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EIGHT URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

By

Jessie McFadden Muldrew

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

EIGHT URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES: AN EXPLORATORY
STUDY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

By

Jessie McFadden Muldrew

This exploratory study was undertaken to extend the current research on

African American family involvement and children's school experiences by

qualitatively examining the perceptions and actions of eight Black families

regarding their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade children. Also of

interest was how these families perceived that their actions and perceptions

influenced their youngsters' school experiences. To accomplish this, the

researcher investigated the complex interactions and relationships among the

families, the students, and the schools. One primary research question and six

subsidiary questions informed this research. A conceptual framework based on

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological psychological theory and Blumer's (1969)

symbolic-interactionist theory was employed. The ecological psychology theory

centers on the importance of the relationship between human behavior and the

environment (Patton, 1990). The symbolic-interactionist perspective places

great emphasis on meaning and interpretation as essential human processes (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934).

The sample included eight urban African American families with children who were in fifth grade. The students attended five elementary schools in an urban school district in the Midwest. Four males and four females were selected using purposeful sampling techniques (Patton, 1990). The data-collection methods included one-on-one, face-to-face, tape-recorded interviews in the naturalistic environments of the home and school; participant observations in classrooms; and review of school-related documents. Transcriptions were summarized, and data from the three sources were triangulated to form case studies. The presentation of findings was based on Miles and Huberman (1994).

It was found that: (a) against all odds, the parents in these eight families participated in their children's schools; (b) this participation was perceived as support for the school experiences of the fifth-grade children; (c) there are differences in the opinions of parents and educators relative to how parent involvement is defined and how the school experiences of the children are described; and (d) there is general agreement that the five schools encouraged family involvement and provided adequate opportunities. Based on the extensive review of literature and the findings of the present research, some future implications for families, educators, researchers, and policy makers are offered.

This dissertation is dedicated to my children—Deloris and Theophilus,
Ken and Deloris, and Marcia—and my grandchildren—Jacqueline,
David, Jamarius, Jessika, and Josee. May you be
inspired to make your dreams become realities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The pursuit of this Ph.D. has been a long and often tedious process. This endeavor was first a dream and then a goal. However, in my moments of doubt and uncertainty, some very special people provided me with support and encouragement. I take this opportunity to say, "Thank you!"

First, I am grateful to Dr. Lauren Young, my academic advisor, who helped me to visualize the completion of this degree. Second, thanks to Dr. Gloria Smith for always being a role model, a confidante, and a friend. Third, I am most appreciative of Dr. Harriette P. McAdoo for sharing with me her wisdom and expertise on Black family life. It was through her instruction, research, and literature that I was inspired to choose a dissertation topic that would increase my understanding of Black families.

I am especially indebted to my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Maenette Benham. Her tenacity, frequent contacts, and persistent monitoring of my progress motivated me to continue the work, overcome many obstacles, and finally complete the task. I am also grateful to the other committee members, whose help and support have been invaluable. Dr. Chris Wheeler recommended research and literature related to my study and made suggestions that helped me to focus my ideas. Dr. Phillip Cusick shared valuable insights regarding scientific writing and recommended excellent resources. Dr. Chris

Thanks to my nine siblings for cheering me on. They have always been there for me, supported my endeavors, and taken pride in my achievements.

Although they are deceased, I feel compelled to acknowledge my parents, Irving and Mattie McFadden. They certainly played a part in this, as they taught me the value of hard work and persistence, and inspired me to believe in myself. Another extended family member, my Aunt Lula McFadden, also deceased, was my role model and mentor. She deserves the credit for helping me realize the value of learning. She demonstrated the feasibility and importance of pursuing higher education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

"An indictment has been handed down against the Black family; it has been held responsible for many of the problems of black people" (Heiss, 1973, p. 3). Heiss began his treatise with this profound declaration. The quotation was included here to call attention to the problem on which this research was centered, a problem that closely mirrors that declaration. An indictment has been handed down against urban African American families relative to their perceived limited involvement in the education of their children. Consequently, these families are accused of being responsible for the majority of the problems that African American children experience in schools.

The involvement of families in schools and the family's role in the success or failure of their school-aged children continue to be issues of national concern. Researchers and practitioners long have acknowledged a strong link between parents' involvement and their children's success in school. The high rate of low achievement among African American children and the perceived limited school involvement of African American families have been the topic of numerous studies (Chavkin, 1993; Comer, 1985; Epstein, 1991; Strickland, 1987; Winters, 1993).

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This exploratory study was designed to extend the current research on African American family involvement and school achievement by examining the perceptions and actions of African American families regarding their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade children. Also of interest was how these families perceived that their actions and perceptions influenced the school experiences of their youngsters.

Several researchers have placed urban African American students at risk for failure and attributed the status of these students to three factors: (a) the failure of these students' families to socialize them for school success, (b) limited family involvement in the education of their children, and (c) the students' lack of motivation to succeed. Many researchers and scholars have devoted their efforts to the study of troubled African American families and the problematic school experiences of unsuccessful students. Research on functional African American families, as well as well-adjusted and achieving African American students, has been neglected. This omission has given rise to a tendency to make generalizations about African American families and children based on the negative prevailing school of thought.

This researcher argues that the perceptions of African American families relative to their involvement in the education of their children differ greatly from those of the majority of researchers, scholars, and educators. In this research, qualitative methods were employed to examine the perceptions, actions, and interactions of selected African American families with the school, along with the school experiences of their fifth-grade children. These variables were examined

in the naturalistic settings of the participants' homes and schools. The research was bounded by case-study methods. A cultural portrait of African American family life was captured through the use of ethnography. Grounded theory was used to develop a conceptual framework from which to examine the variables.

Purpose

The researcher's primary purpose in this study was to investigate and describe the perceptions and actions of urban African American families regarding their involvement in the education of their children. A further purpose was to determine how these perceptions and actions influenced the school experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters. To accomplish this, the researcher investigated the complex interactions and relationships among the families, the students, and the schools.

Research Questions

One primary research question and six subsidiary questions provided a framework for this inquiry.

Primary Research Question

How do urban African American families perceive and actualize their involvement in the education of their children, and how do these perceptions and actions influence the school experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters?

Subsidiary Questions

1. **What are some traditional Black family cultural factors that appear to enhance or to inhibit the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children?**

2. **How do urban African American families perceive that their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade children is influenced by current family ecological factors?**

3. **How do urban African American families perceive that they structure after-school activities and the home environment to support school learning?**

4. **How do urban African American families perceive that they negotiate their involvement in school and school-related activities?**

5. **How do urban African American families, and teachers, perceive that schools encourage family involvement in the formal education of their children?**

6. **What are the perceptions of urban African American families, and teachers, regarding the school experiences of the fifth-grade students?**

Importance of the Research

The findings from this investigation will be useful to African American families (specifically, those with school-aged children), educators, policy makers, and researchers. The results also should be of interest to civic and community organizations concerned with the relationships between families and schools, as well as the education of urban African American children. This study is

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especially timely because of the rapid rate at which urban schools are becoming populated predominantly by African American students (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). In light of this fact, it is not only expedient, but crucial, that educators and teacher education institutions broaden their understanding of the issues addressed in this study. The topic is also timely and relevant because citizens are scrutinizing the public schools and calling on them to give more consideration to understanding and meeting the needs of diverse groups and individuals. The continued emphasis on educational reform in the United States reflects new goals and objectives that give priority to including all stakeholders in the school improvement process. Hence, relevant and current research, such as the present study, that includes the perceptions of families and students is needed.

Further, the changing demographic trends in African American families (Taylor et al., 1997) underscore the need for this kind of study, to increase the awareness of these families and communities of the perceptions that many outsiders have pertaining to African American families' involvement in the education of their children, as well as how the public perceives that African American families' involvement influences the school experiences of the children. For example, current ecological changes in the African American family include increases in the numbers of households headed by single mothers, teenage and young parents, and grandparents and foster parents (National Survey of Black Americans, as cited in Taylor et al., 1997). Likewise, because of the mass exodus of White families from the cities to the suburbs,

urban schools are now populated primarily by African American and other minority children. These changes indicate a need for more studies such as the present one.

This study is also significant because the findings will enhance the understanding of (a) how urban African American families perceive and define their roles in the education of their fifth-grade children; (b) the factors (racial, cultural, home and family related, and school related) that urban African American families perceive as contributing to their involvement in the education of their children; (c) the discrepancy that exists among the perceptions of parents, children, and school professionals relative to the families' involvement in the school experiences of the children; (d) the interactions between the families of urban African American fifth graders and the people who make up school organizations; (e) how African American families involve extended family and community networks to support the learning of their children; (f) whether and how urban African American families structure their homes and the family's after-school time to support the learning of their children; (g) future directions for families, practitioners, policy makers, and researchers.

Assumptions

This was an exploratory investigation of the perceptions and actions of urban African American families relative to their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade children. Also of interest was how the families perceived that these perceptions and actions influenced the school experiences of their fifth-grade students. The research was predicated on the following assumptions:

1. To consider the state of the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children is to focus on family involvement in public schools in the cities. Jones-Wilson (as cited in Lomotey, 1990) stated, "It is still true that public schools are the primary source of education for African American children."

