beliefs, and activities described by parents that were not part of the HLE were coded as Other. The researcher and members of the research team (four research assistants) identified these practices and beliefs separately and then met to find consensus regarding the assigned categories. Within these general categories, more descriptive codes were assigned to the passages to further describe what type of activity or behavior had been coded (e.g., modeling or school-related activity). The researcher and research team all completed coding and achieved consensus for three interviews to finalize the coding scheme and ensure general consistency in coding moving forward. The remaining interviews were consensus coded by two research assistants and the researcher, with each person first coding independently, then meeting to discuss any differences in coding and coming to consensus on the final code or codes assigned. All final coding was completed on the Dedoose platform. Once all of the interviews had been coded for passive and active HLE, the activities and practices from the HLE were reviewed for patterns in types of activities found across families.

The researcher also attempted to code deductively according to two existing models of the HLE to determine the extent to which these models represent the opportunities for literacy and language development in the lives of the participants of this study. The two models previously employed with school-aged children were: 1) the Katzir et al. (2009) model that
consists of five composite parts of the overall HLE: home literacy environment, family teaching and help with literacy, family members’ own engagement in literacy activities, child’s literacy activities, and frequency of child’s visits to the library; and 2) the Braten et al. (1999) model that consists of three components: positive models, access to written language, and exposure to written language at home. However, the type of interview data collected for this study did not align well with the specificity and scope of the existing models according to the definitions available. Because coding the interviews according to these models would not fairly or accurately represent either the interviews or the models, the findings of this study will be compared more generally to these models in the Discussion chapter.

Participant observation data and child interviews served to confirm and extend parents’ accounts of life for the target child outside of school. Participant observation data was also used to create profiles of each family, which provided holistic accounts of how literacy and language activities are imbedded in actual family life. Commonalities found across families were also identified.

**Researcher Position Statement**

In all qualitative research, the identity of the researcher(s) impacts the outcome of the study, whether that be in the recruitment of participants, collection of the data, interpretation of the data, or any other step along the way. In a study that required participants to reveal so much about their daily lives, and for some to allow me into their homes, my identity absolutely played a role. As a long-time childcare professional, I went into participant recruitment confident in my ability to make families feel comfortable enough with me to allow them to act naturally, answer questions honestly, and even enjoy the process. While every parent who participated in this study
expressed some level of self-consciousness about the home literacy practices in their families (Am I doing enough? Am I doing the right things?), my identity as a researcher and as a relatively young, Caucasian, and apparently middle-class woman absolutely impacted some of my participants differently than others. For those families of higher SES, it was clear that my position was largely non-threatening; for those from a lower SES, my presence had the potential to create more anxiety. This was particularly true for those who may have and eventually did take part in observations.

The first three families that participated in the observation portion of this study were all recruited from a university demonstration school in Los Angeles, CA. All three families that volunteered to participate were Caucasian, had a family income well over $100 thousand a year, and had completed college or a graduate degree. These families were fairly easy to recruit, all volunteering to participate after the school sent a letter home with children and I made announcements in the handful of age-appropriate classrooms at the school. Spending time with these families felt very much like it did when I was a nanny and first started working with a family: After meeting the parents and children at school and spending time talking to the parents on the phone and over email to answer questions and schedule our observation days, it took only a short time before they seemed to relax and feel comfortable with my presence in their homes, cars, and wherever else they needed to be that day. Parents fairly quickly (usually within a couple hours on the first day of observations) either went about their normal routines, almost seeming to forget I was there as I followed the target child, or would engage me in conversation and more purposefully fold me into the routines (for example, asking me to sit at the table while the children had a snack, talked about their day, and got started on homework). Children took a little longer to stop acting shy or giving sideways glances as I went with them from room to
room, but also tended to warm up to me within the first day much like their parents. For these families, my position as a researcher and outward appearance did not seem to impact their actions or answers in interviews very much at all.

The two families recruited later for this study were much harder to find. I wanted to observe families from a different socioeconomic background, with low to average income and/or some or no college education. Despite actually living in the same (or similar) neighborhood as many of the families I was recruiting and being conversational in Spanish, it took months of visiting schools, sending information through tutoring programs, and both me and my research assistants directly asking potential families through work or personal connections to find these participants. It was similarly difficult to find families with this kind of background to participate in interviews. One evening, while observing with the first of the two families that eventually agreed to participate, an interaction at the target child’s basketball practice made very clear how differently I was viewed in this context: I sat in the bleachers near the target child’s mother and another mother, watching the practice and taking notes on my iPad Mini. During a water break, one of the other children, a friend of the target child, came over to me and asked if I was a social worker. With these families, instead of being viewed more like a nanny or extra friend around the house, I was viewed as some kind of professional. Moreover, I was viewed as a professional who could pass judgment on them, or at the very least attract unwanted attention and judgment from others. This brief interaction at least partially explained very succinctly why so many families I had spoken with who seemed to support the research and goals so enthusiastically ultimately stopped returning my calls and did not participate in the study.

After spending time with these families, and even by the conclusion of the interviews with those that did not participate in the observational portion, I believe I had convinced them
that I was not there to judge, but to learn from them. However, finding families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that would trust me enough in the beginning to give participation in this kind of a research study a chance proved to be the exception and not the rule, in large part no doubt because of how I was perceived by them and their communities. Therefore, my access and ability to find a diverse group of families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds for this study was hampered by my own appearance and background. However, once families agreed to participate in my study, they generally became comfortable with me as quickly as those families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.
Chapter Three: Interview Findings  
Discovering and Describing the Later Home Literacy Environment

Identifying the HLE:

Consensus coding was used to identify all mentions of activities, practices, beliefs, or modeling behaviors in the parent interviews. To be able to accurately identify HLE components and distinguish them from other activities and behaviors of the family, all activities and behaviors were coded as either part of the HLE or as “Other.” For consistency, and to better support coding decisions, a detailed codebook was developed. All interviews were coded using the Dedoose platform.

Defining the HLE: Coding of the interviews was both inductive and deductive. From the literature on HLE in early childhood, both active and passive forms of HLE discussed in the interviews would need to be identified. The Active HLE was defined by two major codes: Activities and Practices.

• An “HLE Activity” is an activity that is either specifically for the child’s interaction with literacy or language development (e.g., reading individually or with a family member) or that includes these themes (e.g. creating a travel journal during a vacation).

• An “HLE Practice” is a practice that is embedded into the child's life that includes literacy or language development (e.g., dinnertime talk that parent specifies as important or homework practices), but was not necessarily initiated for the purpose of that development.

Whether initiated by the parent or child, the child was an active participant in the activities and practices identified as part of the Active HLE. While the distinction between an activity and a practice is subtle, it is helpful in identifying components of the Active HLE that parents or
children may otherwise fail to recognize. For example, while some parents may explain that sitting down for dinner as a family and discussing their days is an important and purposeful part of their child’s language development, other parents may engage in the same practice without thinking of it as part of language development and instead only mention it as part of a daily routine.

The Passive HLE was defined by three major codes: Beliefs, Child Characteristics, and Modeling behaviors.

- An “HLE Belief” is an expressed or implied belief about literacy or language development (including about activities, practices, or general concepts about children or adults).
- “HLE Child Characteristics” are individual differences between siblings, strengths and weaknesses of the target child, and the target child's preferences as described by the parent.
- “HLE Modeling” is when a parent (or other family member or adult) shares HLE beliefs with children or models literacy or language behaviors.

Target children were not active participants in the elements of the HLE identified as passive, but were still impacted by them. HLE Beliefs helped to shape parents’ decisions about the activities children and families participated in (such as the amount of “screen time” children were allowed, if they “should” spend more time playing outside or with friends, or if they needed tutoring to “reach their potential”) as well as the short and long-term expectations communicated to children about literacy, language, and education more generally. HLE Child Characteristics was a code that came about inductively from the interviews, as parents frequently described the ways they differentiated literacy and language instruction or encouragement between different children in
the same family based on a child’s interests, demeanor, and abilities, effectively changing
children’s experiences with the HLE within the same home. HLE Modeling captured the literacy
and language activities that children saw other adults or older children in the home participate in,
sering as an example and motivation for children to participate in them as well.

In discussing typical routines throughout the interview, parents also identified a myriad
of other activities that regularly occurred in their children’s and family’s lives. Both to
differentiate these activities from the HLE and to create a more complete picture of these
families’ lives, these activities were coded as “Other” and then broadly categorized as follows:

- **Miscellaneous**: Daily activities such as brushing teeth, driving places, etc. that did not
  include any educational or HLE component

- **Family activity/practice**: Activities done together but not specified to have any kind of
  literacy or language component (such as trips to the beach or bike rides). This also
  includes involvement of extended family and family roles (such as a grandparent doing
  school pick up).

- **Friend activity**: Activities with friends that were not literacy or language related and also
  not organized sports, etc. (e.g., playing at a friend’s house).

- **Games**: Games the child played (e.g., board games, video games) that were not related to
  language or literacy.

- **Belief/values**: Life or educational belief or philosophy not related to literacy or language
  development.

- **Music**: Extracurricular lessons, etc.

- **Religious practices**: Church attendance, religious school, etc.
• School: School-related activities that were also not related literacy or language development (e.g., “Back to School Night” or school performances).
• Sports: Extracurricular, organized or individual.
• General activity: Activities that did not fit in other categories.

Almost all parents interviewed described some or all of these activities as being a regular part of their family life.

**Components of the HLE**

Once the active and passive elements of the HLE were identified, it was possible to describe the components that make up the HLE for upper elementary school-aged children from the themes that arose in the interviews. Elements of the HLE described in these interviews were classified into the following categories: Homework or School Support; Child Non-School Literacy Behavior; Parent Literacy Behavior; Sibling Literacy Behavior; Family Home Literacy Activities; Family Literacy Outings; Technology; Additional Language; Parent Beliefs; Child Characteristics. Each category will be defined and further explained below. Tables 2-11 provide some examples of parent responses for each category.

**Homework or School Support:** By the time children enter the third grade, it is clear that homework is already or quickly becomes a significant part of their home routine, even if they only have 30-60 minutes of homework each weekday. For most children in the families that participated in this study, some amount (usually about 20-30 minutes) of independent reading of a book of their choice was required on a daily basis. The homework that children completed was often worksheets for various subjects, but also included bigger projects that they completed over
time. While families handled homework in a range of ways, each family had their own strategies and philosophies regarding homework that shaped how children approached it.

The first element of homework support was the *homework routine*, which defined when, where, and how children would complete their homework. Most children had a designated or usual area in the home, such as a desk in their room or spot at the kitchen table, where they regularly did homework. Even children who attended afterschool programs that provided time and space to do homework had a homework routine at home, as most of these children seemed to not complete their homework before coming home on a regular basis. The homework routine was impacted by a few key factors, including the parents’ philosophies on homework, the child’s temperament and preferences, other siblings in the house, and additional activities impacting the schedule. Families that had busy schedules juggling work for both parents and extracurricular activities for both the target child and other siblings might expect children to start homework in the car or in between activities and then finish it at home later in the evening at the dinner table. Families that had someone who could regularly pick up the child from school and come straight home might instead expect homework to be completed at a desk after a short break at home. Parents were not inflexible with their children, but children also knew what to expect regarding their homework. Parents also adjusted the homework routine to work best for each child in the family. One child may need help focusing and therefore need to do homework close to the parent, while another child in the same family could require less supervision and work independently in her room.

