

HEAR MY VOICE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE VIEWS OF PARENTS WHO ARE
RAISING CHILDREN OF AFRICAN AMERICAN DESCENT

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have demonstrated that children who attend early childhood education programs benefit academically and socially (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003).

However, other researchers have shown that African American students may still lag behind their counterparts when they enter school (National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES], 2004).

To explain this phenomenon, scholars and practitioners have relied on deficit theories, such as Ruby Payne's (2005) culture of poverty theory or John Ogbu's (1992) oppositional culture identity theory, which shift the blame solely on the child or their parents. However, there are other researchers who have stressed the importance of examining the impact of racism and classism on African American children's academic success. The purpose of this study is to provide a voice to parents of children who are of African American descent. Specifically, I examined parents' perspectives on early academic success and various factors that impact their children's success using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Spencer's (1995) phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) as frameworks.

To develop an understanding of early academic success from the perspective of parents, qualitative methodology was chosen, specifically grounded theory. Fourteen families who lived in a Midwest city or town, particularly mothers and their children, participated in this study. Data resources included two interviews, journals, and academic and social skills screeners. The data were analyzed based on parents' degree status and marital status as well as grade, gender, and disability status of their child.

Results show that parents define early academic success as acquiring the following: literacy, numeracy, and social skills. The participants stressed the importance of parents and teacher characteristics as important to their children's early academic success. Furthermore, these parents believed that family factors such as a structured and consistent family routine are relevant to academic achievement. In terms of neighborhood factors, parents believed that a quiet and peaceful neighborhood as well as a neighborhood that valued and foster academic achievement as a community is crucial. Participants stressed the importance that their children should participate in various activities such as sports and music and dance classes. Their children should possess such values as respect and compassion, which are necessary to be successful. Additionally, the participants discussed their various teaching strategies and the importance of spending time with their children. Finally, the participants discussed the conversations they have with their children regarding race and how their children's school and teachers embrace their children's heritage.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It has been shown that children benefit from early childhood education services (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003). Children who attend early education programs are less likely to be retained in grade, and as adults they are more likely to obtain employment and less likely to participate in criminal activities (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003). Although early childcare positively impacts academic readiness and achievement (Geoffroy et al., 2010), many children who receive formal schooling from programs such as Head Start and similar entities may lag behind academically. In a longitudinal study of a cohort of children who began kindergarten in fall 1998 and were followed through spring 2004, the National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES], 2004) found that African American children had lower mean achievement scores in reading and mathematics than any other children from ethnic groups such as Hispanic Americans and Asian/Pacific Islander Americans. Based on this same report, researchers have suggested that the following risk factors may be correlated with African American children's academic failure: family poverty level, single-parent households, and low maternal education.

School practitioners often rely on deficit models to understand African American children. For example, Ruby Payne's (2005) culture of poverty theory is an example of implicit

racism. Through her depictions of poor African American families, she suggests that such families need to adopt white middle-class values and behaviors (Gorski, 2008).

Payne (2005) described children from low socioeconomic status families as liking to be entertainers and class clowns who use physical violence as a part of their culture as well as liking high noise levels in their communities. Working within this deficit model, researchers have failed to account for other causes of African American children's underachievement. For instance, long-term and systemic problems of racism have had a devastating impact on the African American community (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Swick & Brown, 1994). Often when African American children enter school, they encounter cultural dissonance, or a cultural mismatch between the student and school, and teachers' fear of African American children (Banks & McGee-Banks, 1997). As Ho (1992) indicated, for ethnic minority children, school may be the first place where they experience cultural conflict and behavioral adjustment problems.

Furthermore, African American children enter schools where their skills and talents are underappreciated or not valued at all (Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1976). Hilliard (1976) reported that African American children are highly socially oriented, intuitive, and physically active. This is different from the Eurocentric perspective of education, which promotes individualism, insensitivity to others, and independent learning. Researchers concerned with home-school partnerships have also indicated that African American parents may feel unwelcome in school settings (Swick, 1991; Swick & Brown, 1994). This is alarming because parental involvement has been correlated with academic success. Perceptions of feeling unwelcome may suggest that school personnel are not ready for all children. These findings may

indicate that researchers and practitioners may not be doing a sufficient job of communicating their need for every stakeholder's assistance in actualizing early academic achievement.

Studies of school readiness too often focus primarily on children's cognitive skills (Snow, 2006). Moreover, when researchers try to explain factors that impede or promote early academic achievement, there is a heavy emphasis on single parenthood, ethnicity, and peer interactions and less emphasis on parenting and home environments (McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005). Another criticism of some researchers is that factors that may impact or impede school achievement are not treated as dynamic factors (McAllister et al., 2005; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). This is a problem because judgments are often made based on educators' and administrators' perspectives, which limit the lens through which to examine the issues and solutions that impact children's early academic achievement (Kunjufu, 2006). Researchers have also indicated that there is a need for more studies that take into account cultural differences that correspond with early academic success (McAllister et al., 2005). This is vital because understanding the diverse educational perspectives of parents can have a positive impact on children and counteract the impact of the sometimes misguided perceptions of others. For instance, Hill and Craft (2003) found that teachers believed that parents who volunteered at school valued education more than others, a belief that correlated with teachers' ratings of students' academic performance and skills. However, other researchers have found that ethnic minority parents value their children's academic and social success in school, even those who do not volunteer at school (Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010).

Statement of Problem

There is a need for more studies that provide a voice for parents raising children of African American descent within a mainstream cultural context. Researchers need to understand

and highlight these parents' beliefs, specific behaviors, and concerns regarding their children's academic success. Specifically, there is a need to understand parents' beliefs, goals, and values regarding how they prepare their children for early academic success.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth description of the views of parents who are raising children of African American descent about early academic achievement. Another purpose of this study was to examine the home routines of these families as they may relate to academic success or failure and parents' concerns regarding their children's early academic success. Finally, I examined specific behaviors parents utilize to prepare their children to be academically successful.

Research Questions

1. How do parents conceptualize early academic success and the factors that contribute to it?
2. How do parents view family routine as important to early academic success?
3. What are parents' concerns about their children's early academic success?
4. What specific behaviors do parents use to promote their children's early academic success?
5. What other factors, besides parents' specific behaviors, do parents believe help to promote their children's early academic success?

In this study, I investigated the views of parents who are raising children of African American descent regarding early academic success and examined the impact of such factors as family, school, and community that may promote or impede academic success. Unlike

previous studies, my focus was on parenting behaviors in connection with children's actual academic achievement (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1995, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) established eight goals to reduce the academic gap among three-to-five-year olds. One of the goals was that every school would establish partnerships with parents that would increase parental involvement and that every parent would be his or her child's first "teacher" (NEGP, 1995). These goals sparked research interest in parental beliefs about academic success, parents' teaching strategies, and family routines. "Family is obviously a major socializing agent and therefore important in determining the child's motivation to achieve success in various areas" (Muola, 2010, p. 214). Thus, it is no surprise that a number of researchers have conducted studies to understand parents' beliefs and behaviors related to academic success.

Parental Beliefs About Early Academic Success

Researchers have shown that parents' views of cognitive and social emotional issues are important to school success (Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000; Kim, Murdock, & Choi, 2005; Sonnenschein, Baker, & Cerro, 1992). Investigators indicated that even though parents have a broad conceptualization of school success, they place more emphasis on academic abilities than any other skill (Diamond et al., 2000). On the other hand, investigators who have combined qualitative methods such as interviews, ethnographic case studies, and "photo-voice" have indicated that parents view social and emotional factors as equally important as academic and

cognitive factors and in some cases as more important (McAllister et al., 2005). Furthermore, Kim et al. (2005) found that parents believe that early academic readiness consists of children exhibiting the following skills: counting to 20, taking turns and sharing, being enthusiastic and curious, knowing how to use a pencil and brushes, being able to sit still and pay attention, reciting the alphabet, and communicating verbally. Sonnenschein et al. (1992) used interviews and a written questionnaire to determine which skills parents from a middle-class suburban community believed their children should possess before entering school. Their participants reported that the most important skills and attributes were social skills; self-confidence/self-esteem; the ability to pay attention, listen, and follow directions; language and communication skills; and independence and self-sufficiency.

Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000) administered the *Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School* (CARES) instrument to Hispanic and Black parents of children who attended urban schools and who were eligible for reduced-price lunch. These parents indicated that health, peer relations, effective communication skills in language, emotional security, self-care, interest and engagement, and motor skills are important to a child's early academic success. Using thematic coding to analyze interviews, Wesley and Bussye (2003) reported that parents who were part of a focus group believed that the following activities are important to children's early school success: play and pretending, social interaction, imitation, hands-on experiences with materials, active exploration of environment, repetition, a balance of adult instruction, opportunities to choose their own activities, conversation, looking at books, reading, and listening skills, and predictable daily routines. Furthermore, low-income parents believed that children should be exposed to books, go on field trips, learn songs, do art activities, and participate in cooking projects; these parents stressed that these activities should occur in a

structured manner and that play is important but for educational purposes (Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers-Piérola, 1995). However, Holloway et al. (1995) noted that low-income parents do not use terminology that professionals have developed to describe good educational practices and they are more likely to view school-related learning as the sole responsibility of the teacher.

Parental Behaviors That Promote Early Academic Success

Very few researchers have examined the impact of parental behavior on children's academic performance (Wigfield et al., 2006). Nevertheless, researchers have demonstrated that parent behaviors are connected, in particular, to students' academic motivation (Wigfield et al., 2006). Moreover, there is an association between parental involvement and the development of social skills (Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). Even so, parental involvement has been defined in various ways. Englund, Luckner, Whaley, and Egeland (2004) indicated that operational definitions of *parental involvement* have included the following: communication between parents and teacher, parents' communication with their children regarding school issue, number of hours parents volunteer in their children's school, parental involvement in school-related activities with their children at home, and parental expectations regarding their children's educational attainment.

Parents have reported that they are involved in their children's education by helping with homework, inquiring about school matters, visiting museums, explaining pedagogical rules, and assisting with secondary school choice (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005). Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple, and Peay (1999) used a number of inventories to investigate parent-child relationships (e.g., Parental Attitudes Toward Child Rearing Questionnaire, Cooperative Preschool Inventory, and the Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory). Their findings suggested that

parents who overuse a didactic approach may overwhelm their child and cause him or her to become less task-oriented; in other words, the more school-related things parents do or talk about with their child, the less task-oriented the child becomes. Parents who emphasized an entertainment orientation to early literacy reported their children were more engaged than parents who emphasized skills (Sonnenschein et al., 1992). Schaller, Rocha, and Barshinger (2007) found that Mexican immigrant mothers of young children who had positive attitudes about education engaged in participatory behavior such as helping with homework.

Gutman and McLoyd (2000) found that whereas African American parents of high achievers organized homework schedules, created math problems, and assigned extra reading and writing lessons, parents of low achievers discussed barriers such as hectic lives and work schedules. Carlise, Stanley, and Kemple (2005) suggested that for single-parent families and families in which both parents are employed fulltime, demanding work schedules make it difficult for parents to be involved in school activities.

Piotrkowski et al. (2000) found that African American and Hispanic American families stressed the importance of being able to speak mainstream English and believed that basic knowledge is more important than how children approach learning. Scott-Jones (1987) conducted a two-part study (teaching task and interview) with African American parents from a small, Southern university town and found that the mothers of low-readiness children tended to act more like teachers, while mothers of high-readiness children took a more supportive role. In their literature review, Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) found that African American parents scored low on parenting measures of teaching. Holloway et al. (1995) found that low-income parents placed more emphasis on didactic school preparation, assuming that their children will be

ready for school and implicitly trusting that the teacher will adjust the curriculum to accommodate the needs of children.

Moreover, researchers have reported that parents who have higher educational attainment frequently helped their first- and third-grade children problem-solve situations and had higher expectations; when parents had higher expectations for their children, youth had higher overall levels of academic achievement (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009). In a study of Caribbean immigrant parents, those who monitored their children's activities and kept track of their behavioral and academic progress in school were found to have children who performed well academically (Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, & Evans, 2006).

Parental warmth and sensitivity are other characteristics that researchers have studied. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (2008) reported that both fathers and mothers who were sensitive to the need for autonomy had sons who made greater gains in reading and math achievement from 54 months to third grade. In a study of preschool children's readiness, Hill (2001) assessed children's skills and administered a parent behavior inventory and a parent-teacher involvement survey to their parents. Hill reported that mothers who are warm and accepting while introducing reading and math tasks are likely to promote the development of their children's reading and math skills. In some longitudinal studies, parental warmth has also been linked to social aspects of school (Bierman, Nix, & Makin-Byrd, 2008); Estrada, Arsenio, Hess, & Holloway, 1987).

Family Routines

Parents use a variety of routines and skills to prepare their children for school: teaching necessary routines, such as teaching children to tie shoes; talking with other family members and

friends; helping children to memorize their home address and phone number; discussing behavior expectations, new classmates, and teachers; discussing what will happen the first day of school; and preparing the child for the nature of school work. These routines are “powerful organizers of family behavior and may be instrumental to children and families during times of transition, such as elementary school entry” (Wildenger, McIntyre, Fiese, & Eckert, 2008, p. 69). Middle-class parents who completed a written questionnaire and an interview reported teaching their children emergent literacy skills, prosocial behaviors, emergent mathematics skills, manners, language and communication skills, gross motor skills, cleaning up after themselves, dressing themselves, personal hygiene, cooking, fine motor skills, artistic skills, and nutrition and healthy eating skills (Sonnenschein et al., 1992). In a pretest vs. post-test longitudinal study conducted in a large urban city, Parker et al. (1999) found that there was a correlation between parents who understood the nature of play and the development of skills in sensory activation, greater creativity and curiosity, and independence. In a study of 132 children who were transitioning to kindergarten in an urban school district in the Northeast, single-parent families were not likely to have a highly structured daily routine, particularly surrounding waking up, eating breakfast, and eating lunch (Wildenger et al., 2008). However, in a longitudinal study, researchers reported that there was a negative correlation between parents who qualified for government financial aid and their use of preschool transition activities (Hess, Holloway, Dickson, & Price, 1984), but low-income parents were willing to incorporate professional advice into their childrearing routines if their child’s academic problems were perceived as serious (Holloway et al., 1995).

Family Book Reading

Few researchers have investigated whether parents view the various activities that occur within the family routine (e.g., bedtime, homework, or dinner time routines) as important to their children's development. An exception to this is the activity of family book reading, which has received considerable attention because book reading has been shown to be beneficial in the development of early literacy skills. Variations of reading styles have been found between low-income African American mothers and middle-class European American mothers (Vernon-Feagans, Hammer, Miccio, & Manlove, 2001). For instance, Heath (1983) found that African American families create group literacy activities, and African American mothers typically employ a modeling style in which they label the pictures in a book and expect their children to mimic them (Hammer, 1999). Hammer (1999) reported that low-income African American mothers produce more directives than middle-class mothers and hypothesized that this is because they read less frequently to their children. Anderson-Yockel and Haynes (1994) also found that African American mothers produced fewer questions than did White mothers, and they reported that African American children produced more spontaneous vocalizations than their counterparts.