2. Parents are children's first teachers; teachers are children's surrogate parents. Ford (1990) predicted, "Without family involvement, schools and children are less likely to succeed."

3. African American families maintain a set of cultural values and perspectives that are uniquely grounded in the historical and contemporary experiences of African Americans in this country (Billingsley, 1968; Heiss, 1971; McAdoo, 1990, 1996; Nobles, 1976; Sue & Sue, 1990).

4. Not all families are created equal. Procidano (1992) indicated that not all families have the same abilities, resources, and opportunities to fulfill society's expectations relative to families' involvement in the education of their children.

5. Factors such as cultural, racial, and economic differences between families and school professionals can lead to incorrect assumptions and stereotyping on both sides. Mapp (1999) referred to this and several other obstacles, such as work schedules, inadequate child care, lack of transportation, and insecurity with the school environment, that can also limit the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children.

6. The school adjustment, performance, and attitudes of urban African American students are variables that are influenced by a multiplicity of factors both related and unrelated to family involvement. Irvine (1990) included low teacher expectations, hostile school climates, tracking, discriminatory disciplinary practices, irrelevant curriculums, and ineffective teaching strategies among the contributors to the school failure of African American students over which parents have little, if any, control.

Limitations

The limitations of qualitative research are presented to point out potential weaknesses. This researcher identified three areas of concern in the present study: (a) the sampling procedure, (b) researcher bias, and (c) the data-collection methods. Each area of concern is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Using purposeful sampling decreased the generalizability of the findings. The researcher relied on her school contacts to recommend families that fit the criteria and might be willing to participate in the research. She soon realized that most of the recommended families were those who were said to be involved, and those whose fifth graders were experiencing success in school. With some persuasion, other families with children who were having difficult school experiences and whose families were not rated as highly involved were also recommended. The small sample size (eight families) may also limit the generalizability of the study findings.

The term *bias* refers to an inclination or leaning based on prejudice. In this study, the researcher's bias might also have been a limiting factor. Her past experiences as a teacher and administrator in the target urban school district made it difficult to maintain objectivity. Resisting the temptation to allow preconceived notions to creep in was an ever-present obstacle. The investigator's sensitivity to this problem led to the implementation of some methods to reduce the effect of researcher bias on the study. For example, she relied heavily on the conceptual framework, based on the ecological-psychology and symbolic-interactionist theories, as the lens through which to view the findings. She also leaned on opinions of scholars in the field and the results of related studies from the four comprehensive bodies of literature that were consulted. Furthermore, the researcher validated the accuracy of her findings by rereading the case studies, interview transcripts, and field notes numerous times.

The limitations of this study that might be linked to the data-collection methods involve the honesty and integrity of the participants, and the time line for the data-collection process. During the interviews, the researcher noted times when some participants appeared to gear their responses to what they thought was the desired answer. This became evident when the researcher compared the parent, child, and teacher responses. However, the discrepancies in responses could also have resulted from differences in perceptions.

The research also was limited by the time period in which the data were collected. The interviews were conducted over a three-month period. Thus, it

was not possible to determine how the involvement of the families during their children's fifth-grade year compared with their involvement in earlier years. Perhaps such a comparison would have broadened the study, as parents are generally more involved during their children's earlier years of school. Finally, the study was not designed to point a finger or assign blame for problems to the families or the schools. Finally, generalizations about all families cannot be made from the findings of the study because the sample group, although diverse, was small.

Delimitations

The delimitations of a study concern how the research was narrowed in scope. The researcher's goal in this study was to add to the research pertaining to the perceptions of urban African American families' involvement in the education of their children, and how these perceptions and actions influenced the school experiences of their fifth-grade children. The sample for the study was delimited to eight African American families with fifth-grade children attending five elementary schools. This was not a study comparing the involvement of African American and White families, nor were urban and suburban African American families compared. Instead, the researcher's intention was to examine perceptions and actions relative to the involvement of urban African American families in the school experiences of their children.

The study was not designed to evaluate the success of school-sponsored parent-involvement programs. When the researcher refers to such programs, the intention is to describe the perceptions and actions of the urban African

American families toward those programs. Likewise, this was not a cause-and-effect study of the relationship of family involvement to student achievement. Instead, the emphasis was on how these families viewed and actualized their involvement, and whether they perceived that it helped or hindered the school experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters. However, this emphasis should not be construed as an attempt to concur with the critics of African American families who have focused on the deficit theory of dysfunctional families.

Conceptual Framework

Miles and Huberman (1984) emphasized the importance of the conceptual framework to research studies, stating that "a conceptual framework explains graphically and/or in narrative form the main dimensions to be studied; the key factors, or variables; and the presumed relationships among them" (p. 18). In this study, the researcher employed a conceptual framework based on the ecological-psychology and symbolic-interactionist theories. By linking the research questions to the larger theoretical constructs, the investigator demonstrated the importance of the study findings. The findings are important because they illuminate larger issues pertaining to how urban African American families perceive and actualize their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade children, as well as the influence of these perceptions and actions on the school experiences of these youngsters.

The researcher's rationale for employing this dual-theory conceptual framework was based on the dual nature of the inquiry, which necessitated the examination of two separate issues: (a) perceptions and actions regarding the

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involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children and (b) how the families and teachers perceived that these perceptions and actions influenced the education of the fifth-grade students. The researcher's choice of theories was also motivated by two premises:

1. Marshall and Rossman's premise (1995), which stated, "In examining a specific setting or set of individuals [such as a family], the researcher should show how she is studying a case of a larger phenomenon" (p. 7).

2. Boykin's (1985) premise, which identified the following three important reasons for providing a viable conceptual framework for the study of African American family-child socialization processes:

> First, there is considerable complexity attendant to Black family life in America. Second, a multiplicity of socialization agendas must be negotiated simultaneously. Third, the demands that result from having to cope with the American social context are multifaceted and inherently contradictory. (p. 33)

Hence, a conceptual framework based on two theories was deemed appropriate.

The ecological-psychology theory centers on the importance of the relationship between human behavior and the environment (Patton, 1990). In the present investigation, the researcher employed this theoretical lens to examine the interactions of the families (the primary unit of analysis), and actions related to the families' involvement in the education of their children. Marshall and Rossman (1995) referred to the ecological-psychology emphasis on the interactions of the person or group and the environment in shaping behavior. Describing the behaviors of the eight families and analyzing the influences of the environment on them was a primary reason for choosing this

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approach. Thus, the ecological model was congruent with the focus of this study. Marshall and Rossman (1995) also described the environment as especially important. They stated, "The physical setting, its characteristics, arrangement, and atmosphere can both suggest and inhibit behavior."

Furthermore, the ecological model has been recommended as a framework for the study of African American families (McAdoo, 1997). It allows researchers and practitioners an opportunity to explore the interactions between the historical and contemporary aspects of the unique culture of these families.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicated that human behavior occurs within an ecological environment. He portrayed this environment as a set of nested structures, for which he offered the following definitions:

1. **Macrosystem**: Consistencies that exist at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies (p. 26).

2. **Mesosystem**: Comprises the interrelations of two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for an adult, among family, work, and social life) (p. 25).

3. **Microsystem**: The pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics (p. 22).

The researcher elected to use Bronfenbrenner's concept of *nested Structures* as a lens through which to examine the eight urban families and their

home environments, adapting similar definitions to describe the African American family concept as follows:

1. **Macrosystem**: Informal support networks, in which assistance is supplied by family, friends, neighbors, community networks, churches, and human service agencies.

2. **Mesosystem**: Comprises the interrelations of two or more settings in which the family actively participates (such as the parents' workplace, the school, and social life).

3. **Microsystem**: Family mechanism, culture, children and parenting, daily family life, and family interactions.

The researcher used this theoretical concept of nested structures to respond to the subsidiary questions pertaining to family ecology (Questions 2 and 3). She also used the concept to relate the study to previous literature and in analyzing the findings.

The symbolic-interactionist theory embodies three major premises (Patton, 1990):

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of meaning that the things have for them.

2. The meaning of things arises out of the social interaction one has with one's fellows.

3. The meaning of things is handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters.

This perspective is a social-psychological approach, closely associated with Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969). It is a perspective that places great emphasis on meaning and interpretation as essential human processes. Using this lens, the researcher examined the set of symbols and understandings that had emerged to influence the development of selected African American families' perceptions of how they were involved in the education of their fifth-grade children. She also used this lens to examine the school performance, attitudes, and adjustment of the fifth-grade students. The investigator applied the following features of the symbolic-interactionist lens to gather information relative to all of the research questions for which the concept of a common set of symbols was applicable:

1. The theory's **reflective** capacity–to provide the participants with the means to reflect on their own activity as students, parents, and teachers.

2. The theory's **appreciative** capacity–to explore the social action from the perspective of the participants.

3. The theory's **illuminative** capacity–to examine the range, depth, and richness of detail in the individuals, groups, institutions, and issues, and to study the interaction between cultural ideologies of equality and the reality of social, racial, and cultural differences.

