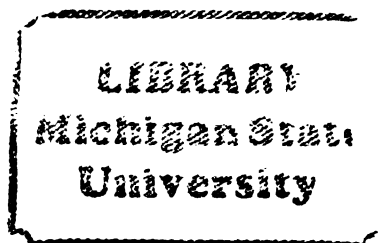


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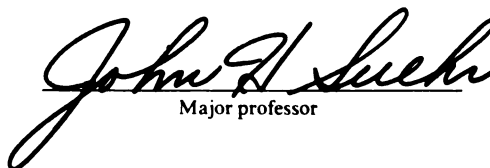
Parental Perspective Toward the Academic
Achievement of High Achieving High School
Students.

presented by

Susan H. Lebow

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Philosophy


Major professor

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PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE TOWARD THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
OF HIGH-ACHIEVING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Susan H. Lebow

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
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Department of Administration and Curriculum

1984

ABSTRACT

PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE TOWARD THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HIGH-ACHIEVING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Susan H. Lebow

The purpose of this research project was to study the educational perspective of parents of high-achieving students. If high academic achievement is desirable, and parental perspective can be influential, then such perspective needs to be studied to encourage high academic achievement. Perspective is defined as beliefs and behaviors. The population included parents of top ten graduates of the classes of 1980, 1981, and 1982 of a suburban central Michigan high school.

The method was that of in-depth interview. Questions to parents included (1) how parents viewed academic achievement, (2) what parental guidelines were given, (3) how parents gained their perspective: social and domestic determinants, (4) how parents influenced environmental factors and interactions related to academic achievement, and (5) what general comments parents made about raising high-achieving children. From the taped and transcribed interviews, summary sheets were made and were used in organizing findings and conclusions.

Susan H. Lebow

While encouraging children always to do their best, parents stressed learning rather than the acquiring of grades. They expected their children to have personal responsibility for academic achievement.

Parental guidelines supported high achievement through elementary school, but few guidelines were needed in secondary school because children had internalized learning as important. Later-born children experienced fewer guidelines than first born.

Study of parent backgrounds showed that reading and thought-provoking discussions were common in all families. There was a tradition of valuing and working for academic excellence.

Open exchange of ideas and reading were stressed by parents as important. Parents believed that success in a variety of activities (art, music, athletics) would help children gain self-confidence needed for optimum learning.

Concluding comments by parents emphasized parenting as a priority in their lives. Other factors important in the educational perspective of parents were high expectations, developing self-confidence, and providing a basis of unconditional love in the home.

This study should be replicated at other socioeconomic and educational levels. By working together, educators and parents should be able to understand and use parental perspectives to improve academic achievement for all students.

Backdoor
To Bernie

Whose loving encouragement has inspired
the completion of this study

"Growth can occur even in the ashes of reality."

B. Lebow

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Special appreciation is extended to Delta Kappa Gamma for the Hazel Johnson International Scholarship Award (1982-1983) and to Susan Cooley for the typing of this manuscript.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Among the challenges facing American schools and parents is that of educating children to enter into society as functioning, achieving adults. A child's training begins with early home experiences. These experiences provide the skills needed for high academic achievement. In order for higher levels of societal achievement to occur, it is essential that high-achieving students be produced. Further, recent studies have indicated that if the United States is to remain internationally competitive, higher achievement levels will be required in the academic skills of verbal, quantitative, scientific, and social reasoning. As early as the 1700s, Adam Smith wrote that the wealth of nations depends on the abilities, knowledge, and achievement of their people.

Parents are an important factor in student achievement. Each parent has a perspective about education. This study addresses the educational perspective of parents of high-achieving students.

Background

The topic of parental perspective and its influence on academic achievement has received little attention from researchers. Perhaps

such lack of attention is due to the complexity of parental perspective and the difficulty in determining how it actually functions. The topic of parental perspective is important since parents are the primary teachers of their children. Furthermore, parents are the one continuous force in the education of children. Recent studies indicate that until the end of high school, parents control 87% of a child's waking time.

In a broad sense, this study refers to perspective as the beliefs and behaviors of parents. These parental beliefs and behaviors reflect a parent's own character and personality. They grow and develop as new life situations arise and influence the motivation, psychic energy, and persistence needed for encouraging high academic achievement for themselves as well as for their children.

It is easy for one to become caught up in an examination of matters of home environment and interaction when examining parental perspective. However, the root of parental perspective on academic achievement concerns itself with how a person develops the ability to mobilize and commit "psychic energy" (Etzioni, 1982) to the task at hand. Etzioni (1982) referred to this ability as self-discipline and suggested that self-discipline occurs in situations of structured rather than authoritarian settings. Children not only experience parental supervision, but a structure for growing up which includes goals related to learning and academic achievement. In cases of students with high academic achievement, after a parent has provided structure to a child's early life, at some point the child learns to

control his own life. The parental perspective functions as a structure from which desire and persistence develop, and from which a fertile climate for independent development and academic achievement can occur.

Parental perspective can encourage children to do their best so that they will achieve well in school. The implicit assumption of this statement is that once the impulse to achieve is personalized, that persistence is a prime prerequisite to achievement. In a school setting, this idea would mean that students who work harder and longer achieve more than students who do not. In a spectrum of academic experience, some students keep trying while others do not. And some parents persist in enforcement of academic excellence while stress diminishes their control.

Such a situation was described by Feather (1962) as a general persistence paradigm.

That in which a person is confronted with a very difficult or insoluble task and is unrestricted in either the time or number of attempts he can work at it. He is unsuccessful at each of these attempts at the task, but he can turn to an alternative activity whenever he wishes. Persistence may be measured by the total time or total trials which the person works at the task before he turns to the alternative activity. The former is sometimes referred to in the literature as temporal persistence, the latter measure is analogous to resistance to extinction. (p. 94)

Because persistence seems to effect academic achievement, it is important that it be mentioned.

Feather further discussed persistence as (a) a personality trait, (b) resistance to extinction, and (c) a motivational phenomenon.

Since there exists much evidence demonstrating that parents exert powerful influence over child behavior, it is helpful for educators to know how parental perspective functions and to use this knowledge in motivating student achievement.

Another aspect of academic achievement influenced by parental perspective concerns behavior controlled by consequences. B. F. Skinner's study in animal behavior conceptualized positive reinforcement as an environmental consequence that makes initial behavior more probable when certain stimulation reoccurs.

Using a Skinnerian-like experiment, Siegel and Foshee (1953) found with children that resistance to extinction can be measured by the number of reinforced or unreinforced responses by the adult present. This study showed that a child's persistence was affected by adult responses.

The particular motivating factors that spur an individual to perform his/her best depend on the interaction of personalities, reinforcement history, and such variables as sex, socioeconomic status, intelligence, environment, and other areas such as need for approval.

Parental perspective on academic achievement is also affected by the concept of family. Bowen (1966) suggested that there is an emotional process within the family unit where there are varying degrees of emotional responsiveness of individual family members. The extent to which a family member responds to life experiences depends partially on his level of involvement in what Bowen referred to as "ego

mars." For example, when there is stress in the family, family members tied to the ego mars can experience such effects as learning disorders.

Bernstein (1975) further discussed parental perspective in two dimensions: (1) the regulative, which establishes authority relations; and (2) the institutional, which transmits skills and content.

Some writers have examined perspective relative to academic achievement in terms of culture. For example, Riesman in The Lonely Crowd (1960) presented a discussion of persons as "inner-directed" and "other-directed." Since this study concerns middle- and upper-middle-class subjects and considers motivation as related to parental perspective, it is important to examine Riesman's position.

Riesman suggested that in the inner-directed person a "psychological gyroscope" is implanted early in life by parents and teachers. This will eventually enable the person to steer himself through the challenges of life. This inner-directed person is not expected to replicate the lives of his parents, but he is expected to live up to the ideals and values of his parents. This psychological gyroscope acts as a bone for keeping the person in tow.

The other-directed person is directed by "psychological radar," by peers and media and the order of society. Riesman contrasted the gyroscope and radar guiding of these two types by suggesting that the inner-directed person is governed internally by a pre-established course, whereas an other-directed person responds to signals received from others.

In an inner-directed parental perspective children are "brought up," while in the other-directed parental perspective, children are "loved up" through interaction with others.

Bernstein (1975) suggested that the parental perspective that encourages inner direction is one in which order and authority are stressed. He described this inner-directed parental perspective as having strong boundaries between people with explicit organizational rules and order. He used the term "positional" to describe the effects of a family where the position of parental authority is influenced by age and sex, as a patriarchal father.

For the other-directed parental perspective, Bernstein suggested that there are more fluid relationships. The parents and others influence the academic experience through meeting personal needs and desires rather than by formal decisions and roles. The inner-directed parental perspective reveres the private lives of individuals and self, whereas the other-directed parent promotes the personalized self where one's inner life is shown to all, and where one must sometimes modify inner needs to work well with group needs.

In considering the two perspectives, it seems reasonable to assume that few children experience only one approach. Certainly parental perspective is shaded with varying degrees of inner and outer direction.

Newberger's (1977) model of structural-developmental parenting is helpful in analyzing these two types of parenting perspectives, inner-directed/positional and other-directed/personal.

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Newberger's related levels of parental perspective include conventional and analytical levels. The conventional level corresponds with the inner-directed/positional type of perspective described by Bernstein and Riesman, while the analytical level most corresponds with the other-directed/personal type of perspective. Newberger's conventional perspective may be described as:

The basis for parental activity and the basis for understanding the child is the child's actions and inferred intentions in relation to preconceived, externally derived expectations. The child is conceived as having internal states and needs which must be acknowledged, but the parents conceive of the child's subjective reality in a stereotypical way. The child is not seen as unique, but as a member of the class "children," and the parent uses tradition, "authority," or the conventional wisdom to inform expectations and practices. The parent and the child are understood to have well-defined roles which it is their obligation to fulfill. Reciprocity is conceived as fulfillment of role obligations. (p. 3)

Newberger's analytical parental perspective may be described as:

The parent can view the relationships between parent and child as a mutual and reciprocal system and understands the child as a complex psychological self-system. The parent can conceive that motives underlying a child's actions may reflect simultaneous and conflicted feelings. (S)he can also understand that (s)he may have ambivalent feelings and actions as a parent, and still love and care for the child. Individuals and relationships are understood to be in a continual process of growth and change. Reciprocity is built not only on shared feelings, but also on shared acceptance of each other's faults and frailties as well as virtues, and each other's separateness, as well as closeness. (pp. 3-4)

Parental perspective can influence the impulse, psychic energy, and persistence which are necessary in order for academic achievement to occur. If the energy to achieve exists but the desire and persistence to accomplish academic tasks are not strong enough to produce high academic achievement, parental perspective as it addresses these factors becomes an important consideration. When academic tasks need

completion, does the parent exert authority or does the parent provide a structure that encourages the child's internal self-discipline? Parental authority structure exists in early childhood before the need for discipline to complete schoolwork, and indeed begins as the toddler learns to pick up toys.

The enigma of the matter of developing personal discipline and pride in academic achievement lies in the nature of the relationship and the stimulation as influenced by the parent. For example, Brophy (1970) found that the amount of stimulation given a child is not as important as the way the stimulation is organized in the home. The organization of the environment, sex-role influences, sibling relationships, and extended family relationships are all influenced by parent perspective.

In a study by White (1973), it was found that a parental perspective that is likely to provide the greatest warmth of affection, firmness, and consistency of discipline produces children who become high achievers.

The "psychic energy" needed to become an achiever may be described as the strength to withstand fatigue or hardship with resilience and stability. It is also a harmony between mind and body which is genetically and behaviorally influenced by parents. Postman (1982) suggested that this psychic energy is encouraged by an open, flexible approach to life, with emphasis on good self-esteem, a spontaneous outgoing temperament, and a minimum of tension, depression,

anxiety, and anger while under stress. Postman further suggested that this energy, or stamina, separates winners from losers in life.

More than psychic energy is important for high academic achievement. Energy must be directed to the necessary tasks at hand. For example, Renzulli (1977) referred to this quality as "zeal," or "task commitment." This is the ability to focus one's drive on a certain topic. Williams (1970) used the more passive term "willingness" to convey the same idea. Bloom's (1982) recent study on achieving students cited a "willingness to work" as a major contributor to success in high academic achievement.

Research supports the idea that an important aspect of parental perspective emphasizes human relationships. Loving, human relationships can form an emotional stability that helps to encourage self-esteem needed for psychic energy to be developed and maintained.

Parental effect on a child's learning falls into a number of categories, which are addressed in Chapter II of this study. The headings in this chapter include parental aspiration and interest in children, control of the child's environment, personal life of the parents (which may be referred to as modeling), parent-child interaction, and the influence of parents in relation to the child's development of self-concept of ability.

In an over-all sense, what the parental perspective aims to do is to produce children who can live effectively in the culture. However, the culture itself is in a constant state of change so that a certain parental flexibility or adaptability may be needed. Often

parents have not examined their own perspectives about achievement since they were children in a parent-child relationship. Confronted with the role of advising their own child/children, parents often draw on their past experiences which have formulated their perspectives about child rearing and about their child's academic achievement.

This relationship of the past influencing present perspective was described by Hymes (1974), who said that humans of all ages get caught in a powerful "web" spun of two strong threads: the way they were treated in the past and the way they function in the present.

Understanding a parent's perspective of academic performance must adapt to the circumstances at hand. For example, no longer do most parents vocationally prepare a child as they did in pre-industrial society. However, in considering the need for preparing a child for success in an educational environment, one needs to examine the relationship between education and culture. Postman (1979) suggested that in this relationship "the stability and vitality of an environment depends not on what is in the environment, but on the interplay of its elements, that is, on their diverse and dynamic complementarities" (p. 18). However, determining how life experiences complement each other is a difficult subject to analyze. This may be explained by the idea that what makes something good may be the existence of some opposing force which keeps it under control.

When parents express their views they can encourage or discourage a child's thoughts. For example, when this researcher was

first exposed to religious training, parental comments called attention to the benefits and dangers of indoctrination. Thus, parental action, while at some times encouraging, may at other times question the child's idea. A tempered effect occurs and assists the child in the development of analytical thinking needed for high academic achievement.

A cultural change that must be adapted to by parents concerns current life style and the resulting structure of homes. Keniston (1979) in All Our Children wrote that one out of every three children in America now grows up in a single-parent family. For the parents and children there are both social and psychological implications of such experience. When one parent shoulders the major responsibility for the child's learning and life adjustment, matters of communication, modeling, quality and quantity of shared experiences are focused more on the one parent. While the absent sex role may be less influential in the child's life, the single parent's perspective may be influenced at least temporarily by the upheavals of divorce. While this study does not majorly address this issue, it will simply state that the sharp rise in single-parent homes is different from the traditional nuclear family in terms of the above-cited dimensions.