Hockenberger, Goldstein, and Hass (1999) examined the effects of commenting during joint book reading by low-income African American mothers and found that the use of specific comments during joint book reading facilitates interactions between low-SES mothers and their preschool children. In particular, the number of specific comments produced by the mothers increased the number of utterances per interaction with their child. Contrary to Hammer's (1999) findings, Hockenberger et al. (1999) indicated that children increase their interactions when their mothers comment in a way that relates story content to real-life experiences during

book reading sessions. Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, and Daley (1998) indicated that kindergarten and first grade children's written language knowledge was associated with parental attempts to teach their children about print but not with exposure to storybooks. Interestingly, Britto and Brooks-Gunn (2001) found that children whose mothers did not graduate from high school demonstrated greater expressive language compared with children whose mothers did graduate, even controlling for mothers' language use in the book reading.

Parental Concerns About Children's Early Academic Success

Also, parents have expressed concerns about their children's early academic success. McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) asked parents to complete a 57-item survey designed to investigate family perspectives regarding their children's school readiness skills. Their participants expressed common concerns about getting their children accustomed to a new school and to following classroom directions. They also expressed concerns about potential behavior problems and underdeveloped academic skills and wanted to know what they could do to help prepare their children for kindergarten. Furthermore, they were worried that they did not know how to prepare their children for school and wished that teachers would communicate their expectations of them and their children (McAllister et al., 2005; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). McAllister et al. (2005) found that African American parents indicated concerns about racism, classism, violence, disrespect for individual children and families, and inappropriate behavioral expectations for young children as perceived dangers from teachers, schools, and new peers as children transition to kindergarten. They also worried that schools are not ready for their children, particularly children with developmental needs and different cultural backgrounds, and believed that teachers are unwilling to adapt to children's individual and

specific needs. Lower-income parents are also concerned about violence and the perceived anarchy in public schools (Holloway et al., 1995).

In 2002, President George W. Bush passed No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which increased the focus on school accountability and outcomes. NCLB required states to implement learning standards and assessments. With this shift, another concern parents had is that higher expectations by the government have overwhelmed the schools and that there is a need for better communication from schools to families about school expectations and what children need to learn, school policies, schedules, class assignments, their children's activities each week, and their children's general progress (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Chun (2003) reported that Chinese parents whose children were transitioning from preschool to kindergarten did not realize the stress that some of their children were experiencing. Even though parents have expressed such concerns, prekindergarten teachers, kindergarten teachers, and principals urged parents to spend more time being their children's first teachers (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Although the abovementioned studies provide a solid foundation of information on parental beliefs and behaviors, researchers have indicated that less is known about the motivation of children from racial and ethnic groups other than European Americans, and very few researchers have examined parent-specific behaviors such as time use with their children, teaching strategies, and encouragement to participate in activities (Wigfield et al., 2006).

Cross-Comparison Studies

Researchers have examined cultural differences such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status that may impact parental beliefs and behaviors. Cross-comparison studies are very prevalent in the literature looking at the effect of parental beliefs on children's academic success. In a cross-cultural comparison of Chinese American and European American mothers, Kinlaw,

Kurtz-Costes, and Goldman-Fraser (2001) found that more Chinese American mothers believed that effort is related to academic success and Chinese American mothers' beliefs are related to encouragement of their children's autonomy. Furthermore, although European American mothers view their own efforts as important to their children's academic success, Chinese American mothers view their children's efforts as important to academic success. Brooker (2003) interviewed Bangladeshi parents who indicated that it is important that their children listen, which is a skill they have to teach their children, but Anglo parents place more emphasis on their children being able to talk and on encouraging children. Ng, Pomerantz, and Lam (2007) reported that Chinese parents de-emphasized rather than emphasized children's success and emphasized rather than de-emphasized children's failure when compared with European American parents.

Ethnic minority parents were more likely to exhibit concerns about delaying their children's entry into kindergarten, but European American parents were actually more likely to delay their children's entrance (Diamond et al., 2000). Achhpal, Goldman, and Rohner (2007) conducted semi-structured interviews with 60 European American and Puerto Rican parents and found that both sets of parents indicated that physical skills and creativity are less important to academic success. However, European Americans placed more value on emotional affective competencies, while Puerto Rican parents placed more value on educational attainment, being successful, and espousing family-oriented values. Ryan et al. (2010) reported that Latino parents who had a stronger Latino orientation valued academic and social success more strongly than did Latino parents who had a stronger White American orientation. In a survey of 376 Black and White mothers in inner-city Philadelphia, Ardelt and Eccles (2001) found that mothers' parental

efficacy was a stronger predictor of children's self-efficacy and academic success in disadvantaged family and environmental contexts, such as Black single-parent households. Ricciuti (1999) indicated that low-income single mothers' beliefs about school success did not differ from those in two-parent homes. However, in a three-year study in which a sample of low-income mothers were interviewed on three separate occasions, Holloway et al. (1995) reported that these mothers stressed the importance of didactic instruction in basic literacy and numeracy skills and that they viewed teacher-structured activities as vital to their children's academic success more than middle-class mothers. Conversely, researchers have suggested that parents with postsecondary education take a more holistic approach to literacy development than parents without postsecondary education, who take a more skills-based approach to literacy (Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2006).

One cannot doubt that cross-comparison studies have had an impact on research and practice in education, but what type of impact? McLoyd (1991) reported that studies of the difference between African Americans and European Americans are prevalent across disciplines in psychology.

[The comparative paradigm] has been criticized not so much because of its focus on contrast per se but because of the restricted nature of the information it yields, the intellectual foreclosure it encourages (e.g., documenting race differences as an end in itself and devoting little effort to identifying and understanding the proximal causes of these differences), and the characteristic interpretation of comparative data. (McLoyd, 1991, p. 424)

Quite often researchers compare ethnic minority groups to European American families. Monteiro (1999) argued that African Americans are discussed using ideological frameworks that

“propose that African Americans do not possess prerequisite biological or cultural structures necessary for advanced psychological functioning” (p. 154). These include the organic deficit (e.g., Ferguson, 1970), the sociocultural deficit (e.g., Bereiter & Engelman, 1966), and the sociological–structuralist frameworks (e.g., Ogbu, 1978). Deficit and sociological–structuralist models stress race, class, or caste factors that selectively promote or inhibit the performance of particular groups, in this case promoting European Americans and inhibiting African Americans (Ogbu, 1978). Researchers have used these models to explain the “deficient” performance of African Americans, such as lower scores on standardized measures. In fact, most researchers who study academic achievement use this approach.

On the other hand, the African Americanist and Africanist models presume that African Americans are cognitively intact and hence are not inherently deficient (Clark, 1972; Nobles, 1986). Clark and Nobles both argued for analyses of African American behavior and thought, which are anchored within African American culture without regard for cross-cultural comparisons but focus on how African Americans develop without making comparisons with other groups (Monteiro, 1999). For instance, Scott-Jones (1987) conducted a within-group comparison of African American mothers’ teaching styles, which allowed her to take a microscopic view of the variables associated with various levels of achievement within an African American community in the South. McLoyd (1991) “found strong support for the claim of some critics that research on African American children is essentially an a-theoretical undertaking in which raw empiricism typically triumphs over thoughtful conceptually grounded inquiry” (p. 426). This increases the chances that researchers claim significant cultural differences that are exaggerated or false. There is a need for more examination of the views and behaviors of parents who are raising children of African American descent and their early

academic success that are not cross-comparative in nature and are encapsulated within a theoretical underpinning.

Historical Perspectives on African American Education

Given that academic achievement is studied by both researchers and practitioners, one must have a historically contextualized understanding of African American education. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) indicated that the history of African American education is one filled with struggle and liberation. In 1647, the Massachusetts Act established public-supported education with the goal of teaching reading, writing, and religion. This act was not intended for African Americans but for European American males (Allen, 2008). During slavery, it was a crime for African Americans to learn how to read and write; however, many slaves faced with such barriers were still willing to endure the consequences in order to become literate. Even the fear of beatings or death did not stop slaves' desire for literacy (Perry et al., 2003).

After slavery ended, freed African Americans demanded schooling (Sadovnik & Semel, 2010). This demand led to the opening of many schools for African American children (Norman, Ault, Bentz, & Meskimen, 2001). During Reconstruction, school attendance among African American children and per capita spending on African American schools were approximately equivalent to their European American counterparts (Norman et al., 2001). However, "African American education was met with violence from white supremacists, which was then codified in segregationist Jim Crow laws and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 Supreme Court decision that ruled separate but equal was not unconstitutional" (Sadovnik & Semel, 2010, p. 6). This violence led to a decline in African American school attendance and enrollment (Norman et al., 2001). However, in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate but equal education for African Americans was unequal and

unconstitutional (Sadovnik & Semel, 2010). The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision gained momentum with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which mandated integration throughout the nation.

In 1972, the Supreme Court mandated busing in Northern public schools in *Keyes v. Denver School District*, but in 1974, President Nixon's conservative Supreme Court appointees in the *Milliken v. Bradley* ruling constituted a significant setback for educational standards based on equity (Sadovnik & Semel, 2010). By the 1980s a trend toward re-segregated schools occurred:

President Ronald Reagan's administration opposed desegregation, falsely portraying it as an abject failure as well as an imposition on whites, and enacted numerous policies that ensured that it would not succeed. It cuts federal funds that enforced desegregation, reduced the number of Desegregation Assistance Centers by 75 percent, refused to file any desegregation research, endorsed the dismantling of school busing in Norfolk, Virginia, and supported the notion of neighborhood schools. (Altenbaugh, 2004, p. 7)

This background provides a historical context for what has been a consistent theme in African American education: the Black–White achievement gap.

The Black–White Achievement Gap

National attention to the Black–White academic achievement gap occurred with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1964 (Braun, Chapman, & Vezzu, 2010). Although the academic gap between African American and European American students garnered attention 47 years ago, the achievement difference between these two groups is still significant and alarming. The NCES (2004) reported that European American students scored higher on all national reading assessments than African American students. More specifically, European American students' letter recognition rate is 37%, but the letter recognition of African

American students is 28% (Aud, Fox, & Ramani, 2010). In 2007, 43% of European American students scored at or above the national reading level, but only 14% of African American students scored at or above the national reading level (Aud et al., 2010).

Scholars have offered perspectives as to what causes the Black–White achievement gap. However, to have in-depth conceptualization of the Black–White academic gap, one needs to understand that at the beginning of the twentieth century, Polish, Jewish, Italian, and other southern and eastern European immigrants performed poorly compared to their native-born European American counterparts (Norman et al., 2001). Over time, the academic achievement performance for these immigrants improved dramatically, erasing the achievement gap as they become more mainstream and assimilated. This occurrence stresses the importance of socio-cultural position and academic performance (Norman et al., 2001). One perspective that has been prevalent for many years was that African Americans were intellectually inferior to their European American counterparts. However, for the purpose of this study, the research will focus more on the socio-cultural perspective, because this perspective dominates the current national debate on the academic gap compared to biological explanations.

John Ogbu developed the cultural–ecological theory to explain African American academic performance (Garas-York, 2010). His theory is based on the following forces: the minority groups' frames of reference when comparing schools, how the minority groups value schooling, the minority groups' interpretations of the relationship between them and the school, and the symbolic beliefs related to schooling (Garas-York, 2010). Ogbu conducted cross-group comparison ethnographic studies of school achievement among Chinese American and African American children in Stockton, California, which led him to conclude that a group's incorporation into mainstream society and their social position in that society predicts academic

achievement, rather than status as a racial minority (Perry et al., 2003). Based on this premise, Ogbu (1992) categorized racial minorities into two groups: voluntary and involuntary.

“Voluntary minorities were defined as groups whose ancestors came to U.S. in search of greater economic opportunities. [However], involuntary minorities were classified as groups, whose ancestors suffered slavery, colonization, and who were historically denied true assimilation into American society” (Spradin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000, p. 17). Downey (2008) indicated that voluntary minorities typically compare their situations to those of their relatives in native countries, which is a favorable comparison. Voluntary minorities will embrace the notion that hard work will pay off in the host country. The comparison for involuntary minorities illuminates barriers to success and contributes to a sense that hard work will not pay off.

Warikoo and Carter (2009) wrote,

[Cultural–ecological] theory maintains that voluntary minority students see school success as major means to upward mobility, believing that the strategies that hold for middle-class Whites hold for them, whereas involuntary minorities view the opportunity structure as primarily closed to them and their family members. This is, involuntary minorities render certain behaviors conducive to upward mobility as only beneficial to the White middle class; hence, they culturally invert and embrace an oppositional culture.

(p. 370)

Ogbu (2003) suggested that African American parents are unsure about their children’s success and are unsure whether schooling is an appropriate path to success for African Americans. In other words, African American parents give their children an ambivalent message about school success and credentials from a young age:

Even before they are old enough to understand the weak connection between education and jobs through observations, children hear it from family discussions and begin to internalize the beliefs of their family and community. Furthermore, minority parents and other adults may teach children the abstract beliefs about the importance of education, yet their own educational practices may convey contrary messages. In practice, children may observe very little cultural emphasis on striving to do well in school or to go get good credentials. (Ogbu, 2003, pp. 147-148).

Another theory based on a sociological–structuralist model is Ruby Payne’s (2005) culture of poverty theory. Before I elaborate on Payne’s theory, it should be noted that this specific deficit theory is based on Hess and Shipman’s (1965) cultural deprivation research. Hess and Shipman conducted research on Black mothers and their children; they reported that these mothers created an environment where their children were impulsive rather than reflective and their language skills were restricted rather than elaborate. Moreover, they reported that these children could only respond to immediate consequences, especially punishment, and were unable to do long-term processing to establish future goals (Hess & Shipman, 1965). Black mothers could not mediate situations with their children verbally or teach their children how events are related to each other and connect to the future (Hess & Shipman, 1965).

In the 21st century, Ruby Payne continued with the same negative messaging. According to Payne (2005), there are hidden rules to poverty: the noise level is high, the most important channel of communication is non-verbal, and a main value is to entertain others. Payne believes that generational poverty is based on entertainment and relationships. Many individuals stay in poverty because they do not know there is a choice, but if they do know that, they have no one to teach them the hidden rules of the middle class. Discipline should be carried out by verbal or

physical chastisement, followed by forgiveness and food. Payne stressed that it has become more difficult for educators in public school to teach because the number of students of middle-class culture is decreasing, while the number from low-income backgrounds is increasing. There are legitimate concerns with both Ogbu's (2003) and Payne's (2005) theories. Through their comparisons, both theorists examined individual factors of the child and family rather than institutional factors that may impact a child's academic success. In other words, they suggested that the individual is solely responsible for his or her own academic failure.

Furthermore, Perry et al. (2003) reported that there is not sufficient evidence for Ogbu's belief that African American students and their parents develop a level of distrust of school; also, they reported that Ogbu does not have a complete knowledge and interpretation of African American social and educational history and how it impacts modern-day attitudes. Perry et al. (2003) believed Ogbu could not have made the assertion that African Americans have not developed an academic tradition if he had experienced personally the effects of African Americans' epic historical struggle for literacy and educational opportunity.

The documented history of African American education illustrates an intertwined relationship among home, school, church, and community that helped parents secure education for their children before and after *Brown v. Board of Education* (Fields-Smith, 2005). Even in the context of the complex relationship African Americans have with schooling, Payne's deficit theory is often used as a lens to understand people of low socioeconomic status. Although Payne (2005) claimed her theory addresses poverty across race, researchers have suggested that her theory is based on the racialization of poor people, representing ethnic minorities as poor (Gorski, 2008; Osei-Kofi, 2005; Valencia, 2010). Osei-Kofi (2005) indicated that through the examples she provided in her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Payne depicted

poor families as headed by a Black single mother who is considered a welfare queen; this woman has many children, an unstable love life, and little-to-no education. Furthermore, Payne created a racialized continuum of deservedness where poor people of color are seen as a burden to society and poor White people are only engaging in self-destructive behaviors (Gorski, 2008; Osei-Kofi, 2005).