The next element of homework support was *homework help*. In most families, parents or someone else in the home, such as a grandparent or older sibling, provided or was at least available to help the target child with homework. The kind of help provided depended again on a
few factors, including the parent’s (or other caregiver’s) availability and ability, the parent’s philosophy on homework help, and the child’s needs, abilities, and temperament. Almost all parents, either because of a school requirement to sign off on homework or on their own, regularly checked that their children completed assigned homework. However, parents that either did not think homework was particularly necessary or appropriate at this age, or that felt the responsibility of completing homework should reside with the child and teacher, may simply ask the child if homework was completed. On the other end of the spectrum, parents that felt it was their role to teach accountability through homework or thought homework was particularly valuable at this age might read over each page of work every night to check for accuracy and completion. Parents were also often more hands-off with children that were meeting or exceeding expectations academically, while being more involved with children who were struggling. Parents also responded to children asking for help, whether it was assisting with a larger project over time or answering content or procedure questions. Parents that for various reasons could not assist their children with homework (such as time constraints because of work or content knowledge) usually made sure there was someone else the child could go to, such as an older sibling or someone in an afterschool program.

The third element of homework support is other school support. This kind of help may not have been directly related to a homework assignment, but was specifically meant to support school achievement. Examples of this kind of support included visiting the library or helping to conduct internet searches to learn more about a topic the child was studying in school, or discussing test-taking strategies before a big test.

A final element of homework or school support for some families was tutoring. When children struggled, presented with a disability, or in some circumstances when they did not seem
to be meeting the parents’ expectations, some parents hired outside tutors to help their children.

Tutoring could take place at school (after the school day), at a tutoring center, or privately at home.

Table 2: Homework or School Support Examples

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<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>I check his work. I make sure the punctuation is correct. I make sure that spelling is correct. I sit with him I, one make sure he’s understand unit so I can be there to support him. I know that his teacher has a lot of responsibility and there’s so many other kids in the class. Even though we go to a really good public school, there’s such a wide range of abilities in each class and I know there’s some many problem with the low and the high kids and everything in between. So, I feel like if I can just spend that hour with him at night I feel like I’ve done my job and I also think it’s a good bonding for us.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mirna</td>
<td>And I separate them, you know. I set, everybody sits in a different place. Because they don’t have their own rooms. I mean they share, all three share a room, I live in an apartment, so they share a room. So I separate them. One sits outside, one sits in um the room, and one sits in my desk in my room. So, I try to make it where everybody has their own, you know, mind.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Yeah, I mean, especially like when they get home after school they need a little bit of decompressing so I’ll try to talk to them on the way home from school and you can hear I’m getting “Um” “Nah”, one word answers. And I started to realize that after school they just, like sometimes A*** will just like go off into her room and I don’t even know what she does in there.</td>
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**Child Non-School Literacy Behavior:** Once children are independent readers, it becomes possible for them to engage in literacy and language activities without their parents or other adults. Behaviors in this category may not necessarily have been motivated by the child, but they were completed by the child without other family members in the home. For example, a parent might encourage a child to read more by buying more books on a topic the child shows interest in, but the child does the reading on his own time and at his own discretion. Parents could also ask or direct children to read more by having them read independently for more time than was required for homework. Children might also attend extracurricular activities that
involved literacy or language development, such as art classes that discussed artistic methods or some art history. Parents also reported using different methods to encourage different children in the family to participate in literacy or language activities, helping children find books that interested them or encouraging children that did not seem to enjoy reading and writing to play word-based games.

Conversely, some children were more self-motivated to read or write on their own. Children might go online to research an animal they were interested in, write stories, create artwork to accompany books they enjoyed, or simply read frequently on their own without any outside requirement. Children that participated in these kinds of activities most often tended to do so out of enjoyment, either because they enjoyed reading or writing more generally, or because they had found a topic (such as a genre or particular topic in something like science) or medium (such as graphic novels, short stories, or articles geared toward children) they enjoyed.

Children were also motivated by friends or peers, sometimes reading a book that other children at school were reading or in some cases participating in book clubs with friends.

Table 3: Child Non-School Literacy Behavior Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>She does a lot of book swapping with her friends. Particularly with one friend. They do a lot of book exchange. She has like almost like a book club with friends of hers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>But I, but I do go to the library and they have those, um those, uh comic books that the, the graphic novels… And I'll bring a stack of twenty of them home and just let them pour through those. God knows if they're age-appropriate, but, you know, as long as they're reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>Well Br*** is working on, on cooking. Like he likes to make pies and stuff and so he’ll look in the cookbook and they’ll be, you know, there’s measurements and stuff so he, he’s reading it, he’s processing it, he’s doing his measurements, he’s finding the right cup and, you know all that stuff.</td>
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**Parent Literacy Behavior:** As with Child Non-School Literacy Behavior, these activities were completed by parents at home (or outside of work) but without the child. These behaviors were considered part of the HLE because they could be observed by children and therefore part of the passive HLE, though it is worth noting that children who participated in observations and interviews also seemed to have a general awareness of what parents did at work and if it included literacy skills. Parents participated in a variety of activities, both for work and for pleasure, though the amount of time parents spent doing these activities varied widely between families based on amount of leisure time, necessity, and preference. Some parents mostly did literacy activities electronically, reading and writing emails and reading articles or books on smart phones, tablets, or computers. Others read magazines or newspapers as part of their morning or evening routines, and some parents had regular reading habits with novels (though most said they did not have time to read books as regularly as they would like). Some parents also worked at home, using computers to read or write for work either in an office or common space like a dining table.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>But now as much as I can like when we started our book club, you know part of it was so that I could read my own book and they could see me reading my book while they were reading theirs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamara</td>
<td>I’m probably either in the living room or in the, my bedroom. And then depending on the book if I’m reading, if it’s real good like I just read one book and I think I finished it in like 3 days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>You know, like I said on occasion, their father reads to them, um on occasion I read, um the boys will on occasion get into bed with me 'cause I read every night and so they'll get in bed with me and read with me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hakim</td>
<td>[Be]cause I’m an attorney, I always read. I always love to learn read new case laws and papers, you know everything that I come to, to um you know. Outside that I like to learn more and I read so. Uh, Sometimes I actually I share them with my son, you know look these are the stories actually that</td>
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happens to people. And then I read what happened in this case or that case. You know you never know about, it’s just like a character, like somebody came in and, this is what happened.

**Sibling Literacy Behavior:** These activities were completed by siblings outside of school and were observable by or known to the target child. Sibling literacy behaviors varied by age, but generally fell into similar categories as the target child (none of the target children in this study had much younger siblings). Siblings had homework routines and their own independent reading and writing activities, and while many children shared some of these routines and activities, parents often adjusted them based on the preferences and temperament of each child. For example, a parent might describe one child as “a reader” while another child was only really interested in literacy activities if they felt like games. Similarly, some children required more supervision or a quieter space with less distractions to complete homework or to read for sustained periods of time, while others could do so independently. Older siblings were usually more independent and also had their own set of extracurricular activities. Target children often attended or at least commuted to and from older siblings’ activities and would see if they had long hours of homework or participated in other literacy-based activities, such as writing poetry.

Table 5: Sibling Literacy Behavior Examples

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<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>He’s [older brother] a, I’d say a pretty gifted writer. And kind of an interesting poet. He was just shortlisted in um, and this is inspirational for the little one, for A***. There’s a, they’re great together. But of course every now and then there’s a little kind of eh eh eh. But he sees K*** write well, I think it raises A***’s game.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Berta</td>
<td>I think it helps that our older daughter’s such an advocate of reading that the two little ones picked up on that. You know, she grabs a book and the other one grabs a book.</td>
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</table>
**Family Home Literacy Activities:** These activities were not related to homework and were completed at home by the child with other family members. Family activities could be motivated by the child or other family members. For example, the child might suggest playing a literacy-based game, like Scrabble or another trivia game. Many families kept a supply of games (literacy- or education-based, or otherwise) and other supplies (such as art supplies or things that could be used for creative projects) available for children to access at their own discretion. Children played these games and activities with parents, siblings, and sometimes with friends when they visited. Alternatively, parents might start conversations with their children during car rides or over dinner, engaging children in the details of their day and asking about school, friends, and other topics. Particularly during dinner conversations, parents would also discuss their days, at work or otherwise. Some activities were also long-standing routines, such as reading together or, for some children as they grew older, individually before bed. Reading before bed may have started as an activity motivated by parents when children were younger, but as they grew older some children also looked forward to reading together each night. For some of the older target children, reading before bed continued to be an important activity, but became an independent one instead.

Other family home literacy activities were those that encouraged literacy or language development without either being the expressed goal. In addition to mealtime conversations (which some parents viewed as an important and purposeful part of language development while others primarily considered to be important family time), several families also valued the casual and playful conversations they had while watching television or spending leisure time together at the house. These conversations could include humorous word play and playful teasing,
observations about people, animals, or activities that could be viewed from the home or yard, topics spurred by television shows or shared activities, or discussing in more depth details, conflicts, or topics of the day. In describing these conversations, parents said that children experimented with word play, learned how they should speak to different people in different contexts, and learned new vocabulary when encountering new topics. Conversations like this could also spur another common family home literacy activity, which was looking up information on topics they had questions about or wanted to investigate further. Some parents supervised internet searches, while other times siblings worked together and used the internet as part of a larger project (such as figuring out how to build a small baseball diamond in the backyard and how much it would cost, finding recipes for goods to make and sell at a bake sale fundraiser, or exploring other topics of interest). Attending religious services or events where the family read or studied religious texts were also included in this category.

Table 6: Family Home Literacy Activities Examples

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>So, but during the summer, if you look behind you there’s those two baskets over there. And I call those baskets, there’s the brain activities. So I never called it homework, I called it brain activities. So ever since they were little, even my older son who’s 16 will still say the word brain activities. So I encourage them to like, you know what you guys need to do some brain activities. Why don’t you get something out and do something. But it’s everything from like really traditional, like something you’d pick up at an educational supply kind of store, like a fifth grade you know spectrum reading or whatever, you know language arts fifth grade, sixth grade or whatever workbook, to you know crossword puzzles or Sudoku, to you know just whatever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>She reads all the time. She’s really into the books. She’ll read to D*** if they wake up. It’s funny when they wake up, not funny but I think it’s cute when they, like, in the summer especially they sleep in, so I will just peek in there and see what they are doing and B***’s in bed reading a book to D***. She’s just reading her book out loud and D***’s next to her and listening to the story.</td>
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</table>
Julia  Really, if you do nothing else with your kid, reading with them is the most important thing you can do. So I still read with them even though we’re reading chapter books, but I’ll read a page he’ll read a page sometimes if he’s really tired I’ll just read and sometimes I’ll just make him read, but it’s kind of that time that’s just he and I…

Tina  But the creativity part's not so great and so trying to get the kids to be creative for a story ... you know, I said, ”Let's sit down and try writing it out.” You know, let's do, you know. Just can't do it! Just can't do it, the boys can't do it and I'm you know, so I've told my girlfriend the next time, she has to come and help us write the story and then we'll animate it.

Malik  You know there’s a lot of laughing and silliness. And usually language based. Double entendres, you know wry humor.

**Family Literacy Outings:** These activities were not related to homework and were completed outside the home by the child with other family members. Some families had regular literacy-based outings, such as going to a favorite bookstore or library on a monthly basis to peruse the shelves as part of a day where the family also visits a coffee shop or goes for a walk together. For others, these outings were more sporadic, either because of time constraints (such as busy work or extracurricular schedules) or opportunity (such as waiting for special events at a local library or annual book fair). Families might also use road trips or other vacations as an opportunity to play word-based games (such as finding something that starts with each letter of the alphabet), listen to audiobooks in the car, make travel journals, or read books on a plane. Other activities out of the house that may not be specifically to engage in literacy or language development included visiting museums or other similar venues for general enrichment.

Table 7: Family Literacy Outings Examples

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>We’re big gallery people. I mean, we go to museums and galleries a lot. And we talk about art and painting and so that, visual literacy and conceptual literacy. Like the kids know loosely what modernism is and you know what abstraction is. So that, that’s a pretty constant thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>[Describing travel books she makes for her children] I got all the animals in</td>
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here, they circle the animals they saw ... I mean, you know, describe it in detail what was in this shop, draw a picture. Um ... [mutters about travel journals] Yeah, he's got all the animals that he saw ... pasted something here, um ... and I find that the, the smaller it is, the better they do, they don't really write big essays. They did initially, but not so much ... but, um you know, so all of them are prompts, um ... what did you eat? And I try to do things that are easy, like what did you eat?