4. The theory's **theoretical** capacity–to aid in the generation of theories relative to participants' beliefs and actions, and the way expectations shape and constrain the same; to generate theories related to policy, practice, and research.

The researcher acknowledges that, in studying perceptions and actions regarding the school experiences of fifth-grade students in the context of the school environment, it was helpful to use the symbolic-interactionist lens to examine what led to the development of those perceptions and actions. The theory was suited to understanding how individual students developed their attitudes, behaviors, work habits, and relationships that were exhibited in the school setting. Accordingly, the term *symbolic interactionist* refers to the peculiar and distinctive character of interactions as they take place between and among human beings (Neuman, 1994, p. 63). In this case, the African American families and the students interpreted or defined the actions of people at school, based on the meanings they attached to those actions. Thus, their behavior was mediated by the use of symbols, or their own interpretation of the actions of school people.

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

The following terms are defined in the context in which they are used in this dissertation.

<u>Case study</u>. In qualitative research, this is the study of a "bounded system," with the focus being either the case or an issue that is illustrated by the case or cases. A qualitative case study provides an in-depth study of this "system," based on a diverse array of data-collection methods, and the researcher situates the case within the larger context or setting (Stake, 1995).

<u>Cross-case analysis</u>. This form of analysis applies to a collective case, wherein the researcher examines more than one case. It involves examining

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themes across cases to discern themes that are common to all cases. It is a step that typically follows case analysis, when the researcher studies multiple cases (Stake, 1995).

Extended family. Several related families living together or near each other; a family with several generations living together (Zinn & Eitzen, 1990).

Family. A small group of people who live together in a committed, intimate interpersonal relationship and who see their own identity as being importantly attached to the group—a group that has a clear identity of its own (Stinnett, Chesser, & Defrain, 1979). Ronnau (1993) defined a family as a particular societal arrangement whereby persons related by ancestry, marriage, or adoption live together, form an economic unit, and raise children.

Parental involvement. The practice of any activity that empowers parents and families to participate in the educational process, either at home or in a program setting (Epstein et al., 1986).

School experiences. A phrase used to refer to the following factors pertaining to what happens to children at school: (a) attitudes of students toward learning, (b) students' relationships with teachers and peers, (c) students' work habits and performance, and (d) students' behavior and attendance.

Overview

Chapter I contained an introduction to the problem, as well as the purpose and research questions. The importance of the investigation and its relationship to similar research were discussed. The assumptions, limitations, and

delimitations were set forth, and the conceptual framework was described. Key terms were defined.

A review of literature and related research is presented in Chapter II. The four bodies of literature that informed this study include (a) African American families: history, culture, and theory; (b) urban African American families' ecology and home environments; (c) family-school involvement and relationships; and (d) school experiences of African American children.

The research design and methodology used in the investigation are described in Chapter III. The appropriateness of qualitative methods (grounded theory, ethnography, and case study) to this investigation is explained. The field research experience, including the sample and settings, is discussed, and the three data-collection methods (participant observations, interviews, and review of school-related documents) used in the study are delineated. Ethical considerations, field procedures involved in conducting the study, and the pilot study are discussed. Issues of access, the researcher's orientation, recording and management of data, and reporting the findings are set forth.

Chapter IV contains the eight family case studies, including the background and setting. These case studies include relevant data gleaned from the observations, field notes, interviews, and reviews of school-related documents.

Included in Chapter V are a discussion of the findings; conclusions drawn from the findings; implications of the research; and recommendations for further

research, practice, and policy. The chapter concludes with the researcher's reflections.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The researcher's primary purpose in this study was to investigate and describe the perceptions and actions of contemporary urban African American families regarding their involvement in the education of their children. A further purpose was to determine how these perceptions and actions influenced the school experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters. The four bodies of overarching literature that informed this research include (a) Black family life and theory, (b) parenting and child development, (c) family and school relationships, and (d) education of African American children. This comprehensive review of the literature is organized around the following general themes: (a) Black Families: History, Culture, and Theory; (b) Urban African American Families: Structure, Parenting Styles, and Home Environments; (c) Family Involvement in Schools; and (d) School Experiences of African American Children.

Black Families: History, Culture, and Theory

"To know the possibilities of a race, an appraisal of its past is necessary."

Carter G. Woodson

Sudarkasa (1997) argued that understanding today's Black families requires an understanding of their evolution over time. In this study, the phrase

Black family is used to refer to families who see themselves as the descendants of individuals who were brought from Africa to be slaves in the United States. It should be noted that the terms *African Americans* and *Blacks* are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. As a group, Black families display a diversity of characteristics, beliefs, values, and lifestyles. This portion of the literature review focuses on studies, articles, and works that pertain to such aspects of Black family life as (a) extended family and kin, (b) community networks, (c) family strengths and values, and (d) theories of Black family life.

Extended Family and Kin

Researchers have documented that African Americans, as a group, are more likely to reside in extended-family households than are Whites (Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, & Lewis, 1990). The Black extended family also was described by Martin and Martin (1978), Stack (1974), Sudarkasa (1997), McAdoo (1997), Nobles (1997), Staples (1974), and Billingsley (1992). In the Black culture, the phrase *extended family* is generally used to denote several related family members living together or near each other, or a family with several generations living together. Martin and Martin described the extended family as a multi-generational, independent kinship system that is welded together by a sense of obligation to relatives. Their research of a poor Black community in a midwestern city highlighted the adaptive strategies, resourcefulness, and resilience of Black families under conditions of poverty through the economic stability provided by extended family and kin networks.

Martin and Martin concluded that extended Black family networks serve as mutual-aid systems for the welfare of their members and the maintenance of the family as a whole.

In her anthropological field study of Black family life, Stack (1975) described family kin networks as "patterns of co-residence, kinship-based exchange networks, links to multiple domestic units, elastic household boundaries, and lifelong bonds to three generational households" (p. 124). The data, which she collected through taped interviews and informal conversations, captured the points of view of the informants. Stack's findings indicated that, in Black families, kinship networks traditionally have continued to provide a major mode for coping with the pressures of society. She also stated that, "despite the distinctively negative features attributed to poor families, the Black urban family with its kin networks proves to be an organized, tenacious, active, lifelong network" (p. 124). Among the benefits of extended-households that Stack identified are (a) the pooling of economic resources, (b) assistance with child care and socialization, (c) social and emotional support, and (d) assistance with domestic responsibilities. Stack characterized this system of "doubling up" in extended-family households as an important survival strategy for Black families.

In another reference to extended families, Billingsley (1968, 1992) used the term to refer to households in which family members, such as grandparents, reside with nuclear families. Accordingly, he maintained that such households do not, in and of themselves, constitute entire extended families. African American extended families embrace many households, some with two, three, or

more generations. These households are sometimes headed by women, sometimes by men, and at times by both (McAdoo, 1997, p. 19).

Sudarkasa (1997) presented an overview of the African extended family out of which African American families evolved. She called attention to special aspects of Black family households and family organization as transformations from African families into African American families. She observed that, (a) after slavery, those African Americans who owned parcels of land again created kin networks by bringing other family members to live on that land; (b) in cases when relatives did not live close together, the extended family ties linked people across households and states; and (c) traditionally, among African Americans, the term refers not only to family members who reside in particular households, but to extended family members living in other households as well.

Community Networks

In addition to the extended family and kin networks, the Black community has a historical tradition of strong spiritual networks. This is true of many African American families today. The Black church has been an instrumental aspect of the Black culture. Hines and Boyd-Franklin (1982) described the role that the Black church played in the development and dissemination of plans to escape to freedom during slavery, and in the organization and strategizing in the fight for civil rights. Many Black community leaders were also religious leaders. The Black church provided more than connection and leadership. It was a place of refuge from the feelings of anger, pain, and humiliation that African Americans

endured. Hines and Boyd-Franklin argued that it was through the Black church that African American families developed the strength to bear their pain and sorrow, and to press on in the face of adversity.

Emerging research has focused on the role of friends and church members in the informal support networks of African Americans. Several studies have indicated that friends, neighbors, co-workers, and in-laws are important sources of assistance for Black families (Hale, 1994; McAdoo, 1997; Taylor et al., 1997). Several of these studies have indicated that these community networks often serve as surrogate families when relatives are far away. Church members have been found to be a source of critical support among Black families. In their review of a decade of research on these families, Taylor et al. (1990) found that these community networks provide a number of benefits, including car pooling, shared child care, neighborhood crime watches, block clubs, and boys and girls clubs.

In addressing Black family values from the insider's perspective, Sudarkasa (1997) identified the following seven R's that are among these family values: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, restraint, reverence, reason, and reconciliation. Further, she proposed that the family, especially the extended family, is the institution most responsible for the survival of African Americans in the United States. She argued that not all of the social ills in the Black community can or should be laid at the doorstep of the African American family. Sudarkasa's argument supports one of this researcher's contentions—that not all

of the problems that contemporary urban African American children experience in schools can or should be attributed to the family.