Moreover, Kunjufu (2006) proposed that Payne's culture of poverty theory does not take into account the roles racism and capitalism play in creating poverty or the factors that have a positive impact on African American children's success, such as computer literacy and GED training that Head Start programs offer to parents. Gorski (2008) stated that "housing discrimination, racial segregation of schools, slavery, Jim Crow—these are all examples of how racism has been used to maintain an economic and political status quo" (p. 141).

Bronfenbrenner (1967) echoed similar sentiments when he stated,

The three together—slavery, poverty, and discrimination—lie at the root of the biological and social forces which produce widespread psychological debility and disturbance in the Negro child. From this perspective, it is the white man who is the first instance primarily responsible for the inadequacies of the Negro and his way of life. (p. 918)

Not only does the work by Payne ignore systemic factors, it is based on a pseudoscience encapsulated in ideology (Valencia, 2010). Payne's work is based on her own individual experiences and not supported by empirically validated research (Gorski, 2008). Payne (2005) stated the following in her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*:

Where I had gotten the data? First of all, I was married more than 30 years to Frank, who grew up in poverty. . . . Over the years, as I met his family and the many other players in the "neighborhood," I came to realize there were major differences between generational

poverty and middle class but what put the whole picture into bas-relief were the six years we spent in Illinois among the wealthy. (p. 1)

Furthermore Valencia (2010) contended that in the test of Payne's framework, many of her references are placed at the end of the book, titled "Research Notes"; this allows Payne to decontextualize and misrepresent any information she quotes to legitimize her claims. For instance, "Payne (2005) references Jonathan Kozol (1991, 1995) five times in her book but never mentions the inequalities he describes" (Gorksi, 2008, p. 133). Payne's lack of empirical research and her deliberate misrepresentation of researchers' and writers' work leads to the damaging impact of stereotypes that low-income people, particularly people of color, only value education as an abstraction, but middle-class and wealthy people, particularly White people, understand that education is needed to be successful (Valencia, 2010).

Ecological Systems Theory

Given the shortcomings of Ogbu's work and particularly Payne's theory, there is a need for a theory that enhances the understanding of African American families and education. Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory postulates all of the various systems within which families exist and provides a framework to understand how parents believe they may impact their children's academic performance. This is vital because children develop self-concepts, values, and beliefs about their academic skills at a very young age (Muola, 2010). Ecological systems theory is based on the premise that children develop within a complex system of relationships that is impacted by several layers of the environment, including and extending beyond home, school, neighborhood, and broader institutional and cultural settings. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stressed that perceived reality is more important to behavior and development than objective reality. This perceived reality is at the center of the interpersonal

systems in which one participates both within and across settings. Bronfenbrenner (1979) also placed particular importance on the primary dyads between parents and children.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) identified the four layers of the environment as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem represents the child's intimate environment, connections that directly sustain the child every day. A heavy focus is on the impact adults have on children such as parent-child relationships because "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 38). The second layer, the mesosystem, examines the connections across microsystems such as the interactions between home and school, home and neighborhood, or home and daycare center. The exosystem includes social environments that do not contain children but impact their experiences, such as parents' work and social networks. The outermost level is the macrosystem, which includes the values, laws, and customs of a specific culture and is not necessarily a specific context. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, because this process is affected by relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. Spencer (1995) contributes another dimension to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems by adding a phenomenological approach. This added dimension not only allows one to understand a process within a context but by the phenomenological experience of race (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartman, 1997). Spencer's phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) allows one to examine the following: risk and protective factors, challenges and

supports, coping products such as healthy relationships and effective parenting, and emergent identities such as ethnicity and self-efficacy.

The PVEST theory is ideal for contextualizing the beliefs and educational impact of parents who are raising children of African American descent. Also, this theory helps to create an understanding as to how these parents view the impact other settings and their connections have on their children's education, ultimately creating a better understanding of the academic socialization of children. To summarize, the purpose of this study is to add to the literature on parents' beliefs and behaviors used to promote academic success. Additionally, I examined how parents conceptualize their family routines, which go beyond family book reading. Third, I examined the views and behaviors of parents who are raising children of African American descent without using a cross-culturally comparative lens. Last, using a phenomenological ecological systems approach, I studied how parents believe various systems impact their children's early academic education.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth description of beliefs about early academic success held by parents who are raising children of African American descent. Another purpose of this study was to examine the home routines of these families, as these may relate to academic success or failure, and parents' concerns regarding their children's early academic success. Finally, these parents' specific behaviors were examined as well as other factors that motivate their children to be academically successful. The research was primarily qualitative in nature and had as its goal to provide an in-depth description of parents' views of early academic success and specific behaviors and factors that motivate children to be academically successful. In order to gain this description, the interviews contained questions that did not inquire about deficits but focused on both strengths and weaknesses.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how parents who are raising children of African American descent conceptualize variables related to early academic success and academic motivation. The research questions that were central to the study were

1. How do parents conceptualize early academic success and the factors that contribute to it?
2. How do parents view their family routine as important to early academic success?

3. What are parents' concerns about their children's early academic success?
4. What specific behaviors do parents use to promote their children's early academic success?
5. What other factors, besides parents' specific behaviors, do parents believe help to promote their children's early academic success?

Research Design

This study was conducted using an ethnographic approach and was designed to be exploratory in nature. This approach allowed me to provide a thick description as to parents' beliefs about early academic success, family routines, and parents' concerns regarding their children's education. This type of thick description allowed an understanding to emerge of the directly lived experiences of parents and their children instead of abstract generalization (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Ethnographic methods are used to study groups in their natural setting. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) contended that ethnography is "analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most" (p. 248). According to anthropologists such as Boas and Malinowski, social and cultural phenomena are different in character from physical phenomena and need to be explored in their natural environments (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Although critics of ethnographic methods have questioned their scientific validity and reliability, ethnographers have produced research that is empirically based and academically solid. The implementation of ethnographic methods has increased, particularly in the field of education. Atkinson and Hammersley have argued that this increase is due to a decline in confidence about quantitative research. Most importantly, ethnography allows a researcher to

conduct objective research in which he or she is able to advocate for the people, guided by ethical principles.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined grounded theory as an inductive strategy that allows the researcher to understand concepts through constant comparative methods. “Essentially, grounded theory methods are a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 507). Furthermore, grounded theory consists of data-driven theory development that allows for an understanding of various conceptual relationships. Researchers who use grounded theory try to explain phenomena in their natural environment (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) and are able to describe contextual conditions of the study (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992).

Participants

Participants consisted of 14 families from a town in the Midwestern United States. The residents of this town can be described as primarily blue-collar, with 86% of the population composed of European Americans and 10% composed of African Americans. The participating families had children in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third grade. The participants were recruited from a day care center. The director of the center assisted me in identifying participants by distributing the consent form and parental permission letter (see Appendices A and B). After the parents signed the consent form and parental permission letter, the children were asked to sign an assent form (see Appendix C). The daycare center can be described as a small white house, consisting of four rooms. One room served as the main room with tables and chairs for children. It was decorated with academic materials, such as worksheets completed by the children, and their drawings, such as hand prints. Another room served as a computer room

and a quiet reading area for older students. There was also a kitchen area and office space. The overall atmosphere of the daycare could be described as intimate and cozy. Typically, there are three older Black women and one young White woman on duty. To provide an in-depth understanding and contextualization of the participants' responses, I describe each of the participants below (see Table 1).

Michelle

Michelle is an African American woman who was married with three sons. She had a high school diploma. Both she and her husband worked as laborers at a factory. She and her family lived in a neighborhood that could be described as a predominantly White middle-class neighborhood.

Rose

Rose is a European American woman who was married. She and her husband adopted an African American girl. She had a master's degree and was a minister at a local church. Her husband was an accountant for a local car dealership. She lived in the same neighborhood as Michelle.

Melinda

Melinda is a European American woman who lived with her partner, an African American man. Together, they had two sons. Melinda had an associate's degree and worked as a health information management specialist. Her neighborhood could be described as working class with both Black and White residents.

Judy

Judy is a European American woman who was single and had a bachelor's degree. She was a supervisor for a home health care company. She had three children that were fathered by

an African American man. She owned a house that was one of only two houses on a block, located near a coffee shop and grocery market. Her house was extremely neat with the exception of the kitchen table, which was used as a work station for both her and the children.

Kelly

Kelly is an African American woman who was single. She graduated from high school and worked for the city. She had one son. I cannot describe her neighborhood because she and I met at the coffee shop that was located near Judy's home.

Yolanda

Yolanda is a single African American woman who had two children and was expecting another child. She worked at the coffee shop that was located near Judy's house. She lived in an apartment complex that was located in the southern part of the town. The apartment complex consisted of residents from both working-class and middle-class backgrounds.

Eno

Eno is a single African American woman who had two children. Both of her parents were born in a country in Africa. Eno had a bachelor's degree and was a homemaker. She lived in a two story home with her children and younger brother. Her home was decorated with furniture that appeared to be oversized for the space in the living and dining room.

Imani

Imani is an African American woman who was married with four children. She and her husband were medical doctors. They lived in a two story yellow house that was located off a main road in a wooded area. Imani and her husband had a work room for their children to complete school assignments. The walls in this room were decorated with pictures of African American figures and a map of Africa.

Lauren

Lauren is an African American woman who was married. She had an associate's degree; however, she was unemployed. Her husband had a blue-collar job working at a factory. Their home, which they rented, was located in a predominantly White middle-class area. However, she did not know her neighbors. She and her husband had two sons and a daughter.

Deborah

Deborah is a single African American woman who had three children. She had an associate's degree in medical assistance. I interviewed Deborah at the daycare center, because at the time this research study was conducted, she was in the process of moving.

Rachel

Rachel is a single African American woman who had two daughters. She graduated from high school and worked for the city government as an administrative assistant. She and her daughters lived in a two bedroom house that was located near a small pond. Her neighborhood could be described as consisting of an aging middle-class White population.

Tiffany

Tiffany is an African American woman and was married. She had four children. Tiffany was a school counselor for a local elementary school. Her husband owned a construction company. I interviewed Tiffany at her job, which was located in a middle-class neighborhood.

Frances

Frances is an African American woman and is married. She had a master's in education and was pursuing a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction. Frances's husband was a physical education teacher for a local elementary school. She and her husband had two children. I interviewed Frances at Tiffany's workplace.

Karen

Karen is an African American woman and was married. She had a master's in human resource development, and her husband was a teacher for a local school. Together, they had two children, a boy and girl. Just like Frances, I interviewed Karen at Tiffany's workplace.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Degree Status
Michelle	African American	Married	High School
Rose	European American	Married	Master's
Melinda	European American	Cohabiting	Associate's
Judy	European American	Single	Bachelor's
Kelly	African American	Single	High School
Yolanda	African American	Single	High School
Eno	African American	Single	Bachelor's
Imani	African American	Married	Medical Doctorate
Lauren	African American	Cohabiting	Associate's
Deborah	African American	Single	Associate's
Rachel	African American	Single	High School
Tiffany	African American	Married	Master's
Frances	African American	Married	Master's
Karen	African American	Married	Master's

Materials

Two semi-structured interviews were devised for use with each parent (see Appendices D and E). Semi-structured interviews provide sufficient structure for common opportunities across participants, but they allow participants to express themselves more freely. Interviews allowed participants the opportunity to be not only participants but also stakeholders in the research project. Researchers who view their participants as stakeholders demonstrate a high level of transparent respect, which is conducive to a cordial relationship between researcher and participants (Sheridan, 2000).

In the first interview, parents were asked to describe their beliefs about early academic success and their children's academic success, to describe their family routine, and to describe their concerns regarding their children's academic success. In the second interview, parents were asked to journal their daily family routine for two weeks. This procedure allowed me to confirm information that parents provided during the interviews.

Procedures

The study followed a five-step procedure once consent forms were returned to the daycare provider. First, each parent was interviewed to gather information about his or her view of early academic success and concerns regarding his or her child's early academic success (see Appendix D). Second, as a part of their family routine, parents were asked to journal what they do to prepare their children each day to be academically successful. Third, curriculum-based measurements (CBMs) were administered to assess the children's literacy and numeracy skills. Fourth, parents were asked to complete the Social Skills Inventory Scale (SSIS). As a final step, parents were interviewed again to gather information regarding specific behaviors and factors they believe helped to motivate their children to be academically successful (see Appendix E).

Data Analysis Procedures

After both interviews and journals were collected, I analyzed the data for themes and concepts. Experts in qualitative research have recommended waiting until all fieldwork has been completed to engage in rigorous and specific coding (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Before thematic coding was conducted, I had to transcribe all interviews, which were recorded on audiotape. Three participants withdrew from the study before the second interview could be conducted. However, they give me permission to analyze their first interview. To ensure accuracy and thoroughness, I took a month to transcribe all interviews into one document, reviewed the interviews twice to immerse myself in the data, and conducted three edits of the transcripts. The responses of the participants were compiled. Next, I recorded common themes in my memo notes for the interview questions and then condensed the number of themes based on similarities. All journal entries were typed up into a single document and analyzed for common themes. All themes were analyzed based on parents' degree status, marital status, gender of child, age of child, and whether the child had a disability.

I used Dedoose software ([http:// www.dedoose.com](http://www.dedoose.com)) to organize the themes and concepts because it allows one to create code trees that can be applied to excerpts throughout the data. These coded excerpts can be viewed within the context of the data, and a frequency count of codes can be generated. Overall, Dedoose is a data tool for code-based inquiry, searching, and reporting of data obtained through interviews and journals. The word-processed interview and journal entry documents were transferred into the Dedoose software. Then, I created code trees and nodes based on the themes established during the review of the data. Reading through the data, I applied the codes to various excerpts throughout the data. This process allowed me to compile excerpts based on the application of codes and conduct frequency checks to ensure

common thematic schemes. Frequency checks comprise a common pattern level of analysis because they allow the researcher to identify frequent patterns as themes should they appear over and over again and to say with a level of certainty that a pattern exists.

Responses to the CBMs and SSIS instruments were scored. These data allowed me to compare the various themes that emerged from the interviews and journals with the results from the assessments. For instance, if parents are commonly reported that literacy is a significant academic skill, their children's literacy score may reflect this emphasis.

Trustworthiness and Confidence

In order to ensure trustworthiness and confidence, I used triangulation as a mode of inquiry to conduct the study—common themes were identified across interviews, journals, and academic and social skills assessments. Huberman and Miles (1994) stated that “by self-consciously setting out to collect and double-check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence, the researcher will build the triangulation process into ongoing data collection” (p. 438). It is important to share findings with others. Therefore, I had two college professors who were experts in qualitative research review the data and coding schemes in Dedoose. Both professors indicated that their observations were consistent with my findings and the themes that emerged existed in the data.

Field reports and notes were also utilized in this research. Eisenhart and Howe (1992) reported that

the validity of ethnographic research is judged to be strong when researchers spend long periods of time in the field so as to get to know participants, their views, and situations when the researchers' actions and interviews are conducted in the idiom of participants; and when the researcher is directly involved in the lives of those being studied. (p. 647)

I spent time with the participants in their homes and had dinner with some of them. I spent time with the children at the daycare center and attended some parent events held at the center. This process is important because qualitative researchers are a part of the interaction they want to investigate and are not a neutral tool (Fontana & Frey, 2005). During the interview process, I summarized information obtained during the interview and delivered to it parents for clarity and accuracy. Furthermore, multiple interviews were conducted from which I directly quoted a significant part of the interviews in order to ensure authenticity of parent voices. In regard to measuring the children's early academic skills, I adhered to the assessment protocol and directions to administer the tests to the children and to score their responses.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Micro- and Mesosystems**Parent Definitions of Early Academic Success**

The coding of the interviews revealed four general conceptualizations of early academic success by parents: (a) literacy skills, (b) numeracy skills, (c) social skills, and (d) passing all subjects. Eleven of the 14 participants defined early academic success as literacy skills, which included reciting ABCs, basic reading skills, and reading comprehension skills (see Table 2).