**Technology:** The use of technology to facilitate literacy behavior was pervasive in the families that participated in this study. Children used computers for word processing and internet searches for both homework and for non-school activities. Many children had, or at least had access to, a smartphone or tablet that they used to text message with friends, play word-based games (such as Words With Friends or Scrabble), look up information, or access other language-based applications (such as Duolingo, a foreign language-learning program). Some children used tablets to read books, though this was less common and sometimes only done under certain circumstances (such as putting several books on a tablet to read over the course of a vacation instead of having to pack all of the books). Parents also used technology for many, or sometimes almost all, of their literacy activities. For some parents, their main literacy activities were reading and responding to emails, reading online magazines, newspapers, and other articles, and completing work-related writing. These activities could be done on a computer or, very often, on a smartphone or tablet.

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<th>Parent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>And we’re pretty strict when it comes to just, you know in terms of age-appropriate stuff. So he doesn’t do it alone. K***’s sixteen, he does it alone... But A*** will say, “I need to do this, this, and this. Can I go on? Oh this thing’s come up, is it safe?” So we tend, you know the internet for A*** is very academically oriented...Other than shopping for skateboards and skate apparel. And soccer stuff. So then we know like what two websites he’s on</td>
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and we can just see him, like see all of his saved like bookmarked stuff.

Giva  So usually she’ll say, “What did such and such,” and I’ll say you know, cause I’m a strong believer, and if I just tell you, it’s not gonna stick, if you look it up on its own you’re gonna remember it on your own just how you spell this, or what does this mean, so she’ll, you know, she’ll Google just about anything.

Tamara  I do email, I check my emails, I um, look at the AAA magazines that they might send or something Lancaster City. You know, activity book for that month or whatever but, I don’t order any like magazines or stuff like that.

**Additional Language:** Many of the families in this study spoke or exposed the children to a language other than English in the home (including Spanish, French, Arabic, and Hebrew), either as a primary home language, specifically because they wanted their children to speak another language, or as part of their religious traditions. In some families, children spoke a home language fluently, but did not have any formal instruction; in other families, children primarily learned the language through formal instruction and practiced at home (through tutoring or school or religious programs); some families spoke a language at home and with extended family and also employed tutoring to improve children’s written and verbal skills.

Table 9: Additional Language Examples

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>…he has private tuition on the weekends. It’s only an hour, of Arabic. So, which is something that he took up in the last year and half. And it’s like an hour a week of formal tuition and probably no more than that during the week where he sort of works himself. So we try to, try to get that in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>We do converse in Spanish. My husband kind of, he does not speak English. He’ll say like, “Yeah right” or something like that but he’s not one to really carry a whole conversation… because like he actually was born in Mexico.</td>
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**Parent Beliefs:** Parents held various beliefs regarding their roles in contributing to language and literacy development in their children at this age, how to define language development and literacy, and their expectations for literacy and general school achievement.
Some parents expressed that, at least at this age, the school should be taking the lead in literacy and language development (some of these parents felt they had a larger role when children were younger, but a smaller one now that children were more independent). They may encourage their children or help when asked, but they either did not know how to otherwise facilitate this development or did not feel it was their role to do so; instead, they wanted to focus their efforts on enjoying quality family time with their children. Other parents felt very strongly that they needed to actively support and encourage their children’s literacy and language development in addition to what they received at school. In defining literacy and language development, some parents took a broader, more liberal view of the terms. They saw language as a tool for communication that opened up other possibilities, and so they also included more than just reading, writing, speaking, and understanding in their definition, adding exposure to art, science, and culture and discussions around these topics. Other parents saw literacy and language development more narrowly, defining them more as the necessary abilities to read, write, speak, and understand at an age-appropriate level.

Table 10: Parent Beliefs Examples

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<th>Parent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>And, also, for them just to realize that book-reading isn’t something that’s just for school, that book-reading is a part of giggling and cuddling at night before we go to sleep. And that book-reading is a part of telling stories, and telling stories about my childhood or when grandma comes over and she tells them stories about what, me when I was little as we go to sleep. That it’s fun and that it’s joy, that is not just work, that it’s about loving. I really, really wanted my kids to love to read because I’m a voracious reader, and so that was really important to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aubrey</td>
<td>Literacy means knowing or learning what you need to succeed in life. So there’s reading, writing, and training yourself in a certain specific study of a certain area… But mainly I think the tools to succeed in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>I think summer should be summer for kids. So I think they should have time to play. So I don’t have like a, I don’t set up like a “you’re going to do this,</td>
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you have to do this, and you have to do this” because I think play is important for kids.

Valerie

Sometimes I feel bad 'cause you know, as you can see, it’s 4 boys to one of me. Especially with the two younger ones, I try to—when the two older ones were in school I was more involved because I had that extra help. With these two it’s... I try to become as involved as I can besides you know trying to provide for them you know. Sometimes I think I’m not doing enough. I help them advance in education you know. I don’t—my goals are for them to graduate in high school and go to college and university. That way we don’t have to struggle—because I know they are very intelligent.

Jaime

I think part of literacy too is don’t treat them, don’t treat them like babies. You know, we see a lot of parents that treat their kids, yeah, it’s gonna baby them but, you don’t, you treat them like little adults, you know, almost where, because they learn fast, and they catch on, and I think that’s part of literacy as well where you know, we communicate with them at an adult level where, you know, they’re learning and we’ll do things like, you know, let’s say we go to, um, go to a restaurant, and I’ll give her the credit card and go “Hey, you go pay. You go ask for the receipt.” you know, so she’ll bring it back and just teaching her to be I think independent. I think independent is a big thing. You know, showing her to be independent as well.

**Child Characteristics:** Parents frequently reported adapting to a child’s preferences or temperament, or attributed a child’s interests or abilities with their “nature” or innate qualities.

For example, a parent might describe an older sibling in the home as “a reader” or “a poet,” but describe a younger sibling as “more into math” or as a “physical” kid or learner. Parents considered child characteristics when creating homework routines, in determining the type and amount of extracurricular activities appropriate for each child, in finding ways to encourage literacy behavior (such as finding books that might interest a child), and, to a certain extent, in determining their academic expectations for a child.

Table 11: Child Characteristics Examples

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<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<td>Malik</td>
<td>With that said, his little brother A***, um who we’re primarily talking about, uh was in many ways, sort of I guess… If K*** is atypical let’s say, A*** is typical in the sense that he just like works, he just like homework’s a chore,</td>
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you know I gotta get it out of the way, da da da da da. A***, we’re sort of like, kinda go, “huh, well he’s not as diligent as K***, but he’s kind of interesting. You know hanging out, he has a point of view. He loves numbers. He hates words.

Donna

‘K*** is harder to get to read than the girls. I don’t know why but it’s harder for him to find something. If he finds a good book, he, he will read it all, that’s fine. But he's more like um, must be doing something like, so we end up getting Popular Science and Popular Mechanics because he likes that kind of reading.
Chapter Four: Observation Findings
Literacy and Language Embedded Into Family Life

Introduction

A total of five families allowed me to observe them during their normal routines outside of school. Three of these families were from the same school, and all of those families were observed during the last couple months of the school year. These three families were all financially well-off and highly educated, but each had unique ways of approaching language and literacy both philosophically and in practice. With these families, I was generally able to meet up with a parent before the target children were out of school so that I could observe them from the time they picked the children up from school until it was almost time for bed on the weekday observation days. If this was not possible, I was also able to observe the target child at least once in their afterschool program so that I could see what their day was like from the time the school day ended. In two of these three families, the mothers did not work outside the home. In the third family, both parents worked and they had a part-time nanny to help at home.

With the remaining two families, I had to meet up with them at their homes later in the afternoon or evening on weekdays to accommodate long commutes and afterschool care arrangements. One family was a single-parent household and the other a two-parent household, and both relied on afterschool programs and carefully choreographed schedules to get their children home. Because of this, I necessarily had to spend less time with these families than the other three. However, I was still able to observe enough of their routines to have a good understanding and appreciation for their daily lives.

After spending three observation days with each family, I conducted interviews with the parents (only the mother participated in this interview in every family but one, where the father also participated) and the target children. The parents were asked the same questions as those
asked of families only participating in interviews, and were additionally asked questions regarding my time observing them. In interviews with target children, I asked questions about my time observing them, as well as additional questions about their preferences and thoughts about language and literacy that I would not be able to determine from observations alone.

In this section, I will introduce each family with a description of their typical routines, informed by both my observations and my interviews with the parents and target children. These descriptions exemplify and extend the findings of the previous section by providing examples of the different HLE categories identified, while also providing insight into how the HLE is created by families and balanced with other activities and interests. Then, I will describe and discuss the children’s physical HLE in each family, an element of the HLE that was not necessarily apparent through parent interviews.

Family Descriptions

Molly’s Family

The time I spent with Molly, age 9, and her family at the end of August 2016 gave me a window into a new normal for them. Just a couple months earlier, the family moved a couple hours inland from the coastal areas of San Diego they had lived in for most of Molly’s life. A little more than a year earlier, Molly’s dad, Jose, started a new and much better paying job, so the family of three spent that year living in a one bedroom apartment in a less desirable neighborhood closer to work so they could save money to buy a house. Over the summer, they were able to accomplish their goal of buying a house, but had to trade in coastal living and shorter commutes to make it happen. Shawnda, Molly’s mom, is a nurse, and by the time I
interviewed the family after a couple weeks of observations she was able to transfer to a hospital much closer to their home—though she had to take a pay cut to make the change.

This change in venue necessarily meant many alterations to their typical routine, largely to accommodate commute times. After school, Molly busses to an after school program with the Boys and Girls Club nearby. At the program, she has an hour set aside for homework in a room with other kids her age, and then the rest of the time is spent in free or organized play, along with an evening meal around 5:00pm. Jose and Shawnda chose this program both because it was affordable, and because Molly would be able to stay as late as 6:30pm, instead of 5:00pm or 6:00pm at the after school program on site at her school. With their new longer commutes, Jose and Shawnda needed this buffer time to account for traffic.

Jose generally picks up Molly because he’s able to get to her first, usually sometime around 6:00pm. On the short ten minute drive home from the program, Jose encourages Molly to talk about her day:

I always ask her about school and Boys and Girls Club and she’s always saying, “It’s fine, it’s fine.” I’m like no I want to hear something you gotta tell me one thing cause I always try to like make her talk about her day because I don’t want to just get comfortable with just not saying anything about it and then I don’t really know what’s going on, so and then I always have this thing I say, “I like your stories, tell me your stories” you know so just to kind of entice her. So I kind of make her go over something about school, but I’m also kind of trying to find out what is she doing in school? (Jose, Interview D05)

When they arrive home, sometime between 6:00pm and 7:00pm, this playful yet encouraging attitude continues. As they enter the house, Jose will remind Molly to do certain chores (such as letting their dogs outside and cleaning up after them) as well as to get started on her homework. And while it is not unusual for parents to remind their children to do chores and start homework, Jose’s and Shawnda’s rapport with Molly almost never feels like nagging, but rather more like teasing. When Molly gets distracted or takes too long, one of them will chide, “Girl, what are
you doing?” in a playful voice that also somehow says, “Get to work!” Molly took awhile to warm up to me being in the house, and so at first she seemed fairly quiet. But by my last day there, I saw that she would respond in kind to her parents, letting them know she was in on the teasing but also knew she needed to get her work done.

Depending on traffic, Shawnda usually arrives home just before or just after Jose and Molly. Upon arriving home, she changes out of her scrubs and then immediately starts cooking dinner and doing dishes from the morning. On my first night with the family, I wasn’t sure if this was the norm or if Shawnda felt extra pressure to cook and clean after a long day because I was there. When I asked, she enthusiastically told me that she cooks every night. She loves to make healthy meals from scratch, and it’s something she has always done, and something her mother always did as well. During my time observing the family, not only did Shawnda cook multiple meals, but she and Molly spent free time looking up new recipes on Pinterest to try separately or together.