Strengths and Values of the Black Family

Researchers and scholars often have been so preoccupied with the pathology of the Black family that they have overlooked what Hill (1972) referred to as the strengths of Black families. Hill defined family strengths as "those traits which facilitate the ability of the family to meet the needs of its members, and the demands made upon it by systems outside the family unit" (p. 6). The five family strengths that Hill identified were (a) strong kinship bonds, (b) strong work orientation, (c) adaptability of family roles, (d) strong achievement orientation, and (e) strong religious orientation. Hill (p. 27) and several other scholars (Hale, 1982; Harrison, 1990; McAdoo, 1988) maintained that these five characteristics have been instrumental in the survival, advancement, and stability of Black families.

Work and education are among the Black family values that African Americans stress to their children. Scanzoni (1971) described in his research how Black families have traditionally stressed the importance of work and education to their children, reminding them that because of their race they would have limited opportunities to get ahead in society. Thus, hard work and a good education were the route to success. McAdoo (1988, 1997) maintained that Black families continue to stress the importance of education and work as a means to achieve economic security and upward mobility. She described how

family members combine their resources to support that one child who needs help to complete his or her education. McAdoo referred to this process of helping those who have helped others in time of need as "reciprocal obligation."

Some scholars have concluded that, of all the traditional African American family values, the most fundamental of all is the commitment to the family itself (Billingsley, 1968; Hale, 1982; Hill, 1971; Stack, 1975). Further, authors have contended that this sense of commitment to kin and the values that are taught to children as a way of instilling and reinforcing this commitment were brought to America by the enslaved population (McAdoo, 1997, p. 36).

Theories of Black Family Life

A number of attempts have been made to find an appropriate theory for the study of Black families. Some of the theories most often found in the literature are included here to demonstrate the diversity of approaches used to study Black families.

Allen (1978) conducted a study of theories applicable to studying Black family life. In his attempts to identify appropriate theoretical frameworks for the study of Black family life, he argued that theory in the area generally consists of both objective (conceptual approach) and subjective (ideological perspective) components. He evaluated competing conceptual approaches (structural-functional, interactional, and developmental) and ideological perspectives (cultural equivalent, cultural deviant, and cultural variant) in the literature. Allen proposed unification of the developmental approach with the cultural-variant

perspective in future studies as one strategy for enhancing understanding of Black family structures and processes in society.

An ecological structural framework has been widely used in the study of family life. This model, based on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and others, can be used to examine individuals' behavior within the context of the settings in which they live, as well as the interactions among those settings. The ecological framework allows a holistic understanding of individual development.

Staples (1986) concluded that current theoretical and conceptual frameworks are poorly suited to the study of Black families. He suggested that contemporary models preclude the development of viable perspectives of Black family life because of their tendency to impose ethnocentric values on the analysis. Therefore, he called for the development of theoretical frameworks that are sensitive to the unique circumstances, structures, and styles of Black families in the United States.

History records a list of contrasting theories for the investigation of Black family life. Johnson (1997), in her treatise "Three Decades of Black Family Empirical Research: Challenges for the 21st Century," described several of the most commonly used theories. Her examples of some theoretical frameworks and researchers and scholars who subscribed to them are as follows: (a) pathologist framework (Moynihan,1965); (b) reactive framework (Billingsley, 1968, 1992); (c) cultural-equivalent framework (Scanzoni, 1971); and (d) Black nationalist framework (Hill, 1990). Finally, Johnson admonished Black family

scholars to maintain an intellectual posture of openness to the many shades of family life (p. 107).

Among other theories that have been proposed for the study of Black family life are (a) the triple quandary theory, offered by Boykins and Toms (1985), and (b) the Black family historical cultural theory, advanced by Nobles (1997).

Finally, theorists of the Black family are still pursuing adequate theoretical frameworks for the study of Black families. This review of some sources represents an attempt to contribute to the identification of theoretical frameworks applicable to the study of Black family life in American society. Additional theoretical models, including the symbolic-interactionist approach, are discussed more fully in other sections of this review.

Summary

Black families in the United States have developed a unique, distinctive, and diverse culture. Many aspects of this culture are historical and have been handed down through many generations. This review of literature pertaining to historical cultural characteristics of Black family life has provided a vehicle for the application of the symbolic-interactionist theory. Reflecting on these cultural traditions allowed the researcher to identify a common set of symbols and understandings that emerged to give meaning to contemporary urban African American families, and their interactions with others.

Urban African American Families

Introduction

African American children today live in homes with diverse family structures, parenting styles and childrearing practices, family interactions, families as educators, and homes as learning environments. Their adult role models and primary caregivers have a range of educational levels, occupations, and resources. This portion of the literature review is intended to provide an overview of research pertaining to the above-mentioned topics. The studies and writings reviewed here will provide a basis for responding to Subsidiary Research Question 2: How do urban African American families perceive that their involvement in the education of their children is influenced, or not influenced, by current ecological factors related to the above-named topics? It is important to ask this question because educators and researchers frequently tend to blame the problems that African American children experience in school on such factors as dysfunctional families, single-parent households, inadequate childrearing practices, low expectations of achievement, unstable home environments, and absence of positive adult role models.

Several researchers have evaluated Black families using deficit models, with which they compared lower-economic-class African American families with White middle-class families (Clark-Steward, 1973; Moynihan, 1965; Pinderhughes, 1982). However, these writers did not address the special issues and concerns that African American parents face in raising their children. These circumstances and adversities have been described at length in the literature on

African American parenting (Billingsley, 1968; Comer & Poussaint, 1994; Hale, 1987; Hill, 1972; McAdoo, 1985, 1997; Nobles, 1997; Peters, 1988; Slaughter, 1988).

Family Structure

In this dissertation, the phrase *family structure* is used to describe the family composition, or the implications of the living arrangements for the children. Glick (1998) examined recent changes in the United States concerning the diversity of Black family patterns and those of all races combined. The goal of Glick's study was to add to the growing number of reports on Black families that viewed them from a positive, rather than negative, perspective. The study sample was obtained from U.S. Census records for 1971, 1981, and 1993.

Among the major findings of Glick's study were that (a) a larger proportion of Black families than families of other races included young children among their members, (b) a large and growing proportion were maintained by women, (c) the proportion of Black married-couple families with young children present had increased, (d) the most extreme contrast between the living arrangements of Blacks and other families was found among children living with a lone mother who had never been married, and (e) poorly educated Black women tended to have more children than did their counterparts of other races. Blacks also were found to exceed their counterparts of other races in numbers of remarriages, divorces, and re-divorces. In the area of educational level of parents, the average educational level of Black parents was still substantially lower than that

of parents of all races combined. Black women were found to be more likely than other women to be married to men with less education than themselves. The low incomes and high unemployment rates among African American fathers were responsible for the negative family income difference.

Glick's overall findings indicated that the gaps were narrowing in most areas, but negative differences still persisted. Glick admitted that the results were subject to some limitations because of unequal amounts of misreporting in censuses and surveys on such subjects as presence of husbands or fathers in the household. The results of Glick's study are important to the present research because they concern some of the same aspects of African American family demographics that this researcher investigated.

Morris (1992) described African American family structures as ranging from two adults with one or both working, to a single adult who may or may not be working. Like Glick, she emphasized the negative effects of economics, stability, and resources on single-parent households. Morris described extended family networks as a socializing force that positively influenced economics and child development.

In her treatise on African American students and their families, Morris emphasized the importance of researchers' and practitioners' becoming sensitive to the ecological and cultural contexts in which these families live in order to better understand their children's development. Other concerns that Morris addressed were (a) the negative effects of reductions in state and federally funded social programs; (b) schools and communities being stripped of

resources by the flight of European Americans and middle-class African

Americans from the central cities; and (c) significant numbers of Black children

who have been neglected, malnourished, abandoned, or abused. Among the

encouraging factors Morris presented were some African American

characteristics and processes, such as (a) promoting respect for authority that

carries over to school, (b) having high educational aspirations for their children,

and (c) teaching children to have pride in their race and their cultural heritage.

Further, Morris cited the empirical studies of Blau (1981), Clark (1983),

and Scott-Jones (1987), which provided evidence that African American children

from poor circumstances can succeed in school when there is a framework of a

supportive family, school, and community network. She also identified some of

the variables that impede these children's achievement and stressed the

importance of family involvement throughout the children's school years. Many

of the issues related to African American families and their school-age children

that Morris discussed provide support for the present researcher's argument that

a number of these families are successful in preparing their children to succeed

in school.

Hurd, Moore, and Rogers (1993) examined strengths among African

American parents. Building on a model of family competence, the authors

explored the values, attitudes, and activities of African American parents. They

asked a sample of 53 parents to describe the values and behaviors they

imparted to their children and what support they received from external

caregivers. The authors used and cited the Competence Model of Family

Functioning (Waters & Lawrence, 1993) as the theoretical framework for examining family strengths. This model presumes that all individuals are motivated to behave as they do by an overwhelming desire to achieve competence. Thus, the basic assumptions underlying this research were that (a) parents try to raise their children competently, (b) parents will be successful at some aspects of child care; (c) parents who have problems with their environments nevertheless have strengths that can be used to improve their situations; and (d) extended family members, and neighbor and friend networks, strive to assist parents in their childrearing efforts.