Parental management of television viewing has also emerged as a distinct difference in the "generation gap" between parents and their own childhood experience. Present estimates are that, between the ages of 5 and 15, an average American child watches 15,000 hours of television. Other reports have shown that American high school students

average 30 hours of television viewing and four hours of homework per week. Television viewing has emerged as an omnipresent factor in American homes and has affected a change in family life from previous generations in terms of reading time, family chats, sings around the piano, and the "eye-to-eye" family interaction described by such child psychologists as Gary Stollack. While minimum television viewing has been cited as beneficial to learning by raising student motivation and responsiveness to instruction, the amount of television viewing in relation to other enriching experiences can affect academic achievement. Since television viewing occurs largely at home, parental perspective regarding television viewing is examined in this study.

The effects of the women's movement, trends in child day care, as well as electronic devices that entertain children for long hours, have also lessened the quantity of parent-child interaction from the previous generation. Increasing numbers of mothers of school-age children now work outside of the home.

Walberg (1984) reported that in a synthesis of 2,575 studies of academic achievement, parents directly or indirectly influenced determinants of affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning. Some of the determinants cited included student ability, student motivation, stimulating home environment, peer group with academic interests, goals and activities, and minimum exposure to "low-grade" television.

If parents and educators mutually understand each other's perspective about academic achievement and are able to blend their perspectives, goals of learning will be facilitated for students.

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The core of this study examines the concept of parental perspective. The term "perspective" may be described as:

an ordered view of one's world; what is taken for granted about the attributes of various objects, events, and human nature. It is an order of things remembered and expected as well as actually perceived, an organized conception of what is plausible and what is possible. (Shibutani, 1961, p. 161)

Further defined, perspective is a cycle of beliefs and actions that develop as a person interacts with his surroundings. In assigning the term "perspective" to parenting, it is necessary to study the experiences that influence how a parent views himself. More specifically, what a parent believes and does depends on how he perceives himself as influenced by life experiences.

Parental perspective about academic achievement develops from interaction between individuals or groups. In the parent's own personal experience and in the parenting experience in particular, this interaction determines how a parent feels about academic achievement. For example, there may be a family tradition of high academic achievement.

Regarding group perspective, Becker, Greer, and Hughes (1968) explained that:

Members will develop ideas in this interaction that, because they are held in common, create a universe of discourse, a common frame of reference, in which communication may take place. Similarly they develop as they interact in a variety of settings and specific situations, patterns of individual and collective activity. The activities grow out of the ideas being their logical extensions in actions. They also give weight and meaning to the ideas by creating patterns of everyday experience that make these ideas seem reasonable and appropriate to the situations that they are applied to. In this sense, the ideas grow out of the activities. (p. 58)

While it is impossible to discount parental perspective as a cause factor in high academic achievement, the emphasis of this study focuses on perspective as a reflective point of view. The beliefs and behaviors of parents are described and explained.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain the educational perspective of parents of high-achieving students. High-achieving students in this study are defined as being in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class as defined by grade point average.

From the discussion presented, some questions emerge concerning parental influence and its relationship with academic achievement:

1. What is the parental conception of parent role in the academic achievement of their children?
2. What parental beliefs and behaviors enhance the motivation, psychic energy, and persistence needed for high academic achievement?
3. What kinds of parentally encouraged experiences help a child to become a high-achieving student?
4. How do parents of children who achieve high grades deal with the experiences of formal education?
5. What connection can be established between the reflective consciousness of the parent and the fact of high academic achievement in the child?
6. Is it possible to identify forms of parental perspective that facilitate high academic achievement?

These questions are addressed in the interview questions in this study, which are cited on succeeding pages of this chapter.

In the case of high-achieving children, the educationally related beliefs and behaviors of the parents of such children need to be studied because research has shown that a child's success in school is greatly influenced by his parents. This study is undertaken with the assumption that if high academic achievement is desirable, and if parental perspective influences school experience, then such perspective needs to be examined for the optimum encouragement of high academic achievement. Information gained can be of value to students, parents, and educators.

Extensive research in education and social-psychological development has examined high achievers from the position of student self-esteem, motivation, family background, class, values, and behaviors. However, there exists extremely limited material examining parental perspective and school-related behavior of parents of high-achieving students. Therefore, this study describes and explains the educational perspective and school-related behavior of parents of high-achieving students by studying:

1. the relationship of parental perspective to academic achievement,
2. parental beliefs and behaviors relative to children's school performance,
3. the association of home experiences relative to academic achievement of the population studied.

This study examines parents' beliefs and behaviors relative to academic performance as perceived and reported by them.

To this end the following questions were asked of parents. These questions were derived as a result of extensive reading of related literature and were formulated from questions the researcher wished to examine. They were designed to provide optimum insight into the parents' educational perspective: how it was developed and how it functioned in relation to the high-achieving child.

A. IMPORTANCE OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

1. How do you feel about the importance of grades and academic achievement?
2. What did you say or do about conveying your feelings about academic achievement to your son/daughter?

B. PARENT BEHAVIOR

1. Were there particular guidelines which you established in the home which might have influenced academic achievement?
2. What about your insistence upon academic achievement?
3. Did you find that your son/daughter did schoolwork mostly on his/her own? Did you help with the schoolwork?
4. Were you ever involved with the schools at all?
5. Did you read and study about child rearing, or did you proceed in parenting experience mostly by your own sense?

C. TIME ELEMENT

1. When did you first realize that your son/daughter would excel academically?

D. PARENTS THEMSELVES

1. Would you comment on your own academic background?

2. How did you come to feel as you do about academic achievement?
(influence of family, environment, etc.)

E. PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILD

1. Did your son/daughter relate more with one parent than the other in terms of being interested in academic achievement?

F. FAMILY POSITION

1. How do you feel about the birth order or relationship with siblings and its effect upon academic achievement?

G. DEVELOPMENT OF PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Did your perspective about achievement change any as you went along the road of parenting with this child? How? Why?
2. What is the most important thing you could say about academic achievement?
3. What advice do you have to give young parents about how to raise an academically achieving child?

Significance of the Study

Understanding of parental perspective regarding education is important in the process of studying academic achievement. From a review of the literature, it appears that more research is needed concerning parental perspective. It is clear that researchers in education have not seriously addressed the topic.

The American social and economic system demands high levels of technology which must be directed by highly competent school graduates.

Since the 1970's, scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress tests of 17 year olds have declined. On International Assessment tests in mathematics, science, and reading comprehension, the United States placed last on three of the tests and lower than the other developed countries on seven of them. (Hersh, 1983, pp. 636-637)

Decline in student academic achievement poses a threat to economic survival. Perhaps the decline in U.S. productivity and struggle to compete in world markets is affected by decline in student academic achievement. Indeed, Wharton (1981) suggested that decline in literacy may condemn us to be "technopeasants--modern day serfs, nominally free, but disenfranchised by ignorance and fear of prevailing technology" (p. 3).

It may be that some school leaders feel that studying parental perspective regarding academic achievement is a threat to their qualifications as educators. Indeed, as reassessment in education continues there is frequent discussion of the role of parents versus the role of educators in producing academic excellence.

Recognizing the need for encouraging high academic achievement, Coleman (1962) suggested that minor attention has been given to the influences that affect the academic performance of adolescents.

Additional knowledge concerning parental perspective of academic achievement is needed, for in order to encourage parenting which assists in academic achievement, it is necessary to determine parents' views toward scholastic achievement. If research can establish the relationship between parental perspective and academic achievement and the conditions that affect that relationship, then theories can be established that will more effectively assist students in achieving their academic goals.

Influences that parents are assumed to have on academic achievement include parent influence on self-concept, on student

academic aspirations, on nonacademic facts such as peer relationships, on knowledge and skills, and on the affective domain. For example, "a parent can raise a child to be excited or fearful of academic tasks" (Linger, 1954, p. 100). It is also perceived that parental norms about clothing, dating, and career choices affect the academic performance of students (Rosen, 1955). By placing parental value on activity related to the above, academic achievement may be affected. Such influence does not make up the complete picture of parental influence, and certainly no one influence is more important than another. As Siegel (1956) suggested, "there is a multiple and interactive impact of various influences upon academic achievement" (p. 33).

This study takes the premise that:

1. the student-parent relationship involves a definable perspective about high academic achievement,
2. perceived parental academic aspirations are usually related to academic achievement, and
3. academic success when a child feels an obligation to do well corresponds with parental perspective regarding academic achievement.

As declining test scores have emerged, it is easy for parents to assign responsibility for declining academic achievement to the schools, citing lack of discipline, uncaring teachers, or low expectations as reasons. Likewise, schools often hold parents responsible by accusing that television has replaced reading and that broken homes and working parents have allotted less time to helping their children learn.

While all recognize the importance of academic achievement, the acceptance of responsibility for academic achievement is still tossed between home and school. Regarding excellence in school performance, Hawkins (1983) suggested,

It does not happen by chance. It must be made a high priority which is carefully nurtured and rewarded when attained. It occurs best in a hospitable environment which prizes the individual and encourages initiative. It is stifled by repression and lack of vision. (p. 2)

This study focuses on the parents of high-achieving students and does not deal with parental views of "gifted and talented" students. While many high-achieving children are indeed "gifted and talented," some achieving children are simply unusually motivated to achieve and to produce results equal to or surpassing students who indeed test with unusually high intelligence-test results.

Summary

Chapter I has presented parental perspective as a structure that influences character development in terms of desire, psychic energy, and persistence needed for academic success. The nature of the parent-child relationship was discussed, and dimensions of inner and other direction, as studied by Bernstein, Riesman, and Newberger, were examined. This chapter discussed the need for adapting parental perspective to the present cultural circumstances. The notion of complementary influence was mentioned. Questions emerged about parental perspective in relation to academic achievement. The term "perspective" was defined and explained. In discussing the stimulation

provided by parents, questions were presented relative to parental beliefs and behaviors and parental experience with formal education.

More research is needed to help establish the relationship between parental perspective and academic achievement. After such research has been completed, educational theories can be developed that will be useful as parents and schools plan together for students' optimum academic achievement.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Overview of Parental Perspective in Relation to Child Academic Achievement

There has always been parental involvement in the education of children. Through modeling, teaching, and the use of praise and discipline, families have provided informal education for their children. In early Egyptian, Roman, Hebrew, and Greek times, parents were involved in the selection of teachers and in the selection of what was to be taught to their children. During the Middle Ages (400 A.D. to 1400 A.D.), children were sent to apprentice a trade and were treated as "miniature" adults rather than as helpless children. During the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries when the concept of family began to develop, strict discipline was imposed on all classes of children. By the late eighteenth century, parental perspective about children was less strict and included a touch of humanism. Such philosophy is represented in the writings of Pestalozzi (1747-1827), who said that mothers should nourish a child's mind and body. Friedrich Froebel, born in 1782, recognized the importance of the mother in the education of her child. In his book Mother Plays and Nursery Songs he organized such mother-child activities as finger plays and nursery-rhyme songs.

In colonial America, child-rearing practice was mostly tied to the religious background of the family. The Puritans developed rigid rules for their children which reflected the belief that the child's will should be broken in order to foster "perfect" behavior. After the Industrial Revolution and the social crises brought about by the revolution, it was felt that parents needed assistance with the new demands of parenting and preparing children for newly defined life roles. Spencer (1900) wrote that education for parenthood was more significant than preparation for citizenship.

In the 1860s after the Civil War, women began to become farm-hands and to fulfill other obligations previously reserved for men. Prominent women founded the PTA (then the National Congress of Mothers), child-study groups, and free kindergartens. Reflecting interest in home-school cooperation and in the development of student achievement, the PTA grew from 60,000 in 1915 to 1,500,000 in 1930 (Schlossman, 1976). In the 1880s, parents began to read about parenting in such journals as Parent's Magazine, Mothers' Magazine, and Domestic Education. Calvinist writings influenced many parents who believed that children were not to be spoiled and that parents were to expect total and immediate obedience. It was considered fatal to let the child win out (Sunley, 1955). A later theory cited by Sunley suggested that children should be treated in a gentle manner with consistency and firmness underlying the nurturing. This guideline was thought to help children reach their full potential.

Reflecting a change in parental perspective from the nurturing attitude of the 1890s, by 1910-1920 a new trend suggested that discipline and punishment were important for good character development. Parents were advised to use more discipline, and less emphasis was placed on a nurturing home environment.

During the years of World War II, parent-education programs continued while

child care money became available for mothers working in the war effort. A trend in parent-child interaction saw that "parents began to spend less time with their children than in previous decades." Additionally, a trend toward permissiveness in parent-child relations was indicated. Increasingly the American society gave decreasing prominence to the family as a socializing agent. (Bronfenbrenner, 1970, pp. 98-99)

During the 1950s, more concern was devoted to the mental health of children. Benjamin Spock's writings shifted the ideas of many from strict scheduling of children's lives to more concern for mental health.

In the 1960s, after the launching of Sputnik by the U.S.S.R., the attention of parents and educators was directed to the intellectual development of their children, particularly in science and mathematics. It was common for all institutions, education, family, religion, and government, to be questioned and criticized by young people. Since the 1890s, the American family had changed from a largely rural nation to an urban nation. Families became dependent on others for employment in business and industry, where previously they had been self-sufficient rural units with authoritarian parents. Children were no longer

economic assets who helped their parents with the family farm or business. Instead, they became financial liabilities, costing \$20,000 to raise from infancy to 18 years of age (Hill, 1970).

Spock was joined by Ginott in the 1960s, who suggested that parents talk about their feelings with children and guide their children in a way that avoids guilt and helps children understand parent feelings, thus disciplining the child in positive ways. Piaget's theories of cognitive development stressed active involvement of the child with his learning environment. Many parents and educators were influenced by his writing.

In the 1960s the United States' standard of living was the highest in the world. Studies of behavioral scientists and educators presented overwhelming evidence that early development and the influence of parents had a profound influence on a child's development (Bloom, 1964; Hunt, 1970; Skeels, 1966). Research indicated that parent involvement and family background were correlated with academic success. As programs such as Head Start were initiated, parent involvement in the education of children was recognized as crucially important.

During the 1960s the United States was involved in the Vietnam War; this resulted in changes in family relationships, moral standards, and social change. There were immense changes in parental perspective as many families were torn apart by young people who used drugs and who had experienced conflict about participation in the war. Parents of adolescents needed counseling when confronted with overwhelming

value changes in their children. Television, peer-group influence, lack of consistent social and moral guidance, and involvement in the war thrust parents into an arena for which they were not prepared by previous role models of parent-child relationships. Many parent groups were organized in an effort to understand the new roles of parenting.