Once getting settled in for the evening, Molly spreads out her homework on the dining room table. Each night, Molly seems to continue working on her homework until it’s time to get ready for bed (around 9:00 p.m.), breaking for dinner and other interruptions or distractions. From her spot at the table, she’s in the middle of all the action downstairs: her mother cooking dinner and sometimes chatting on the phone, her father taking care of chores and watching television, and the small dogs scampering around. She focuses for periods of time, then participates in something going on with her parents, then goes back to her work. When she’s finished and it’s time for bed, her parents tell her it’s time to call it a night, but leave her to get ready for bed and the next day independently.
On the weekends, while both parents are off work, the family seems to keep just as busy as during the week—though Shawnda and Jose would tell you they like to take time to relax. When I am there to observe, the family seems to bounce between relaxing in the living room and watching sports or a movie together, to doing some chores, to trying to do something outside (though the heat this day is prohibitive), and back to relaxing together. The day before, the whole family was out of the house for the day running errands and then at an event with friends, so this Sunday is for recuperating. Molly is able to act somewhat independently. Sometimes she watches what her parents are watching, but intermittently she starts a project upstairs (such as painting her doll furniture or making signs to put up on the stairs for her imaginative play) or watches her own shows in her room or listens to music on her phone. Shawnda and Jose act similarly: Jose periodically does projects around the house, Shawnda looks up recipes and cooks a meal for lunch, and later she and Jose hop on the laptop together to look up emails with schedules for Molly. While the family does at times do their own activities independently like this, Shawnda and Jose explain that they typically try to do activities together as much as they can, even on weekdays—though the move and longer commute times has cut into this time during the week:

We do hangout a lot more than maybe you saw the couple nights that she was in her room doing her own thing. We go to the park, we’ll walk. In fact we all have bikes, we go do that a lot together. We do things as a group most often it’s just tough sometimes because our days are a little bit longer now we just don’t have as much time to do as much as we’d like and we’re still adjusting…The weather, day, there’s times when we’ll go for a jog so it’s not always so okay we’re home, we’re done, we don’t come back out. It just really depends on the flow of the day and we try to make a point to like we haven’t really done this in a while let’s go out and do that so it’s XX idea it’s us three all the time.

(Jose, Interview D05)

Both Shawnda and Jose attend school part-time, Shawnda to work towards being a Registered Nurse and Jose to complete his Bachelor’s degree to become more competitive in the
workplace. While they both tend to complete schoolwork when Molly is at school or asleep, Molly at least knows that her mother is in school. When asked about what she thinks about her mom going to school, she tells me, “I want her to but I sometimes don’t want her to go and leave for a long time” (Molly, Interview C05). Like the team-player her family is raising her to be, Molly supports her mother’s goals, and at the same time wants to make sure she gets to spend as much time with her as possible.

**Eva’s Family**

Eva, age 10, and her mother, Gabriella, lived in a converted garage studio apartment together when I spent time observing them. The small apartment was located behind a main house and had a kitchen, a dining area, a bathroom, and a bedroom area with a bed they shared. About a month later, when I returned to interview Gabriella, they were looking at moving into another converted garage apartment next door that wasn’t much bigger, but had small separate bedrooms so that they could each have some space to themselves. During the evenings I spent with them, when we were at the house, Gabriella tended to mostly stay on the kitchen and dining area side, leaving the bedroom area for Eva. Because Eva stays with her mother on weekdays and her father on weekends, I only spent time with the pair during the week once the school day was over.

Eva is a thoughtful, independent, and quiet girl. She spends much of her evenings helping Gabriella in one way or another, whether it’s by playing with the neighbor’s kids who Gabriella is taking care of, helping prepare dinner, or taking care of her chores (which were primarily to care for their new puppy). Typically, Eva arrives home about a half hour before Gabriella when a neighbor drops her off after school. For a short period of time she tries going to an afterschool
program that she learned about from a flyer at school, but she and Gabriella decide the transportation to and from the program takes up too much time in the afternoon and doesn’t leave enough time for Eva to get her homework done. When Eva gets home, she usually starts on any homework she has but may not finish it before Gabriella arrives. By the time Gabriella gets home from work around 4:00 p.m., Eva is usually watching television. Gabriella fairly quickly asks Eva about her homework and will refocus her if there is more to do. By the end of the night, Eva makes sure her mother signs her homework form, which Gabriella will sign without feeling a need to check everything. One night when we spent some time with one of Eva’s friends and her mother, the friend told the parents they had finished their homework, when in reality they still had one more task to complete. As soon as her friend left, Eva told her mother about the unfinished assignment and completed it, not wanting to get her friend in trouble but also wanting to finish her own work.

Because Gabriella only has weekdays with her daughter and she works each day, any errands that need to be done for Eva need to be completed during those weekday evenings. In addition, Gabriella and her neighbors help each other out so that everyone can get to work and have their children cared for. As a result, it seems that each day is both routine and has the potential to be different. For example, one evening we spent the entire day at home while Gabriella took care of her neighbor’s children. This wasn’t terribly unusual, but she was watching them for more time than she normally would because the neighbor had been recently injured. Another evening, we went out to buy shoes for Eva for her new basketball team and then continued on to other errands while we were out, before going to pick up the neighbor’s children from where they were being cared for in another town. And on another night, we went to basketball practice before heading out to a store with friends to buy supplies for the themed days
coming up at school (crazy hair day and pajama day). So while it isn’t necessarily typical to go out for supplies or to buy new shoes, it also isn’t unusual that something needs to be accomplished other than homework and other things around the house.

One constant each night is Gabriella making a dinner from scratch. No matter how late we get home from errands, Gabriella starts making a new meal. Eva also offers to help her mother cook, seeming eager to learn how to do each task properly. Gabriella later joked with me that Eva sometimes messed up parts of the meal, but she would pretend everything was great to encourage her to continue learning. Gabriella spends hours cooking each evening, making large meals with several different parts, and sometimes making a separate dessert. When I ask, she tells me she thinks it’s very important to have a good dinner, and that she enjoys cooking. She’s clearly very proud of the meals she makes for her family.

Throughout the afternoons and evenings, Eva entertains herself in various ways. At times she actively plays with the children her mother is taking care of, keeping them occupied by playing some small game, playing with the puppy, or having them watch television or something on her phone or tablet. Other times she quietly pulls away, doing something on her phone or asking the young children to play on their own so she can watch television. Eva also does small projects throughout the evenings. One day she made a small book for the boy they were watching by cutting pieces of paper in half and stapling them together, writing “M’s Book” for him on the cover. Another time she played with a slime or putty she made at school, explaining to her mother how she made it and showing her what could be done with it. When she works on homework she is fairly quick, and does not seem to need help to get it done.

Eva and Gabriella have a well-established schedule during the week that involves a lot of teamwork. Gabriella works across town in a dining hall at a university starting at 5:30 a.m. each
morning, so she and Eva both go to sleep by 9:00 p.m. each night. Before bed, Gabriella makes sure Eva’s school supplies are ready to go for the next day and that food is ready for her in the morning because she’ll need to leave by 4:30 a.m. for work. On her break, Gabriella calls Eva to make sure she is up for the day and doesn’t need anything. Gabriella pays the same neighbor to bring her to school in the morning and pick her up in the afternoon. While Gabriella does not like to do many things in their neighborhood, and is in fact working to get Eva into a school further away in a safer area, she feels Eva is fine being on her own for these short periods with all the neighbors around. Gabriella is chatty and outgoing, but Eva is quieter and more reserved. They speak to each other in a mix of Spanish and English, with Eva speaking English a little more comfortably than Spanish. Eva and Gabriella are honest with each other about what needs to be done and do what they can to help each other finish everything that needs to get done each night.

Chloe’s Family

Chloe, age 10, lives with her mother, father, and younger brother. At home, the family typically speaks only French, though for my benefit they use more English when I come to observe. Chloe’s parents, Marie and David, are both faculty in different departments at a local university and both grew up outside the United States speaking French. Chloe and her younger brother, Sam, age 7, are fluent in both languages—though Chloe would tell you her brother could work on his French grammar a bit more. Chloe is a precocious child—very intelligent and mature—and at first, even though she had agreed to have me observe her, she seemed a bit aloof and annoyed when I followed her around. However, by the end of our time together she had warmed up and I was able to see that while she is quite bright, she is also fun and silly and imaginative.
With two working parents and children busy with activities, this family is often on the go during the week. In addition to attending the school’s afterschool program a couple days a week, Marie and David have hired a part-time nanny to care for the kids until they are able to be home in the afternoon or evening so that Chloe and Sam can attend their extracurricular activities. Chloe’s week after school is packed with violin lessons, French tutoring, and most of all dance. While Chloe has been dancing since she was about four-years-old, she stepped up her involvement the previous year and joined one of the dance teams in addition to her lessons. She attends dance classes at least twice a week for a couple hours at a time, and periodically performs and competes. Dance is a huge time commitment for Chloe, but she absolutely loves it. When I asked how much time she would spend dancing if she could, she quickly replied, “Like fifty thousand hours!” (Chloe, Interview C04). She dances through the house and outside in their backyard, and previews her dance for me before I attend a performance, explaining the precise moves and positions. Chloe often feels like a very serious person, but when she dances she is joyful and clearly uninhibited.

Chloe is also a big reader and writer. When we are in the car with her mother driving to and from her activities, or when there is downtime between her different dance classes, she is almost always reading. At home, she frequently steals away to her room to work on a “novel” she is writing that she plans to give to a friend for her birthday. The story she writes is about Greek gods, inspired by the *Percy Jackson* series. She explains that she initially just wanted to write about all the Greek gods, but then decided to put them into a story. After finishing her novel, her French tutor encourages her to write something in French, so Chloe decides to write a chapter from another character’s perspective. She tells me, “…it’s really short. It’s like eleven pages or something,” (Chloe, Interview C04). Chloe is detail-oriented and thorough, carefully
creating pictures for the book, such as a blueprint of a house, on the computer using the program Paint. Marie tells me the old laptop in Chloe’s room is a recent addition that they gave her earlier this school year, but Chloe is already very adept with it. Chloe reads and writes in both French and English, with Marie making a conscious effort to find French books for her to read, although, Marie admits, it’s hard to compete with Percy Jackson and Harry Potter, which Chloe prefers to read in English.

Speaking French at home is very important to Marie and David. They want their children to be able to speak with their other French-speaking family, but also think it is very important for children to be able to speak different languages. Marie explains to me that she believes speaking multiple languages means the children will be able to immerse themselves in other cultures, feel a connection to their heritage, and that learning them early helps with being able to use the languages like a native speaker. To support French, Marie finds books for the kids and hired the French tutor for more formal instruction, and she and David insist on using only French at home, which Chloe and Sam do not resist. On the weekend day I spend with the family, Chloe is talking to her grandmother over Skype, going on and on excitedly in French. However Chloe does not only speak French and English—she is also in a Spanish-English dual immersion program at her school. After two years in the program, she is reading and speaking at grade level in Spanish.

Once everyone is home from work and activities on weeknights, Marie usually cooks dinner for the family. Chloe and Sam enjoy cooking and helping both their parents during the time I spend with them. During the week, Marie gives them tasks to complete, supervising and assisting them as they go. Over the weekend, Marie uses a recipe to make a cake with the children, which they read and help follow—though, Chloe is so anxious to finish writing her novel she slips away halfway through. The family spends much of their time together in the
kitchen and dining room, chatting about the day over the dinner table or joking and playing games at the kitchen island. At one point, Chloe and David discuss the differences between and merits of being vegan or vegetarian. At another time, David and Sam play games on an iPad while Chloe watches. Dinners during the week and even some lunches on the weekend are long, relaxed affairs with the family all together talking. Chloe complains to me that sometimes her parents talk too much about their work, which she doesn’t always like because she doesn’t necessarily understand what they’re talking about. Marie tells me, “It’s a French thing, but we spend a lot of time at the table,” (Marie, Interview S14).