Clark (1983) conducted a landmark study on family life and school achievements. His findings refuted the myths about the limitations of family structure or income on the school achievement of poor African American children. Clark disagreed with the claim and implications of previous studies that the family unit and role properties (number of parents in the home, parents' marital status, family size, maternal employment status, maternal educational status, and income) are the source of children's school behavior and learning outcomes. Instead, he maintained that it is the family members' beliefs, activities, and overall cultural style that produce the mental structure required for effective and desirable outcomes during the school experience. To support his contention, Clark conducted 10 intimate case studies of African American families in Chicago, Illinois. All of the families were at the poverty level and were equally divided between one-parent and two-parent families. All were also equally divided between having produced either a high-achieving or low-

achieving child. Clark's model included detailed observations on the quality of home life, noting how family habits and interactions affected school success, and what characteristics of family life provided African American children with "school survival skills."

Elder and his associates (1995) examined the perspectives of inner-city families on the strategies of parenting. The researchers traced the effect of economics on the emotional distress and parenting behaviors of 429 African American and European American parents. Two-thirds of the families in the sample were African Americans. Nearly 90% of the primary caregivers were mothers, 6% were fathers, and 5% were grandmothers of the youths, who ranged in age from 11 to 15 years of age. Eighty percent of the single mothers were African American. Forty-five percent of the families had below $20,000 in total family income. Twelve percent of the mothers had a college education, and 52% reported having a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Elder and his associates addressed three issues: (a) the effect of economic stress on parenting beliefs and behaviors, with emphasis on its effects on parental efficacy, as mediated by feelings of demoralization or depression; (b) the extent to which types of family structure (strong and weak marriages, and single-parent families) and perceived support modify the effects of hardship and economic pressures; and (c) the link between efficacy beliefs about parenting and the use of family management strategies that minimize developmental opportunities.

The findings from Elder and associates' quantitative study were as follows. Among Black families, single-parent households and conflicted marriages undermined the well-being of parents. Compared with White parents, African American parents' sense of parental efficacy was more predictive of child management strategies, enhanced developmental opportunities for children, and minimized risks. These results were discussed in terms of the differential availability and use of neighborhood resources for parenting between the two racial groups.

Summary. The literature contains an abundance of studies and reports focusing on the composition of African American families. Examples were included here to increase readers' understanding of the structure of contemporary African American families. Among the reappearing themes in this review was the issue of diversity. The nuclear family consisting of mother, father, and their children has never been, is not now, and perhaps never will be the characteristic way to describe the structure of Black families.

Parenting Styles and Childrearing Practices

Parenting styles are defined as constellations of parental attitudes, practices, and nonverbal expressions that characterize the nature of parent-child interactions across diverse situations (Glasgow et al., 1997). The literature on African American parenting styles and childrearing practices that has implications for this research includes the works of Billingsley (1968), Comer and Poussaint (1994), Hale-Benson (1987), McAdoo (1985), Nobles (1997), Willie

(1981), Heiss (1973), and Scanzoni (1971). These scholars stressed the importance of moving beyond the comparative pathological approach (used in much of the research of the 1960s and the early 1970s) and studying Black families from a perspective that recognizes the cultural variations, functionality, and validity of Black family lifestyles (Peters, 1988).

Writers on parenting in general (Baumrind, 1967; Bowlby, 1988; Procidano & Fisher, 1992) have contended that how children develop socially and emotionally depends largely on how they are parented. Baumrind identified three types of parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Authoritative parents are high on both control and responsiveness; their children tend to be more competent, independent, and responsible than other children. Authoritarian parents are those high on control and low on responsiveness in interactions with their children. Permissive parents are low on responsiveness in interactions with their children and low on control.

Taylor et al. (1997) assembled a collection of articles on family life in Black America. Each of these articles was firmly grounded in empirical data and based on, but not limited to, the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA). The authors' approach was to move away from the deficit perspective and present a viewpoint based on the cultural context. These articles have relevance to the present study because they deal with many of the same issues this researcher examined, including family ecology, parenting, education, and socialization of children, along with a number of other challenges and adversities that Black families encounter. Another important correlate of this volume to the

present research is the amount of diversity it revealed within African American families, as well as the forces that shape, limit, and enhance them.

The childrearing attitudes and behavior of Black parents living in a working-class neighborhood were researched by Bartz and Levine (1978). They compared interview data from 160 Black mothers and fathers to similar data from 152 Chicano and 143 Anglo parents living in the same neighborhood. Among the significant findings of the study were the parenting traits that Bartz and Levine identified as characteristics of African American parents. These parents were typified as (a) expecting early autonomy, (b) not allowing wasted time, (c) being highly supportive and controlling, (d) valuing strictness, and (e) encouraging equalitarian family roles. The authors also concluded that Black parents differed from Anglo and Chicano parents on several dimensions of childrearing. Few differences by gender of parent or child were reported.

In their conclusions, Bartz and Levine stated that there is a need for further research to explore how the complex attitudinal pattern that emerged in their study is actually communicated in the Black family with children of different ages and sexes. Accordingly, the authors concluded that, only after considerably more research, will insights be gained into how the childrearing attitudes of Black parents today will affect the overall personal, educational, and social competencies of the young Black generation. The preceding conclusions highlight a need for the present research, in which many of the same Black family childrearing practices (i.e., support, control, permissiveness, and strictness) highlighted by Bartz and Levine were examined.

In her synopsis of parenting young children in Black families, Peters (1985) concluded that the lives of Black parents and their childrearing approaches are embedded in the racial, cultural, and economic situations of Blacks in the United States. Further, she maintained that research on parenting in Black families must reflect this reality. Peters made the following general observations about research on childrearing in Black families:

1. Evidence indicates that the behaviors, interactions, and lifestyles of Blacks are different from those of Whites.

2. Blacks' childrearing priorities, attitudes, and patterns of behavior have developed out of the unique economic, cultural, and racial circumstances in which they have lived.

3. A number of researchers have characterized Black families' differences as deficits that need to be improved to conform to the standards of mainstream White America.

4. More recent researchers have begun to describe the childrearing patterns of Black parents from the perspective of their effectiveness as relevant, supportive, or practical strategies appropriate to the social realities Black people face (p. 159).

A number of researchers and scholars have described the childrearing attitudes and practices of African American parents and have provided a variety of implications. Spencer (1985) found that many Black parents tend to transcend race in their socialization efforts and strive to raise "neutral children." On the other hand, Thornton (1997) researched racial socialization among

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African American families. He defined racial socialization as a means by which Black parents and families teach their children with specific messages relevant to race, group, and self-pride as protection against racism and discrimination in society. Racial socialization in Black families also has been investigated by Peters (1985) and Harrison (1985).

Families as Educators

Families as educators is the terminology used when the emphasis is on the interactions within and among families that are related to learning (Bobbitt & Paolucci, 1986, p. 48). In reviewing the literature related to families as educators, one finds a broad range of models, concepts, methods, and opinions. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined those writings that addressed family processes, parent-child interactions, homework, and learning-related activities in which children are involved outside of school. Many writers have focused their attention on families of specific compositions (nuclear, single-parent, or blended families), education, or employment. The aim here was to include information on the influence, or lack of influence, of families as educators by choosing literature on the learning-related activities of families. Families often have been characterized as the child's first teacher because a considerable amount of learning and socialization occurs before the child begins school (Spencer, Brokens, & Allen, 1985).

Bobbitt and Paolucci (1986) described the strengths of the home and family as "informal learning environments." They explained this concept as "the

learning that is associated with activities which occur within the home or family situation. Inputs into this system consist of information and resources of family members, friends, and other sources that perform a role or function in the home" (p. 47). Some of the other salient points the authors made include the following:

1. The home and family environment is the primary and pervasive setting for learning basic life tasks.

2. In the home, learning can be pursued within the context and pattern of everyday life at the time it is needed.

3. Play provides a significant function in maximizing the role of the home and family as educators.

4. Parents who understand child development can foster interactions and reinforce the child, thereby enhancing the child's learning within the home and family.

5. Evidence indicates that the family ecosystem (family members in home environments) is the most effective system for fostering and sustaining the development of the child.

6. Society has much to gain if attention is focused on the vital importance of the role of family members and significant others in influencing and enhancing the cognitive development of young family members.

In his study of family life and school achievement, Clark (1983) described learning-related interactions of African American families. He identified the patterns and styles of contact parents organized into their relationships with their children that provided a particular level of parental sponsorship of the child's

growth and development. The four parental behaviors that Clark highlighted were (a) carefully delegating to children certain duties and responsibilities in literacy-skill-development activities; (b) providing regular instruction, assistance, suggestions, and coaching during highly effective interpersonal encounters; (c) establishing the legitimacy of particular norms, rules, and values (code of conduct for appropriate behavior); and (d) using verbal supports, sanctions, and other nurturing reinforcement strategies as a mechanism of social control (p. 200).

Leichter (1974) explored the topic of the family as educators. In an extensive review of literature, she began with the work of John Dewey (The School and Society) and gave a historical and chronological account of perspectives on the family as educators. In her treatise, she examined several issues related to the topic and featured noted scholars in the family and child development arena, including Margaret Mead, Robert Levine, and Urie Bronfenbrenner. Socialization and education, grandparents as educators, parental goals, and early intervention were among the issues the authors addressed. These studies have particular implications for the present research because they also emphasized diversity in families, highlighted the use of a variety of approaches to the study of families, explained and described the concept of families as educators, and highlighted the benefits for children.