The children represented in this study were born during the decade of the 1960s. The social influences of that time were of concern to young parents since there was such significant upheaval in values affecting parenting and education.

By the 1970s there was parental emphasis on the development of the "total" child: social, intellectual, emotional, and physical. Cognitive development was stressed, and Piaget's theories about cognitive development had great impact on education. An over-all concern for the well-rounded development of the "total" child was emphasized.

While parents originally had control of the education of their children, the changes from rural to urban education had brought increasing separation of school and families. In the 1970s, control of education now shifted from parents to professionals (Goodson, 1975).

During the 1970s, however, parents served on advisory councils and were represented in such federally funded programs as Home Start and Head Start. Experts began to believe that a partnership between parents and schools and agencies was essential. Research indicated that parent involvement and family background correlated positively with academic success.

Mass media, the fast pace of life, changing life styles, and employment of both parents brought increased attention to the life of the total family.

After the first White House Conference on Families convened in July 1980, the diversity of philosophies on parental perspective became apparent. There was, however, general concern for the role of parents in the education of their children (Berger, 1981).

Aspirations and Interests for Children

The following discussion is based on the premise that individuals tend to perceive the commonly held expectations of others in the social system and will behave in ways that they believe others expect as appropriate. For example, a child may learn that certain academic demands must be met in order for his relationship with his parents to continue. In other words, "the child learns how he is to behave in one social system so that he can not only meet the demands of that system but of related systems" (Linton, 1945, p. 97).

The influence of parental aspiration for their children has been studied by many researchers. In examining the interest of parents for the education of their children, Mallinson (1963) found that the most influential factor in science achievement was that of aspirations and interest of parents for the education of their children. In discussing this influence of parent aspiration on academic achievement, Miner (1968) found that there is a positive correlation between intelligence, academic achievement, and parental educational aspiration. More specifically, Miner's studies have shown that parents whose

children achieve academic success have been found to (1) give praise and approval, (2) show interest and understanding, (3) allow children to feel a sense of family belongingness, and (4) encourage their children to identify with them.

In a study of adolescent academic achievement, Baumrind (1968) found that adolescents whose parents demand high academic achievement are more likely to deliver it. Baumrind suggested that when adolescents are oriented to academic achievement, they tend to (1) get along with parents, (2) obey rules willingly, and (3) seek social acceptability.

In examining the effect of parental perspective on academic achievement, it seems clear that the circumstances by which parents communicate expectations to their children make a difference in their children's reactions to those expectations. Children tend to develop high levels of aspiration when their parents make appropriate demands at appropriate times, reward success liberally, and hold standards of excellence for them while giving them freedom to work out their own problems in their own ways (Veroff, 1965).

In examining academic achievement in reading, science, and literature, Coleman (1974) found that the total effect of home background is greater than the total effect of school variables. In relation to the three areas studied, reading was found to be more fully an outgrowth of home influence than either science or literature.

In addition to their supportive attitudes and behaviors toward their children, parents of high-achieving boys were found to encourage

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a positive attitude toward teachers, toward school, and toward intellectual activities (Wilson & Morrow, 1962).

While many studies have cited the positive influence of parents, it has been frequently claimed that as a child enters adolescence, parents become less and less an influence on academic achievement and that peers take over the major influencing role. Coleman (1960) took the position that "what our society has done is to set apart an institution of their own, adolescents for whom home is little more than a dormitory and whose world is made up of activities peculiar to their fellows" (p. 339). It is possible that if peer influence becomes important in a school where achievement brings few social rewards, then those who seek scholarly achievement would be few.

In a study of home environment and academic achievement, Sommerville (1970) concluded that there is a significant relationship between home environment and the achievement level of students.

Environmental Control

Further evidence of parental perspective relates to control of student environment. Such control concerns the physical as well as the psychological environment. It includes environment influences on behavior in relation to (1) interpersonal processes, (2) reinforcement, (3) identification, (4) social learning, and (5) modeling.

In examining the effect of environment on academic achievement, Bronfenbrenner (1970) found that high-achieving students used parents as the major source of support and control in their environment.

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Regarding class differences, studies have shown that the middle-class parent is more concerned than parents in other classes about academic achievement. The middle-class successful parent is a model of academic and occupational achievement and thus encourages his children to follow the same life style. The lowest motivation to achieve was found among large lower-class families; the next lowest in large upper-class families. Medium-sized upper-class families produced about the same aspiration levels as middle-class families (Rosen, 1959).

Environmental factors related to family position have shown that the oldest child does not always achieve the most. Specifically, first-born children of fathers with at least a high school education scored higher than their later-born brothers and sisters, regardless of education. Scores of National Merit Scholarship participants showed that first borns of smaller families scored higher, even when parents' educations and family income were controlled, than participants in larger families (Glass, 1974).

Highest achievement scores occurred among children born into intermediate positions in large families of upper- and middle-class status. Eldest children of upper- and middle-class medium-sized families scored highest. The youngest child in a small upper- or middle-class family was likely to be just as achievement oriented as the eldest. Least ambitious of all was the eldest child of a large lower-class family. Second place for lack of achievement motivation

went to the youngest child of a large upper- or middle-class family (Torsen, 1959).

While parents are the most important factor in affecting a child's environment, they themselves are susceptible to myriads of varying environmental influences. A central challenge for the parent is to deal with uncertainties in the environment and to adapt them for the child's growth. However, there are several problems associated with doing this. First, in the activities between parents and children there is no definite set of cause and effect factors. Studying the basis of learning rests on a system of belief about relationships, materials, and the students themselves. For example, a proportion of inner/other direction and conventional versus analytical perspective (see Chapter I) exists in each home.

A parent cannot simply control or remove environmental factors such as peer influence, or any circumstance that could affect high academic achievement. In fact, it would be necessary to have full-time home researchers to isolate the essential components of the parenting-learning process and to deal with the numerous variables operating at the fringe of the family in order to make more scientific study of the parent-child relationship as it influences academic achievement. The values, beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors of children are all affected outside of the home. Research has shown that factors such as class, culture, family size, position in the family, and family structure also affect results. Although parents may be unable to control

the number of potentially influencing variables affecting their children's lives, they are a major influencing factor.

In discussing individual child uniqueness and potential, Dobson (1970) suggested that each child has "unique genes and a unique psychological environment." He added, "Don't put a pre-conceived mold down for the child. Stand back and allow him to actualize the unique and potential self which is unfolding in him" (p. 321). In so doing, a parent will be more likely to encourage what Bronfenbrenner (1980) described as the "highest expression of development." Such development is

a child's growing capacity to remold reality in accordance with human requirements and aspirations. It is the development of the child's evolving conception of the ecological environment, his relation to it, and the child's growing capacity to discover, sustain or alter its properties, that is significant. (p. 92)

Influence of Educational Pursuits by Parents for Themselves

Parents showing interest in the education of their children influence achievement. However, additional influence is exerted when the parent himself is involved in educational matters. In such a case the parent's interest becomes a model. Bronfenbrenner's (1970) studies found that "there is a substantial body of data demonstrating the powerful effect of parents as models in shaping the intellectual behavior and development of the child" (p. 125).

In a study of academic achievement and occupational plans of 3,245 high school seniors, Picou (1973) found that the father's occupation, income, education, and academic performance as well as his

academic achievement and education had the strongest effect on the student's academic achievement and occupational plans.

In the University of Chicago Quincey Youth Project, Pierce (1959) explained why some students achieved high while others, of similar ability, achieved below their potential. He found that high achievers placed a higher value on concepts of work, school, and imagination which were considered necessary for high academic achievement. The high achievers cited their fathers as the most important influences in their lives more often than did low achievers (Pierce, 1959).

In a study of parental influence in the academic achievement of Mexican-American high achievers, Gandara (1980) found that parental regard for the work ethic and the attention of a role model were significant factors in affecting student academic achievement.

Parent-Child Interaction

Parent-child interaction is another factor affecting student internalization of parent aspiration. In a study of academic achievement, White (1973) found that success in producing children who are high academic achievers is not dependent upon money, education, a happy marriage, or both parents living at home. Instead, White concluded that academic achievement is more closely related to parent understanding of the factors affecting a child's development and the nature of the interaction between parent and child.

The nature of these beliefs and parent-child interactions defines a parent's particular perspective. In a study investigating the nature of the interactions between parents and high-achieving

children, Watts (1973) found that mothers of achieving children used intellectually stimulating techniques of teaching, justifying, and conversing. Direct participation in child-initiated activities by the mother who had acquired an understanding of what was developmentally appropriate and intellectually stimulating was the key attribute in helping children become high achievers.

In a study of mother-child interaction, Brophy (1970) found that the amount of stimulation given a child is not as important as the way in which stimulation is organized in the home. Brophy also concluded that not only is the organization of stimulation important, but the mother's impression of herself influences child academic achievement.

In studying the effects of mother-child interaction and cognitive development, Strassguth and Bee (1972) concluded that differences in learning environment and motivational characteristics are related to differences in cognitive functioning. They also concluded that contingency of social reinforcement is important in modifying behavior and that teaching styles and patterns of feedback used by mothers are important in shaping cognitive functioning. More specifically, Chance (1968) found that need achievement in boys is associated with early training by mothers concerned with controlling child behavior. This study also concluded that the development of personal control of outcomes was enhanced by early independence-training behaviors of the mother.

In a study of differential cognitive abilities and corresponding characteristics of the child's home in terms of human interaction, Bing (1967) found that the essential condition for the development of verbal skill is close relationship and communicating with an adult, and that verbal ability is encouraged by a high degree of interaction between mother and child.

In further defining the effect of parent-child interaction, White (1973) found that parents whose children become conscientious are likely to be those with the greatest warmth of affection from parents and the greatest firmness and consistency, not severity, of discipline.

In a study of parental perspective in relation to academic achievement, Pierce (1959) found that academic achievement in boys is encouraged by homes that are democratic, whereas for girls, academic achievement appears to be aided more by homes that are strict and demanding. Parental perspective toward child rearing affects academic achievement and can be conceptualized in terms of two dimensions: the degree of control and the quality of acceptance. Various combinations of these two dimensions are possible. The five general types are (1) overly protective, (2) authoritarian, (3) neglectful (rejecting and permissive), (4) indulgent-permissive (conditionally accepting), and (5) authoritative (accepting and flexibly autonomy creating) (McKinney, 1982). In actual practice, all parental relationships fluctuate in these two basic dimensions. Additionally, one parent may be more or less authoritarian than another. The relationship of these patterns of parental roles to adolescent behaviors, and most specifically to

academic achievement, is important to this study. For example.

Baumrind (1968) reported parental behaviors that produced the following results:

1. Overly protective parents had children who were dependent, passive, conforming, timid, insecure, lacking self-confidence, and not able to take charge.
2. Authoritarian parents had children who tended to defend traditional values and conform to parental expectations. Such children had not been trained to think or question for themselves.
3. Neglectful parents often had children who externalized or acted out hostility in the form of antisocial aggression. Having been treated "unfairly," many neglected children tend to be law breakers. Such adolescents had internalized few controls which would enable them to change their aggression into socially acceptable avenues. Harsh, neglectful, and inconsistent parents were apt to engender hostility and lack of self-control in their children.
4. Indulgent and permissive parents often experienced children with loss of self-control and self-sufficiency. Their children were often self-centered, attention seekers, and were used to getting their own way.
5. Authoritative parents encouraged their children to be self-confident, independent, and assertive. Their children were willing to fight for the principles and values to which they were committed.

Nuttall and Nuttall (1976) found that parents who were perceived by their children as less hostile tended to produce children

with high academic traits. Academic achievement seems to be facilitated by parents who are able to maintain effectiveness while adapting their behavior to meet the needs of the child's developmental level.

A part of the consideration of parental child-rearing practice is the idea of a conceptual system that explains how a child thinks and is influenced by parental beliefs and behaviors. For example, students whose basic behavior falls into conceptual system level I are obedient to authority; level II students are rebellious and anti-authority oriented; level III students are abstract and flexible but very socially oriented; and level IV students are creative, flexible, information based, problem solving and decision making (Berger, 1981).

It is likely that parental beliefs and behaviors play a significant role in the development and use of formal reasoning. Authoritative parental behaviors seem to enhance academic achievement and seem to be associated with level IV reasoning; however, parents who carry out authoritarian and neglecting roles seem to affect a child's development by arresting him at level I or level II. Level II children seem to be related to protective child-rearing beliefs and behaviors.

Brookover suggested that it is not only the presence of parent-child interaction that affects academic achievement; the nonpresence of parental influence is also a significant factor. In his The Ecology of Human Development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) discussed molnar behavior, which is behavior having its own momentum. It is perceived as having meaning by the participants. Bronfenbrenner suggested that the developmental status of a young person can be assessed by the variety and

complexity of the molnar activities which he/she initiates and maintains without another person instigating or directing the activity.

In further discussing adult-child relationships, Bronfenbrenner expanded the concept to include influencing relationships of significant others. He categorized influences into mesosystems (the relationship of a person dealing directly with another person), exosystems (the relationship of a third person influencing the second person--for example, another person influencing a parent), or macrosystems (the influences of prevailing institutions in society).

Although there seem to be no simple formulas regarding parental discipline in relation to achievement, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) studies have shown that achievement is lowest in homes with laissez-faire discipline and higher in homes where there is an authoritarian style of discipline.

Banner's (1979) studies concluded that mothers of high-achieving students are less dominant, rigid, possessive, and intrusive than mothers of low-achieving students. Banner further suggested that students from stable family environments tend to experience higher academic achievement than students from less stable home environments.

A related study by Nuttall (1976) found that high achievers had accepting mothers, parents who were low in the use of hostile control, and parents who were low on allowing independence in the child's early home experience.

Another study by Nuttall (1969) considered parental relationship and academic achievement among 5,300 Puerto Rican junior and

senior high school students. Nuttall concluded that "generally higher socio-economic status relates with higher parental acceptance of child functioning and lower hostile psychological control."

The Influence of Parents in Relation
to Self-Concept of Ability

A major theoretical proposition studied extensively by Brookover (1965) suggests that students develop their self-concept of ability largely through the perceptions of how others evaluate their ability. Brookover (1954) also found that a student's self-concept of ability is positively related to the image he perceives that significant others such as parents, teachers, and peers hold of him. Furthermore, student self-concept of ability was positively correlated to school achievement. Brookover further reported that parents were perceived to be the most important significant others named by adolescents, with peers ranking second.