Despite the amount of activity that happens on weeknights, by the time the family has settled down for dinner in the evening, the atmosphere is relaxed. After dinner there is not much down time before the children get ready for and go to bed. On days when she has more homework than she can finish at the afterschool program or while she’s waiting in between activities, she will head up to her room to finish after dinner. Each night before bed, Marie reads to at least Sam, sometimes reading shorter stories and other times reading chapters out of longer books. Chloe used to participate in this nighttime ritual, but in the last few months has decided she prefers reading on her own before bed. Marie guesses that Chloe is bored by the books that are more age-appropriate for Sam, in part because she has already read most of them. But Chloe still loves reading at night—she confesses to me that when she doesn’t have to get up early the next morning, she’ll sneak a flashlight in her bed and read for an hour when she’s supposed to be asleep.

Ally’s Family
Ally, age 8, has a family that is constantly on the move, going at a frenetic but happy pace from the time the kids are picked up from school until they settle down for bed. Most afternoons begin with Ally’s mother, Rebecca, picking her and her younger brother Andy, age 7, up from the school carpool. Their minivan is stocked with activities for the kids to do while they sit in Los Angeles traffic going to and from their activities, and Rebecca also arrives prepared with snacks for the drives. Each day there is at least one activity for the family to attend: Monday afternoon is spent with their grandmother, Tuesday both Ally and Andy have play practice, Wednesday they host an art class and Andy has baseball practice, Thursday Ally has math tutoring, Friday is Ally’s hip hop class, Saturday Andy usually has a baseball game, and Sunday both kids attend Hebrew school. Once they are home from activities, Rebecca begins making dinner while Ally and Andy find different activities to do around the house or play with friends that have come over. They might choose a board game from the collection in the family room, continue an art project or start a new one, or run around outside in the backyard.

Ally is a bubbly, sweet, eager girl. Rebecca says she is often shy at first, but Ally is very quick to ask me to play games with her. She loves Clue, which the family plays more collaboratively than competitively. Some of Ally’s new favorites are Cranium and Pictionary, while her brother prefers card games. While she seems to love having a playmate, Ally is also able to find ways to entertain herself when everyone else is busy. She might read for a few minutes curled up on the armchair in her room, color or pick up a craft project, or make signs for her door with instructions on who is or is not allowed in at different times. Ally doesn’t really like sports, so when we go to her brother’s baseball game over the weekend, she packs up a full baseball game’s worth of activities: There is a folding lounge chair and blanket, and a backpack
filled with stuffed animals, a notebook and pens, and stickers. As long as she is armed with her activities, Ally is happy to be on her own.

The goal of the family seems to be to maximize time as much as possible—time together, time for activities, time for friends. We wait in the minivan during Andy’s baseball practice to avoid sitting in LA traffic going back and forth to the house. Instead, Ally does her homework while Rebecca watches the practice from her parking spot next to the dugout. Rebecca has snacks ready to go when she picks up the kids from school so there’s no need to stop on the way to play practice. She also instructs Ally and Andy to run their lines with each other as we drive, and we arrive early to the practice so that Rebecca can check the lines with them as well. Hosting the art class at their home leads into friends staying over and playing for a couple hours, which means Ally and Andy are able to have time to play but still be home when their father, Michael, gets home from work. Rebecca flits between supervising the children, whether it be at the kitchen table where they have snacks, do homework, make craft projects, and have their art class, or just outside the kitchen window where they play in the backyard, and prepping and then finally making dinner. This way, when it is finally time to sit down to dinner, they can all do so together.

While Ally and Andy have plenty to do and entertain themselves well, this is no accident. Rebecca is constantly on the lookout for family-friendly activities in the area, and has filled every corner of their worlds with age-appropriate things to do. Ally’s room has a bookshelf filled with books alongside a chair and ottoman in one corner, a dollhouse and other toys in another corner, and her bed in the third corner. But in between all these bigger items, it seems that almost every inch of the room is decorated according to Ally’s personality. She’s been able to tape up pictures and signs she’s made on the walls and doors and the surfaces of her dresser and shelves.
are filled with trinkets and toys she has arranged. The ceiling is filled with paper poppies that are taped up by the stem, so that it looks like there is a field of flowers floating above the room. Ally tells me, “I told my mom and my dad and my grandma that I had a dream that I would wake up in a field of poppies... and my mom said, ‘Tonight, I think you should sleep in my room and then maybe when we'll move you back into your room,’” and that night her mom and grandma decorated the room.

And the end of each day, everything quiets down before Ally and Andy go to bed. Many of the lights around the house are turned off, and then both kids crawl into Ally’s bed with Rebecca to read together. They are reading a chapter book together, so Rebecca asks the kids what had happened already in the story before they start reading. Rebecca reads, but they pause for questions about words or other thoughts the kids have, and sometimes they go off on tangents for a couple minutes. The nights I am there, they are cuddled up together for about a half hour or less, but Rebecca tells me this can go on for hours some nights when they have time. She loves spending that time with the kids, and they love reading the stories—and they also know they can stay up just a little bit later if they can keep her talking.

**Berkeley and Benjamin’s Family**

Berkeley, age 10, and Benjamin, age 9, older sister and younger brother, are just a year apart in age and very close, spending time together both at home and during breaks at school. Because both were in the target age range for this study, I was able to observe and interview both children. They also have a younger sister, Jaime, who is three years younger than Benjamin. All three children have sandy blonde hair and tanned skin from spending so much time out in the sun, whether it be playing in their pool, running around and exploring in the backyard, or
heading to the beach on the weekends. During the time I spent observing the family, they were remodeling the main living space and kitchen in the house, but other than making it difficult to cook dinner, the construction did not seem to have much impact on the children, who largely spent their time outside.

Tara, their mother, describes her approach to parenting as somewhat “laissez faire.” In what feels like a contrast to many other families, she purposefully does not want to overschedule her kids. She tells me:

> I think that this is a time when, this is why I stay home from work. I don’t work because I take care of the kids and I really want them to be able to, be able to have freedoms and relax and come home and read a book if they want to or play on the computer – do the things that they need to do to figure out the, the world. (Tara, Interview S15)

Instead, time after school and on the weekends feels largely spontaneous. All three children may rush to the pool upon getting home from school, playing together on a raft they row to and fro across the length of the pool and shrieking as one falls off or jumps off to stalk the others from underwater. Then one of the siblings will lose interest, moving on to a small craft project or looking up something about animals on a laptop. Benjamin likes to explore around the backyard, looking for animals or other interesting finds. He later tells me he once caught a snake that bit him a couple times, but it was fine because the snake was not venomous; in fact, he hoped to find one again! Berkeley also likes to explore, but is more likely than Benjamin to steal off to the room she shares with Jaime to concentrate on something she is reading or working on. Over the weekend, the family piles into their SUV first thing in the morning and heads to the beach, a frequent trip for them. After a few hours of the siblings running around and burying each other in sand, we leave for a late lunch, pulling over at a Thai restaurant they spot off the coast highway.
While they play, there is a constant chatter amongst the family. At times it is Berkeley and Benjamin making up stories to go along with their activities, such as a pirate storyline to accompany the raft in the pool. Tara watches them amused and reads magazines, sometimes chatting with the odd child out. Other times it is the children asking questions, or Tara (and Bill, their dad, when he is home from work) pointing out observations like a hawk flying by in the canyon behind the yard. When I interviewed Berkeley, Jaime interrupted us to ask if worms “lay eggs or give live birth.” Berkeley answered that they lay eggs, to which Jaime countered, “With a lot of juice in them?” The kids are uninhibited with each other and their parents; they joke and tease and shout and laugh, quickly forgetting or ignoring that I am there.

The kids may not be involved in too many activities outside of school at this point in time, but they have tried several. The kids are not very competitive, so in general they aren’t on any sports teams. Instead, they’ve taken swim lessons and private music lessons at home. However, as they lose interest in them, Tara will end the activity, not wanting to push the kids into something they don’t want to do. The one class that has stood the test of time with all the children is an art class held by a woman with a studio down the street. Once a week the family walks down to the art studio, where the instructor has children work on or complete an art project inspired by a particular artist or genre. When I attend with the children, the class uses charcoal and pastels to draw birds. The studio is bright and minimalist, with the group working at long tables surrounded by carts with supplies and walls lined with bookshelves filled with art books. Tara loves the freedom the instructor gives the children to create, and Berkeley and Benjamin each tell me they enjoy the class and like learning about different artists.

Tara and Bill also support Berkeley and Benjamin’s interests at home, because, as Tara tells me, “experiencing is learning.” Bill recently purchased coin-collecting books for each child.
because one of them (nobody can remember who now) started taking an interest in the different designs on quarters that seemed to spark something in all of them. Berkeley’s book is a small, classic collector’s book with space for one quarter from each state on each page, while Benjamin chose a map of the United States that has a spot for each state quarter on the map. Inspired by some animals they learned about in school, Berkeley and Benjamin have recently taken an interest in saving a certain kind of ferret. They want to raise money by selling pies and other goods, so Tara and Bill have bought them supplies for making posters and a sales stand. The pair use Berlin’s computer to look up facts about the animals for their posters, and Tara jokes that they’ll soon be looking up airfare prices because Berkeley has decided she wants to raise enough money to fly to their country of origin to see them in the wild. However, the stand will have to wait until the house remodel is completed so that Benjamin, the cook of the kids, is able to bake his pies and other goods for sale.

In the evenings, after a relaxed dinner together out on the patio, it can be hard to wrangle all three kids in preparation for bed. Tara tried having checklists for the kids to gather their own things for school each night, but says they fell by the wayside when keeping track of the checklists became more work than actually completing the tasks on them. As they quiet down, the children will often sit at Bill’s feet as he does a crossword puzzle or puts on a show, happy to spend time with him home from work at the end of the day. Once all the children are in bed, Tara and Bill alternate which of them reads to Benjamin and which of them reads to Berkeley and Jaime. They each have a different book they’re reading with Benjamin, and used to also have a book with Berkeley that Jaime would try to keep up with, but now Berkeley is more interested in reading on her own before bed, so they choose books for Jaime’s benefit instead.
The Physical HLE: Children’s Spaces

Learning about older children’s HLE through observation revealed that the physical HLE, or “home resources” as this aspect is often referenced in the literature, appeared to be a much more varied and complex component than it typically appears. The physical HLE is typically measured through the number of books (and sometimes newspapers and magazines) in the home. However, this study finds that the number of books is only one part of the physical HLE in older children, who also interact with text electronically and apply their knowledge and skills learned from text through a number of different outlets. The following section describes the children’s physical environments through the spaces dedicated to them in their homes.

Molly’s Spaces

In her previous home, Molly shared all of the spaces of the one-bedroom apartment her family lived in. Now, in her new home, Molly had both her own room and shared spaces with her parents. In general, Molly was allowed to play or inhabit almost any space in the family home as long as she cleaned up after herself when she was done. For example, Molly liked to make signs and do smaller craft projects around the house (Figure 13), especially on weekends when her parents were relaxing. Additionally, there were toys and games for Molly in a hall closet and the guest bedroom (Figures 10, 12). Molly also spent a lot of time at the dining table on weekday evenings doing her homework, where she was able to spread out and her parents were available to help her and keep her on task (Figure 9).

Molly’s room was bright and cheerful (Figures 1-8, 11). While it was not big, it had several areas for projects and imaginative play. Around the room there were bins of toys and baskets of books, including underneath her lofted bed, as well as drawers with notebooks and craft supplies. Most surfaces, like the tops of her craft drawers and dresser, had trophies, ribbons,
pictures, and trinkets on display. All of the walls had framed posters (mostly Star Wars themed), achievement certificates, or pictures of Molly. Next to her door and on the wall by her bed there were three different chore charts. Molly also had her own television in her room mounted on the wall, where it could be seen from the floor, where she often played, or her bed. The room was not messy, but it felt like a kid space.