In a study of the effects of early intervention on the cognitive performance of 161 low-income African American children, Burchinal, Campbell, Bryant, Wasik, and Ramey (1997) used a general systems model to examine multiple

influences, including characteristics of the child and family, and early childhood intervention. Their findings indicated that (a) child characteristics were also related to cognitive development, and (b) over time, cognitive performance of African American children from low-income families was enhanced by intensive, high-quality intervention and by specific child-maternal and family environment factors. These results are consistent with a general systems model that describes development as related to the transactions between the child and his or her environment. The results were also consistent with McLoyd's (1990) person-context theory, which suggests that the quality of caregiving is a strong determinant of cognitive performance in young African American children over time. The sample for Burchinal et al.'s (1997) research comprised young Black children aged 2 to 8 years. Even though the present study involved fifth-grade children, some factors are common to both studies, including (a) considering developmental diversity among low-income African American children and (b) identifying characteristics of the child, mother, and family environment related to these children's school performance.

In her treatise on families as educators, Scott-Jones (1988) explored the transition from informal to formal school learning. She argued that shifting the blame for children's school problems from the school to the home is not a satisfactory solution. Instead, she maintained that mutual support is the answer and that schools, as well as families, must work toward mutually supportive relationships. In concluding her assessment, Scott-Jones made the following recommendations:

1. Teacher-preparation programs should require completion of courses in the following areas: (a) contribution of the home environment to the achievement and development of children and youths, (b) parent education, (c) social diversity in parenting styles, and (d) Black family life.

2. Because parents transmit values and expectations regarding education, they should impose standards of excellence, set high but attainable goals, indicate their belief in the child's competence, reward success, and judiciously punish inappropriate behavior.

Summary. The literature on parents as educators reflected that:

1. Families as educators are important to the school experiences of African American children because of their unique and culturally sensitive development.

2. Each family is different, and functions that work for some families might not be applicable to others.

3. Programs facilitating parents as educators in the early years result in substantial improvements in children's later cognitive functioning.

The Home as a Learning Environment

The phrase *home as a learning environment* is used when the focus is on the resources of the home, such as tools, equipment, facilities, and particular space, that are used to support learning (Bobbitt & Paolucci, 1986). Bobbitt and Paolucci posited that most people will agree that their learning had its beginning in the home. Learning to walk, talk, feel, and make sense of one's everyday

surroundings starts in the home. The home is often referred to as an informal learning environment and is defined in terms of familial boundaries; the learning is associated with the activities that occur within the home or family situation. The literature pertaining to African American homes as learning environments contains myriad opinions relative to the influence of this variable on the school success of Black children. A few of those selections with implications for the present study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

As stated earlier, Bobbitt and Paolucci (1986) identified several strengths of the home and family as a learning environment. They asserted that "some homes are more effective as learning centers than others; learning in the home is sometimes incidental, non-structured, and often implicit; the major purposes of learning in the home and family are socialization, acculturation, and development; and time is an important consideration in assessing the strengths of homes and families as learning environments" (p. 56). In essence, the authors regarded the home and family as primarily informal learning centers and recognized the school as the formal learning center. The cautioned against shifting too much of the responsibility for formal learning to the home and family because it would interfere with the important functions of socialization, acculturation, and development.

Other scholars and researchers have reported findings that supported the desirable outcomes of structured home learning models as interventions for disadvantaged learners. For example, Rich (1987) referred to the success of Home and School Institute (HSI) programs for families. These activities provide

a structured tutoring role for the family that supplements, but does not duplicate, the traditional work of the school. Instead, these programs are designed to teach the basic motivational skills and cultivate the positive attitudes toward learning that children need in order to do well in school.

Slaughter and Epps (1987) conducted a study in which they compared the home environments and academic achievement of Black children and youths. The researchers focused on the questions, What roles do Black parents have in the schooling of their children? and What contributions do Black parents make to the students' achievement? The sample included 16 low-readiness children (7 girls, 9 boys) and 8 high-readiness children (4 girls, 4 boys). The 24 low-income Black families and their first-graders lived in a small southern university town during the 1978-79 school year. For this study, the authors compared high- and low-achieving first-graders in low-income Black families. Mothers' and children's behaviors during a maternal teaching task were examined. Two kinds of data in addition to those on the structured teaching task also were collected. First, naturalistic observations were conducted in the children's homes. This information was useful because behaviors that occur during a structured task might not occur in children's everyday interactions. Second, hour-long interviews were conducted with the children's mothers, who were asked questions about family demographic characteristics, family routines and childrearing practices, and values and practices related to education. Data also were collected on the students' achievement. At the end of the school year, four measures were taken from the school records: scores on the California

Achievement Test (administered near the end of first grade), number of

language and mathematics skills mastered (assessed by teacher-administered

tests), number of behavior problems reported on teacher checklists, and number

of days absent.

Significant results of the Slaughter and Epps study were as follows:

1. The groups did not differ significantly with regard to behavior problems

or absences from school, although the means on these measures were twice as

high for the low-readiness as for the high-readiness group. School records also

revealed that 8 of the 16 low-readiness and 1 of the 8 high-readiness children

would be retained in first grade the following school year.

2. The two groups, selected initially on the basis of school-readiness test

scores, remained significantly different on measures of academic performance at

the end of the school year.

Slaughter and Epps found that there was no evidence to suggest that the

high- and low-readiness children were concentrated in any particular type of

classroom or school. The researchers did not assess the role of the children's

school experiences in maintaining the initial difference. They concluded with a

number of implications for policy, practice, and parenting to aid in improving the

academic achievement of low-income Black children.

Although Slaughter and Epps's sample included very young children, their

study is closely related to the present research. Similarities include:

1. Both studies had samples of low-income Black families with

elementary school children.

2. Both studies used nearly identical data-collection methods (interviews and observations in a naturalistic setting, and review of the students' school records).

3. Both studies had a similar focus related to the contributions that Black parents make to student achievement.

Ascher and Flaxman (1987) concluded that family participation in education at home appears to be more clear-cut in its effectiveness in improving student achievement than parent involvement in decision making and other roles less directly related to education. The authors posited that school policy directed at involving families in at-home learning appears to be particularly useful for low-income elementary school children whose parents might not naturally participate.

Several other researchers have reported findings on positive results of home environment learning support, as well as school-initiated learn-at-home programs (Barth, as cited in Slaughter, 1988; Walberg, 1986). Specific models and strategies were recommended by Clark (1983), Comer (1985), Hrabowski, Matson, and Geoffrey (1998), and Rich (1987).

A number of researchers have examined the influence of the home environment and maternal characteristics on children's learning. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Leichter (1974) indicated that the more actively parents are involved in the learning of their children at home, the greater will be the effect of the school program for these students.

Similarly, Belsky and Rovine (1990) found that the personal resources (self-esteem, locus of control, educational attainment, and age) that mothers bring to their child rearing also have significant effects on the children's home environments. The authors argued that their findings indicate the importance of the home environment to the cognitive and socio-emotional development of young children. The purpose of the study was to examine (a) the determinants of the home environments that employed mothers provided for their young children and (b) the influence of current employment experiences, current family conditions, and maternal and child characteristics in shaping children's home environments. The sample for this investigation included 795 employed mothers with young children. Participants were selected from the 1996 National Longitudinal Study of Youth, Mother-Child Supplement (NLSY). Belsky and Rovine acknowledged that their findings may not be generalizable to more mature and advantaged mothers with flexible occupations. In addition to the relevant findings and conclusions, this study provided pertinent information for the present research, which also concerned the influence, or lack of influence, of the family and home environment on the school experiences of fifth-grade children. Also, both studies addressed the effects of problematic family and home situations that impinge on the learning of Black and other minority children.

The literature pertaining to the family and home as learning environments is relevant to the present study because it underscores the importance of the family and home to children's school performance and adjustment. Most of the

findings discussed here were from studies involving families of diverse racial, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, to improve our understanding of the perceptions and actualizations related to the involvement of African American families in the education of their children, a study such as the present one (which focuses on Black families) was needed. The present exploration of the learning-related family interactions and characteristics of the home environment can add to the literature on the topic and will provide some implications and recommendations for improving the school experiences of African American children.

Summary. Many researchers have documented the benefits of families as educators, and homes as learning environments, for the school experiences of the children. However, Slaughter (1998) cautioned that the family and home serve in a supplementary capacity and cannot perform the educative functions of the school. Nor can preschool educational intervention compensate for the need to teach children, regardless of their previous experiences. The reports and studies related to the support of the home as a learning environment reinforced the need for more qualitative research, such as the present study, examining family processes related to cognitive development and eventual support for school learning within contemporary Black families. Studies like this will increase the understanding of how these childhood competencies are optimally encouraged in the natural urban home setting. The design and implementation of effective strategies and programs will be greatly enhanced by providing a

balance between qualitative research studies and the numerous quantitative studies that have already been conducted.