For a student to gear himself toward achievement, he must think that it is possible for him to meet the necessary requirements for the achievement. Additionally, he must believe that he is doing the right thing when carrying out the necessary tasks for achievement. Whether or not a given task is seen as appropriate depends on his self-identity in relation to others. Erickson (1965) suggested that this perceived evaluation of ability does not necessarily cause the student to engage in an activity. If the student learns that he is capable of achieving highly, and his self-concept of his ability does not limit his achievement, he must also decide that such achievement will positively

influence his life goals. If these conditions are met, then the likelihood of his pursuing his goals is enhanced. Parental influence in these areas of self-concept and motivation distinctly affects academic achievement.

This discussion of parental perspective in relation to high academic achievement would not be complete without mention of Jencks's (1972) study regarding educational achievement and social or biological phenomena. Jencks's research led him to conclude that genes explain about 45% of the variance in American test scores, that environment explains about 35%, and that the tendency of environmentally advantaged families to have genetically advanced children explains the remaining 20%.

While this study of parental perspective does not emphasize genetic versus environmental influences, there is much literature that addresses the topic. Other studies have produced slightly differing percentages of genetic versus environmental influence on academic achievement. Since there is not conclusive evidence supporting accurate percentages of influence, this study merely states rather than explores in depth this topic.

Palmer (1967) conducted a study for the Toronto Board of Education regarding the influence of parents on academic achievement. This study concluded that when the quality of parental influence on a child's academic performance is identified and evaluated, educators can more fully understand and aid the child in classroom performance. Palmer suggested that if conflicts between the goals of home and school

are understood by educators, steps can be taken to help the child acquire motivation to learn and to appreciate the long-term educational goals that are made for children by school and society. Palmer further suggested that not only can parents learn from schools about academic goals and procedures, but schools can learn from parents in such areas as use of rules, inspired learning, and the style of learning that a given child is best suited for.

Specific findings of Palmer's study reported that the highest academic achievement tended to come from homes of small, middle-class, Protestant, college-educated families and from parents who were "moderate" in their use of force in rearing their children.

Summary

A historical overview of parental perspective in relation to child academic achievement was presented. In this overview, special mention was made of the societal changes affecting parents in the 1960s, when the parents in this study began their parenting experience.

Other sections reviewed the literature and discussed parental perspective in relation to (a) aspirations and interests for children, (b) environmental control, (c) influence of educational pursuits by parents for themselves, (d) parent-child interaction, and (e) the influence of parents in relation to self-concept of ability.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Population to Be Studied

The population to be studied included parents of the top ten graduates of the classes of 1980, 1981, and 1982 of a suburban midwest high school. The top ten graduates were students whose total high school academic achievement as computed by grade point average in all subjects was in the top ten of the graduating class. The names of these students were procured from local newspaper articles reporting graduation information from the classes of 1981 and 1982. Additional information regarding the addresses and telephone numbers of the parents was provided by the high school guidance office. No records were available for the class of 1980. However, the county intermediate school system, which stored all computerized school records including student grades, was able to provide a printout of the grades, names, and addresses of the parents of the class of 1980.

All parents of the students selected still resided in the school system. All parents except one enthusiastically agreed to be interviewed. That one parent who refused to be interviewed for personal reasons did not explain to the researcher.

The following statistics provide background information on the students studied:

Sex of the students represented:

Boys: 12
Girls: 18

Race of the homes represented:

Caucasian: 25
Black: 0
Oriental: 5

Marital status in the home at the time of the study:

Single parent: 1--by death
2--by divorce
1--by separation

Both parents at home: 26

Parent interviews: 20--mother only
2--father only
7--both parents

The parents ranged in age from 35 to 60, with most parents being in their forties. The average age was 45-50.

Setting

A suburban, midwestern community was selected for this study. This community was chosen because high academic achievement is strongly encouraged by the school and community and because student records were available to the researcher. It is a stable community, adjacent to a large university campus. During the three-year span of the study, all parents remained in the community. Additionally, as a resident, parent, and former teacher in the community, the researcher had experienced social and economic dynamics that are characteristic of this particular community and that might affect understanding of parental perspective.

Design and Methodology

The specific methodology was that of semi-structured, in-depth interview. The researcher went to the homes of the parents, and after a brief introduction, interviewed them. Questions about parent beliefs concerning academic achievement and parent behavior related to raising an academically achieving child were asked. The type of research selected for this study is qualitative and can also be referred to as phenomenological or ethnographic research. It is characterized by two sets of perspectives about human behavior: naturalistic-ecological and qualitative-phenomenological (Wilson, 1977).

The naturalistic-ecological perspective suggests that it is necessary to study psychological events in natural settings because "such settings generate regularities in behavior that often transcend differences among individuals" (Wilson, 1977, p. 248). In this study, the researcher felt that since there was no direct observation of parenting, an observable constant would be provided by conducting interviews in the homes of the parents. Certain family views, roles, values, and norms would be more clearly evident by interviewing in the home.

In conducting the interviews the researcher was aware of aspects of the interview situation that might influence behavior and make accurate assessment difficult. As Rosenthal and Rosnow (1969) pointed out, the following negative research influences often occurred:

1. a suspiciousness of the intent of the research,
2. a sense of the behavior that is either appropriate or expected,
3. a special interpersonal relationship with the experimenter, and
4. a desire to be evaluated positively. (p. 129)

In each of the cases cited, the stated negative influences were minimized because the interviewees were models of success in that they had already proven themselves by producing high-achieving students. Because of the nature of the research, interviews occurred under nonthreatening circumstances. Since the students in the population had already graduated and the researcher was permanently leaving the community, open discussion of the parents' perspective was enhanced.

In respect to the qualitative-phenomenological approach, "one cannot understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which the subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions" (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969, p. 150).

To aid understanding of this framework, this study posed open-ended questions regarding parental perspective. During the process of obtaining data, this study made use of what Glaser and Strauss (1967) described in their discussions as "grounded theory." In other words, the tension between participant data and the observer's analysis was constantly used to refine the emerging theory. Glaser and Strauss stated that "our approach allows substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge on their own and enables the analyst to ascertain which, if any, existing formal theory will help to generate substantive theory" (in Wilson, 1977, p. 249).

The semi-structured interview was used in this research because of the exploratory nature of the study.

Although a wealth of material was produced by the interviews, there were such problems as need for considering how the effect of time had influenced response.

The interview was guided by the researcher, who assisted the subject in exploring his or her thinking. While much material emerged, some rambling and digressing from the immediate topics of the interview outline diminished the sustenance of the responses, particularly in some of the earlier interviews. As the interview process continued, the researcher became more skilled in keeping the interview responses "on target." The open-ended questions allowed the subjects an opportunity to discuss items of particular meaning to them.

The researcher continually checked the meanings of events and evaluated influencing relationships. To that end, this study will describe and explain how parents perceived events related to their child's academic achievement, the cultural and subcultural norms present and affecting the perception, and the similarities and differences among the situations present in the data. These perceptions emerged in the interview. Analysis of the parental perspective will articulate forces that act on the behavior described.

Process

The research process of this study was begun with a telephone call to each of the parents included in the study. The researcher identified herself as a graduate student interested in studying parental perspective about academic achievement and in knowing more

about how and why certain children achieve so highly. Since the researcher anticipated moving from the area where the data were collected, a time limit of four weeks was set for data collection. Despite the fact that the researcher had lived in the community for 20 years, the fact of immediate and permanent departure from the area seemed to free participants to tell her openly what they felt. The researcher's comments that she, too, was a parent of three young children and wished to understand parental perspective of "successful" parents seemed to add credibility to her study. As Bruyn (1966) suggested, "the participant must come to trust and value the observer enough to be willing to share intimate thought with him/her and answer the endless questions" (p. 21).

During the initial telephone inquiry it was determined which of the parents had had the greatest influence on the child's academic achievement. An interview appointment with that parent was made at that time. If both parents had significantly affected the child's academic achievement, then both parents were present for the interview. Even if only one parent was selected for an interview, both parents were given a parent information form, which was designed to assess the degree of similarity or difference between the parents concerning their views on academic achievement. Basic information regarding age, education, and occupation of the parents was also provided for on this form (see Appendix). This form was, in fact, a check to see whether the views of the most influential parent could be substantiated by the other parent.

The interviews ranged in length from one to three hours and, when typed, included three to nine single-spaced pages of interview data with most interviews being from seven to eight pages in length. The accumulated data consisted of 187 single-spaced pages of narrative in which the subjects reflected on their perspectives regarding high academic achievement.

In these semi-structured interviews, the flow and direction of the interview process were determined by the interaction between subject and interviewer. The general pattern was that each question was explored separately, and it was not until the conclusion of the interview that a summary of parental recommendations was requested. Careful attention was made for responses to be fully described.

Data

In the effort to study parental perspective, several types of data were used:

1. verbal interaction with the researcher, which was tape-recorded and then typed from the tape,
2. nonverbal behavior, and
3. notes regarding the physical aspects of the home (organization, general climate, setting), which reflected perspective toward learning.

An interview notation sheet was used to assist the researcher in items 2 and 3. This form provided a system for notation of details of the interview situation (see Appendix).

Regarding the typed interviews described in item 1, the following procedure was used: interviews were read and studied, and then a summary sheet for each interview was prepared. The results of all summary sheets were compiled under the headings of (1) how parents view academic achievement, (2) parent behavior and parental guidelines, (3) background of the parents themselves, (4) environmental control and interaction, and (5) recommendations. Conclusions and summaries were organized from the compiled materials described above.

Frequency of responses was noted. The most frequent responses provided a core for the conclusions of each of the five areas cited.

To obtain more objective results, the researcher sought to examine perspective with the idea that such perspective has more meaning than the standard "who? what? when? and where?" questions, and responses provided. To understand unexpressed meanings, the researcher sought to empathize with the participants and to comprehend the subtleties of the actions and thoughts. The researcher used her own experiences and reactions as a parent and educator to understand the reactions of the participants. In the evaluation of the interview material, the researcher was careful not to abandon her own perspective to that of the participants by constantly monitoring and examining her own perspective. It is this tension between personal and other views that keeps the researcher from "lapsing into subjectivity" (Wilson, 1977, p. 259).

In an effort to state the researcher's points of view at the onset of this study, the following items are addressed: the

researcher's role in the setting and the researcher as a parent, teacher, community resident, and researcher/graduate student in the community.

The researcher's previous experience related to this field of study; the researcher had participated in numerous parent groups interested in student achievement, parent-effectiveness training, and many parent-teacher-association projects. Additionally, she had taught high-achieving students. Personal involvement included academic encouragement of her own three children. The researcher's personal interest about parental perspective began in childhood, when both of her parents were teachers. The relationships between parental perspective and student academic performance were of early interest to the researcher as a result of the academic involvement of her family.

As the study progressed, the three phases of field work described by Strauss (1967) were followed:

1. phase of general "observation" of the topic of parental perspective toward academic achievement;
2. phase of making some sense of the flow of events observed, such as significant classes of persons or events; and
3. phase of systematic effort to pinpoint various hypotheses.

The findings will form a theory or a set of concepts and inter-relationships that exist among those concepts. They will include consequences that will logically follow the relationships proposed in the theory.

The term "concept" is used to refer to the characteristics of events, situations, or people being studied. Among the concepts being considered in this study are the aspirations and interests of parents for the education of their children, control of the environment, and related parent behavior which enhances the motivation, psychic energy, and task commitment needed for high academic achievement.

Summary

A description of the population studied was presented. The design and methodology of in-depth interviews were explained referring to the naturalistic-ecological perspective and qualitative-phenomenological perspective which characterize this study.

The complete process of the research was described from the arrangements for the interviews to the organization of the data.

Personal explanation of interest in the topic and in choices made in the selection of the setting were presented. Finally, the procedure of summarizing the findings was explained as they will relate to (1) parental aspirations and interests for the academic achievement of their children, (2) parental guidelines and control of the environment, and (3) related parent behavior that affects the psychic energy and task commitment needed for high academic achievement.

CHAPTER IV

THE FINDINGS: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

The intention of this chapter is to present the educational perspective of parents of the selected high-achieving students. Interview data and verbatim quotations will be provided to substantiate conclusions.

The researcher will distinguish between the perspective common to all 29 subjects, the perspective that represents most of the subjects, and the perspective that represents mixed views of the subjects.

Question 1: Parental Perspective--Academic Achievement

Responses to this question included three points of focus:

1. the importance of academic achievement as demonstrated by learning and not by grades,
2. parental expectation for a child's sense of personal responsibility for academic achievement, and
3. the child developing a personal value for doing his best.

All parents believed that academic achievement was important for success in school and for success in later life. Many parents interpreted school success as "learning" and not acquiring a specific grade. "Learning is more important than grades." "Knowledge is

power." "Study not just so that you will get high grades, but study to learn." "Be sure that you learn. Don't worry about A's." "Ask the teacher if you don't understand so that you can learn. That's what it's all about." "Study well. Learn the most you can, and the grade will come automatically." "Grades aren't all that important." "You don't have to get A's." "Grades are someone else's measure of accomplishment. What's important is that you are learning."

While many parents insisted that they did not press their children for A's, they said that they believed learning and high achievement were vital for success in life. "Grades are very important." "Success in school usually means success in life." "Education is important for a better life."

Going one step further several parents said, "We stressed goals, not just cognitive learning. I mean why you're doing it, the purpose." "What you plan to do with learning is the most important thing in life. It is second only to health and safety." "What's the goal of learning and achieving? Go after them and reach them." "He never loved school, but he knew the end would help him get a good job." "You can't go wrong with education. The more you have, the more you can apply."

In justifying parental stress on learning, parents said, "Learning gives one a sense of fulfillment." "When you learn something well--maybe with an A--you have a sense of achievement and a sense of intellectual enrichment."

The notion of happiness in life as related to learning was mentioned by several parents who said, "A child that achieves is a happier child." "Learning should be challenging and fun." "School needs more humor and compassion." Citing a reverse notion, one parent said, "If they don't succeed academically, it's depressing."

While most parents stressed that learning rather than acquiring high grades was the ultimate goal, all parents recognized that grades were the accepted measure of student learning. "Grades are very important. They are important for success in school and school success usually means success in life." "Having good grades is a must to get ahead."

Parents viewed "getting ahead" in an individual sense. They valued the work ethic, and believed that the combination of good ability and hard work would amount to "success." Although individual "success" was not defined in these interviews, the researcher assumed that parents believed that having good education, a fulfilling vocation, and good personal life adjustment were the major components of "success." With the above ingredients, a child would then be able to carry out an adult role in a similar way or with greater fulfillment than his/her parents. There was a sense of parental duty to produce an educated young person who would be prepared for a leadership position in whatever area of life the child might choose. Parents did not express having specific vocational or leadership plans for their children. The immediate parental goals were more directed toward having

the children become propelled, and most specifically self-propelled, toward educational experience that would enhance their lives.