Figures 1-13
Molly’s Spaces
Eva’s Spaces

Eva lived in a studio apartment with her mother, so she did not have her own room or a separate space that was only hers. However, Gloria did create separate spaces for Eva and decorated shared spaces with things for Eva or that Eva made. On top of their shared wardrobe and dresser, there were bins of craft items for Eva. Next to the dresser, there was an area for books and workbooks. The bed they shared had linens that were bright pink and purple that Eva had chosen, along with matching curtains. There were also two televisions in the small space, one in the dining room that Gloria generally used and one in the bedroom area that Eva used most often. On the dining room table and refrigerator, Eva’s projects from school and home were displayed. They also kept a calendar on the refrigerator that Eva updated and referenced frequently. In general, Eva did her homework and small crafts at the dining table and then spent most of the rest of her time in the bedroom area or playing outside.

Figures 14-17
Eva’s Spaces
Chloe’s Spaces

While Chloe and her brother spent a good deal of time in the common spaces of the house when they were at home, in particular the kitchen and back yard, these areas were set up as they would be for adults. Both children were comfortable in these adult spaces, spending time talking with their parents or exploring the garden. Sometimes Chloe would bring a book downstairs to read, or would practice dancing in the front room where there was enough floor space. Chloe spent a lot of time upstairs in her bedroom (Figures 18-22), which was set up for her to play, read, write and do homework, and of course to sleep. The room was quite organized: all of her books were put away properly in the bookshelf, her dollhouses were contained, and other projects were put away neatly in the closet. Still, the room had the flare of a child, filled with bright colors, trinkets on the dresser, nightstand, and desk, and a typically unmade bed.

Figures 18-22
Chloe’s Spaces
Ally’s Spaces

Ally’s home was set up such that she and her brother had something for them in almost every room, and even in the car where they spent a good deal of time commuting to different activities. There was a container of craft items in the car (Figure 23), signs around the home
designating areas or providing reminders (Figures 26-29) made either by one of the kids or their mother, a stack of board games in the family room, a table with craft supplies near the kitchen (Figure 24), and the kitchen dining table, which was frequently used for crafts and homework (Figure 25). Ally and her brother spent much of their time at home in the afternoons and evenings using the kitchen dining table as a home base, but going to their own rooms or other rooms in the house, or in the backyard, for different activities on their own or with friends.

Ally’s room (Figures 30-34) was a whimsical space. There were paper poppies hanging from the ceiling and flower decals on the wall by her bed. Another bed was covered in stuffed animals, and she had toys, trinkets, and other figurines on her dresser and most surfaces. In one corner Ally had a reading nook, with books on the lower shelves of a bookcase and stuffed toys on the higher shelves, and a comfy chair and ottoman. Her mother had helped create the space to reflect what she wanted, but Ally also had contributed a lot to the look of the room and took charge of the area. She had decorated her door with pictures she drew and decals, and had a chalkboard sign that she used to write messages or let the family know who was allowed in her room. In the evenings, Ally’s mother usually read to her and her brother in her bed, so while the room was clearly hers to take charge of, she also shared it regularly for family activities.

Figures 23-34
Ally’s Spaces
Berkeley’s and Benjamin’s Spaces

With the main living space of the house undergoing a remodel, Berkeley and Benjamin did not have their typical access to the living areas that they normally would during observations. However, in late spring or early summer, it was typical for them to spend their days as they were observed—playing outside. Berkeley, Benjamin, and their younger sister spent much of their time either in the pool or exploring and doing other projects in the backyard (Figures 42-43). All of the bedrooms and a den were accessible from the backyard, so the children went in and out of the different rooms for supplies, to rest or have quiet or solitary time, or to spend time with their mother. No areas appeared to be off limits, and the children operated fairly independently unless they needed their mother’s assistance.

Benjamin had his own room (Figures 39-41), while Berkeley shared a room with their younger sister (Figures 35-38). Both rooms had bookcases and were decorated similarly, with family photos, children’s artwork, and nature-themed decals and bedspreads. The rooms were not particularly cluttered, with few trinkets and toys like stuffed animals. The kids retreated to their rooms to be alone for brief periods of time, such as to quickly finish up some homework,
but generally spent time together. Berkeley had the better computer of the two in her room, so she and Benjamin, and sometimes Jaime, would sit together at her desk to play games and research animals together. Even this would not typically last very long, with the siblings more excited to bring their projects to the backyard.

Berkeley’s and Benjamin’s Spaces
Figures 35-41
The Contribution of Children’s Physical HLE
In addition to the HLE activities the families took part in individually and together, the children’s environments appeared to play a role in shaping their HLE by providing them with access to textual materials as well as opportunities to explore and experiment with them. Certain HLE elements were common to all of the families observed. For example, all of the children observed had a place for and access to their own books. They also had areas to do homework and spaces to read, whether they were more secluded (in a child’s room) or in a common area (such as the kitchen table). Other elements were more individualized, reflecting the family’s beliefs or the child’s preferences.

**Impact of Family Beliefs:** How parents described their beliefs on a few issues seemed to impact the environments they helped create for their children, including: their role in facilitating literacy and language learning, how they viewed literacy and language development more broadly, and how they felt their children should spend their time outside of school. A parent who defined literacy and language development narrowly, as the skills necessary to read, write, speak, and listen adequately, and saw the school as the primary source of learning these skills, may have a more minimal HLE space, focusing instead on keeping the child comfortable and engaged in other interests. Another parent who defined literacy more broadly, including that it meant being able to interact with the world conceptually or for a person to be able to engage comfortably in different settings and contexts, and believed a parent should facilitate growth in these areas, may have a more elaborate HLE space.

Eva’s mother, Gabriella, believed it was the school’s responsibility to further Eva’s language and literacy development at this point. She felt her role was to make sure Eva was able to complete her homework, and then to focus on other aspects of her development. It was important to Gabriella that Eva speak Spanish, so she did frequently use Spanish with her at
home. Aside from helping Eva be bilingual, Gabriella focused her efforts at home on making sure Eva had other important skills, like helping with family chores, and on providing a comfortable space for Eva to relax. Reflecting these beliefs, Gabriella dutifully checked that Eva had completed her homework each night and provided her dedicated space at the dining table to do it. But the rest of Eva’s spaces in the small home were focused on giving Eva fun options for spending her time, whether that be doing crafts or watching a favorite show, and on making her feel comfortable, such as by using bed linens that Eva liked on the bed they shared.

On another end of the spectrum, Ally’s mother, Rebecca, believed she played an important role in facilitating language and literacy development in her children, and included engaging in the creative process and being able to effectively communicate emotions in her definition of literacy. Ally’s home reflected these beliefs in many ways, including in the many stations set up for creativity and imaginative play, and signs made for or by the children, throughout the common spaces of the house. Ally’s room included her own areas for reading and creative play as well, and was deliberately decorated to inspire this kind of play. Rebecca was also an ever-present part of the home environment, near her children while they did homework and encouraging them to do different activities if they were ever bored.

**Impact of Child Preferences:** Perhaps more so by this age than in early childhood, child temperament and preferences also played a role in how parents and children created children’s spaces. In a family where a child is an enthusiastic reader, parents may create more or more elaborate spaces for reading (for example by buying more books or creating a personal reading nook). In a family where a child prefers to be more active, parents may provide more project-based activities instead (for example by providing a child with the resources to research and carry out a passion project).
Of all the children observed, Chloe was by far the child most self-motivated to read and write. While her mother, Marie, did also influence her habits, pushing her to read books in French to solidify her skills in that language, much of what Marie provided for Chloe’s room was based on Chloe’s preferences. The best example of her support was giving Chloe an older laptop to support her desire to write stories on her own. Chloe’s room had both an area to read (a futon) and an area to write (her desk) that was separate from her bed and play spaces.

Molly, conversely, did not generally choose to spend her free time reading a book. Instead, she liked to play board games (particularly chess), create craft projects, and watch shows or listen to music. To support her more creative interests and purposefully give her options other than watching television or spending too much time on a smart phone, her parents provided her with many different craft supplies and a great deal of freedom to do what she pleased with her things. For example, one day Molly decided to paint her old pink dollhouse furniture black. She found paints in one of her drawers, asked her mother, Shawnda, for a towel to protect the floor of her room, and began painting and experimenting with how to get the best coverage on different surfaces. Given Molly’s interest in her smart phone, Shawnda also encouraged Molly to use her phone or the computer as tools to find new recipes that she could make on her own or with help, something Molly often did while spending time with her parents in the living room or kitchen.

**How Observations Contribute to the Study of the HLE**

The findings of this chapter, which are based primarily on observing children with their families during their typical daily routines, further the findings from parent interviews in two main ways: First, as the findings regarding the physical HLE demonstrate, observations provided insight into additional aspects of the HLE that were not explored well enough through interviews.
alone. Second, the observations serve to triangulate the findings of the interviews, providing context, examples, and showing how and when findings from the interviews may apply.

Triangulating interview findings has been particularly important in this exploratory study that is meant to build a strong foundation for further work with the HLE of school-aged children. At times, parents provided answers regarding home literacy activities that did not, on their face, necessarily seem like literacy activities. For example, when asked about routine literacy and language activities done together as a family, several parents discussed cooking as a family as a somewhat frequent activity. While some parents did explain that they would have children follow recipes, which required reading, it was still difficult to understand from parent descriptions how salient of a language-based activity cooking could be without the context of observations. For both Molly and Chloe, cooking with their mothers was a language rich and enjoyable activity that clearly encouraged vocabulary development, critical thinking, and reading. Chloe and her brother read out the recipe to their mother and performed steps with assistance, while also asking questions about ingredients and procedures. At mealtime, they would further discuss the food and what they might want to try next time. Molly also helped with reading recipes while cooking with her mother, but she also looked up recipes on the internet on her own, going beyond pictures of the foods and examining ingredients and steps to make sure it was something she would like and could actually make. For Eva, however, cooking with her mother looked a little different. Eva’s mother was a very experienced cook (both at home and professionally) and did not seem to use written recipes at home. Instead of having Eva read a recipe, her mother would give her detailed verbal instructions on which ingredient to retrieve or how to prepare a food.
Observing these families therefore not only confirmed interview responses, but also provided a more in-depth understanding of these responses. Many parents already understood that certain activities, such as cooking, were important aspects of the ways they were developing their children’s applied literacy and language skills, even if how that was accomplished was not immediately apparent to an outsider. Seeing how families accomplish creating the HLE provides concrete evidence for researchers to take into account the less obvious literacy and language practices when building the HLE construct for school-aged children.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Comparing Findings to Existing Measures of HLE in Middle Childhood

In the three studies identified in the literature review that studied the HLE for children in upper elementary school, each team of researchers defined and measured the HLE slightly differently, drawing on existing literature on the HLE in early childhood and other relevant concepts in older children to create HLE questionnaires for parents or children (Boerma et al., 2017; Braten et al., 1999; Katzir et al., 2009). While the qualitative and exploratory nature of this study makes it difficult to simply apply the quantitative questionnaires from each study to the findings, they can be compared for similarities and differences. By comparing the findings of this study with the tools measuring the HLE in existing studies with school-aged children, we can determine if existing tools are sufficiently representing the HLE for this age group. This will allow for more nuanced interpretations of current findings and provide guidance for future investigations into the HLE of older children. How each study measured HLE is outlined first below.

Braten and colleagues (1999): A questionnaire called the Home Literacy Environment Questionnaire (HLEQ) was created for this study. The final version contained 12 questions across three components and was completed by children. The first component

“was operationalized by five questions about the frequency of parents’ and siblings’ reading of newspapers, comics, and books. For example, the question concerning books was how often the subjects observed anyone at home reading books for pleasure. The subjects were to check one of the following alternatives: never or almost never/sometimes/about once a week/several times a week” (p. 77).