<div align="center">Family Involvement in Schools</div>

Family involvement in schools has been defined in several ways, depending on the context in which it is described. For this portion of the literature review, the phrase *family involvement in schools* is used to refer to the practice of any activity that empowers parents and families to participate in the educational process, either at home or in a program setting (Epstein et al., 1986). A few of the definitions, descriptions, studies, and opinions most commonly found in the literature are included here to provide a framework for examining how the African American families participating in this study perceived that they actualized their involvement in their children's schools and school-related activities. The information in this section pertains to the following indicators of school involvement: home-school communications, parent-teacher interactions, in-school participation, benefits of parent involvement, and barriers to parent involvement.

Epstein has conducted much research and written extensively on parents' participation and involvement in their children's schools. In her 1993 model of parental involvement, she identified and described five types of involvement: (a) Parenting—the school helps parents create a supportive learning environment at home, (b) Communication—the school reaches parents through effective communication, (c) Volunteering—the school recruits and organizes parent help,

(d) Learning at home—the school provides parents with ideas for helping children at home, and (e) Representing other parents—the school recruits and trains parent leaders.

Dauber and Epstein (as cited in Griffore & Boger, 1986) researched parents' attitudes and practices of involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. They found that

1. Children are more successful at all grade levels when parents participate in schools and encourage learning at home.
2. Parent involvement is strongly limited to the actions and practices of their children's teachers.
3. Few studies have focused on schools with large populations of educationally disadvantaged students or hard to reach parents. (p. 104)

Dauber and Epstein's research provided this investigator with a model for examining the perceptions and actions of the families in the present study relative to school involvement.

Home-School Communications

Information that parents receive from the school is the link between the home and the school. The means by which this information is disseminated varies from school to school. Barbour and Barbour (1997) provided a table showing both traditional and innovative communication strategies (see Table 2.1). The table is included here because it contains strategies that are most often used in home-school communication. Researchers who have examined patterns of communications between families and schools have looked at such modes of contact as school newsletters and special bulletins, calendars of

Table 2.1: Parent and teacher communication strategies: traditional and innovative.

Traditional	Innovative
Conferences	
Teacher schedules and directs conference. Teacher prepares materials, provides input, and strives for cordial and productive exchanges.	Parents prepare for conferences as well as teachers. Parents schedule appointment. Child contributes ideas to conference and/or attends.
Home Visits	
Teacher attempts to understand home and establish positive relations.	Collaboration is sought. Parents become partners in planning visits and sharing ideas. Parent empowerment is sought.
Telephone Calls	
Teacher initiates calls when concerned. Teacher uses phone as substitute for conference.	E-mail allows either parent or teacher to initiate calls or leave messages. Answering machines with messages on schedules, homework, etc., permit exchange of information.
Informal Contact	
Beginning and ending of school day are times for brief exchanges between parent and teacher. Demonstrating interest is goal.	Parents can accept more responsibility for communication.
Written Communication	
Teachers develop bulletin boards. Newsletters include school news, dates to remember, and tips for helping children at home. Informal notes are ways to keep in contact and inform homes.	Parents can help arrange bulletin boards or collaborate with school personnel in developing one. New items are included: photos of schoolwork, artwork, notes on parents' contributions, and how kids home learn. Notes reflect children's special accomplishments. Notes designed to give both parents and children a sense of well-being.

Source: Barbour and Barbour (1997), p. 197.

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events, grade and progress reports, telephone calls, and visits to the home. On the other hand, parents frequently have concerns and needs that necessitate their initiating a school contact. Barbour stated that the manner in which these parent-initiated communications are handled can enhance or deter parent involvement.

Reglin (1993) conducted a study of poor African American families and schools to explore the relationship between the homes and the schools. The study was focused on home school contacts in general, as well as the contacts with the least-favored elements of the parent populations. Participants were from a nonrandom sample of low-income parents with children in kindergarten, primary, and elementary schools in three locations. Interviews were conducted by a team of graduate students. The results indicated that most of the low-income parents had little or no positive contact with the schools. Most of what the parents heard from the teachers and school officials pertained to their children's academic or behavioral problems.

Parent-Teacher Interactions

Berger (1994) described the teacher as "central to parental involvement in the educational process" (p. 129). Among the roles that the author identified for teachers were facilitator, mediator, counselor, communicator, program director, interpreter, resource developer, and friend. Several other researchers and scholars have examined parent-teacher interactions (Barbour & Barbour, 1997; Comer, 1985; Kaplan, 1992; Ryan, Adams, Gullotta, Weissberg, & Hampton,

1995). Morris (1992) recommended that teachers prepare for African American

parents who, like all parents, are both positive and negative, those who will

come to the school angry, suspicious, and challenging. The author suggested

that essential to such preparation is an awareness of the Black family's cultural

context and how it is reflected in the perceptions, expectations, and interactions

of Black parents.

Teachers' practices of parent involvement were investigated by Becker

and Epstein (1982). They used survey data from 3,700 public elementary school

teachers in more than 600 schools in 16 of 24 school districts in Maryland.

Ninety percent of the sample were females. Ten percent of the males in the

sample were fifth-grade teachers. About 20% of the sample were African

American, and more than 60% of these teachers were assigned to an urban

district. The responding teachers were representative of their profession in the

state.

The questionnaires that Becker and Epstein distributed to the teachers

requested information on what they thought about parent-involvement strategies

and how they practiced those strategies. The survey focused on 14 specific

techniques that teachers might employ to encourage parents' participation in

learning activities with their children. Those techniques were distributed among

five categories: (a) techniques that involve reading and books, (b) techniques

that encourage discussions between parents and children, (c) techniques that

specify certain informal activities at home to stimulate learning, (d) contracts

between teachers and parents that specify a particular role for parents in

connection with their children's school lessons or activities, and (e) techniques that develop parents' tutoring, helping, teaching, or evaluation skills.

Some of the major findings from Becker and Epstein's research have implications for the present study, which also involved interviewing teachers to gain their perspectives on parent involvement. For example, Becker and Epstein found that many teachers believed parent involvement at home could be an important contributor to reaching student achievement goals. Many teachers acknowledged that they did not know how to initiate and accomplish programs of parent involvement that would help them the most. A majority of the teachers admitted that they had not been educated in the management of parent involvement. Teachers reported having the most contact with parents of children with learning and discipline problems and with parents who were already active in the schools. Many of the comments that teachers wrote reinforced common stereotypes of parents, such as "pushy" upper-middle-class parents, "helpful" middle-class parents, and "incapable" lower-class parents. Educational levels of the parents, school and principal support for parent involvement, and home-school communications are other issues that have implications for the present study.

Watkins (1997) investigated teacher communications, child achievement, and parent traits in parent involvement models. He used "theory and research on achievement goals and parent involvement to examine parental mastery, orientation, performance, and efficacy in involvement as predictors of parent involvement" (p. 3). Those variables were also investigated for their ability to

mediate the effects of amount of teacher communication, child achievement, parent education levels, and ethnicity on parent involvement. Watkins found that the primary direct predictors of parent involvement were performance orientation, child achievement, mastery orientation, parent efficacy in involvement, and amount of teacher communication. The focus and orientation of Watkins's study were similar to those of the present research, and the premises of his study were based on several of the same parent-involvement and achievement-motivation studies and theories that this researcher relied on, including Epstein (1980, 1986, 1990), Becker and Epstein (1982), Scott-Jones (1987), and Martinez-Pons (1996).

Watkins concluded his discussion with some recommendations for future researchers. These included (a) identifying specific types of parent involvement and child achievement motivation, (b) continuing the investigation of parent-involvement patterns, and (c) identifying ways in which child achievement information can initiate or increase parent involvement. Hence, Watkins's research also illuminated the need for a study like the present one, in which the researcher's goal was to contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between Black families' involvement and children's achievement by examining the perceptions and actualizations of the participating families relative to this phenomenon.

In-School Participation

Henry (1996) examined public schools' relationships with parents and communities. She used the anthropological approach and feminist theory to support her argument that, for educators, knowledge of family and social contexts and working with communities are essential. The author maintained that the school structure has to change from making more demands on parents while school remains the same. Because Henry's study addressed vital questions about cultural and social understandings, empowerment, and collaboration, it is a great tool for school administrators, teachers, parents, and those interested in public policy. In addition, Henry's work is a source of new practices and ideas for organizational structures and for school leadership that will be needed for parent-school collaboration to work.

Henry examined why traditional parent-involvement programs such as the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and open houses are not enough, and how educators might rethink parent-school collaborations. In this ethnographic research, the author analyzed institutional barriers to collaboration in order to get beyond simplistic explanations for why so many attempts to involve parents in schools fail to work. Data obtained from interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators reflected the viewpoints of the people involved. Henry used these data to direct readers to focus on what children need now and how parents and educators can support children's needs for learning and growth. She challenged parents and educators to transform competitive school bureaucracies into caring communities (p. 197). Henry's research provided a

springboard to aid the present researcher in developing implications for the future roles of parents, educators, and policy makers.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Stevenson and Baker (1987) examined the relationship between parents' involvement in schooling and children's school performance. They used a nationally representative sample of American households to select 179 children, parents, and teachers. The investigation was based on three hypotheses: (a) The higher the educational status of the mother, the greater the degree of parental involvement in school activities; (b) The younger the age of the child, the greater the degree of parental involvement; and (c) Children of parents who are more involved in school activities do better in school than children with parents who are less involved. The authors' analysis of cross-sectional data revealed support for the three hypotheses. They found that (a) the mother's educational level and the age of the child were stronger predictors of parental involvement in schooling for boys than for girls, (b) parents with more education were more involved, (c) parents' involvement was related to children's school performance, and (d) parents of younger children were more involved in school activities. The findings did not indicate a direct effect of mothers' educational status on school performance.