While this study did not examine parental social views, it is reasonable to assume that parents intended that their children's academic achievement would help them to be more responsible citizens and to respond to future social needs with more knowledgeable background. Since the parents themselves were academically achieving individuals and sought academic success for their children, the children's successes were likely seen as reaffirmation of their own lives.

The acquisition of material wealth was not as stressed as the importance of knowledge and ideas. One parent commented, "We don't value things as much as we value ideas."

From data collected a reasonable conclusion regarding the importance of grades and academic achievement is that while learning was stressed by most parents, they recognized that grades were the most accepted measure of such learning.


Parental expectations for high academic achievement were cited by all parents. "We as parents had expectations for excellence. We expected them to do well and to go to college." "Our perspective about high achievement was a cultural value from our family. We really didn't stress it." "It was an internal family goal." "Our family culture was the biggest influence." "We said, you have to do well in school so you can go to college." "We said, you have to go to college. It's just one of the things in our family."

Thus far, we have found that the parents in this study stressed learning for "learning's sake," and learning well so that college, a good job, and a "better life" can follow.

Whereas parents stressed academic achievement and the importance of academic achievement in the family tradition, some parents stated that children have individual differences in motivation, circumstance, and ability. "You have to assess their ability and if they have the talent, then you do all you can to encourage." "If the seed is there you develop it."

Only two exceptions to family high achievement were cited: "With our older one we pushed too hard and he just didn't have it. He was always turned off about school. But with _____ we just let it happen." "Our daughter was sick a lot, so she fell behind and never caught up. She got married instead of going on to school."

Most parents in this study produced a whole family of high achievers where all of their children achieved highly. The children had very little choice but to achieve because the family expectations were so high, because the parents were persistent in guiding these expectations, and because effective communication seemed to be established between parents and children.



In further discussing academic differences in siblings, parents commented, "Emotionally but not in academic ability I see the differences between the child who had me at home and the one who was at the sitter when he was in pre-school years and more because I was working." "We were more rigid with the first. You always are with the

first. I think that made a difference in the performance of our two children." "Our kids all went on but _____ didn't love it."

No parents expressed concern about the emotional effect of expectation for academic excellence. It was presumed that this expectation was good for all of their children. There was no indication that the children had felt pressured or that they in any way experienced negative feelings from the academic expectations held for them by their parents. This study did not address the issue of emotional adjustment of the children.

Some parents had experienced competitiveness as a motivating factor in their child's academic achievement: "She was competitive." "He was competing with his friends possibly because we said if _____ can do it, you can." "_____ is competitive, just like his father and grandfather. I think it's inherited." "There were a lot of honor students in this community to compete with. If you were a good student, you weren't an odd ball."

The expectation for academic excellence was set by many parents who established expectations for having the child want to do his/her best. "We didn't push for A's--only for doing his best work." "We said, study because you want to do it." "Be yourself, but be proud of what you do." "Anybody can learn well if they want, and if they put time and effort into it." "You don't have to have great ability to be a good student, you just have to work hard and have self-discipline." "Achieve what you're capable of." "Use your ability or it goes to waste." "Gratification comes from doing your best and being happy

about it." "You will feel good about having done your best and about having been thorough." "Be proud of what you do because it is your best." "Believe in yourself." "Work up to your ability, and don't be satisfied with less than your best." "Don't waste your talents." "We and the kids are proud of a job well done." "Do your best. If you fail, start again." One honor student in this study had failed at one area several times, but kept trying until she finally "made it." Several parents said that if a child is encouraged to do well in all things, then failure in one subject will not completely destroy self-confidence. Most students in this study, however, had not had any significant experience with academic failure.

While all parents agreed that academic achievement was important and that they had done all they could to impart that value, most parents seemed to naively say, "I don't have to do anything about encouraging studying." All parents agreed that their values had been internalized by their high-achieving children to the extent that their high-achieving children wanted to achieve. Their children had come to believe that they were actually responsible for educating themselves. Students were led to believe that it was not their parents' responsibility to see that their work was completed and of excellent quality. "Our child is educating himself. We are not educating him." "_____ is self-motivated." "_____ is a personally driven high achiever." "Our son is overconcerned about achieving." "_____ is an academic perfectionist." "Our daughter presses herself to do her best. It's

her make-up. Her pressure is internal." "_____ puts too much pressure on herself to achieve."

Parents seemed to take little or no credit for the academic accomplishments of their children. However, analysis of the data revealed the network of expectations, family tradition, and guidelines that were present as the child was growing up and achieving well. In discussing the mechanism for encouraging high achievement, parents saw themselves as providing a network of support that would support their child's upward direction in achievement. "Get them interested and then do all you can to encourage them." "Encourage strong points." "Where possible make allowances for weak points." "Praise as you go along." "Be positive." "Remember you won't always succeed at everything."

One parent summarized his feelings by saying, "Failure in one area isn't that big a thing if you're doing enough things that you have success in."

There was mixed response from parents regarding the area of praise and reward. Most parents believed that praise was an important part of their perspective. "Praise as you go along." "Be positive." "Encourage strong points." "Encourage them." "It was one dollar for each A." However, two parents said, "We don't praise much. It's expected that they'll do well." "We don't believe in any reward for good grades."

A general conclusion about parental perspective regarding academic achievement was that a close, supportive family environment

enhances academic achievement. The interviews and home settings revealed that:

1. Most parents were proud of their "close," traditional, and/or religious homes where moral values were clearly defined and taught. In this teaching, it was not so much a religious liturgy that was stressed but teaching by living and human interaction that was valued. The caring spirit, and shared human interests encouraged by family and religious activity, were more valued than a recognition of the formal institutions of home and church or temple.

2. While academic achievement was stressed by all parents, there was general concern that the high-achiever child be a well-rounded person and that high achievement be considered as only one of the child's goals in life.

3. The home settings and interviews revealed that a child's physical appearance and social graces were also stressed as important factors in the child's total development as a person.

4. Developing a sense of humor and being able to laugh at oneself was considered as an important personality trait by many parents. Most parents were concerned that their children would become too serious about academic success and therefore "miss" becoming a well-rounded, socially and emotionally integrated human being.

5. Parental perspective regarding the school setting stressed encouraging children to ask teachers to explain difficult lessons. Parents unanimously cited the importance of asking questions in class and paying strict attention to explanations that were made. Parents

unanimously agreed about the importance of supporting good teachers and of personally being involved in the actual workings of the school, such as being involved in the PTA or being classroom parents.

Discussion

Responses to the three major points of focus stressed that learning had been emphasized more than acquiring a high grade. However, if children had been asked about their goal, it is likely that they would admit working for A's. It was the parental perspective, which had stressed learning as a continuous process, that was a more desirable focus than the acquiring of a grade.

Regarding the students' internalizing of personal responsibility for learning, the parental perspective, tradition, and home atmospheres of the subjects studied encouraged students to want to learn all that they were capable of learning. The continual encouragement for "doing one's best" was a major factor in the parents' perspective for themselves and for their children.

Question 2: Parental Perspective--Guidelines

The overwhelming response of parents regarding guidelines for the encouragement of high academic achievement was that no guidelines were needed. Typical responses included the following: "My child is a self-motivated high achiever." "My child has over-concern about high academic achievement." "I am only a bystander, an observer in my child's high-achievement experience." "I am concerned that he does not get enough sleep because of studying so late." "We never had any

rules, only a few loose guidelines." "We had no guidelines because the kids did it for themselves." "My role is to get her to quit studying." "He puts so much pressure on himself--we never pressure him." What seemed to be self-motivation to parents might also have been students fulfilling parent expectations. As one parent summarized, "She's been a good daughter, she knows what we want."

Some parents indicated that certain guidelines had been established when the children were in elementary school, but as they became older, parental guidelines for such things as bedtime hours and general organization of living which encouraged good learning were no longer needed. "When the children were young, it was 9 o'clock to bed. But now they know that they get tired without sleep." "We urged him to get his homework out of the way so he'd have time for other activities. If you don't get it done early, you have to do it after the dinner hour. As he went through school there was more time required for homework and less for activities. But by then, he had developed the habits." "The kids learned how much sleep they needed to function effectively and what schedule suited them best." "Our son goes to bed early and gets up early to study. That's his style and he found out that this works for him." "_____ came home to get her studying done first, then she could go out to play. She still does it that way." "If you study everyday you retain more than if you try to study all at once. _____ found that out." Enforcing the message of personal responsibility, one parent commented, "Study yourself, it depends on you." One parent, whose two children had been valedictorians, said, "Once when he was in

fourth grade, we found he was a year behind in math. So we sat down, both my husband and I, and worked with him every night, one of us on each side of him till he was caught up and ahead. We knew he had high ability but was just lazy." The children knew that if they were ever again to fall behind, there would be additional work sessions with their parents.

While most parents insisted that they did not "pressure" their children to succeed academically, it was evident to the researcher that these students really had little choice but to succeed. With a network of positive reinforcement established, parental goals were being carried out. One father commented, "Once you decide on the value you want to stress, be positive about and work to see them become a reality."

Most parents indicated that by the time the child was in high school there was little need for parental regulation. Children regulated their own lives in terms of personal demands and interests. Since studying and acquiring high grades was clearly a personal priority for these students, parents no longer needed to be concerned about whether their children would see that studying was accomplished. Behind the modesty expressed by the parents there was a network of expectations that had provided an impulse for high achievement. Parents commented that it was their right to impose guidelines whenever they felt that they were needed. Parents said, "Occasionally I'll suggest that homework be done before some fun outing." "Since the children were fourteen, I haven't had to tell them to study."

With such parental perspective operating, one might ask whether or not students had any choice about being high achievers. Since parents felt that each of the students had high ability, and since the expectations of the parents were directed toward high achievement, this researcher feels that the students actually had very little choice. While parental perspective took into account students' interests, academic excellence was expected.

Parents concurred that the younger children received fewer guidelines than did older children. Most parents felt that there was gradual recession of their parental control with each succeeding child. Bedtimes got later, and general home regulations were not as rigidly enforced. "We changed our rules over the years." "As the children got older we didn't have to check on them as often." "The first one you're pretty strict with, and as you go along you're less strict with the others, partly because the older one can set an example, partly because of what they've done. You have more confidence in their ability to make intelligent decisions on their own." "We were more lax about everything with the younger child." "As the children got older, we didn't pay much attention to bedtimes." "It was 9 p.m. when they were younger. Now we have no guidelines." "You're more relaxed with the second one. You're less fearful of them being in danger."

There was mixed belief among parents about the performing of household chores. Some parents felt that all household members should help with household matters, while others, especially mothers who were at home all the time, felt that school was the child's "job" and caring



for the house was mother's job. In the former category, parents said, "All have to clean up their rooms." "We all share household chores." "Having household duties teaches responsibility and that's what they need to be good students."

However, several parents said, "We don't ask the kids to help at home." "The girls only do a few everyday things." "I do most of the housework." "The kids help when they have time."

Regarding television viewing, there was also mixed response. Most parents indicated that very little TV was watched by anyone in the house. Most had only a small television that was only occasionally turned on.

"We are not a TV family." "My kids tease me that I never know how to adjust our little TV--I never watch it." "We keep a TV in the closet for special events." "Our kids were never allowed to watch TV after school. They were to read or play out-of-doors." "We're a reading family. Nobody watches much TV."

Other parents said that television was turned on quite a lot in their homes. "We watch TV a lot." "TV can help with vocabulary and general learning." "Our son studies with the TV on loud. I don't know how he does it." "Kids learn a lot from TV."

Most parents commented that regulating television viewing was not a significant concern in their perspective about academic achievement. "I never have to check on the TV watching." "As the kids became older nobody watched much TV." "I don't worry about TV viewing." "He gets his work done--if he wants to watch TV, it's OK."

Some parents felt that guidelines they provided were given by example. With all parents studied at least one parent had been a model for high academic achievement. Several parents commented: "We didn't teach him [their child] anything. Our lives were models." "The work ethic was alive and well in our home." "We valued educated people, which set the stage for interest in reading and world affairs." "She saw her older sisters reading and studying a lot." "We read a lot and had family discussions." "My husband was always an A student, and still studies a great deal."

Parents in general were secure in their own position about guidelines for raising children and encouraging academic achievement. Strong family ties and specific cultural and religious orientations allowed parents to say and enforce, "A good portion of education has to come from the home. We felt they needed years of growth, social development, love and sharing as much as they needed the academic aspect." "This is what we expect to have done in our house." We say, "When you are out, we expect to know where to reach you at all times. We do the same for our kids." "We have a home rule which says the kids are home at 4 p.m. That's the social cut-off time. While I cooked supper, the kids studied. At least they were winding down at home." "I told the girls they couldn't get married till they were 25 years old and had an M.A." "After church we always had a family meeting time to plan the week's events and talk things out." "We always attended family camp for the last ten years. It's a spiritual and intellectual experience. Our church cares about how children are raised. As a

result, our kids care about how God wants them to be raised." "Our kids have come up with a strong set of moral values. They analyze what they do. Although our son was raised as a Christian he's going into the Jewish faith. He's marrying a Jewish girl." "We do have an outstanding church here. They have a strong youth leader. It has helped _____ establish some pretty high standards--very strong values." "We started them in parochial school. We emphasized religion when they were growing up." "We all went to church together. Even now they are grown up and away, they go to church and are involved in the activities and the music."

All parents supported schools and teachers especially in the presence of their children. All parents had been involved in classroom functions at sometime either as classroom parents or as parents assisting with some school experience. Parents supported and attended school functions regularly. "We attend all orchestra concerts." "We never miss a game our son is in." "We support the school in every way we could."

All parents believed that it was important that their feelings about their child's academic needs were being met by the school. They were willing to become involved in this matter in order to feel that the best possible experience would happen for their child. "We went to Board of Education meetings to see that our son could take a class that he needed." "I went to talk to the principal several times so that they would change the "rules" and allow _____ to take college classes his senior year." "I feel it's important that I know what's going on

in the school. I volunteered in the library so I would know the school better." "We always found out about the teachers of the next grade and recommended the one we thought would be best for _____. "I tried to tell them to put _____ in a higher math class. It took quite a while to get them to realize that he needed that."

There was mixed response regarding parental satisfaction with schools. Supportive comments included: "We moved here partly because of the excellent reputation of the schools." "_____ was fortunate to have good teachers who cared all the way through." "Not only were the schools good, but there were other bright, achieving kids here. So, if you were an all A student you weren't an odd ball. There are lots of smart kids." "When we went to talk with the teacher or principal, they were always cooperative and tried to help with the particular problem."