The second component

“was assessed by five questions concerning the subjects’ access to newspapers, magazines, and books in the home. In addition to four multiple-choice questions, the subjects were instructed to color a part of a drawn bookcase filled with books, to indicate the total amount of books in their home” (p. 77).
The third component

“was measured by two questions concerning the children’s experience of having been read to. The first question asked the subjects if anyone had read books to them before they were able to read themselves, with the following possible answers: it happened almost every day/rather often/seldom/I can’t remember. The last question assessed comic reading in the same way” (p. 77).

Each answer was given a point value, allowing a total score to determine the quality of the HLE.

Katzir and colleagues (2009): Parents completed a questionnaire that contained 20 items that yielded five following composites (p. 273-274)²:

Home literacy environment
• Total number of parents/adult books in the home
• Total number of children’s books in the home
• Age (in months) of child when first read to
• Amount of time at home that someone reads to the child each week

Family teaching and help with literacy
• How often do family members read books, magazines or newspapers with the child?
• How often do family members teach the child how to write?
• How often do family members teach the child to count?
• How often do family members teach the child the alphabet?
• How often do family members teach the child to read words?
• How often do family members help the child with their school work?
• How often does the child ask someone to read to them?
• How often does someone at home help the child with their homework in reading and writing?

Family members’ own engagement in literacy activities
• How often do family members read newspapers, books or magazines?
• How often do family members write messages, notes or lists?
• How often do family members write letters, cards, diaries, stories, or poems?
• How often do family members share rhymes or jokes orally with the child?

Child’s literacy activities
• How often does the child look at books at home by themselves?
• How much does the child like to read?
• How much does the child like to write?

Frequency of child’s visits to the library
• How often does the child look at books at home by themselves?³

² The questionnaire is presented as it appears in its published form.
The authors referred to the complete questionnaire as measuring child and family home literacy practices with the home literacy environment as a subcategory. However, the way the authors define home literacy practices is compatible with the way the HLE is defined in the current study.

**Boerma and colleagues (2017):** A composite score was created from three items completed by parents (p. 184). The three aspects measured were parent print exposure and parents’ estimation of how many of their own books and how many children’s books were in the home. Parents took an author recognition test to measure print exposure and chose from multiple-choice selections to estimate the amount of each type of book in the home.

The tools of these studies are consistent with the findings of the current study in a few ways. First, all three studies included some measurement of parent literacy activity, with Braten et al. (1999) and Katzir et al. (2009) also taking into account the literacy activities of other family members such as siblings. While more narrowly defined than the parent and sibling literacy activities found in this study, family participation in their own individual literacy and language-based activities was a prevalent theme in interviews and was also apparent during observations. Next, all three studies included some measurement of the physical environment of the home, though this was again more narrowly defined and usually measured by the number of books in the home or access to print. Particularly visible during observations, but also mentioned in interviews, were areas or shelves where books for parents and children, newspapers, and magazines were stored in varying amounts in homes. Katzir et al. and Braten et al. take into account in some way literacy activities that parents and children participate in together.

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3 This question appears to be an error in the publication and should instead read, “How often does the child visit the library?”
The measurement tool that most closely aligns with the findings of the current study is the questionnaire developed by Katzir et al. (2009). The composite categories covered the physical environment and children’s access to text, help with literacy and school activities children may receive from family members, the literacy activities of family members, the literacy activities of the child, literacy activities children and family members may take part in together, and (with visits to the library) the potential for literacy activities outside of the home facilitated by parents. The questions also provided more detail into the home literacy activities than in the other two studies, such as by asking about multiple ways in which family members could engage in literacy activities other than just reading (especially including oral language activities such as joking with the child), how often someone in the home helped the child with homework or read to the child, as well as about the child’s feelings concerning reading and writing. One area where the questionnaire deviated from the findings of the current study is the inclusion of questions about family members teaching children math and literacy skills. While some parents interviewed reported helping children with homework and/or hiring tutors or using available tutoring resources, only one parent described spending time teaching her child (and in this instance, the child was struggling with literacy because of a learning disability).

However, even though Katzir et al. (2009) take into account more potential contributions to the HLE than the authors of the other two studies, even their questionnaire did not include the breadth of possible home literacy activities found in the present study. While several reading and writing activities were listed that family members could take part in (e.g., writing notes or diaries and reading books or newspapers), school- or work-related activities that parents or siblings may did at home were not included. Several parents in the present study reported periodically working at home and many of the families had older and younger siblings that also completed
homework regularly, activities that target children would have regularly witnessed (Further discussion of inclusion of parent modeling activities can be found in the next section.). More narrowly defined were the child’s independent literacy activities, which only included how often the child read books alone. The findings of the current study indicate that while children may not have always frequently read books on their own, they also did activities such as writing stories, researching topics that interested them online, or playing word-based games. And though the questionnaire did include questions about the physical environment, they were only concerned with the number of books in the home, which the current study has found to be a very limited view of the physical HLE.

Neither Braten and colleagues (1999) nor Boerma and colleagues (2017) included independent child literacy activities or child preferences about reading and writing in their HLE measures. The study by Braten et al. instead considered child leisure reading a separate variable that could be affected by the HLE, and the study by Boerma et al. treated child print exposure (which was considered a proxy for reading frequency) as an independent variable. Considering the findings regarding the importance of child characteristics and preferences in the current study, completely separating child behavior and disregarding child preferences may be a mistake. As children grow older and more independent, they have a greater ability to affect their environments and determine how their time is spent. Parents in the current study tended to respond to this independence by shaping environments, when possible, around the needs and preferences of each child. A parent might respond to a child who did not like to write stories or poems by encouraging her to write jokes or create art projects that are inspired by a favorite character. If children’s independent literacy activities are measured separately from the HLE, perhaps as a dependent variable, the findings of the current study suggest that child preferences
should at least be recorded as well. Additionally, how the HLE responds to child preferences and fosters literacy habits appropriate for the individual child should also be considered.

Given the findings of the current study, the use of number of books in the home as the main proxy for the physical HLE also appears to be too narrow. Aside from the problematic confounds of measuring many aspects of the physical environment with socioeconomic status (Park, 2008), counting physical books may not be representative of the many ways children can see and interact with text in the home. Parents and children played word-based board games, created signs and wrote notes, and had areas in the home associated with reading (such as a special chair or nook). These dedicated child-spaces provided children with opportunities to develop and practice literacy and language skills through topics and themes they found interesting in a comfortable and supportive setting. Also notably absent from all three studies, particularly the two more recent studies, was reference to or measurement of access to text through technology. The pervasiveness of technology in homes has created virtual spaces for access to text and language exposure that is becoming increasingly accessible with each year. Many parents and children read and wrote on computers or laptops, used tablets for reading books, and used smart phones for word-based games and other text-based activities. Use of technological devices could decrease the number of physical books in the home, but could maintain or increase the child’s access to books and other texts.

The consistently narrow interpretations of the HLE in these studies in comparison with the findings of the present study lead me to conclude that the HLE should be considered in broader terms to more appropriately reflect children’s development at this age and what is actually taking place in children’s homes that may be contributing to their development in language and literacy. If children at this age are expected to read to learn, then it follows that
environments that support literacy development would allow children to experiment with applying literacy skills in educational and real world situations. Parents in this study participated in traditional literacy activities, such as reading with their children, but also expanded on them by finding different ways to leverage language and text to engage their children and pique interests. For example, several families went to science and art museums periodically, while others played trivia games, and others listened to audiobooks on road trips. They also provided rich spaces for children to explore, so if, for example, a child was reading a science text about different kinds of leaves, he could then collect leaves in the yard and create an art project with them using supplies from his own drawer. Alternatively, a child could come home interested in a topic covered at school that week and spend time further researching the topic on a computer instead of or in addition to the parent finding books to read that aligned with the topic.

While the authors of these three studies did find significant indirect effects of the HLE on literacy outcomes, more comprehensive measures of the HLE could yield more robust and informative results. Together, the studies find that the HLE particularly affects word recognition and reading comprehension through positive attitudes towards reading, amount of leisure time reading, and print exposure. However, when looking closer at how the HLE was measured in each study, we see that most often the characteristics of the HLE that predict these outcomes are how much a parent reads and how much text the child has access to in the home. Including measures of qualities such as how often families participate in literacy activities together, how much parents support literacy activities through home environment, and how often children are able to pursue interests using or inspired by literacy resources could show stronger connections between home environment and literacy achievement and other academic outcomes. Furthermore, finding such connections could provide families with more and alternative methods
to improve children’s academic achievement, which would be especially important for parents with children who are struggling or families that do not have the resources (time or money) to have large home libraries or model literacy behavior through leisure reading.

**Relevance of Parent Beliefs and Modeling Behaviors**

Previous studies have used parent behaviors and characteristics as indicators of the HLE. The findings of the current study confirm that parent contributions that have been shown to define and shape the HLE in the past, such as parent leisure reading behaviors, parent resources and literacy abilities (Burgess, 2002), and parent beliefs (Weigel et al., 2006b) were also clearly relevant for the families interviewed and observed. How parents defined literacy and beliefs about their role in furthering language and literacy development aligned with the home environment they created for their children. Additionally, children clearly noticed parent literacy behaviors, both at home and at work, easily describing their perceptions of parents’ behaviors in interviews.

The findings from the observation portion of this study regarding the impact of family beliefs on children’s physical HLE not only revealed how parent beliefs shaped children’s environments, but also children’s schedules, including free time and time spent with the family. While some of the choices parents made about encouraging more reading or writing versus encouraging guided or free play were obviously linked to their beliefs about the importance of literacy and feeling they should play a strong role in the development of literacy skills (such as with Ally’s mother), in other families these choices were linked to broader views about education and how children should spend their time. For example in Berkeley and Benjamin’s family, parents Tara and Bill believed that children should not be overscheduled and that family
time together should be spent with everyone active and having fun. Some fun activities were literacy-based, but literacy development was not necessarily the priority.

The children observed and interviewed for this study also reported noticing their parents’ literacy behaviors. When asked, each child was able to provide a reasoned answer about whether or not each parent enjoyed reading or writing. Some answers aligned well with the logic behind measuring parents’ leisure reading or number of books in the home. For example, both Ally and Molly said they knew their mothers liked to read because they saw them reading whenever they had the chance and they had large, visible book collections. However, almost all of the children gave other or additional reasons for knowing their parents enjoyed reading and writing. One of the most popular answers was that a parent had to read or write for work. Benjamin, Eva, and Chloe all felt that at least one parent enjoyed reading and writing because they chose professions that frequently used those skills. Other children reasoned that parents enjoyed reading or writing because it was something they did as a family. Berkeley and Ally said they knew at least one parent liked to read or write because it was an activity they did together (either reading books or writing short stories together) and enjoyed very much. Children also noticed and reported parents participating in literacy activities other than reading novels or writing for leisure or work, such as reading newspapers or completing crossword puzzles, or doing work for school programs they were completing.

These findings again support the notion that a broader view of how parent beliefs and behaviors shape the HLE and related outcomes should be considered and further examined. In measuring the HLE, parents’ professions, leisure activities, and the activities they do with their children could model positive literacy behavior that measuring leisure reading alone would not capture. Including such modeling behavior has the potential to allow researchers to find stronger
relationships between the HLE and child literacy outcomes. A more inclusive approach to including parent beliefs and behaviors in research could also lead to findings that are more informative for educators and families. For example, if communicating with children about the practical ways literacy is incorporated into parents’ lives improves their interest in reading or other literacy outcomes, encouraging these types of conversations would be a simple suggestion for parents. Alternatively, if further research found that a broad definition of literacy led parents to encourage more enriching literacy behaviors in children, researchers and educators could devise strategies to inform families of the many functions and types of literacy. Research into the HLE in early childhood has contributed to current campaigns encouraging parents to “talk, read, and sing” to their young children to encourage their development, so it is reasonable that similar campaigns could be effective for older children as well.
Chapter Six: Conclusions, Limitations, and Further Directions

Overall, this study finds that the HLE is a discernable and relevant construct for school-aged children. However, as children grow, so too does the scope of the world in which they interact. While a toddler is quite limited in the way she can interact with text and language, a fourth grader has taken her first few steps into the adult world of literacy. Consequently, this study finds that the scope of the HLE must also expand to appropriately encompass what literacy and language development does or should include in the home as children grow older. The findings from this study suggest that a broader view of the ways children interact with language and literacy on their own and with other family members, as well as how other family members model the importance of language and literacy development through beliefs and actions, will yield more informative results in research and more helpful suggestions for families and educators.