Table 2

Definition of Early Academic Success

Conceptualizations	Number of Parents Who Identified Theme
Literacy Skills	11
Numeracy Skills	6
Social Skills	6
Passing	3

For example, when asked to define early academic success, Michelle reported, “to be academically aware and what I mean by academically aware is that he recites his ABCs.”

Another participant indicated, “Um, right now because she is only in second grade, a lot of

reading, taking tests on the book. She now needs to comprehend. So I think reading and understanding and not just reading.” Judy replied,

I think reading, writing at an early age. America did not learn how to write to about age six. My dad encouraged reading and writing by age four. Something like that you know.

Reading at an early age to the children helped them get accustomed to it.

Along with literacy, six participants defined early academic success as numeracy skills.

Statements that highlighted this characterization are “number recognition, recognizing numbers” or “counting to twenty.”

Some parents also defined academic success as acquiring appropriate social skills. Of the six parents who identified social skills as relevant, five of them had sons (see Table 3). These parents knew that boys, especially those of African American descent, were more likely to be identified as having more social skill deficits than their counterparts. Thus, these parents might have taken more time to work on prosocial skills acquisition with their sons. Lauren indicated that if “he is goin’ by the rules, he is payin’ attention [then] he [is] learnin’.” Moreover, Tiffany identified social skills as a component of academic success. She stated that “how to work in a group, how to line up, [and] follow directions are important academic skills.”

Table 3

Parent Identification of Social Skills as Important by Gender of Child

Gender of Child	Total Number of Children	Number of Parents Who Identified Social Skills
Boys	7	5
Girls	7	1

Along with the above mentioned conceptualizations, three participants identified their children passing all of their subjects as early academic success. One parent stressed, “Getting good grades, even in elementary is important because the foundation it sets to get better grades in high school and those are important ones for college.” Although these parents did not identify specific skills, it does not mean they were not aware of the importance of such skills as literacy and numeracy. It may mean that they believed if their children earned passing grades, then they were acquiring such skills.

Family Factors Impacting Academic Success

Along with the way parents conceptualized early academic success, they discussed factors impacting early academic success. Twelve of the 14 participants believed that parental characteristics are an important variable. When discussing parental characteristics, Lauren said,

Working with them at home, not just leaving everything else up to the teacher. You have to work with them on a regular, consistent basis. Because if you don't, they are that young so they forget. You have to work over and over with them. Be real repetitive.

Moreover, Rachel described her parental characteristics as

um, me being involved in her school work. Me showing my face at her school. Um, me being involved in school activities. Me just knowing what is going on with her at school. Because if you don't ask, they won't tell you. Me being there for her. Making sure she is in bed early, gets dinners.

Parents across socioeconomic statuses understand the importance of the parent role. They embraced the idea that they were their child's first teacher. Specifically, a larger proportion of the parents who headed single-parent households vehemently discussed the significance of parental involvement or the lack of such involvement (see Table 4). The single parents in this

study constantly had to think about how involved they could be in their children's lives while also providing for the household. Furthermore, parents who were working long hours and working more than one job to provide for their families worried about how their lack of availability might impact their children's academic performance.

Table 4

Identification of Parental Involvement Based on Marital Status

Marital Status	Number of Participants	Total Number of Participants Who Identified Parental Involvement
Single	6	4
Married	8	2

Interestingly, the four parents who had children with disabilities also identified the teacher as important to their children's academic success. For instance Kelly, whose son had ADHD, said,

I believe when I was growing up, I believed teachers cared as far as a child's academic success. And that was from kindergarten on to high school. I believe now we have some teachers that are just there but there are those out there that actually do care. Coming up in high school, anyone that played sports, they passed. If you do not play a sport, you could be in class every day, trying your best, trying your best, trying your best, trying your best and you failed but that person who probably the star on the football or basketball team or something like that, they passed on and they could not come to class

or they could turn in homework or not turn in homework and they could still get an A out of the class and you are getting a C. I don't think some teachers play it fairly.

Parents whose children had disabilities thought that it was important for their children to have teachers who would be fair and care about their success. They wanted a teacher who saw their child first and the disability second. Without such a teacher, these parents knew that their children might struggle in school to be both academically and socially successful.

Family Routine and Time Management

Parents discussed the importance of their family routine as it related to their children's early academic success. All 14 participants reported that a family routine that is structured and based on a consistent schedule is relevant. Often the sentiment expressed was that a consistent schedule provides structure, which allows children to know the daily expectations. When Rachel was asked to convey her thoughts about her family routine and academic success, she indicated,

She has a routine that you are gonna know. If she doesn't have a sleeping routine, I definitely think that is not healthy for her. Um she knows she will get one-on-one time with me. That is important to her academic success.

Moreover, parents strongly linked structure and schedule not only to early academic success but to long-term success as an adult. For instance, Imani stated,

They [her children] need to know there is a schedule in school and outside school and their behavior and performance is dictated by the schedule but also the schedule is flexible enough to accommodate their needs. If she has extra work on an evening and requires more time, we can adjust to that. But yes, routines are vital to providing a structure that they fit into and they help uphold and so that they understand that what they do at school is a continuum for what they do at home and vice versa. Throughout their

lives they need to understand they will have a schedule at a pace that is either set by them or someone else.

Furthermore, seven participants believed that family time is important to early academic success. Of those seven participants, five of them were raising daughters (see Table 5). These participants may have stressed family time because they believed it could serve as a protective factor for their daughters who might encounter sexist behavior and interracial issues in their school and in their community. An example of family time was presented by Deborah who stated,

I think promoting academics is like we try to have family time at least once a week—play games and talk, eat pizza. I think that has a lot to do with it. . . . I just think giving a child a balance is important. A balance between academic and social.

Table 5

Parents' Identification of Family as Important by Gender of Child

Gender of Child	Total Number of Children	Number of Parents Who Identified Family Time
Boys	7	2
Girls	7	5

Additionally, of the four parents who identified family cohesiveness as an important factor, three had children with disabilities. For these parents, they knew that it was important that the entire family sticks together because their child might experience problems with others outside the home, which might have a negative impact on their success and adjustment. When discussing family cohesiveness, Imani asserted that

good communication promotes it. When you gather the family around the dinner table and talk about today's activities, you know concerns and areas of interest are exposed, can be talked about, and dealt with. It fosters a sense of importance among children and brings out areas of needs academically, socially, all kinds of ways that carry out in their performance inside and outside of school. I think good communication as a group forum is an important means of giving them a sense of what they do at school, and home is very important, how well they do is very important. It sort of promotes pride and a drive to do well. A whole family takes an interest; they will learn to become their own worse and best critic because of group participation in day-to-day life. That is probably the biggest thing for me as a mom.

By contrast, Yolanda, who was a single mom who experienced tremendous amounts of family conflict as a child, believed that family discord has a negative impact on children's academic success. She recounted a personal childhood story to make the connection about family discord and academic success:

I can speak from personal experience. My father was incarcerated from the time I was 6 to 16. Him being there [home] beforehand was great and then when he left my grades went down, getting in trouble at school. Always something so like. . . it's different if you started off without a parent but having a parent there and then leave, that kinda affects things. And like I've seen different [things occur] in the household. I have seen people in abusive situations and affect the kids really bad. I've seen a mom get hit or mom and dad fightin'. Stuff like that would really affect a kid. It could turn a good child into, wow it's just. . . .

Neighborhood Characteristics

The participants identified specific neighborhood factors that impact a child's early academic success. More parents who were single than partnered stressed that a "quiet and peaceful" neighborhood was necessary in order for a child to be academically successful (see Table 6). This may be because these parents were not able to provide the type of parental monitoring they would like to because they were solely responsible for providing for their households. Thus, to feel more comfortable about having to leave their children unattended they liked to ensure that their neighborhoods were a safe haven. When Eno, who was a single parent, was asked which neighborhood factors promote academic success, her response was,

I think where I live is a good neighborhood. It's quiet. It's peaceful. Everybody's yards are clean. When you wake up in the morning, see people going to work or walking. The neighborhoods on 15th and Freedom, it's dead on those streets. Everybody is still in the bed, so I just think people trying to do something with their life in a good neighborhood.

Tiffany stressed why her neighborhood was quiet and peaceful when she reported,

I think quiet and it is restful for our children. My children don't hear a lot of noise. They don't hear gun shots. They don't hear a lot of traffic at night because my neighbors are home at a decent hour of the night. I think unfortunately sometimes some neighborhoods will have loud noise and traffic that may not be conducive for learning.

Table 6

Parental Identification of Peaceful and Quiet Neighborhood Based on Marital Status

Marital Status	Total Number of Participants	Total Number Who Identified Peaceful and Quiet
Single	6	6
Married	8	4

Additionally, of the seven parents who stressed that living in a neighborhood that is educationally oriented has a positive impact on educational outcomes, five of them had a bachelor's degree or higher (see Table 7). These participants were able to live in neighborhoods where many of the families who resided there had access to a number of resources that could impact their children's education. In these neighborhoods, after-school activities such as dance classes, karate classes, and advanced academic programs may have been located in close proximity. Thus, the children in these communities frequented the same programs, which allowed both the children and their parents to develop close relationships. It should be noted that out of the five parents, four were cohabiting. Thus, if these four parents were an indicator that most of the households in their neighborhoods were headed by a two-parent household, it allowed them the ability and flexibility to share time to support such resources as a community homework hotline. The following dialogue between the interviewer and Eno best highlighted this view of neighborhood factors:

Well, in California, we lived with my sister and her husband. It was more in a subdivision, the kind where you share your yard. They seem a little bit close. They had friends to play with. She had dance classes with some of them. It was a more friendly

neighborhood. You know things like that. They might get along with and go together somewhere. If I don't know how to help with homework maybe if I didn't know, I could ask someone, that way my kids would not be stuck with a bad grade. Like some of the older kids, I noticed that some of the older kinds helped each other a lot more and this community they have a homework hotline, State U, I remember using that when I was in high school.

Table 7

Parental View of Neighborhood as Educationally Oriented Based on Degree Status

Degree status	Total Number of Participants	Number Who Identified Education-Oriented Neighborhood
Bachelor's or Higher	7	5
Less than a Bachelor's	7	1

Closely Felt Concerns and Hopes

I asked participants to identify their academic concerns regarding their children's education. Parents identified both race relations and maladaptive skills as areas of concern. Of the six parents who were concerned about racial issues, four of them were raising daughters. As mentioned earlier, these parents knew that it was a possibility that their daughters might have to deal with sexism in their schools and communities but also racial issues, which could make their daughters' school adjustment more difficult. In regard to race relations, Rachel, who had a daughter, explained,

She goes to Shelby Town which is majority White, so I had concerns about that. She would be a minority at the school. I knew it was a good school and I kinda want her to have the best of both worlds. She is already gonna have Black friends, so I want her to have White friends. But I was worried about if she was gonna get left out, called names.

Yolanda echoed similar sentiments when she said,

Um well being here, what is being a predominately a Caucasian area, that was my biggest issue. I wanted to know how many African Americans would be in this class and how would the other children take to them as a whole with them being a minority in the class. I believe that was my biggest concern.

The participants also identified a lack of appropriate social skills as a concern. Eight parents had concerns that their children might lack appropriate social skills. In terms of gender issues, six of the parents had sons and four of those parents had children with disabilities. Often parents were aware that boys, especially children who have been labeled with an emotional disturbance special education classification or diagnosed with ADHD, were more likely to get into trouble at school due to behavior issues than girls. Therefore, parents might have to work harder to teach directly and indirectly appropriate social skills to their sons. Describing her son, Michelle reported, "Hyperness. he still has that in him, like, um, it's like he can't necessarily keep still. It's like in group setting he is very easily distracted. His attention span is very, very short besides certain cartoons and movies." Tiffany reported how her child's special education classification impacted his social skills acquisition: "Transitioning, he had some behavioral problems transitioning from developmental preschool. He was fidgety, which we later found out he has ADHD, sensory issues. Now we found out he is on the spectrum."

Anticipated Concerns

These parents also discussed their anticipated concerns related to their children's education. When examining the data, there were no significant differences across different categories of participants, which suggested that these parents' anticipated concerns were based on individual family, parent, or child variables. Some mothers expressed fear related to their children's academic success or lack of it. When Michelle was asked to describe her anticipated concerns, her response was,

I am concerned about him possibly being held back in the future, but I don't like to have doubt on my child. I can't be concerned about what teachers are saying when I see different at home. I know he is very easily distracted, but other than that, letter recognition one on one with me and Dad, he recognizes a lot. He is an independent learner.

When Lauren was asked the same questions, she stated,

He takes speech--he stutters. He's come a long way. And, um, he is slow in reading so they take him out for reading class. He does not like to sound out words because he does not like to take the time. He has to learn to read because if you can't read you can't get by.

Another anticipated concern was racial issues. For example, Rachel said,

The concerns that I have is her being a minority at her school and I mean she's smart, pretty. She's outgoing. It's been known from previous family members that teachers do not give minority students the grades that they deserve, so that has been a concern of mine. I have seen her work and everything is B's. She gets A's and B's, but sometimes her teacher will mark off for little things. And I have concerns about that because I'm

like why can't she let that slide. She gave her a B for this little mistake. It has not been anything I feel like I need to deal with now but it has been a concern of mine as far as her teacher because if she goes to Olsen Middle School, she's definitely going to be a minority.

Tiffany, who stressed the treatment of African American males, stated, "To be frank and honest, I worry because he is an African American male. Sometimes African American males are underserved. And so that . . . it concerns me. We still fight for our child no matter what he needs."

Lastly, parents discussed concerns about their children's socio-emotional development.

Karen explained about her daughter,

Just the fact that she is kind of emotional and she talks a lot and I don't want her teacher to label her a problem child. She has a good heart, but she talks a lot. But when I talk to her teacher she seems to be able to control her talking. I think she knows how to behave in her classes. I just don't want it to get to the point where people are saying, "Here comes Ashley, she's a talker. She cries a lot." She is real sensitive.

Tiffany said about her son's experiences in school thus far,

He has had a rough year in kindergarten. I know when we started this process I've taken him out of one school district and put him in another. My son was railroaded and mistreated. My concern is him not liking school. He seems to be doing so much better since he started. I think the biggest concern [is him] not liking school. I think what worries me is that he does struggle with some anxiety, anger issues.

Hopes

When parents were asked about their hopes for their children's future, they commonly brought up attending college. Rose said about her daughter that, "I do want her to go to college.

I want her to get the best education she can so that she can hopefully decide for herself what she wants; to go to the college of her choice.” Similarly, Kelly stated,

I want him to go to college. I want him to be successful in whatever he does. Most all of, I want him to have his education and there are a lot of dropouts today. I definitely want him to get his education.

In addition to attending college, the participants stressed contentment and happiness with life. Frances conveyed this about her daughter’s career options when she stated,

I don’t care as long as it is something that she enjoys and she is being rewarded some kind of way. It doesn’t have to be money as long as she is getting some kind of fulfillment out of it. I would hate to see her at a job that she hates.