However, some parents reported concerns with the schools or teachers. "The teachers don't put themselves into it. They don't care, they just try for the easy way." "I'm disappointed." "One teacher in particular may be just washed out." "They waste so much time." "We just put our children into their hands to educate. It's a special occupation." "The schools are not that challenging. They just get along so easily." "They have a hard time when they change to college. They don't necessarily have a good foundation." "Here they stress tardiness and homework rather than learning. They've returned to school being an institution, not a learning institution. They house children not educate them." "I don't think they're challenged enough." "They have a program for identifying bright kids and then they don't do

anything about it." "I was always involved in the schools before I moved here. But here, the kids don't want me to get involved. They're [teachers] vindictive. The kids are afraid it might come back on them."

Parents believed that they should be available to their children on a day-to-day basis for helping the child be prepared for school. They did not do homework for their children, but provided a sounding board for ideas and assisted and encouraged when help was needed with specific assignments. "We helped occasionally." "I proofread, but never did the work." "We never gave her an answer, but we helped her find the answer." "Sometimes I checked over the homework." One parent commented, "_____ is smarter than me. He never has any homework. He always gets it done in school." The parents were amazed that their son got all A's and did not study at home.

Discussion

While an over-all priority for academic success pervaded the parental perspective, parents agreed that their guidelines had been provided to have their children develop independence and personal motivation in academic pursuits.

While most parents described themselves as bystanders in their child's high academic achievement, the data clearly reflect the fact that guidelines for living reflected a sense of order and attention to all matters that supported school achievement. It was clear that while parental guidelines had been given in the child's earlier years in

elementary school, few guidelines had been needed as the child was in the secondary level.

Since parents in this study had themselves experienced academic success, they had an understanding of what was needed in order to achieve. The close proximity of a large university may have added to the emphasis on and interest in academic matters by parents as well as by their children.

Question 3: Parental Perspective--Social and Domestic Determinants

This question was asked to discover what it was in the parents' background that had caused them to view academic achievements as they did. In all cases, the parents strongly supported academic achievement--both for themselves and for their children. While each parent was unique in terms of life experiences and personal make-up, in all families there was the similarity that at least one parent had a graduate degree. In 21 homes, both parents had achieved more than undergraduate education.

The influence of grandparents and each family's cultural tradition provided a propelling force in the direction of acquiring high academic achievement. "Education and doing well in school was stressed in both of our families." "All of our family is educated, and _____ felt that he had to follow suit." "My husband and I have a thirst for knowledge that was probably begun in our own children." "Our son's Grandpa is a college professor." "My father is a retired college president and my mother is a physician, and my uncle is also a

physician." "In my family we value how smart you are, not how much you have." "I'm an attorney and my girls always followed me around a lot. They learned that it was O.K. for a girl to become a professional. They could observe me or scribble with a paper and pencil." "My belief about achievement came initially from my parents." "We think highly of people who are high achievers." "_____ wanted to please us and his grandparents." "My parents did not have formal education themselves, but they viewed education as a way for a good life. They worked hard to send us to college."

Several mothers commented that a great deal of emphasis was not put on their own education. These mothers largely represented homes where a girl's academic achievement was not considered as important as a boy's achievement. In such families, cultural and religious tradition encouraged a girl to be a homemaker more than an honor student. "My parents didn't encourage my own education." "My mother wanted me to cook and have babies." "My parents weren't interested in my schooling. It was just my brother." "I was one of eleven children and my aunt and uncle raised me. So, whatever I decided to learn, it was on my own." "My parents didn't push school, but they were proud of me when I graduated from college."

Parents in this study were personally interested in learning. "We are a reading family." "I like to grow intellectually." "We are both educators, and I'm sure our professional training influenced our interest in learning." One child had commented at home, "When I'm an adult, I want to be as excited about learning as Dad is at 45." "We

all read a lot." "We have family discussions about international issues." "Learning in our home is fun."

Although the professional experience of many of the parents was in the academic realm, few had read material as parents that was related to child raising or academic achievement. Exposure to the ideas of Spock, Ginnot, Montessori, and others had occurred largely from college studies in psychology before the child-raising experience. While there was a general knowledge of child development, most parents only occasionally read current articles about raising well-adjusted, academically superior children. In general, parents followed their own "sense of parenting."

"I rarely read up on how to raise children." "Mostly we raised kids as we were raised." "Sometimes I read magazine articles, that's all." "In college I prepared to teach so I had courses in psychology then." "Occasionally I read about some aspect of parenting that we may be struggling with at a certain time, but I haven't followed any special method of raising children."

While parents felt that tradition was at least partly responsible for academic achievement, a few parents commented that genetic make-up was an important factor in academic superiority. "You have to have the basic ingredients for academic achievement." "He was just born smart." "I didn't do anything. He just came into the world that way." "You have to have the basic talent."

The importance of high school achievement as a sole indicator of future academic achievement can be questioned. As one father stated

about his own experience, "When I was in high school, the principal told my father that I could never get through college. Later on when I had completed my master's and received A's on everything that I had done, my father said to me, 'I wish _____ could see your record now. I wish he could see how wrong he was.' My father had never told me this in that five-year interval. Not knowing, it wasn't an incentive not to try." This particular father whom the researcher interviewed has four children who have all been honor students. His concluding comment was that "nobody teaches you how to be a parent. You just hope that your own parent-child experiences are real positive."

Discussion

While the importance of parental modeling of reading, thinking, and learning was stressed, family tradition and genetics were also cited. Each of these factors blended to produce a parent who was actively interested in learning and in high achievement. In turn, their children chose to follow the academic expectations that had been provided.

Even though most families were separated by many miles from grandparents and other relatives, the family influence for good academic achievement was probably the strongest factor in the parents' perspective. The term "family influence" may seem like an elusive factor in this analysis. However, it provided an academic nurturing that conveyed certain principles that were both a spoken and an unspoken part of the parental perspective. These principles included the work

ethic and pride in a job well done. Although the interview experience did not directly address issues of citizenry, parental discussions and life example encouraged good citizenship and preparing to meet future social responsibilities with knowledge and ambition. This perspective is the antithesis of an uncaring laissez-faire, unprepared attitude.

Question 4: Parental Perspective--Influence of Environmental Factors

Responses to this question clustered around these areas:

1. general parental management of the environment
2. the nature of the interaction
3. the reading experience

There was general agreement that parents should expose children to many experiences so that children could begin to select and develop their own areas of interest. Behind this idea is the possibility that a child will become competent in some areas that could ultimately, positively influence academic achievement. Parents felt that areas of excellence would spur self-confidence, interest, and happiness in life. This attitude would be reflected in academic success which, they said, is based on self-confidence and an interest in life.

"We exposed the kids to many things so that they could eventually choose for themselves." "Being good at something spurs areas that you're not so good in--even school subjects." "When the kids say, 'I want to,' then I encourage but don't push it." "She has lots of interests. I consciously did that." "Music lessons taught our son that you're never through. There's always a new key, a new style, a

new composition, or a new tonality or technique to master." "Suzuki violin helped develop a well-rounded child." "It was skills and social." "_____ was a star soccer player. He wanted to be a good student too."

Most parents felt that it was important not to pressure children into molds conceived by parents. "We suggested activities, and then the kids got into them if they were interested." "Let the kid say 'I want to.' Then encourage--not push it." "Keep their interests in mind. Don't push your parent wishes." "Never impose something on kids."

While encouraging academic excellence, most parents in this study worked for well-rounded development. "As a former teacher, I knew lots of high achievers who weren't well rounded. So early we stressed various activities." Another parent commented that her shy child enjoyed reading and was encouraged to join a Great Books Club to "help draw her out" with the use of skills possessed in reading. One child who found academic things easy was encouraged in music instruction where he "experienced unlimited challenge." Another parent encouraged manual work (i.e., auto mechanics) as a balance for the intellectual activity that had totally preoccupied the child. This parent felt that "manual" experience would help to balance the child's life and would "help to keep him from developing a sense of intellectual arrogance." Another mother said, "I spent a lot of time on handwork with _____." Parents in this study seemed to be interested in producing well-rounded young people who would be able to adapt to the

challenges of the "real world" as well as the academic challenges that they were able to master. To this end, parents often encouraged a variety of experiences, particularly in the arts and athletics.

The nature of the interaction described by parents stressed open communication. They said, "Talk with children on an 'adult' level, never 'down' to them." "We never used baby talk." "Kids understand what you want to tell them. You don't have to water it down." "We encouraged her to ask questions."

Factors in the interaction which parents said could account for transfer of parental perspective stressing academic excellence centered on communication. By establishing a climate for open exchange of ideas, a fertile ground for developing skills of thinking and analyzing was provided. To enhance such communication, the following thoughts were offered: "If you do something wrong as a parent, admit it." "Let them [the child] know you trust them." "Let them know you love them." "Do things with them. Don't just give them things they can do themselves." "Treat the child as you would like to be treated." "What we did was as important as what we said." "Encourage conversation with extended family members and with adults other than parents." "We have lots of discussions around the dining room table." "Our discussions help him not to take life so seriously. I think you have to have a sense of humor about yourself."

Parents cited the importance of being human receivers of their child's thoughts and actions. Several ways of putting this idea into practice were suggested by the parents; these included: (1) "listening

to a child read a book and sharing his ideas about it," and (2) "having a child perform music (e.g., Suzuki method) while we listened and appreciated what was heard." Time spent with the child was considered extremely important in the perspective of the parents studied.

In line with the parent acting as human receiver, the idea of the mother being at home when the child returned from school was seen as very important by many parents. Regarding this matter, parents said, "Feel what your kids are doing is important." "You need the parent to listen and know you're there." "Children need emotional support when they come home from school because anxiety is a part of the learning experience." "When they first come home from school, if they have something to say, that's when they'll say it." "A listening parent after school can provide the morale needed to overcome difficulties." "It is important to plan time alone with each child." One child had commented to his mother, "I'm surrounded by an environment where I'm appreciated." "My wife would be here when the kids got home from school to listen to the jibber from kindergarten to high school." One father said, "By the time you get home from work they can't recall that a thing they did all day had any merit. They say, 'It's old hat. I've already related it once. I can only tell you Dad it's all over.'" Only one mother expressed an exception to the more typical comments about being at home and with the children. "I worked. My mother had been the traditional mother, always at home. But I haven't been that kind of mother. In some ways, my kids are better off for it. They've tried more things on their own."

Through religious training, sport team involvement and music instruction, some parents felt that the nature of interaction with other adults was as important as involvement with the skills of the activity. Referring to a music lesson, "The teacher would give him five or ten extra minutes, he'd appreciate that, and they developed quite a relationship." "In Boys Brigade _____ spent a lot of time with our son. He'd say, 'I think you can be a good leader in your squad. This is your responsibility. These are the things I want you to do.' Later a scout leader said, 'Do you think you might be interested in engineering?' Then he related this in engineering. At this point _____ thinks it's engineering for him." "She was fortunate to have had some excellent relationships with a lot of very capable people." "People helping kids don't have to be brilliant, just people who are willing to show an interest and to share a talent."

As well as planning time to be with their children, parents agreed that an environment should be provided so that the child could be completely alone if he wanted to be. "In a hectic, noise-filled environment, there exists little time for reflection and personal thinking." Such experience is needed, parents felt, in order for optimum learning and high academic achievement to occur.

Parents also stressed organization. "We plan a household schedule." "I'm a neat person and I expect the kids to be neat as well."

Reading was also seen as an important factor in the perspective of all parents studied. Comments included: "You must have reading and

writing materials available if you want the child to achieve." "I don't think you can be a high achiever unless you like to read." "Reading is the most important preparation for a job, for college, or for grad school." "We subscribe to many magazines." "Reading takes more personal energy than TV viewing." "We read to the children for one or two hours straight, not just children's books, but informative books." And "We had a special family tradition for reading as a family at certain times like Christmas Eve or Sunday afternoons." "Our whole family reads a lot." "We said read. It doesn't matter what you read, but read." "Her Dad read and sang to her, even several hours on some nights." "The kids always have been to the library regularly since they were small." "We taught them to read early at age two with comic books. They still love comics." "We buy lots of books." "We made her an alphabet book before she was born." "The kids see their grandparents a lot, and they subscribe to many magazines." Only one parent said, "I rarely read for pleasure. I don't have time. And I rarely read to my daughter. What I read is professional material at my office and I hardly have time for that."

Several parents also referred to mathematics as being an area stressed along with reading. They felt that excellence in these areas was essential for excellence in general academic achievement.

Discussion

General parental management of the environment:

The first point in the discussion is that parental perspective was clearly that parents should encourage many interests for their

children, taking care that the children's preferences are acknowledged. Parents assumed that a variety of experience was, in fact, good. All children had experienced enriched opportunity in areas of athletics and the arts. The parental perspective seemed to find the parents themselves with a "zest for life" and enriching experiences and wanting their children to experience the same. No one questioned the benefits of such enriching experiences. Apparently in spite of the children running in many directions for activities, their academic experience was not at all harmed because top grades were received. In keeping with the parental belief about leading lives of order, parental perspective must have guarded against a child becoming over-extended.

While parents were quick to say that it was the child's choice to participate in special activities, the researcher observed that the over-all expectations and parental perspectives had nonverbal and generally traditional and cultural ways of steering children into both outstanding academic and "nonacademic" (sports, fine arts) performance. There were supportive comments like, "You would be good at soccer because you're a good runner," or "You have an excellent ear for music," or "When I was in the orchestra it was a wonderful experience."

The second point of analysis refers to the interaction of parents and their children. Parents in this study saw themselves as maintaining communication which enhanced the learning-thinking process. It was a way of life for them. From casual discussions at the dinner table to formal reading sessions, there was conscious effort in the

parental perspective to transfer a love of learning and active thinking to their children.

Parents in this study expressed that parenting was a priority in their lives, and so they naturally planned time to be "human receivers" of their children's ideas and feelings. As one parent explained, "Being a parent is the most important thing in my life." They seemed to feel that as much as a plant needs sun and water, a child needs encouragement and communication. No parent seemed to feel "put upon" as if the children had been a necessary "evil." Parents seemed to exude a genuine enthusiasm for the communication experience that they had enjoyed with their children. There had been a great deal of one-to-one involvement of a parent with a child. Parents spoke with enjoyment about these experiences and felt that they had been a factor in the superior academic performance of their children. Only one parent expressed a slightly differing sentiment with the comment that "Children need a lot of love and attention. I enjoyed giving it, but another time I might give less and have some more time for me."