Limitations

The qualitative nature of this study limits my ability to make direct suggestions about what aspects of the HLE in school-aged children are most important for literacy and language development at this age. While some practices, such as continued shared reading between parents and children, may appear beneficial, this study does not report student achievement and cannot connect such practices to literacy outcomes. The relatively small number of participants also prevents this study from providing a representative sample of California families and their HLEs. In addition, because I was unable to balance the number of families of high and low SES, my findings may skew the importance or salience of certain HLE practices or possibly leave out others entirely that are more common in lower SES homes. However, the findings of this study do reveal that the HLE is a much broader and richer concept than the way it has been represented.
in current literature for this age group, and that it has the potential to provide important insights for educators and families. Future research into the HLE in older children should focus on which activities, environmental factors, and parent beliefs predict or contribute to student outcomes.

**Conclusions and Further Directions**

While this study finds that parents are creating diverse and varied environments for their children, many parents do not realize how much of what they do could be contributing to children’s literacy and language development. Many parents, especially before interviews began, expressed self-consciousness in how many literacy activities they would be able to report for the study. They would say they knew they did not do enough or wanted to do more and needed suggestions or guidance. Then, in the course of the interview or over days of observations, these parents would reveal the many different ways this study found them supporting literacy and language development. To capture such practices as creating supportive environments for homework and creative or exploratory play, the continuity of a bedtime reading routine over time, or the impact of fun and emotionally fulfilling activities like spending a day at a book festival with children, future research will need to find ways to capture these behaviors. Using more than one type of survey or questionnaire (such as including open-ended questions along with multiple choice questions, or other formats like daily timelines), or using mixed methods to uncover literacy practices (as this study does) may be particularly important in determining which HLE practices best predict academic outcomes. Before relying on composites or proxy variables, such as parent leisure reading, it is important for researchers to first verify if these measures are truly representative or indicative of family practices overall.

For example, this study found that the number of books in the home may not be a sufficient measurement of the physical HLE environment to provide meaningful distinctions
between different HLEs and student outcomes. Comparing the physical HLEs of Molly, Ally, and Chloe is helpful in illuminating this issue. Molly and Ally both lived in homes where multiple “kid spaces” could be found throughout the house. Both girls usually did their homework in a common area (the kitchen or dining table), had signs that they or their parents had made posted in various places to remind them of chores or for imaginative play, and both had rooms filled with various activities, literacy-related and otherwise, for them to use independently or with friends to explore their own interests. Molly and Ally also had other similarities in their HLEs, to include having parents who were very involved in their homework routine. However Ally also had a fairly large book collection in her room displayed on her own bookshelf, while Molly did not appear to have nearly as many books, with smaller stacks of them in a few places in her room. According to their parents, both Molly and Ally were now competent and average to slightly above average readers who had some past or ongoing struggles with academic motivation. Chloe, on the other hand, did not have apparent kid spaces throughout the house outside of her room. She did, however, have a similarly large book collection to Ally in her room. According to Chloe’s mother, she was an excellent and far above average reader who was very self-motivated academically.

If we were to only look at the number of books in the home as an indicator, it could be logical that Chloe was a better reader than Molly. However, that indicator cannot help explain the differences between Chloe and Ally based on HLE. In addition, leaving out a fuller picture of the HLE for both Molly and Ally could risk missing the ways in which a supportive environment may have helped each of these girls improve their skills over time. Both Ally’s and Molly’s parents expressed they had taken steps to respond to the girls’ interests to better motivate them to read, write, and engage academically over time. Future longitudinal studies of HLE in older
children should track such changes in environment (and behaviors and practices) to determine if they can help explain changes in children’s achievement over time, providing evidence for concrete steps families and educators can take to improve child outcomes.

It will also be important for future investigations into the HLE to consider the use of technology and the impact of virtual spaces on literacy and language development. Families at all levels of socioeconomic status (SES) in this study used technology very often in their daily lives, particularly because of the pervasiveness of smart phones and the easy access the devices gave them to communication and information. Some families limited children’s access to television, computers, and smart phones, while others were less concerned about children’s use of technology or simply encouraged other behaviors, like playing outside. In some families children were heavily supervised, monitored, or assisted when using a computer, while in others children were fairly independent. When children used technological devices, they sometimes participated in activities that employed or furthered literacy and language skills, but sometimes engaged in activities that did not. For example, while Molly did use the family laptop to complete some homework and used her phone to look up new recipes to try, she also watched non-educational shows on the television in her room and used her phone to listen to music and watch music videos. Eva frequently used her smart phone to watch videos and play games during the time I observed her, but she also used it to contact her older siblings when she had homework questions, which her mother could not help her with. Berkeley and Benjamin used Berkeley’s laptop together frequently, sometimes to play games and sometimes to look up more information about the ferrets they wanted to raise money to save. With the now pervasive nature of technology in children’s lives, future studies into the HLE (or any environment impacting a
child) cannot ignore its existence and must make strides to disentangle its positive and potentially negative contributions.

While, according to parent report in interviews, children in all the families in this study had some kind of access to technology at home, SES still affected the kind of access children had. For example, Chloe had her own laptop in her room, but I never saw a computer in Eva’s home. Differences in SES affected the HLE in other ways as well. Families from lower SES backgrounds in this study often lived in more remote areas with less access to things like museums or large annual book festivals. Both parents in these families needed to work, and also tended to spend more time commuting, leaving less time at home (especially on weekdays) to spend with children. While Ally’s mother was able to facilitate and curate activities any day of the week and could easily make time to read with her, Molly’s parents could only support extracurricular activities they could get back in time for and had about two to three hours each night to facilitate activities, homework, and dinner before Molly needed to be in bed.

To account for SES without coming from a deficit perspective, future research of HLE will need to consider the choices parents with less resources must make to balance financial (or other) realities with creating the best overall home environment for their children and families. For Eva and her mother, Gabriella, living in a very small home in a less desirable neighborhood allowed Gabriella to provide the clothes, activities, and devices that Eva wanted to be happy and fit in with her friends. And while location was a limiting factor in finding the best educational opportunities for Eva, Gabriella was working hard to get Eva into a better school the following year, even though it would require more commuting and schedule juggling. Eva’s HLE was clearly not as expansive as even that of other children with working parents in the study, such as Chloe, but this may have only been in part because of Gabriella’s limited resources. Gabriella
focused her energies on what she believed would most help Eva, spending a great deal of time finding a better school and figuring out how to make sure her daughter would be able to attend.

For this reason, it is important for future research to not simply uncover differences in HLE by SES as previous research has shown in early childhood, but also to understand the mechanisms that cause such a divide. If future research into the HLE of school-aged children finds that the differences in HLE and academic achievement continue to be correlated with SES, researchers and educators will need to find ways to address this persistent difference. Knowing how a more supportive HLE improves academic outcomes for children at this age will be particularly helpful for those with low SES to know how to prioritize their time and other resources. However, equally or more importantly, understanding the numerous ways in which families from different backgrounds support literacy and language development at home will also be vital for educators to consider when creating culturally responsive classrooms that respond to and build upon their students’ strengths and experiences (see Purcell-Gates, Melzi, Najafi, & Orellana, 2011). For example, teachers may include more “real-life” literacy activities that are specific to and resonate with their students’ communities. Based on the findings of the current study, such activities could include building literacy skills through reading, following, and creating recipes or other procedural activities, or reading and creating online content, such as small blog posts.

To conclude, this study serves to extend the field of HLE by corroborating its discernable and potentially crucial element in children’s literacy and language development at school age. Given that the early investigations into the HLE in older children are beginning to show that it does still impact children’s literacy outcomes, it is also crucial to know why this is so. Perhaps when children view reading more positively because they see their parents read or have
enjoyable experiences with reading at home, they simply read more, leading them to perform better in language-based activities (see Purcell-Gates et al., 2011). Alternatively, or in addition to this, teachers may assume that parents take time to discuss homework or other books with their children, giving children more time and practice with literacy skills than what they can receive at school. Some parents in this study already felt they were at least partly responsible for their children’s literacy and language development, while others believed that now that their children were older, it was best for school to be the main source of this development. If educators have expectations for families that disadvantage those who do not share or know of these beliefs, it is important that we as researchers and educators make these expectations transparent and provide support for them to be enacted. Additionally, researchers and educators should also take into account the many different ways families from different communities and backgrounds can effectively support literacy and build on these practices to create more culturally relevant and supportive classrooms.
The Home Literacy Environment: A Qualitative Investigation of School-Aged Children
Parent Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Target Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To you, what is literacy? Language development? Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. There is a range of definitions for these terms, and I’m really just interested in what they mean to you.</td>
<td>To gain an understanding of the parent’s metacognitive understanding of the constructs of literacy and language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2a. Can you please take me through the daily routine? If you do different things on different days, please explain. What activities do you participate in? What activities does your child participate in?</td>
<td>Get a sense of the family routine and when language/literacy activities may take place within them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2b. Based on previous answer, follow up on each activity with the child mentioned that includes literacy or language: • When does this activity typically take place? How often? • Why do you do this activity? • Have you always done this activity? When did you start?</td>
<td>Details and motivations behind the activities parents first identify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c. Are there any other typical literacy activities you (or other parent) and your child do together that you can think of that you have not already mentioned? (May prompt with ideas such as vocabulary review in the car, homework help, games, etc.) • When does this activity typically take place? How often? • Why do you do this activity? • Have you always done this activity? When did you start?</td>
<td>Probe for more (possibly less obvious or salient) literacy/language activities. Details and motivations behind the activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What if I were doing a documentary on the literacy practices of your family? What are the 3 things you think would be best to capture? What would you like to do more of, or what hasn’t worked out? For the activities identified: • When does this activity typically take place? How often? • Why do you do this activity? • Have you always done this activity? When did you start?</td>
<td>What does the parent identify as “best” literacy practices of and “ideal” literacy practices for the family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a. What do you do when you have unexpected time together (such as days off school, power</td>
<td>Uncover activities that may not be a part of the routine, but may still contribute to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4b. Are there any other special or non-routine literacy activities that you do with your child throughout the year? (May prompt with ideas such as events at the local library, trips to the book fair at school, reading a book before/after seeing a movie):
- When does this activity typically take place? How often?
- Why do you do this activity?
- Have you always done this activity? When did you start?

Uncover any other activities that may not be a part of the routine, but may still contribute to literacy/language development and/or give a window into family attitudes toward language/literacy.

5. What literacy activities do you and your children engage in independently? (May prompt with reading the news, doing homework, etc.)

Identify activities that may be done separately, but still contribute to language development. Are there more of these activities, or less, than those done together? Build a more complete picture of the home literacy environment.

6. When you or your child have a question/need to find information, what do you do? For example, if you are watching TV together and have a question about the city where the show takes place, what do you do?

Find out how the family navigates finding new knowledge and potential chances for infusing literacy practice into the home. Does the family use technology?

7. When your child needs help with homework, where does he/she go for help? Who does your child like to read with?

Does the child go to parents for homework help? What other supports does the child use?

8. How would you describe your child’s language and literacy abilities, such as reading, writing, and speaking?

If it has not already come up in the interview, ascertain the parent’s perception of the child’s language and literacy abilities.

Is there anything else you’d like to add?
Bibliography


Zwass, R. (2014). *Parent literacy activities and interactions with school-aged children.* (Masters), University of California, Los Angeles.