Melinda also defined success as “happiness, as long as he grows up and be happy.”

In regard to the discussions about attending college, more participants who had children in second and third grades acknowledged having had conversations with their children around attending college than parents who had children in kindergarten and first grades (see Table 8). It should be noted that three participants withdrew from the study before I could conduct the second interview with them. Therefore, 11 participants’ responses were analyzed for this particular question. More parents whose children were in kindergarten and first grades compared to parents of older children stressed that their hope for their children was that they are happy. A reason that parents whose children were in kindergarten or first grade did not discuss college as much may have been because they believed their children were not cognitively mature enough to have such a conversation; at their young age they should be content and happy. Additionally, parents who did not have a bachelor’s degree or higher talked more with their children about attending college than those parents who did have a bachelor’s or higher. Because parents who

did not have a bachelor's degree might have been struggling financially, they might not have wanted their children to experience the same struggles so they might have been stressing attending college more frequently.

Table 8

Parental Hopes for Child Based on Grade Level

Grades	Number of Children	Attend College	Be Happy
K-1	7	2	5
2-3	4	4	2

Moreover, two parents wanted their children to be independent, which they described as being able to support oneself as an adult. Frances stated this strongly:

I want Belinda to have esteem about herself. I want her to feel good about the choices and decisions that she makes. I want her to reach for goals that people tell her are not attainable. I don't want her to let someone determine her destiny in life.

Rose stressed financial independence. When she was asked about future hopes for her daughter, she stated, "Yeah, I hope she is able to financially support herself."

Parent–Child Interactions

The themes listed under parent–child interactions provided an understanding as to which specific behaviors parents use to promote their children's success, which answered research question 4. All mothers reported that they spend time every day with their children. More parents with less than a bachelor's degree reported doing homework with their children and participating in a variety of extracurricular activities (e.g., board and video games and family outings) with their children. The absence of parents with a bachelor's degree or higher not

reporting such activities did not mean it was not occurring. For these parents, their view might be that it was a given they would do such things with their children. Thus, it may have become a part of their everyday routine and not something they saw as unique to report. Furthermore, compared to single mothers, more parents who had significant others reported doing homework with their children and having family reading time. Mothers in two-parent households might have had more time to work on homework with their children and read with them, and if they should not be available, they could depend on their husbands or partners to help them with such activities. For instance, when Imani, who was married, was asked how she spends time with her son, she reported, “We go over his homework and his work from the school day to review any mistakes. Then usually he read a book and I have him read it twice to make sure he remembers all the words he didn’t know.” Another married mother, Rose, said that she and her daughter “read every day when we go to bed. She is reading to me now.”

In regard to family outings, it should be noted that parents who were raising boys were more likely to report playing sports, video games, and board games; going to the movies; and bowling with their children. On the contrary, parents with daughters reported taking them shopping and to the library. When Kelly was asked about how she spends time with her son, she explained, “We go to the movies, and during the basketball season, I would stay with him at practice. I always stay with him at basketball practice even though it was two hours.” These examples illustrate that these parents might have believed that there are gender-specific activities, a specificity that goes beyond sports. Another point was that generally boys might be more interested in certain activities such as going to the movies, while girls were more interested in going to the library. Thus, parents were simply providing their children with the activities that they liked.

When parents were asked why they spend time with their children, all of them reported that it was to establish a bond with them. A dialogue between the interviewer and Rose effectively depicted the position of other parents:

Interviewer: Why do you do such things together?

Rose: I think it is very important to spend time with my child every day. I think it is good for her but it is always very good for our family. Her dad spends time with her every day, too.

Interviewer: So what do you think you are accomplishing by spending time with her?

Rose: I think we're building a strong relationship. I think it is important for me to share my perspective on the world with her. And for her to know of course how much she is loved. She is very good company.

Parent Preferences

Along with the activities that the parents participate in with their children, they were also asked to identify other activities they liked for their children to do. One frequently mentioned activity was sports. Six participants, four of whom had sons, indicated they wanted their children to play sports. This result suggested that sports-related activities fit into a gender construct that is more male-oriented. In regard to music and dance, six participants indicated that these were activities they liked their children to participate in. All six participants had a bachelor's degree or higher and were raising daughters. People who have a bachelor's degree or higher will earn more money than someone without; thus, they would have the monetary resources to place their children in music and dance classes. The result that only parents with girls reported participating in such activities may suggest that music and dance were seen as female-specific activities. Also, four participants indicated that they liked for children to

participate in community projects where they provided a service to their community, fostering a sense of helping others.

Along with identifying desired activities, parents explained the importance of their children participating in such activities. One explanation parents provided was that extracurricular activities helped their child become a well-rounded person who had a number of experiences. Of the four who identified this as a reason, three had a bachelor's degree or higher. Typically, individuals who had attended college had a liberal arts experience where it is celebrated and expected that one would become a well-rounded individual with a wealth of experiences and knowledge. Judy explained,

Umm, sport activities. I want her to be active. I want her to be well-rounded. We talked about piano and she plays softball. She plays basketball; she does zumba classes. She is interested in that. Zumba thing is something that we can do together. That is another thing that we do together right now. So I don't want her to just watch TV and play video games all day. I want her to experience different things so she can find out what she loves and she might be good at.

The other explanations parents provided more often related to individual characteristics of the family, parent, or child. For instance, Melinda stressed activities that strengthen social skills. When she was asked to explain why she wanted her child to participate in extracurricular activities, she replied,

I want him to learn how to be able to sit and to listen and understand that school is not fun but to learn. I want to him to focus on what the teacher is trying to teach and how it is going to help benefit you for the future.

Such activities were also considered to improve educational and occupational outcomes. For example, Lauren stated that activities

make his mind grow and [are] not based on one thing. It varies the things he can pursue and makes him grow as a person. He can have options of what he wants to do. It gives him activities so that he is not out on the streets like my nephews doing whatever. I want my kids to see that there is another side. You don't have to go hang with your homies, smoke, and drink. I want them to be better than me. Be a better person.

Parents also mentioned that one of their reasons for their children getting involved in activities is that they want their children to “give back to humanity.” Judy, who worked in her job with individuals with intellectual disabilities, explained her view:

I want them to know that everyone is an individual. Just because someone has a disability, that does not make them any different. It is very important to me to make them well rounded with different people, backgrounds, and disabilities. And just to know they are just like us.

Teaching and Motivation Strategies

Participants were asked to identify the various strategies they utilize to teach their children. Of the eight participants who identified modeling and sequential learning, six of the participants had a bachelor's degree or higher. “Modeling” was defined as the parent using herself or another family member as an example for the child to mimic. Judy's response depicted modeling effectively: “Just showing her and trying to give her an example. I try to lead by example.” Tiffany discussed using her older son as a model to encourage her other child to learn a skill:

I use modeling a lot of times. For instance, he is in competition with his brother, and so if he is little bit resistant, I will talk to his brother and say, "Corey, let's do this."

Because he does not want be on the outside, we will do it. If it does not work on a particular day, I will try on another.

The other teaching method, sequential teaching, was described as using a step-by-step approach to teach something to the child. Judy discussed how she uses a step-by-step approach to teach something to the child. Judy discussed how she uses sequential teaching with her daughter who likes to cook. She stated,

She likes to cook, so I have her right there with me, teaching her, explaining what we are doing. I like the safety skills part of it as well so I explain what we are doing and do it in steps.

In regard to the teaching strategies used by parents with less than a bachelor's degree, there was more variation within this group. While one parent reported using flashcards, another reported creating songs and games. Two parents also reported using modeling and sequential learning. Another interesting technique that two other parents reported using was the drilling of information, which was defined by repeating information or facts until the child has retained a set of knowledge or skills. For instance, when Lauren, who had an associate's degree, was asked how she teaches her son new information, she reported, "Umm, when he can't get something right, he starts [to] pout. I make him read it over and over until he figures it out."

One reason that parents who had a bachelor's degree or higher might more frequently use modeling and sequential learning is because they were exposed to such strategies from their professors throughout their postsecondary education. Often at the college level, professors will introduce material sequentially to their students. Furthermore, most of these participants had a

degree in either education or a mental health field, so often professors and supervisors would have conveyed to such students the usefulness of modeling for students and clients so that they could grasp the information better. However, the variation of teaching strategies observed in participants who did not have a bachelor's degree or higher might have been due to how individual parents were able to utilize the various resources available to them. Additionally, they might have used a trial and error approach to identify effective ways to teach their children new material.

The participants were also asked to discuss what strategies they did use to motivate their children to participate in activities that were related to academic success. When looking at the data, there were no differences among the participants. This indicates that parents used motivating strategies that they thought were best for their child, that they were most comfortable using, or that were available to them. For instance, two of the participants indicated that they provide their children with a choice. Judy said,

Well, I ask her. I give her choices. You know because I can't afford everything, at once. I give choices and ask what she would like to try and participate in, if she would like to play that sport again. Sometimes, I want her to play basketball again. Umm, I just give her choices.

On the other hand, Frances indicated she does not give her child choices. Her daughter was "required to do as told and do it well." Other parents reported that they used words of encouragement so that their children would participate in various activities. For instance, Tiffany stated,

Just try to talk to him and tell him, “Wow if you don’t do this, it is not going to be right.”

I try to tell him that he would make the activity so much better. I try to make him as though he is needed so that the activity works well.

Rose stated,

It is better for Mom to let her do her thing. When she was little she was very shy and now in Kindermusic she is very vocal and participates when Mom is not in the room.

But when Mom is in the room, she gets very quiet, but I think she is just her own independent person. I tell her to go and do her best and that’s what she does.

Parental support through attendance was another thematic code. Lauren stated,

By putting him in it and by talkin’ to him, you know what I mean. You can say do something, but if you don’t go to the functions with them, they not gon’ do it. I’ve seen it happen where parents tell their kids you need to go do this but none of the parents take their kids. We are very active. I want them to know that I am up in the stands. You got to. Make them feel good about themselves.

Along with giving choices, using words of encouragement, standing back when needed, and providing support by attending faith-based events, five participants identified their children’s internal desire as an important determinant. For example, Rachel reported that “most of the time she wants to participate in activities. She likes going to all the school events.” When Melinda was asked how she encourages her son to participate in various activities, she stated,

I mean there are times when he wants to do stuff and we will give it a shot. We try some different things and he would quit. I don’t like that whole quitting thing but if you are not into something what are you supposed to do? I have had one of his teachers tell me he should be involved in something musical but he has never expressed a huge desire.

Toys and Gadgets

The type of toys and gadgets and the reasons parents provided such items to their children might have been a part of motivational strategies. The participants indicated that they provide their children with the following items: video games, computer games, DVDs, Barbie dolls, cars and trucks, books, art materials, and bikes. Of the eight participants who reported providing their children with video games, six of them also reported that they provided their children with computer games. Four mothers informed me that they provided their children with books; three of those mothers had a child with a disability. One rationale that was offered as to why they provided their children with certain toys and gadgets was to foster educational enrichment. Kelly indicated, “It is important because he [her son] just can’t learn at school. He has to learn at home as well.” Lauren stated that she buys her son “video games, Batman, and a V-Tech that teaches different things, how to read, and educational things.” Moreover, three parents reported that they purchase items for their children based on the child’s interest. Melinda said simply, “Because that’s what he likes.” While one parent reported that she used the toys and gadgets as a reward, another conveyed that the toys were used for recreational purposes.

Available and Trusted Resources

Another component of parents’ strategies to motivate their children was the ability to solicit help from others. The participants reported a wide range of individuals from whom they would seek help. This variation is an indication of how these parents could locate resources and use the resources available to them. The following were listed as resources: daycare centers, community centers, school counselors, friends, teachers, doctors, school psychologists, principals, and family members. Although there were variations in the types of resources parents would use, the reasons they gave for using them were similar. Seven participants reported that

they sought out certain individuals because they have expertise or knowledge in a certain area. When Frances was asked to describe her rationale, she stated, “Probably, I would go to a professor at a local university that specialized in education because I think that person would have expertise, knowledge, and research that would aid me in the direction that I was looking to go into.”

Additionally, five participants indicated that they sought particular individuals who spent a significant amount of time with their child. For instance, Karen said, “People who spend the most time with like her doctor, he may have different resources health-wise. In terms of her teacher, principal, and the counselor are people who should get to know her well.” Lauren referred to the teachers and church leaders who monitored her son’s behavior. She said,

I trust them because they deal with him almost every day. And sometimes I’m not around and I need to know how he is actin’ when I’m not there. His school teacher, she writes me notes to let me know what he is doin’ wrong or what he is doin’ right. The church does the same thing when he cuttin’ up in church.

Lastly, three participants reported that they sought help from individuals who were able to navigate through a school system and locate resources. For instance, Kelly said that she would ask school counselors, school teachers, and people from a local community organization “because most of them would have their master’s or their bachelor’s . . . they can help guide him to success.” Michelle’s response was,

I feel like away from home maybe he could go to the counselor if he has a problem, if he needs one on one. I personally think the counselor should be able to help me with references such as outside help, such as like tutoring. Say for instance, if he is not developing like he should, those types of resources.

Exosystems

Preparation for School

Themes listed under broader systems answer research question 5, which examines what other specific factors besides parental role are important to a child's success. Along with specific parenting behaviors, the participants discussed the impact of daycare centers. The thematic codes that were identified were prevalent across the data. Many of the parents in this study indicated that the services rendered at their children's daycare facility helped their children with literacy development. Frances reported,

I think it has helped her a lot, especially with her reading because she was involved with a program that started her early with books, letter sound recognition, and phonemic awareness. Basically, what I had to do was refresh her memory on some of that. I don't believe she would be where she is now with her sight word recognition if it weren't for the teachers she had for preschool.

Lauren said, "They helped a lot. They taught him the ABCs, reading, spelling words."

Participants also indicated that preschools helped their children develop socialization skills. Eno conveyed this strongly:

A lot with the socialization. That was my worry, too. There were times that I worked nights so they were just home, you know. Um, so I think when they go to daycare they learn to be around other kids. It kinda increases their knowledge of things. They come home and they know songs. My son learned how to dance from daycare. He comes and he knows how to dance (laughs), maybe something I would have not thought of.

Rachel reported, "It helped her with her social skills before being with other kindergarteners for the first time."

When parents were asked to describe the type of information they received from their child's daycare center, they reported that they learned teaching strategies to reinforce academic skills at home. A dialogue between Yolanda and me effectively conveys this perspective:

Interviewer: What have you learned about early childhood education through his daycare, preschool?

Yolanda: Um. I learned a little bit about what the teachers do to get them to learn.

Interviewer: Can you discuss specifically about some of those things?

Yolanda: Like, um, they do a lot of singing. Singing is the way they get kids his age to learn nowadays. They put everything in a song and that helps them learn. Like they do a song, um, "The Days of the Week." It's like "The Addams Family" thing. So they learn better with songs. Kids love to sing. He loves music. They teach them more with songs. That was something new to me. That was different. I never heard them do the days of the week like that before. They even do it with the months and counting. They would do a counting song. They could depending on the day of the month. They would sing it and then sing it backwards. Then do it faster and then slow down.

Along with academic teaching tools, parents reported they learned more effective discipline strategies. For instance, Michelle stated,

They are more firm with the kids but in a very positive way. It's like they don't yell at the kid but it's, say for instance, they don't get rewarded for bad behavior, but yet, they have to work and study. They might get assigned some homework to do.