Of all of the areas discussed in the interviews of this study, none showed more enthusiastic and convinced perspective than did the topic of reading. There was unanimous agreement that family influence which encouraged enjoyment of reading had been a major factor in the academic success of the parents themselves and of their children. There were no instances of parents or children who had not enjoyed the reading experience since early childhood. All children had experienced a growing and continual emphasis on reading and the discussion of what

had been read. Parents did all that could be done to help provide appropriate reading material.

In summary, parental perspective showed intense--not casual--interest in the

1. organization of home and enrichment experiences for children
2. attention to open, thought-producing communication
3. reviewing of reading experiences

While providing a network of expectations in the above areas, parental perspective emphasized doing things with the child rather than to him or for him. The atmosphere of the family was not to bend the will or personality of the child to a preconceived notion held by the parents, but to provide opportunities for thinking and learning from which the child's own interests could develop.

Question 5: Parental Perspective--General Comments Related to High Academic Achievement

Overwhelming agreement among parents was that parenting was a priority in their lives. Some said: "Being a parent is the most important thing in my life." "We derive pleasure from being with our kids and watching them grow and learn." "We like our kids as people."

In addition to a commitment of parenting, parents agreed that the child had to want to learn in order to achieve on his own. Parents mentioned the inhibiting factors of over-protecting their children, and the importance of challenges which initiate self-confidence and self-determination. "It's the attitude of parents and children for learning that counts, not intelligence." Typical summary comments included:

"The child should know that he is an independent, self-responsible unit." "Kids have to find success themselves." "Let the child learn from observing and experiencing life." "Don't carry the kids around over-protecting them." "You have to study yourself." "It depends on you." "Respect your child's ideas."

While parental expectations were high, there was an unconditional love and unanimous agreement that it is important to "let children know that they are always loved." "Accept the child as he is." "We love him just as he is. We encouraged him rather than tried to mold his life." "Love is a basis for 'freeing one to live, love, and think.'" "You can't give too much love." "Let them know you love them."

Some parents commented about not giving their children so many material things that they had difficulty establishing and working toward a goal. Specific comments in relation to this perspective included: "We never felt that we had to give our kids everything." "We made him save his allowance, and rarely loaned him any money." "There's too much materialism in this country." "Kids have too much." "They have to learn the value of working hard."

Of the population of 30 parents in this study, five were Oriental (Chinese 4, Korean 1). In each of these homes, parents concurred that their Oriental family tradition strongly supported education as an important vehicle for a "better life." "You must acquire some kind of achievement. That's the goal of life." "That's the way education was emphasized in Taiwan." "Education means you get

the job you want. One thing is connected to the other." "Education was emphasized for yourself and for the next generation. That's the cultural part." "The important thing is that you don't have everything now but later in life when you can earn it yourself." "Our kids were always in the top math competition. Usually 8 of 10 finalists were Chinese. These kids are not that talented but they work." "It's the attitude of the parents and children toward education and learning instead of intelligence that makes the difference."

Summary

The findings of this study are grouped into five areas:

1. how parents view academic achievement
2. parental perspective--guidelines
3. parental perspective--its social and domestic determinants
4. parental perspective--influence in environmental factors and interactions related to academic achievement
5. parental perspective--general comments about producing high-achieving children

1. Parental perspective--how parents view academic achievement

Parents in this study viewed academic achievement as very important. Children were generally told to "do their best." Parents felt that it was important that the child develop personal interest in academic achievement. Being willing to work hard, to have goals for academic achievement, and to have a supportive family life were basic beliefs of the parents studied. Additionally, parents encouraged the

development of a well-rounded child who had strength in many areas, not just in academics.

2. Parental perspective--guidelines

The parents in this study provided guidelines that supported high achievement (adequate rest, attention to good organizational habits, and limited television viewing) when their children were in the formative years through elementary school. As the children entered the secondary level, few guidelines were needed because the children had internalized the challenge of high achievement. Later-born children had fewer guidelines than the first born. Guidelines were often given by the modeling of expected behavior by the parents. The guidelines were provided by parents in order to develop independence and personal motivation in academic pursuits.

3. Parental perspective--social and domestic determinants

While each parent was unique as a result of personal and family experiences, there was similarity in family tradition and/or expectation for academic excellence. In all families studied, at least one parent had a graduate degree, and in many cases both parents had earned more than an undergraduate degree. In only one home, a mother had earned only a high school diploma. Reading and thought-provoking discussions were common in their lives.

4. Parental perspective--influence in environmental factors and interactions related to academic achievement

Responses to this question included three points of focus:

(1) general parental management of environmental factors, (2) the nature of the interaction, and (3) the reading experience.

Parents agreed that their role was to encourage a variety of experiences for their child with particular attention to the child's interests. They suggested that success in a variety of activities would help the child to gain self-confidence and interest in life needed for academic achievement.

Open communication and discussion with the parent as "receiver" of the child's thoughts and actions were cited as important factors for educational and intellectual development. Over 90% of the parents in this study had arranged for a parent, usually the mother, to be at home during the child's pre-school years and also later, when the child came home from school. Parents stressed establishing a climate for open exchange of ideas which, they said, enhanced the development of thinking and analyzing skills.

Reading was an important factor in the lives of parents studied and was considered the most important factor stressed in the raising of their children.

5. General comments about producing high-achieving children

Overwhelming agreement among parents was that parenting had been a priority in their lives. High expectations, having the children develop independence in their academic skills, and providing a basis of

unconditional love in the home were factors that were important in the encouragement of high academic achievement.

The Findings: Comparison of Two Types of
Parental Perspective--Conventional
(Hills) and Analytical (Smiths)

Introduction

In analyzing interview data, it became evident that while all parents encouraged high academic achievement, there were subtleties of perspective that could best be described by selecting two families that typified two major perspectives, which were described by Newberger (1977) as conventional and analytical. (See Chapter I, pp. 6-7.) The conventional perspective sees children as "children." The parent uses authority and tradition to deal with the expectations and practices of parenting. Rules and orders are important in this perspective. Pre-conceived, externally derived expectations are a basis for parental activity.

In an analytical perspective, a parent concentrates more on meeting specific needs than on fulfilling formal roles and decisions. Personal needs become less important than working on group needs. A continuous process of growth and change characterizes individuals and their relationships.

While names have been changed to protect confidentiality, the perspectives described help to clarify the findings. Parents interviewed represented varying degrees of the two perspectives described in this chapter.

Findings: Comparison

The Hills and the Smiths are two families that both want their children to achieve highly, but they differ in the ways that they encourage that goal.

The major goal of the Hills was to have their children achieve well in school. They viewed their task as instilling motivation and discipline in their children by informing them of expectations. The parents' perspective and assumed responsibility was that of creating the right conditions which would encourage high achievement. The Hills said, "We recognize the importance of math, and we read to them all the time. It gives them love and learning. We were willing to be involved."

The dilemma for the Hills was that while they felt a compulsion to do everything possible to have the child excel academically, they realized that for the child to excel a sense of motivation, psychic energy, and persistence had to come from within. "Achievement is up to the kids. The parents are there to encourage. I hope they excel because that's the important part." As a result, the Hills' perspective presents two messages: (1) self-motivation is the most important aspect of high academic achievement, and (2) parents are key agents for encouraging high academic achievement.

The Smiths are also concerned that their children succeed highly in school, but this is not their primary concern. They have emphasized more strongly that their child should be a good citizen who

espouses all that the Christian ethic suggests. Mr. Smith commented that:

We never assumed our child to be a high-achieving student. We just wanted him to apply himself to progress well and to be a good person. . . . Once when our daughter was in eighth grade, the teacher called to say she had picked up thrown food in the school hall. The teacher was so impressed that she had to call and tell me that. . . . It's so easy to show no respect for others' property--like you're not responsible for that coat falling on the floor so ignore it. We encouraged our children to be responsible and respectful.

While both parents are concerned with academic success, there are differences in emphasis. The Hills are concerned with developing a child's sense of personal self-discipline for achievement, while the Smiths emphasize having their children follow the work and religious ethics espoused in the home.

Each family has a particular outlook that governs its perception of high academic achievement and the ways of encouraging that goal. These perspectives exemplify a particular outlook and reflect the ideologies of authority and personal motivation in relation to academic achievement.

The Hills' idea of authority and the role of parents is described by Newberger's (1977) Conventional Conception of Parental Awareness: Parent-Child Relationship:

The roles of parent and child are differentiated from the actions of each other. For example, "I do as a parent what my tradition says is right for you as a child, and you do as a child what my tradition expects of children for their parents." (p. 174)

The Hills have a clear understanding that both parents and children have their own responsibilities: the parents to encourage and the children to study. Parents are a source of guidance: "We were there

to encourage the strengths of each of our children. It was their job to study." The Hills always felt that they wanted to be in control and to be listened to by the school and by their children. "We kept at these requests. We went in to the teachers as often as was necessary to get the job done." The Hills were also role models for their children: "My wife and I were both high achievers. I was admitted with National Scholarship to Harvard. . . . Reading was the main thing in my life."

With parental involvement and parental modeling of academic excellence, the Hills were a source of influence that constantly directed and molded the lives of their children.

With the Hills, a certain distance is maintained because of the prescribed roles. For the Smiths, the parents must be in touch with the personal life of the child so that sharing takes place between the parent and child. Mr. Smith said, "We, especially their mother, [were] always at home to help them talk out their problems." In some respects, the parental perspective in the Smiths' home is the inverse of what is found in the Hills'. The Smiths' priority is to have the children know that they are following the mutually defined guidelines for academic excellence. The Hills set rules that expect academic excellence.

The Hills stress the consistency of high achievement, while the Smiths do not stress high achievement and were, in fact, surprised at the fact that their child achieved so highly. "We never assumed that

he would be a high-achieving student. We were surprised that he was in the top ten graduating."

The Hills see their role as "acting on" their children and see their children as recipients of external directions coming from parents and from the environment. The Hills believe that once the ideas of academic excellence have been set down by parents and the child has internalized those ideas, the possibility for variation from what is expected is very little.

The notion that you are getting all A's means you are working too hard is silly. It's not the grade, it's perfection and self-satisfaction that counts. When our child received a poor grade, it was because he was sick. There was anxiety for him and for us.

In this perspective, the child internalizes the parent's set of values and expectations. That direction is not established in collaboration with the child, but is "guided" by the parent. The child is the apprentice and the parent the master craftsman. The parents have the skill to fashion the masterpiece.

One difference between the Hills' and the Smiths' perspective is that with the Hills, the child does not play an initiating role in his development of academic goals, whereas for the Smiths, the child's role and decision to pursue academic excellence is crucial.

For the Smiths there is a joint venture between the parent and child. There is also a joint experience between the child and significant others. It is these relationships that help the child develop a sense of self and a sense of academic pursuit along with being a "good" person. Mr. Smith said,

My father always worked to draw out the grandchildren about the benefits of things they were learning or not learning . . . so I guess I would have to say that there are a lot of people that related to him.

The communication that develops between the parent and child in the Smiths' home is seen as more important than any limitations that either parent or child sees in the other. In this instance, children and parents can learn from each other, and children view parents as still learning and growing. However, in the Hills' home, more parental control was emphasized. In the Smiths' home, communication was valued more highly than the "law and order" presentation of the Hills' home.

Academic achievement is seen by the Hills as important because it provides skills for success in later life. "I went into chemistry because I heard that chemical engineers made more money than anybody."

Once again, an external agent is the motivating factor. What is important for success is seemingly an objective standard, such as the status of a particular college.

_____ was accepted on an early application to Harvard where he had wanted to go since he was six. We took a trip there and it was clear he fell in love with it partly because it's an incredibly interesting place.

Certainly the Smiths have instilled a psychological radar to help their children be aware of the needs of others and to be "good students" and "good persons." "We try to encourage him to be respectful. It's so easy in the hustle and bustle of today to show no respect to anyone. We want him to be a good person." But this detection goes beyond the level of approval or disapproval of others to a level of internal motivation and academic achievement.

In discussing a parent's important input to achievement, Mr. Hill conveyed to his children: "These are the things you want to be positive about. These are the values we stress. Be positive and work to see your values and capabilities become a reality."

Grades are much more important to the Hills than they are to the Smiths. While the Hills stressed "good study habits needed for academic success," the Smiths felt that "study habits are important for helping children develop their own lives."

Summary

In both the Hill and Smith families, parental perspective was a significant influence in the child's experience of high academic achievement. Both families wanted their children to be high achievers and to develop the internal motivation, energy, and persistence necessary to accomplish high achievement. However, the perspectives differ in the emphasis of parent authority versus personally developed motivation which results from parent-child interaction and related environmental interaction.

Of the parents interviewed in this study, varying degrees of conventional (inner-directed) versus analytic (other-directed) perspective are evident. The comparison of the Hill and Smith families is made to increase understanding of these dimensions. It also is intended to help parents develop an understanding of their perspective toward academic achievement.

The two types of parents discussed here certainly do not reflect all forms of parenting. An analysis of different types of

parenting could help parents to reflect about their own child and about their parent-child relationship.

One might hypothesize that the students in this study were academically successful, partly because of the parents' consistency and clarity of parental perspective on academic achievement. In spite of differences in family perspectives, the Hill and Smith students went off to college with a strong sense of academic purpose as well as an appreciation for their parents' contribution to that endeavor.

The students in this study have not yet graduated from college; however, the interviews discussed some of the older siblings and gave a clue to the end result of this experience of academic excellence. Most parents encouraged children to achieve well so that they could go to college, have a better life, and find a fulfilling, rewarding job that would enable them to not only enjoy the comforts of the life style to which they were accustomed, but to possibly surpass the accomplishments of their parents. On an over-all sense, parents felt that their children needed to be well educated in order to meet societal responsibilities with a knowledgeable background.

While careful attention to academic achievement occurred, there was not always fulfillment. "Our older two graduated from college--one in English Literature and one in Psychology--and they don't have a job yet. I just hope they find one soon, or decide they want to go to graduate school." "Like any other young people they are not very happy about the whole economic and political times."

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research has been to study the educational perspective of parents of high-achieving students. That perspective has been examined in terms of the beliefs and behaviors of the parents.

Throughout this study, it has been evident that parents provided a structured network of expectations and a support system in which these children were raised. That support system is, in fact, the perspective of dedicated parenthood and an unfailing commitment to having their children make the most of themselves. Given at least average academic ability, the parental perspective was that with commitment, energy, and using the experiences of their own family tradition, their children would become academically successful.

Parents saw academic achievement not only as a childhood learning experience, but their perspective included projected hopes and plans for their children: an occupation with prestige, earnings, good mental and physical health, and general happiness.