Teacher Characteristics

The participants were asked to discuss teacher characteristics that were important to their children's education. Parents reported that they liked for their children's teacher to be respectful

to their children. Of the three participants who identified respect, two of them had children with disabilities. Parents who had children with disabilities wanted to make sure that teachers would respect their children and that they would be fair with their children even when they might exhibit inappropriate behavior. Judy, whose older son had experienced a number of behavior problems at school, said of his teacher, "I think, umm, she has always treated my daughter with respect. She has always said good things about her. I know she is a good teacher." Working with children, especially those with disabilities can sometimes be a challenge. Thus, it was no surprise that parents who had children with disabilities would want their children's teacher to possess effective classroom management skills. Such skills would reduce their children's behavior problems and the number of negative reports. Similarly, of the three participants who reported that effective classroom management was important to their children's success, two participants had a child with a disability. Karen said of her son's teacher,

I like that she has a good handle on her class. It doesn't seem things are out of control.

When I brought up issues she always made me feel better about what was the issue. Um, she has really been fair and not judgmental. Umm, she sees the kids for who they are.

Interestingly, Lauren, whose son had experienced a number of behavior problems in school, indicated that she wished her son's teacher had more experience, referring to the teacher's lack of effective behavior management strategies. She stated,

I wish she was older and had more experiences. I think instead of all the time calling me,

I think she should try other alternatives, see about switching his seats, take away his recess, and give him homework. He never has any homework.

Along with good classroom management, the participants also stressed that they pay attention to teachers' communication styles. More parents with sons reported this as important

to their children's success. When Kelly was asked to discuss her perceptions about her son's teacher, she replied,

His teacher is very supportive. If I cannot get a hold of her or if I cannot do something for him, I can contact her by email. And she responds so fast. She emails me right back. She explains things to me. She wants him to succeed. She worked with me when [we] found out he had ADHD. She was concerned about his conduct. We sat down and talked and everything is fine now. I still keep in contact with her if I have any issues or problems. She is very open-minded. She knows if I cannot make it in and she has a problem with him she will call my mother. She is very, very supportive.

Rose, whose daughter attended a Montessori school, revealed that she liked her daughter's teachers to be challenging. She mentioned,

Her teacher has been wonderful. They are really great. She has been very encouraging of Lisa. It is a Montessori school, so they kinda make their own choices sometimes and what work they do. But Amy expects Lisa to choose challenging work for herself. And I tell her she has to keep challenging herself.

School Characteristics

In regard to educational programs, two parents with a bachelor's degree or higher stressed the importance of excellent standards and high expectations that schools had of their children. Given that this was stressed by individuals with postsecondary degrees may have indicated that these individuals were able to identify, locate, and have access to schools that promote such standards and expectations. For example, Judy said,

I mean it is very important to show my children that reading can be fun. It's not just picking up a book or learning different things about different countries. You can be

creative, working on money skills. You know, umm, those types of things. . . . I do think they [her children] have had teachers in the past who definitely were challenging. For two years, she had the same teacher. I thought that was an awesome idea and not wasting time to get to know each other and what they were good at. I think really make [self-corrects] push education and make education fun. They are just very driven when it comes to children and their education. They were ready to help with any of the needs I needed for my children whether it be Title I or other recommendations.

Karen's response to the same question was, "I love her school. It is a blue ribbon school. It is the only school in her township that made AYP [adequate yearly progress], which is a really good thing and they have had [a blue ribbon] for every year for about five years."

However, Lauren, who does not have a bachelor's degree, was frustrated with the lack of resources in her child's school. Lauren stated,

If I had a choice I would put him in a different school. They just now bring out the programs like the reading. He's been doin' the speech since he got there. But the reading and Title I that helps the kids that are like my oldest child. I didn't feel like he was learnin' and I wanted to hold him back last year. They told me they wasn't goin' to hold him back because he was too big and I had problems with that. I feel like if he would go to junior high, it would be downhill, but I don't know. I don't know. It is a whole bunch of things. They need more teachers. They have no teachers. In his classroom, he only has one teacher. It has been hard for them to get teachers because of the money and funds. If you got 20 and 30 kids in your class and it is hard for one teacher to put her focus on one child if you got 24 other kids, but if you have a student

teacher who can help those kids who need extra help they would help a whole lot. The school has a long way [to go].

Second, three parents liked that their children's school was community-oriented with an emphasis on home-school communication. Parents wanted to feel that their children's schools were inviting and welcoming. They knew that a teacher-student relationship was a significant one that could have a long-lasting impact on their children's lives. For instance, Frances conveyed,

She [her daughter] will be there from kindergarten until third grade and it is five blocks up the street from our house, which is wonderful because we can walk to her school. So I do feel it is a neighborhood setting which I enjoy, and the community is more involved when it is neighborhood school like that.

Rachel stated,

They send letters home every week to let you know what is going on at the school. The principal calls to tell us about events going on at the school. Umm, it seems more like home than a school. It seems very close and it's a good school.

On the contrary, Rose, expressing an interest in additional home-school communications, said, "I wish we did have progress reports more often. They only do them twice a year. It would be nice to have more than that. But that just might be me wanting to know that."

Lastly, two participants who had children with disabilities informed me that they liked that the school included their children. These parents wanted their children's differences to be celebrated and valued, but also they wanted school members to see their children first and their disability last. For example, Tiffany reported, "Oh, I love it. I love the principal. He [her son]

gets to go spend time with her when he has had a good day and go in her treasure box. They work hard to include their few minority students.”

An interesting point was highlighted by Frances, who was an educator. She expressed an interest in seeing an increase in diversity among the teacher population. Frances said, “The teachers are not very diverse. There is a high concentration of White teachers and very low population of Asian, Native American, African American teachers, let alone male teachers.” As the United States becomes a more ethnically diverse nation, parents may become more vocal about the lack of diversity among the teacher pool.

Macrosystems

Values

Bronfenbrenner (1994) indicated that the macrosystem includes values that are culturally bounded. Therefore, based on research question 5, I wanted to know which values these parents believe are culturally relevant to their children’s academic success. The following values and morals were listed: being respectful, compassionate, polite, family- and friends-oriented, spiritual, honest, and service-oriented and possessing a strong work ethic. Six participants identified “being respectful” as related to success. Specifically, of the seven mothers who had children in kindergarten or first grade, four of them believed being respectful is important. As children first entering school, parents wanted to instill in them values that would serve them well as they transitioned into school. Furthermore, all four mothers who had children with disabilities also identified being respectful as important to their children’s success. Because parents with children who have disabilities wanted others to respect their children, they were more likely to stress that their children were also respectful. This might reduce the number of differences their children would have with teachers and peers. For instance, Michelle, whose son was in

kindergarten, stated, “Treat others the way you like to be treated. Respect for others and their property, especially for his elders. And treat people the way you want to be treated. . . you reap what you sow”.

Another value was compassion. More parents with than without a bachelor’s degree or higher identified compassion as an important value. Maybe these parents wanted their children to be grateful and appreciate the status that their degrees bring to their families. However, they wanted their children to value others who may not be as fortunate as they were. If others were to view them as less compassionate, maybe others would be less likely to want to work with them or provide them with opportunities. This might reduce the level of success their parents believed they could achieve. In addition to compassion, only parents who were in two-parent households stressed spirituality as an important value. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that married couples might have more time to attend church. If one parent was unable to attend, the other might have time to attend church with the children. For single parents, their schedules might be less flexible. Another explanation is that if a single parent was struggling to support her family, it might be difficult for her to be as spiritual as parents who were married or had a cohabitating partner. She might have found it hard to believe that a spiritual being would create situations in which she would be struggling financially. Thus, single parents might live on the premise that an individual is responsible for her own success and not a spiritual being. Tiffany, who was married, reported,

We are a Christian family and we base our family on Christian values. One of those though, we are not self-righteous people, so we try to get him to accept people for who they are. With our Christian values, if it is not in alignment with the Bible, we teach him to accept people because Jesus is love.

Similarly, Karen, who was also married, said,

Well, I was always brought up with religion and it was something that really got me through a lot of different periods in my life. I just think that would be something very important for her because as you get older you go through things and I want her to be able to have a strong faith base to get her through things when she gets older in life.

Racial Issues

Racial socialization has been found to be important to ethnic minority children's success (Bennett, 2007). Spencer's (1995) phenomenological approach to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory stressed the need to examine the race as a process and phenomenological experience. Thus, race or racism was a relevant topic under research question 5 because it allowed me to understand what role these parents believe race/racism plays in their children's lives. Therefore, I asked participants to indicate whether or not they discussed racial issues with their children. Six mothers, both Black and White, indicated they discussed interracial issues with their children. Rose, who was White and adopted a Black girl, recalled a personal story about her daughter, Lisha:

Well, she has a little girlfriend, Claire, and she had a play date with Claire with her grandmother, I guess. And so Claire asked if she were adopted and Lesha said yes. And she talked about how her birth mom was African American and her birth mom chose us to be her parents. She said "Mom and Dad are White, but I'm African American.

Another personal account was given by Judy, who was white and her daughter was bi-racial.

She reported,

We just had a talk about it not too long ago. She invited a whole bunch of people over for her birthday. And she said one of the girls' dads asked if she was Black or White and

her friend informed her dad that my daughter was Black. He then told his daughter she could not [attend] her birthday party. So she was pretty upset about that. This is a girl she has been going to school with for about five years. So she was okay with it after I had to explain it to her. But I thought, wow, I mean three other White girls came and one of the girls' dads asked if you were Black or White, but they said it didn't matter. I thought it was interesting at nine to be discussing that.

Furthermore, three Black parents and two White parents indicated that they talk about African American history with their children. For instance, Rose reported that she reads books on African American history with her daughter, and Imani, who is Black, reported that her son has to read and watch videos on African American history. Alternatively, one White parent and one Black parent indicated that they did not discuss racial issues with their children. Melinda, who was White, stated, "We don't. I don't know what there is to talk about unless something comes up or he has a problem with something." Tiffany, who was Black, stated,

I try not to talk about it because we live in a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood part of town. He is the only African American student in his class, so we try not to talk about it. However, as he gets older, we will probably talk more. He is starting to tell the difference between a Black person and a White person. So I try not to talk about it to him. I don't know how awkward it would be if these things were to come up in public.

It appeared that parents planned to discuss interracial issues as they occurred for their children. However, a parent must be willing and invested in discussing African American history with their children. In the case of Melinda, she might represent parents who take a color-blind approach to race until something happens that forces her to confront it with her son. Furthermore, Tiffany might represent those African American parents who live in majority

White communities and feel that discussing racial issues may cause more harm to their children's acceptance into these communities—ultimately viewing themselves as protective.

Parents also discussed how their children's schools included their children's culture in the school environment. All parents indicated that their children's school celebrated Black History Month and also honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Evidence of Triangulation

Journals

Participants were asked to journal how they interact with their child on a daily basis for two weeks. Overwhelmingly, parents reported working with their children on their homework. Along the same lines, parents highlighted that they reviewed and prepared their children for school. In addition, parents stressed family dinner time, family reading time, and family outings. The participants also highlighted activities that might not be as interactive but were reported as family activities, such as watching television or movies together. Many of the activities that parents listed were similar to what they reported during the interviews. In the interviews, parents discussed doing homework with their children. I conducted a token analysis of the journal entries. Each time the parent logged a certain activity, it was counted. A summary of the activities is listed in Table 9.

Table 9

A Token Analysis of Parents' Report of Home Activities

Activities Reported by Parents	Number of Times Parents Reported Activity	Percentage of the Number of Times Parents Reported Activity
Homework	134	29%
Dinner	66	14%
Review/Prep for School	54	12%
Family Reading	51	11%
Family Outings	50	11%
Movies	21	5%
Video Games	15	3%
Television	14	3%
Board Games	13	3%
Dance	12	3%
Play Sports	10	2%
Independent Reading	9	2%
Color/Draw	4	9%
Watch Sports	3	7%

Child Assessments

Additionally, I administered curriculum-based measurements (CBMs) to the children one time to assess their early literacy and numeracy skills. Out of the four kindergarteners, one was

able to identify 35 letters, and two recognized 55 letters within one minute. One was able to name 75 letters. One kindergartener was able to identify 30 numbers, and two were able to identify 75 numbers out of a hundred. One kindergartener identified 67 numbers. The one first grader was able to identify 85 letters out of 100 and 78 numbers out of 100 within one minute each. Since I administered the assessments to the children in the beginning of the school year, the results suggested that these students' academic skills were at instructional levels. The two second graders' and the three third graders' reading and math skills were at the instructional level, which means their skill levels were grade-appropriate. These data suggest that whether the parents were Black or White, single or married, these parents had children who were capable of academic success and were achieving it.

Furthermore, I had the children's parents complete the Social Skills Improvement System Performance Screening Guide (SSIS). The SSIS examined the social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence of children and adolescents. Ten parents indicated that their children exhibited as many social skills and behaviors as the standardization sample comparison group. However, Michelle indicated that her son had as many social skills as his peers, but also had more problem behaviors. She did describe her son as hyperactive during the interview, but she did not indicate that her son's teacher saw this as a problem. However, during the interview, she anticipated this being a future concern. Tiffany, whose son had a disability, reported he had fewer social skills and more problem behaviors than his peers. This was aligned with the behaviors and school problems she discussed during the interview. Surprisingly, Lauren, who indicated frequently that her child had problem behaviors, indicated that her son had as many social skills and problem behaviors as his peers. This may suggest that she believed that most of her son's problems may be due to his teacher's approach. After all, she did indicate during the

interview she believed his teacher lacked effective behavior classroom management skills.

Overall, for many of the participants, their ratings suggested that they did not see their children's social/emotional status as an impediment to their child's success.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Parent Definitions of Early Academic Success

The parents in this study identified both literacy and numeracy skills as important to their children's early academic success. Such a finding does not support Payne's (2005) or Hess and Shipman's (1965) assumptions that Black parents or parents from low-income backgrounds cannot make connections to future goals. Furthermore, social skills were identified but more parents with boys identified this as important. Restall and Borton (2010) reported that parents tend to worry more about boys' development than that of girls. Participants may stress the need for boys of African American descent to have appropriate social skills because, as Ho (1992) has suggested, African American children, especially boys, enter school where they experience behavioral adjustment problems. Payne suggested that children from low-income backgrounds like to be a class clown and that parents accept such behavior. However, the current findings suggest that parents want their children to exhibit appropriate behavior that is related to academic success. Echoing similar sentiments to Ho's work, McAllister et al. (2005) reported that parents, especially minority parents, perceive school environments as fraught with dangers such as racism, class, prejudice, violence, and disrespect for their own cultural values, as well as behavioral expectations inappropriate for young children. This is important because it has been proven that social skills are an important protective factor for students encountering challenging

school settings (McAllister et al., 2005). In regard to social skills, the participants wanted their children to be able to follow rules, pay attention, know how to work in groups, and share with others as defined by Kim et al. (2005). This finding supports the research of others who have indicated that parents believe that both cognitive and social-emotional factors are important to school success (Diamond et al., 2000; Kim et al., 2005; Sonnenschein et al., 1992). Furthermore, these current findings are in opposition to deficit theories or assumptions that suggest that ethnic minority parents or low-income parents do not value education. These parents understood the short-term significance of both specific academic skills and social skills.