Findings

1. How parents viewed academic achievement

Parents stressed learning and not the acquiring of grades. Learning was presented as a fulfilling, satisfying, and pleasurable activity.

Parents encouraged their children to do their best. They believed that given average intelligence, the result of doing one's best would bring high achievement.

Parents saw academic achievement as part of a larger goal of the child's adjustment to life. They believed that academic achievement is encouraged through a variety of life experiences.

2. Parental guidelines

While most parents initially indicated that their children were self-motivated high achievers, a closer examination disclosed a network of expectations and a support system. This network included

1. parent expectations for learning and high academic achievement
2. home guidelines that encouraged academic achievement and insisted upon organization for living
3. family tradition for valuing education and high achievement
4. encouragement of family discussions
5. emphasis on reading
6. effective parenting as the life priority of the parents

Over 90% of the parents interviewed said that providing guidelines for television viewing had not been an issue in their homes.

The parents watched television on a limited basis (news, specials, occasional programs). Children seemed to follow the patterns of television viewing of their parents. Time spent reading and discussing issues with others rather than watching television was considered a positive factor for encouraging academic achievement.

While parental guidelines pervaded the child's early life, time had partially erased the need for guidelines which had earlier set the stage for academic achievement. As children grew to independence and internalized the value of learning, few parental guidelines were needed.

Parents supported schools and teachers. They intervened as much as necessary to assure the meeting of their child's needs as they perceived them. Their involvement with the school included formal visits with teachers and administrators as well as informal discussions with school staff while they acted as classroom parents and library assistants.

3. Analysis of parental perspective--social and domestic determinants

The educational perspective of parents in this study reflected their own personal life experience. This experience can be described in terms of the six points that Brim (1965) cited as determinants of parental perspective: (1) health and physical ability, (2) strength and size, (3) intelligence, (4) beliefs, (5) attitudes, and (6) motives. Brim suggested that each parent's behavior is further influenced by the normative attitudes of family members, the degree to

which they are bound to the traditions of their culture, and the limitations placed on them by their socioeconomic circumstances.

While parents in this study represented varying experience in the points cited above, all parents were influenced by their family tradition which supported academic excellence. They were bound to the tradition of their culture and worked to encourage and to afford educational opportunity for their children.

4. Analysis of environmental factors and interaction factors related to academic achievement

Parents in this study maintained a sense of control of their children's environment in the formative years through elementary school and stood ready to reinforce their original influence if needed. Parents encouraged special interests, development of thought process by reading and conversation, and generally demonstrated that they wanted, and were willing, to control the child's environment in order to produce the desired result of optimum learning and academic achievement.

Parents wanted to be able to participate in and to monitor the child's growth rather than to feel that the child was just being fed, entertained, and given independence to allow parents maximum time for adult life away from children. They wanted to experience and to know what was going on in their child's life in order to assist in the growth process.

The interaction described by parents was one of open communication. Parents did not talk down to children but worked for mutual understanding in parent-child communication. They took time to develop

an understanding relationship and to determine their children's interests and ideas about life.

This parent-child experience seemed to enhance rather than to deter the child's own peer involvement. That is to say, the time the parents spent with their children created a social adaptability that helped the child with general adjustment to life and to the academic setting and to help channel the child's goals to include the importance of learning. Parents generally agreed that parenting and encouraging their children was the general goal of their lives.

Conclusions

1. How parents viewed academic achievement

Most parents in this study held advanced degrees. They had experienced pride in their own academic accomplishment and had an understanding of factors that would be important for encouraging their children's academic achievement. They spoke with confidence about their beliefs. An understanding of this perspective helps to explain parental emphasis on the "realness" of learning versus a token value of grades given by a teacher.

Because this study involved a select population of parents, most of whom were educators by profession, its findings cannot be generalized to all parents. The proximity of a large university was the major reason for many of the parents being educators.

2. Parental guidelines

Parental guidelines became less needed as the child grew to independence and internalized the need for learning. Once the result of high academic achievement had occurred, the child's pride in the accomplishment of a "job well done" perpetuated the excellence.

3. Analysis of parental perspective--social and domestic determinants

The perspective of parents in this study reflected both personal and societal dimensions. The personal dimension emphasized family tradition for encouraging their own academic achievement as well as the academic achievement of their children. Individual characteristics and motivations further influenced the personal dimension.

The societal dimension influencing parental perspective resulted from the historical time span in which these parents lived. With an average age of 45 to 50, most parents in this study had been born before World War II. During the decades of their own growing to adulthood, there was an escalation of social changes that began to affect the family unit in such a way as to cause decreasing prominence of parental influence and an increase in the influence of peers and television. Some of these changes include urbanization, increased child labor laws, a reduction in apprentice systems, an increased need for commuting, centralizing of schools, increased permissiveness, the influence of television, and the delegation of professionalization of child care (Bronfenbrenner, 1970). Other influencing factors include the rise of divorce and the emergence of new life styles. All of these

changes caused a decrease in the contact between parents and their children.

The parents studied in this research demonstrated a high priority on time spent with their children. In spite of personal commitments and professional or societal involvements, they considered time with their children a priority.

4. Analysis of environmental factors and interaction factors related to academic achievement

The parents in this study represented middle- and upper-middle-class homes. Not only was there family expectation for high academic achievement, but mechanics of home management were geared toward supporting such achievement. Time and space for study were integrated into the style of living.

Most mothers were able to stay at home with their children when they were in pre-school and elementary school. While most of these mothers had professional training, they chose to be at home during the formative years of their children. They believed that building morale and being a receiver of the child's thoughts and actions during the formative years would help to develop the confidence and communication experience needed for later success in school and in life.

Findings of the Interview Experience and Related Forms

From the parents' interview and information forms, it could be seen that there was general parental agreement between parents in each

family regarding the importance of learning and high academic achievement. Over 90% of the families represented closely knit, nuclear families where emotional support and parental cohesiveness were evident. Fathers and mothers both regularly read to and talked with their children.

As high school years came, there was more differentiation in ways in which parents individually assisted. While a father might be best skilled in reviewing a mathematics assignment, a mother might offer suggestions for writing a theme. The general parental perspective was that while students were guided to work independently, parents were always interested and were always available to assist.

All homes where interviews occurred appeared to be functioning in a very organized way. Homes were clean, decorated attractively, and included the special interests of family members in the decor. Parents seemed pleased, if not honored, to be asked about their views related to the high academic achievement of their children. They spoke with a secure delivery and although they spoke extemporaneously, there was a sense of organization about their thoughts. They spoke with pride and conviction. In addition, there was general agreement between the parents in each family unit about the importance of academic achievement and about ways of encouraging such achievement.

Recommendations--Discussion

Before school age, the amount of parental care invested in children differs as much as five times from family to family (Hill & Stafford, 1974). With this knowledge, educators may more easily

understand that in a school setting, children show differing reactions to educational experiences. They bring differing perspectives about academic achievement with them when they enter school.

In seeking educational success and equality of opportunity for all students, there has been a serious oversight on the part of educators in minimizing or ignoring parental perspective toward academic achievement. Research offers conclusive evidence that parental influence on academic achievement is crucial, yet educators make little use of this information. Coleman's (1974) conclusion that "the total effect of the home is greater than the total effect of school" on a child's achievement typifies such studies.

When the topic of educational equality emerges, educators are quick to take a "band aid" approach to patch up the inequalities. If "Johnny" comes from a poor district in socioeconomic status, legislators provide stipends to offset the educational disadvantage. When there is discussion about individual differences of IQ, race, language, and reading ability, educators organize remedial programs to help equalize the inequalities of ability or experience. Why hasn't the educational system addressed the more subtle yet powerfully important inequality of the parent-child experience as it relates to academic achievement?

There is no simple answer to this question. While some factors in the parental perspective are subjective and intangible, some are easily quantifiable. These factors cross over lines of socioeconomic status, IQ, and race. This study has shown that these factors include

adult-child communication, parent-child reading experiences, and family beliefs and involvement in the educational process.

While schools are charged with the assignment of having children learn, there is the accompanying charge of valuing learning, wanting to learn, knowing how to learn, acquiring knowledge, and then behaving according to that knowledge. These charges are an unrealistic demand upon educators without the understanding and support of parents. Realizing that parents are important partners in shaping the child's academic experience, is it possible to build a profile of parent perspective that optimizes academic achievement? How could such a profile be used to encourage more parents to develop such a perspective?

This researcher suggests that an affirmative response to both questions is desirable and that educators and parents need to work together to develop such profiles. While no cause-effect relationships have been established by the findings of this study, some consistencies of perspective have been noted. They need to be interpreted in terms of (1) What are the important findings? and (2) What can educators do to use this information for future improvement in academic achievement? Such analysis would offer increased awareness of the interactions involved in the home-school-community experience and would be used in working out parent profiles.

Parents influence academic achievement. Walberg (1984) reported that in a synthesis of 2,575 studies about achievement, parents either directly or indirectly influence learning in the following

ways: student ability, student motivation, quality of instruction, amount of instruction, psychological climate, academically stimulating home environment, peer group with academic interests, goals, activities, and television exposure. Knowing this, and using the findings of this research to develop home-school goals about achievement, the following conditions would need to be considered:

1. emphasizing learning and understanding with a purpose, not just the acquiring of grades
2. viewing academic achievement as only one of many goals in life
3. defining a child's best potentials and best achievements and helping to see that the "best" is attained (profiles of a child's strengths and interests could assist in the formation of goals)
4. planning a network of expectations and positive reinforcement
5. encouraging meaningful interactions with cultural or family association; where there is an absence of these ties, a substitute experience might be considered
6. encouraging parent involvement in the schools
7. reviewing communication opportunities for children
8. reviewing and developing skills of parenting
9. assessing attitudes of parents and students toward learning
10. encouraging students to have a sense of responsibility for their own achievement

Parents in this study unanimously endorsed the conclusions cited above. Among the factors that produced mixed responses were the following: the effect of competitiveness, use of praise and reward, home responsibilities for children, use of television, and style of perspective (inner-other directed).

Parent involvement was an important part of the perspective of those parents in this study. No parents stood by saying, "It's up to the schools to teach my child." All were involved in the teaching-learning experience and continually encouraged the physical, mental, social, and psychological aspects of growth in academic achievement.

While it is frequently discussed that education is expensive, it should also be viewed as an investment. If viewed in this light, parents and educators may begin to better plan mutual goals for improving academic achievement. For several decades, reports have shown that academic achievement in the United States has fallen below that of many European and Asian nations. High achievement can bring economic returns for both individuals and the nation. When individuals, communities, and the nation are propelled by the need for improving academic achievement, the use of parental perspective will be encouraged. The planning of profiles and contracts could use the technology of computer science.

Related studies could address:

1. the nature of the parent-child communication experience
2. the parental perspective of varying levels of achievers

3. the parental perspective of parents of differing socio-economic levels
4. comparative study of parents of high achievers from contrasting backgrounds and circumstances
5. student perception of parental perspective toward academic achievement

Summary

Parents viewed academic achievement as part of a larger goal of the child's general adjustment to success in life. The parents in this study had experienced academic success and felt that they knew how to best advise their children about academic achievement. Parents stressed high expectations, well-rounded development, learning as more important than high grades, positive reinforcement for academic achievement, and internalization of the challenges of learning by the child himself.

The educational perspective of parents reflected their own personal life experience. During the decades of their own growing to adulthood, there was an escalation of social change that affected family units in such a way as to cause decreasing parental influence and increasing influence of peers and television on the lives of children. There was less contact time between parents and children. However, the parents in this study placed a high priority on time for interaction with their children. The time spent with children provided an intra-age experience that seemed to create an adaptability helpful to academic and general success.

Self-confidence, interest in the future, and a feeling of support gained from home influence propelled these children in effective growth both socially and academically. Parents encouraged children to become independent and to take pride in a job well done.

Parents in this study generally agreed that parenting and encouraging their children's achievement was the most important thing in their lives. They maintained a sense of control of the child's environment in the formative years and stood ready to reinforce their original influence if needed.

Parents encouraged special interests, development of thought process by reading and conversation, controlled television viewing, and generally demonstrated that they were willing to control the child's environment in order to produce the desired result of an academically achieving child.

Parents participated in and monitored the growth of their children. They believed that while a child is guided to learn independently, parents should always be interested in what the child is doing and should always be available to assist.

Parents stressed open communication and did not talk down to their children. They communicated with their children and were receivers of the child's interests and ideas.

All parents were convinced of the importance of reading to academic achievement. They consistently had encouraged children to develop good reading habits.

All homes where interviews occurred appeared to function in an organized way. They were clean, decorated attractively, and included the special interests of family members in the setting and in the decor. Parents seemed pleased, if not honored, to be asked questions about their views related to the high academic achievement of their children. They spoke with a secure delivery and although they spoke extemporaneously, there was a sense of order and organization about their thoughts. They had clearly formulated opinions and spoke with pride and conviction. In addition, there was general agreement between the parents in each family unit about the importance of academic achievement and about ways of encouraging it. Over 90% of the families represented closely knit, nuclear families where emotional support and parental cohesiveness were evident.

The findings of this study should not be generalized to other socioeconomic or educational populations. Comparison of parental perspective with other populations should be the focus of another study.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW NOTATION SHEET

INTERVIEW NOTATION SHEET

1. Parent name: _____

2. Student's name: _____

3. Race: Black White Hispanic Oriental

4. Home: both parents single parent
 living at home homeInterview notations:

1. Person interviewed alone? yes no

If no, who else was present?

2. Did person interviewed respond primarily as "I" or "we"?

3. Response to parental perspective reliability-validity check:

P_1	P_2
S D	S D

Need for additional interview? yes no

4. Interview description:

a. home environment

b. voice and delivery

c. other:

APPENDIX B

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

1. Parent name: _____

2. Parent age: (check appropriate column)

mother

father

60+ _____

55-60 _____

50-55 _____

45-50 _____

40-45 _____

35-40 _____

3. Parent education: (circle appropriate response)

mother

father

H.S.

H.S.

B.A.

B.A.

M.A.

M.A.

Ph.D.

Ph.D.

Other

Other

4. Parent occupation:

mother

father

5. How similar are your parental views regarding academic achievement to your spouse's? (circle appropriate response)

extremely
similar

somewhat
similar

somewhat
different

extremely
different

6. What are the areas where you and your spouse think most the same regarding parenting?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

<hr/> Name	<hr/> Birth order (specific influences)
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- A. How do you feel about the importance of academic achievement?
- B. Parent behavior (guidelines):
- C. Time element:
- D. Parents themselves and their perspective (family influence):
- E. Environmental control: parent-child interaction
- F. Recommendations--advice:

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