Family Factors Impacting Early Academic Success

Parental Involvement

Overwhelmingly, these parents understand the importance of parental involvement as a protective factor that enhances their children's academic performance. Ogbu (1992) and Payne (2005) have both argued that minority parents and low-income parents are passive participants in their children's education. However, this study supports the findings of other researchers who have reported that parents serve as an important protective factor for their children (McAllister et al., 2005). Based on analysis of the interviews, these parents indicated that they help their children with their homework and have dinner time with their children. Additionally, they were involved in school activities. These findings are similar to the findings of other researchers (Driessen et al., 2005; Englund et al., 2004). An interesting finding was that single parents were more likely to stress the importance of parental involvement or the lack of it. Carlisle et al. (2005) gave as one explanation for this that single parents' work schedules make it difficult for them to be as involved in their children's education. Thus, they might have been bothered by their inability to be there on a regular basis. Furthermore, mothers whose children had a

disability also reported that teacher characteristics are also important factors that impact their children's education. These parents needed teachers who were going to be caring. This is an interesting point because researchers have found that teachers are less likely to make accommodations to work with parents of children with disabilities and are less likely to explain information in a way that makes sense to them (Peña, 2001). Using Spencer's (1995) phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), these participants viewed parental involvement and teacher care as protective factors for their children's education and the lack of parental involvement and teacher care as risk factors and challenges.

Family Characteristics

Family factors were also seen as important to children's early academic success and to their long-term success. These parents believed that a family routine that is structured and based on a consistent schedule is vital to their children being successful. This finding is similar to that of other researchers who have indicated that family routine consists of dinnertime, bed time, and reading time. These parents believed that such a structured and consistent schedule allows their children to know what the daily expectations are. Based on the interviews and journal entries, the participants reported doing homework and reviewing school work with their children, having dinner, and family reading time. They also reported having family time which included the following: watching TV and movies; playing board, video, and computer games; and playing sports. Also, family time allows parents time to communicate with their children about the day at school. In spite of Payne's (2005) suggestion that parents from low-income backgrounds have homes that are chaotic and disorganized, the above-mentioned findings do not support this notion.

Additionally, for these parents, their time with their children also allows them to establish a bond, which can have a positive impact on their children's social-emotional well-being. This bond may help these mothers provide their children with parental warmth, which has been linked to both academic and social skills acquisition (Bierman et al., 2008; Estrada et al., 1987). Additionally, Hess and Shipman (1965) suggested that Black mothers who are from working class backgrounds require their children to be compliant; however, the fact that current participants expressed a need to establish a bond with their children does not support the idea that their parenting style is based on compliance. Furthermore, unlike Wildenger et al. (2008), who reported that single-parent families were less likely to have a highly structured daily routine, the findings of the current study suggest that both single-parent and two-parent households support a structured family routine. One negative factor that was identified was systemic family discord. When there is discord in the household, it can have a negative impact on children's education.

One interesting finding was that more mothers with daughters reported family time as important to their children's success. These parents may believe that girls require more nurturing to deal with the various systematic issues such as racism and sexism in their school and communities. Also, researchers have reported that parents may be more sensitive to the need for boys to develop a healthy sense of autonomy to be successful (NICHD, 2008). Therefore, they may not require boys to spend as much time with them as a family. Another gender difference that I observed was that parents reported playing sports and games and going to the movies with their sons but taking their daughters to the library and shopping more often. Researchers have found that parents do perceive boys as being more active than girls (Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005). Moreover, parents who have children with disabilities also identified family

cohesiveness. One postulation is that these families believe that the entire family needs to support the child with the disability. Unfortunately, this study was not designed to examine how and why being African American with a disability would impact these parents' perceptions of factors that impact their child's education. Thus, research is needed to examine the intersection of people's cultural identity and how it impacts perceptions of education.

Neighborhood Characteristics

More parents who were single parents than from two-parent households reported that having a quiet and peaceful neighborhood is important. This contradicts Payne's (2005) assumption that single parents from low-income backgrounds like or promote noisy neighborhoods where there is chaos and loud music. In fact, based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these parents needed to feel that their neighborhood is a safe place for both them and their children (Crain, 2011). Ceballo and Hurd (2008) reported that mothers are able to direct their focus on parenting children when they are less worried about external neighborhood conditions. Single parents, who are responsible for financially supporting their households, do not have the time to be home as often to provide parental monitoring. Therefore, it is important for their children to live in a community where they would be safe from violence. Researchers have found that when parents perceive their neighborhood as unsafe they are less likely to allow their children to play outside as often (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010).

Closely Felt Anxieties and Aspirations

In this current study, the participants indicated that they were concerned that their children would encounter racial issues. More parents with girls than with boys expressed concerns with their children experiencing racial issues. This is a similar finding to McAllister et al. (2005) who reported that African American parents indicated concerns about racism and

classism. The current study adds to the literature because both Black and White parents of children of African American descent expressed concerns with racial issues. Also, this study highlights not only racism as a concern but also, because more parents with girls highlighted this issue, it may potentially highlight the intersection of racism and sexism for young girls.

Another concern of these parents was that their children might lack appropriate social skills. Parents with boys and girls expressed their concerns regarding this issue. Moreover, they also expressed worries that their children's academic skills were underdeveloped. Similarly, other researchers have indicated that parents worry about their children's academic and social skills (McIntyre et al., 2007). Based on the academic and social skills assessments that were administered, a majority of the children presented with age-appropriate academic and social skills. However, these parents also indicated that these are future concerns. One possible explanation may be that these parents are concerned that as their children move through school, they may become stressed with the higher expectations based on school policies, schedules, class assignments, and children's weekly activities (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Along with their concerns, these parents are hopeful that their children will attend college, and they want their children to have lives filled with contentment and happiness. Parents who did not have a bachelor's degree talked more about their children attending college. This may be because these parents do not want their children to struggle as they have to support their families.

I also found that parents whose children were in second and third grades talked more about attending college, and parents whose children were in kindergarten and first grades indicated that they want their children to be happy. No doubt because their children are still young, parents reported that they do not discuss specific careers with their children when discussing college. Once again these findings are in opposition to Ogbu's (1992) and Payne's

(1995) sociological–structuralist theories that suggest Black parents or parents from low-income backgrounds do not value education. Researchers who interviewed both couples and single parents from a small Midwest town with a population of approximately 60,000 reported that regardless of their children’s age or grade expressed they want them to attend college and be happy (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003). Thus, overall, this may support other researchers’ findings that both Black and White parents socialize their children to be autonomous and are willing to negotiate rules and expectations with their children (Suizzo et al., 2008).

Parent–Child Interactions

Parent Preferences

The participants reported that they liked for their children, particularly boys, to participate in sports-related activities. Researchers have reported that it is perceived that boys are more physically active than girls, so more physically related activities are available for them that could cost nothing or require only a small fee (Thompson et al., 2008). However, many of the participants indicated that they like for their girls to participate in music and dance. Interestingly, most of the participants who wanted their daughters to participate in such activities had a bachelor’s degree or higher and most were from two-parent households. One explanation for this suggested by Quarmby and Dagkas (2010) is that parents from two-parent households have the monetary resources and time to support their children in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, children from single-parent families have financial concerns that impact their engagement in activities (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010).

Additionally, mothers reported that they wanted their children to be involved in community projects where they provide a service to their community. These parents believed that their children should be able to give back to humanity. Similarly, Dunn et al. (2003)

reported that White parents who were from single and couple households reported that they wanted their children to develop helping behaviors and give back to their community. Moreover, similarly to the findings of this study, they found that parents wanted their children to participate in activities to develop social skills, earn experiences that will ultimately improve their workforce marketability, and to be a well-rounded person with varied experience (Dunn et al., 2003). These findings do not support Hess and Shipman's (1965) claim that working class parents are unable to make future connections with current goals as they relate to their children's success.

Teaching and Motivation Strategies

In regard to teaching and motivational strategies, parents especially those with a bachelor's degree or higher, reported using modeling and sequential teaching. Where modeling was described as parents using themselves or another family member as an example for the child to mimic, sequential teaching was defined as using a step-by-step approach to teach the child a skill. These parents' use of modeling supports Bandura's social learning theory which suggests that people learn best by observing others (Crain, 2011). Other strategies that parents reported, especially those from single-parent households, included using flashcards and creating games and songs to teach skills. This is similar to researchers who reported that low-income parents who typically were headed by a single-parent household believed their children should learn songs and do art activities—taking more of a skills-based approach (Holloway et al., 1995; Lynch et al., 2006). Typically, parents with postsecondary education will possibly take a holistic approach to education such as using techniques as modeling or sequential teaching to present big picture concepts in smaller parts (Holloway et al., 1995). Another technique that parents

reported was drilling information by having their children repeat information or facts until they have been retained.

The participants also discussed strategies that they used to motivate their children to participate in activities. Parents reported giving their children choices. Moreover, parents reported that their children's participation in activities was based on their own desire. These parents' willingness to provide their children with choice and acknowledgement of their children's internal desire illuminated the idea of healthy resistance. In a world where these parents might believe their children could experience racism, sexism, or classism, they wanted their children to develop optimal resistance (Robinson, 2005). These parents might want their children to have the strength and confidence to make decisions when encountering opposition (Robinson, 2005). Furthermore, using Bandura's self-efficacy concept, these parents might want to encourage their children to self-regulate their own behavior and evaluate their own standards and goals (Crain, 2011). This is important because self-efficacy has been linked to motivation (Crain, 2011). Researchers have reported that both Black and White mothers want to foster a sense of autonomy in their children; also, Black mothers like to foster a sense of autonomy along with conformity in their children (Suizzo et al., 2008). Others indicated that they used words of encouragement so that children would immerse themselves in the activity. Codjoe (2007) reported that encouragement was important to the academic and self-reliance of children who are of African descent.

Tangible Rewards

Mothers from this current study reported providing their children with the following toys and gadgets: video games, computer games, DVDs, Barbie dolls, cars/trucks, art materials, and bikes. Moreover, parents who have children with disabilities reported providing their children

with books. In support of their stated academic values, many of the parents documented in the journal entries that they make time for family reading. The participants reported that they provided their children with books and computer games because these foster educational enrichment and inclusion in regular family activity. Researchers have reported that children who are constantly exposed to intellectually stimulating material at home that is similar to that of the school environment are more likely to have skills that are aligned with achievement tests (Mandara, Varner, Greene, & Richman, 2009). Unlike Hess and Shipman (1965) and Payne (2005), who suggested that Black mothers and working class mothers do not provide their children with a healthy stimulating environment, the above mentioned results suggest otherwise.

Also, the parents in this study reported that they provided their children with toys and gadgets based on children's interest or for recreational purposes. This value supports further claims that both Black and White parents try to provide their children with opportunities for autonomous decision making (Suizzo et al., 2008). However, further research may be needed to understand how parents think such toys such as DVDs, cars, trucks, and bikes are connected to educational enrichment. Also, another important question is how often their children are allowed to use the various toys and gadgets. Spencer (1995) reported that it is important to understand how individuals use the various resources in their community. Furthermore, this finding does not support the notion that parents with higher SES provide a more stimulating environment than parents with lower SES (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Mandara et al., 2009). In fact, the families seemed to provide similar resources equivalently across degree status.

Trusted Resources in the Community

The participants reported soliciting help from a number of individuals and resources. The following were listed: daycare centers, community centers, school counselors, friends, teachers,

doctors, school psychologists, principals, and family members. The reason these parents would seek help from the above-mentioned list is that they would possess the expertise or knowledge in a certain area. Also, the participants reported that they would seek help from someone who spends a significant amount of time with their child. These mothers want someone who can help them and their children navigate through a school system and locate resources. Although all parents need to be able to utilize resources and individuals in their community, it is especially true for single parents or parents from low-income backgrounds. Often, such parents may not have the resources or knowledge they may need to help their children. Thus, they need to know how to use the social and cultural capital of others (Bourdieu, 1986). They need to understand how to locate and use the various resources in their society (Spencer, 1995). Thus, these findings suggest that these parents effectively know how to do this and stand in contrast to deficit models, which assert that Black parents or working-class parents are not reflective about their children's education.

Preparation for School

Participants reported that their children's daycare center helped them develop adequate literacy skills. Specifically, the daycare helped their children develop letter recognition and phonemic awareness skills. McCartney (1984) reported that high quality daycare centers have a positive impact on children's language development. Additionally, the mothers indicated that they believe the daycare helped their children develop appropriate social skills. Such acquisition of skills is important in the time of high-stakes testing and ever more compressed periods of time between when children enter school and have to demonstrate particular skill sets and appropriate knowledge. Thus, structured daycare centers that focus on children's academic and social skills are a vital support for children and their parents. Similarly, researchers have found that children

benefit from early childhood programs like daycare centers, improving their readiness for school (Geoffroy et al., 2010; National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003). The mothers also discussed how their children's daycare centers had helped them. Parents reported that they learned more effective discipline strategies. Furthermore, they learned academic teaching tools to reinforce various skills at home. The various parent educational components offered by daycare center providers are important because they were perceived as making clear what schools expect parents' roles to be in their children's education and providing them with the tools to be more effective stakeholders in their children's education—bridging the divide between the home and school environments. Because these parents valued the resources they received from their children's daycare center suggested they understood that the skills they acquired could better serve their children's education currently and in the future. Therefore, based on Ogbu's (1992) and Payne's (2005) theories that minority or working-class mothers view their children's education as an abstraction is not supported by the current results.

Teacher and School Characteristics

One theme that occurred was that parents, particularly those with a child who had a disability, wanted their children's teacher to respect their children. They would like for the teacher to be fair with their children. Secondly, the mothers reported they would like for their children's teacher to have effective classroom management skills. As mentioned earlier, researchers have reported that ethnic minority children tend to experience behavior adjustment issues at school (Banks & McGee-Banks, 1997; Ho, 1992), and typically children of African American descent are socially oriented and physically active (Hilliard, 1976). Thus, it was no surprise that these parents highlighted that it was necessary for their child to have a teacher who was incorporating effective classroom management strategies. These parents also indicated that

a teacher's ability to communicate with them is crucial to their children's success. Mothers wanted to know that they could talk to their children's teacher about their children's progress and learn ways that they could support their education at home. If teachers are able to communicate effectively with parents, it may reduce parents' perception that because they are raising children of African American descent that they are unwelcome in their children's school (Swick, 1991; Swick & Brown, 1994). Another theme that was identified was that parents wanted their children's teacher to be challenging. These parents wanted their children to have a teacher who was caring and able to communicate with them and their children. Ladson-Billings (1994), using an ethnographic approach, studied effective teachers of children who were of African American descent. Her study revealed that effective teachers challenged their students, which translated into high expectations.

Along with teacher characteristics, the participants discussed school factors that impacted their children's education. Parents with a bachelor's degree or higher reported they liked a school that had excellent standards and high expectations. On the other hand, parents without a bachelor's degree reported feeling frustrated with the lack of resources in their school. These parents may have lived in neighborhoods where they did not have access to the most rigorous schools, and parents who did have a post-secondary degree may have had access to better performing schools. Parents who had a bachelor's degree would likely have more family resources and access to community resources (Entwisle & Alexander, 1995). Ultimately, these parents may have had cultural and social capital based on their degree status which increased their access to resources (Bourdieu, 1986).

Furthermore, parents reported that they would like a school that is community-oriented with an emphasis on home-school communication. Ladson-Billings (1994) reported that

effective schools and teachers of children who are of African American descent create a sense of family, where both the school and teachers incorporate aspects of the child's home culture.

Another thematic code was inclusivity. Parents wanted their children's differences to be celebrated and valued. Also, the need for a more diverse teacher work force was highlighted. School personnel who embraced all forms of diversity created a more welcoming environment (Bennett, 2007). Ogbu (2003) reported that involuntary minorities such as African Americans view education as closed to them. However, these parents wanted their children to have access to high standard community-based schools. Such parental desires were in direct contrast to what Ogbu proposed. Furthermore, Payne (2005) suggested that parents from low-income backgrounds value non-verbal communication. However, the participants in this study highlighted home-school communication, which stands in stark contrast to deficit theories.

Cultural Values

Morality

The mothers identified values and morals that they believed were important to their children's academic success. They listed the following values: being respectful, compassionate, polite, family- and friends-oriented, spiritual, honest, and service-oriented and possessing a strong work ethic. More parents with younger children stressed the importance of being respectful. This may suggest that parents believed in instilling these values with their children early on so they would continue to be respectful as they transition through school. All parents with children who had disabilities expressed the need for their children to be respectful. They wanted their children to treat others the way they wanted or needed to be treated. Dunn et al. (2003) reported that parents of young children to adolescents stressed the importance of their children being respectful. Two other values parents wanted their children to possess were

compassion and a service orientation. Although all parents stressed these values, more parents with a bachelor's degree or higher identified these values. Similarly, Dunn et al. (2003) reported that more parents of girls than of boys stressed they wanted their children to be caring, helpful to others, and contribute to their society.

Spirituality

Spirituality and going to church were also identified as desirable attributes. Only parents who lived in two-parent households reported spirituality as an important value. These parents indicated their lives were based on Christian values that they wanted their children to continue to follow. Furthermore, parents believed that being spiritual would help their children persevere through difficult times. Unlike Dunn et al.'s (2003) study, participants in the current study specifically discussed being a Christian. Dunn et al.'s participants did not elaborate on their spirituality but stressed they wanted their children to know right from wrong. In terms of why only parents from two-parent households identified being spiritual as a desired attribute, I speculated that cohabiting parents may have had more time available to attend church while single parents may have had jobs that prevented them from attending church. Further research is needed to discern the correlation between being married and being spiritual and attending church. The importance of knowing right from wrong may be similar to parents from the current study who wanted their children to be honest. Furthermore, participants in this study indicated that it was important for children to have a strong work ethic that would help them succeed not only in school now but later as an adult. Similarly, other researchers have reported that parents believe it is important for their children to make commitments and establish goals that they work hard to achieve (Dunn et al., 2003). Overall, Payne (2005) suggested that most of the values these current participants reported are more aligned with middle-class values. However, in the

current study both parents from low-income and middle-class backgrounds reported similar values.

Racial Issues at Home and School

In regard to racial issues, both Black and White mothers indicated they discuss racial issues with their children. Specifically, these parents disclosed personal stories that involved their children. Additionally, Black and White parents reported that they talk about African American history with their children. There were a few parents, both Black and White, who indicated that they do not discuss race issues unless their children request information. It appeared that parents would discuss interracial issues if these became problematic for their children. However, some parents appeared to take a color-blind approach to race while others believed they could not protect their children if they did not discuss such issues with their children, particularly if they lived in a predominantly White community. Furthermore, parents reported that their children's school and teachers honored their cultural heritage by celebrating Black History Month and celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is evident that these parents participated in some form of racial socialization with their children and were aware of the ways their child's school and teacher celebrated their children's heritage. Perry et al. (2003) reported that there is a correlation between parental racial socialization and children's success. Additionally, Smalls (2010) indicated that there is a correlation between positive climate parenting and racial pride and barriers. Thus, the combination of discussing interracial issues that children experience and African American history may be beneficial. Lastly, researchers found that parents who communicate racial pride with their children report that their children have higher self-efficacy (Hill & Tyson, 2008). These findings support Spencer's (1995) theory, which suggests that discussion of one's

emerging racial identity promotes self-efficacy; as mentioned earlier, self-efficacy is a motivating factor (Crain, 2011). On the other hand, these findings do not support Ogbu's (2003) theory that African American parents or parents who are raising children of African American descent view academic success as "acting White." Based on the current participants' reports, there is no evidence that they saw being Black and being educated as opposing forces or incompatible realities.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the participants' understanding of early academic success and its importance is similar to what researchers have stressed is crucial in order for children to be successful in school. Most importantly, this study contradicts beliefs that families of African American children do not value education. In fact, the participants in this study across race, degree status, and marital status worked hard to ensure that their children were academically successful. Payne (2005) indicated that low-income parents view education as an abstraction. However, the findings of this study suggest that parents across SES status provided their children with a number of opportunities and experiences that guided their children's success. They worked hard to utilize the resources in their community to provide their children with the best available education, such as daycare, church connections, sports affiliations, and dance and music experiences. These parents understand that their role is the most important as it relates to their children's success. Furthermore, the findings of this study do not support the belief that parents or their children see education as acting White (Ogbu, 1992). Both White and Black participants believed that education is the key to their children's success as adults.

Moreover, these parents, both middle class and working class, stressed the importance of similar values and morals. All participants in this study identified similar values and morals as

the middle-class participants in Dunn et al.'s (2003) study. Payne (2005) suggested that families from low-income backgrounds are comfortable in a loud environment, but the participants in this study, especially parents without a postsecondary degree and single parents, wanted neighborhoods that were peaceful and quiet. Researchers indicate that parents who are raising children of African American descent are concerned about race-related issues in their schools (Smalls, 2010). Although parents expressed some concern about it, particularly if their children were male, most parents did not express overwhelming concern about race-related issues in their children's school or with their teachers. These parents did discuss race-related issues as they arose or planned to do so; however, there was some evidence that parents may have believed that it is important for their children to be academically successful in a system that may not completely value them.

Implications

For these parents, their involvement in their children's education was extremely important. Therefore, school personnel should work hard to provide parents with strategies to improve or enhance their children's education. These participants valued the expertise and knowledge of school personnel. Parents believed they would benefit from school resources that they could use on a daily or weekly basis with their children at home. Additionally, these parents valued schools that have a community-oriented atmosphere, so it would be beneficial for school personnel to ensure that their schools feel welcoming to both students and their parents. Because the participants valued the importance of daycare centers, schools might benefit from developing partnerships with these centers. These centers help to ensure that children have the necessary school-readiness skills. In addition, daycare workers might be well-positioned to provide help such as tutoring or parent-training for families who utilize after-school daycare.

Often school personnel may make certain assumptions about various groups of children, consciously and unconsciously. Therefore, school staff would benefit from multicultural sensitivity training. Such training could help to strengthen the relationships among staff, students, and parents.

Finally, it may be beneficial for school districts and local agencies to ensure that all parents and students have access to extracurricular activities that might enhance children's academic performance. These extracurricular activities should go beyond just sports-related groups. Additionally, local agencies should promote neighborhood-watch programs in neighborhoods that may be stricken with safety concerns. Parents, especially single parents, want to ensure that their children live in safe neighborhoods that would allow them to focus more of their attention on their children's education and not have to worry so often about the safety of their children.

Limitations

One limitation is that all of the participants lived in the same region of the country, so the research findings may not be applicable to other parts of the country. Also, another limitation is that these participants were recruited from a daycare center, which may have biased the sample, because these parents are more likely and willing to pursue community resources to enhance their children's education. Additionally, I was not able to conduct school-based student assessments to support what parents reported during the interviews, logged in the journals, or endorsed on the social skills rating forms.

Future Directions

Future research should use a larger sample with a longitudinal approach using only African American parents. A longitudinal study would allow the researcher to determine

whether the beliefs and behaviors of parents are a long-term phenomenon. Additionally, such a study could allow a researcher to develop a better understanding as to how parents' beliefs and actions impact their children's education over a period of time. A broader sample across regions should include a sufficient sample of participants based on degree status, marital status, gender of child, age of child, and whether the child has a disability. This would allow for the various differences within the systems identified by the parents to be sampled more intensively and with greater generalizability. Further, a case study approach is recommended to begin to understand the issues facing families of children with disabilities who are also African American. Their experiences may be different from their African American peers who have not been identified as having a disability.

Finally, a larger sample with a longitudinal approach should be used to understand the processes and systems that operate in the lives of children who are identified as bi-racial (African American and European American). Their experiences may well be different than those students who identified as African American. In summary, it is important to study groups of Americans, particularly ethnic minorities, from an ethnographic perspective. Such a perspective explicitly provides parents with an active voice to share their views, hopes, and beliefs about their own children. Furthermore, examining participants from a non-comparative approach presents them as intact and whole individuals and not as deficient people (Monteiro, 1999). Non-comparative approaches allow researchers to create a more balanced picture where one examines both protective and risk factors and appreciates both challenges and supports people have in their lives (Spencer, 1995).

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chavez Phelps, M.Ed., a doctoral student from the Department of Communications Disorders and Counseling, School, and Educational Psychology (CDCSEP) at Indiana State University. Mr. Phelps is conducting this study for his doctoral dissertation. Dr. Linda L. Sperry is his faculty sponsor for this project. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are of African American descent and your child has begun kindergarten during the 2008–2009 academic school year.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth description of African American parents' beliefs about school readiness. Another purpose of this study is to examine the home routines of African American families as these may relate to academic success or failure. Also, the researcher will examine African American concerns regarding their children's early academic success. Finally, the researcher will examine how parents' beliefs about school readiness, family routines, and concerns change as children transition into and through kindergarten.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we will ask you to do the following:

1. We will ask you and your child to participate in 4 tasks over the course of a total of 16 weeks.
2. These tasks include: (1) answering questions about what you know about school success; (2) keeping a journal (to be explained by the researcher); (3) sharing any school communications that you receive from your child's school or teacher; (4) completing an assessment three times about your child's behavior; and administering assessments to your child to assess his or her early literacy and numeracy skills throughout the course of this project.
3. The researcher would like to audio record the interviews that are conducted with the parents that will be conducted in your home.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

We expect that any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and we believe that they are not likely to happen. If discomforts become a problem, you and your child may discontinue your participation at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

It is not likely that you will benefit directly from participation in this study, but the research should help us learn how to design and promote educational services to African American preschoolers, kindergarteners, and their parents.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive \$15.00 for each set of data that is completed for a total of \$45.00. Each set of data includes one parent interview, journal, behavior rating scale, and any school communication. Each set of data will be collected three times over the course of the academic

school year. If you withdraw from the study before it ends, you are only compensated for each set of data that you provide.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a code number to let Mr. Phelps and Dr. Sperry know who you are. We will not use your name or your child's name in any of the information we get from this study or in any of the research reports. When the study is finished, we will destroy the list that shows which code number goes with which name.

Information that can identify you or your child individually will not be released to anyone outside the study. Mr. Phelps will, however, use the information collected in his dissertation and other publications. We also may use any information that we get from this study in any way we think is best for publication or education. Any information we use for publication will not identify you or your child individually.

The audio recordings of the interviews will not be used for any purposes outside this study unless we have you sign a separate permission form allowing us to use them. The recordings will be destroyed three years after the end of the study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact

Mr. Chavez Phelps

Dr. Linda L. Sperry

Principal Investigator

Professor

Department of CDCSEP

Department of CDSEP

Room 1302, College of Education

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RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the Indiana State University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

APPENDIX B: PARENTAL PERMISSION LETTER

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a doctoral student in the Communication Disorder, and Counseling, School, and Educational Psychology Department at Indiana State University. I am conducting a research project examining African American parents' views on school readiness such as their children's performance in kindergarten.

As a part of this study, I would like to administer brief tests to assess your child's early literacy and early numeracy skills three times throughout the 2008–2009 academic school year. I will also ask that I have permission to view any academic information that has been collected by the day care center your child attended. The project will be explained in terms that your child can understand, and your child will participate only if he or she is willing to do so. Only I and Dr. Sperry, my academic advisor, will have access to information from your child. At the conclusion of the study a summary of group results will be made available to all interested parents. If you would like a copy, please let me know at our last interview.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect the services normally provided to your child by his school. Your child's participation in this study will not lead to the loss of any benefits to which he or she is otherwise entitled. Even if you give your permission for your child to participate, your child is

free to refuse. If your child agrees to participate, he or she is free to end participation at any time. You and your child are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your child's participation in this research study.

Should you have any questions or desire further information, please call me at 812-237-2880 or cphelps4@mymail.indstate.edu. You may also contact Dr. Linda Sperry at 812-237-7786 or lsperry@isugw.indstate.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the Indiana State University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

Sincerely,

Chavez Phelps, Indiana State University

Please indicate whether or not you wish to allow your child to participate in this project by checking one of the statements below, signing your name, and return it to your child's daycare center. Sign both copies and keep one for your records.

_____ I grant permission for my child to participate in Chavez Phelps' study on African American parents' views of their children's kindergarten success.

_____ I do not grant permission for my child to participate in Chavez Phelps' study on African American parents' views of their children's kindergarten success.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Printed Parent/Guardian Name

Printed Name of Child

Date

APPENDIX C: ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

My name is Chavez Phelps and I am a student at Indiana State University.

1. My professor, Dr .Linda L. Sperry, and I are asking you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about what parents think about school and how young children learn in school.
2. If you agree to be in this study, I will test your reading and math skills.
3. I do not believe that you will be hurt or upset by being in this study. If you take part in the study and believe that you have been hurt or upset in any way, you may stop being in this study. I will not tell discuss your reading and math skills with anyone but you and your parents. But if you tell me that someone is hurting you, I must report it to the proper authorities.
4. This study will teach me important ways to help other children like yourself.
5. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and on one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

6. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. If you are not able to sign your name, you do not have to.

Signature of Subject

Printed Name of Subject

Date

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (1)

1. How do you define early academic success for your child? What does it look like?
2. What factors do you believe promote academic success? What factors do you believe prevent academic success?
3. Do you believe that your family routine is important to your child's academic success? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?
4. What family factors do you believe promote or prevent academic success?
5. Before your child entered kindergarten, what were some of your concerns?
6. Please describe to the best of your ability your experiences as a student in grade school.
7. How would you describe your other children's experiences in school?
8. What neighborhood factors do you believe promote or prevent academic success?
9. How do you believe your child's preschool daycare center has helped him or her?
10. What have you learned about early childhood education through your child's preschool daycare center?
11. Do you believe your child is ready for kindergarten? If yes, please explain. . If no, why not?

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (2)

1. How often do you spend time with your child? What are some of the things you all do together? Why do you do such things together?
2. If you want your child to learn something new, how do you teach him or her? What approach would you use?
3. Do you ever talk about career options with your child? If so, what specific careers have you talked about? (You may not have directly addressed career options with your child yet, given how young he/she is, but what would you like him/her to be when he/she grows up?)
4. What sort of activities do you like your child to participate in?
5. How do you encourage him or her to participate in those activities?
6. Are there any activities that you want your child to participate in later in the future? What sort of activities and why those activities?
7. What sort of toys or other gadgets do you provide to your child? Why do you provide such toys to your child?
8. What values or morals do you want your child to have? Why are these values and morals important?
9. What goals and hopes do you have for your child's future?
10. When you want to locate resources or gain tips to improve or enhance your child's education, who do you ask? And why? (use list)
11. When you have concerns regarding your child's education who do ask for help? (use list)

12. Looking forward, what concerns do you anticipate regarding your child's education?
13. What motivates your child to do well in school?
14. What motivates your child to engage in extracurricular activities?
15. How often do you talk about race or racial issues with your child? What do you talk about and why? If you do not talk about race, why not?
16. What do you think about your child's teacher? What do you like about the teacher? What would like to change about the teacher?
17. What do you think about your child's school? What do you like about the school? What would like to change about the school?
18. Do you think your child's school acknowledges or celebrates his or her cultural heritage?
Does the teacher include information about your child's culture in lessons? Why do you say yes? Why do you say no? Could you provide examples?