Whereas most investigators have explored the benefits of parental involvement in schools to their children, Winters (1993) explored the benefits to the parents themselves. The implications of her study extend beyond the

classroom and suggest ways that low-income, often undereducated and alienated people, such as African Americans, can gain the skills and confidence needed to participate in the education of their children. The variables that Winters examined included participation, competence, interaction, and pitfalls and promises of alienation. Using quantitative methods and socio-cultural lenses, Winters gathered data from a randomly selected sample of 114 mothers, whom she interviewed in spring 1987. Recommendations generated from the major findings of the study included "mediating alienation" and "participating," and "searching for self and community." Winters addressed some of the same concerns that surfaced during the interviews conducted for this study. These concerns include (a) parents' perceptions of their role in the education of their children, (b) parents' confidence in their abilities to help with homework, and (c) the school climate and parents' philosophy regarding involvement. In a similar vein, Hughes, Wiekley, and Nash (1994) found that family involvement benefited parents by enabling them to develop a greater appreciation for their important role, strengthened social networks, facilitated access to information and materials, enhanced feelings of personal efficacy, and motivated them to continue their own education (p. 103).

Brandt (1989) interviewed Joyce Epstein and presented data from her comprehensive model of the five types of parental involvement. Part of that presentation centered on family involvement outcomes for parents, students, and teachers. Points that are relevant to the present research are as follows:

1. **Teacher outcomes**: Understanding of family cultures, goals, talents, and needs; awareness of parents' perceptions, interest in schools, and willingness to help; respect for and appreciation of parents' time and ability to follow through and reinforce learning; and readiness to try programs that involve parents in many ways.

2. **Parent outcomes**: Understanding of the teacher's job and school programs, interaction with teachers, monitoring of the child's progress, familiarity with teachers, and participation in the child's education.

3. **Student outcomes**: Respect and admiration for parents, awareness of the importance of school, improved self-concept of one's ability as a learner, and understanding that there is continuity between the home and the school (p. 26).

Schneider and Coleman (1983) identified benefits of parents' involvement in their children's schools. Their study has particular implications for African American families and for the present research because the authors examined the resources available to parents and the actions parents can take to further their children's education. This research was the first major study based on survey data drawn from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. Schneider and Coleman explored several important issues, including the extent to which parental involvement can mitigate the constraints of poverty for minority and disadvantaged children, school choice, equality of educational opportunity, and the effects that school-sponsored activities involving parents have on children's educational performance. The oversample of African Americans,

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Hispanics, and Asian Americans makes this study particularly valuable for examining racial and ethnic differences in parental resources and involvement, as well as the achievement of children from various racial and ethnic groups.

In her treatise Parents Are Life Savers: A Handbook for Parent Involvement, Batey (1996) listed the following benefits of involvement:

1. Parents become active voices in favor of change.

2. A partnership is developed and trust is created.

3. Parents can stop rumors by focusing on the good within the school.

4. Parents see first-hand what is happening in the school or classroom.

5. Parent involvement helps increase academic achievement.

6. Better student discipline is an obvious result.

7. Financial assistance is increased.

8. Happy parents ensure good public relations for the school.

9. Parents seem more willing to share their skills, occupations, and knowledge.

10. Parents volunteer and give their support to the school.

11. Parents act as mentors and leaders in their communities and with students.

12. Parents, as a team, can bring about physical improvements at school or make suggestions to central office (p. 27).

Barriers to Parental Involvement

The literature contains a number of reports and studies in which the writers speculated about the issue of limited family involvement in their children's schools, thus giving rise to a prolific debate regarding the reasons for this phenomenon. In this debate, several barriers have been said to be the cause of limited involvement of African American families in their children's schools. In this dissertation, barriers are defined as obstacles or artifacts that are perceived as obstructions to goals. The concept of barriers to family involvement in schools is important to this study because it applies to the researcher's examination of how African American families perceive that the schools encourage their involvement in school-related activities.

A number of researchers have examined the obstacles that frequently discourage African American families from becoming actively involved in their children's schooling and school-related activities. These include (a) the negative perceptions that schools and families often hold about each other, (b) teachers' lack of training in how to involve families in the education of their children, (c) previous negative school experiences of family members, (d) unconducive school climate, and (e) parents' feelings of insecurity or inferiority (Kaplan, 1992).

Many of the writers featured in this literature review have proposed several reasons for the persistence of strained relationships between African American families and their children's schools. Some of the suggested barriers to wholesome and cooperative relationships between Black families and their

children's schools include racism, biased viewpoints, and stereotyping (parents viewing school staffs as prejudiced and school staffs viewing parents as unconcerned and irresponsible) (Hale-Benson, 1986; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1985; Procidano & Fisher, 1992; Slonim, 1991; Willie, 1994).

Despite the recent rhetoric and studies supporting the positive influence of wholesome and cooperative relationships between families and schools, there remain many public schools in which there is little positive interaction between African American families and school professionals (Harvard Educational Newsletter, 1999). Several of the reports in this study documented instances in which Black parents were discouraged (sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally) from playing a major role in learning activities or school-governance issues. After many years of struggling with the inequity of the public educational system, many Black parents question the feasibility of continuing to try to improve their relationships with schools (Chavkin, 1993; Lomotey, 1990; Neisser, 1986).

According to Ryan et al. (1995), another obstacle to involving African American parents in their children's schools is the frequency of negative reports. Many of the parents whom Ryan et al. surveyed indicated that they had been turned off because they never received positive messages about their children. The author suggested that educators can remove this barrier by (a) refraining from always focusing on the negative, (b) rewarding children for successes, and (c) notifying parents of positive behaviors and achievements, which can be time

consuming but can establish a rapport that might pave the way for a future report that is not so positive.

Winters (1993) stated that some African American parents blame their failure to be consistently involved with their children's school on lack of transportation, child care, and conflicts with work schedules. Schools can remove these barriers by scheduling parent-involvement activities and opportunities at different times, providing child care, and informing parents of possible involvement outside of the school. Further, Winters said that some parents are reluctant to become involved because of limited knowledge and fear of being embarrassed. Schools can solve this problem by providing nonthreatening training sessions and workshops to assist these parents in gaining the skills and confidence needed to support and help their children.

Summary

There are many definitions and descriptions of and opinions about the issue of parents' involvement in their children's schools. In this section of the literature review, the focus was on reports and studies related to topics that have relevance to the present research. Communication between the school and home is said to be the most "influential vehicle" for promoting family involvement in schools (Chavkin, 1993). Modern technology has transformed the cumbersome traditional methods of communication into more convenient and timely methods such as voice mail, e-mail, electronic signs, and so on. Parent-teacher interactions also are becoming more modern, with the old-fashioned

parent-teacher conference often being replaced by student-led conferences and previews of student portfolios, or videotapes of students participating in cooperative learning activities. Several researchers have pointed to teachers' practices of involving parents as key determinants of parental involvement (Epstein, 1986; Hale-Benson, 1986; Henry, 1996; Kaplan, 1992; Strickland, 1987).

Most researchers have tended to examine the benefits of parent involvement for students and schools. Recently, researchers have begun to address the issue of benefits for families. The problems of misconception, distrust, and cultural differences in attitudes toward education continue to surface in the literature as barriers to parents' involvement in their children's schools. Writers have suggested a number of ways schools and families can overcome these barriers.

During the past two decades, there has been an astronomical increase in the literature pertaining to African American families' involvement in schools. A great deal of emphasis has been concentrated on at-risk families, single-parent, young, and poor families. For example, Winters (1993) suggested that "many of these families are so preoccupied with survival issues such as food, clothing, jobs, illness, and violence that they have little time or energy left for school involvement" (p. 57).

This review of literature related to families' involvement in their children's schools raised some issues supporting the need for a study such as the present one, which examined perceptions and actions pertaining to African American

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families' involvement from a cultural perspective and within an ecological framework. This qualitative inquiry involved studying families in their naturalistic environments, the home and school, and from the perspectives of the participants. Hence, the researcher was able to observe, first hand, interactions, attitudes, relationships, and cultural factors that questionnaires and surveys, commonly used in quantitative studies, cannot capture.

The School Experiences of African American Children

Introduction

In this dissertation, the phrase *school experiences* is used to refer to what happens to African American children in schools. The phrase is inclusive of the actions, events, and everything that is met with, observed, done, felt, and lived through by African American children in the school setting. Numerous studies have been conducted on this subject. However, the focus of this section is on works that pertain to the aspects of the school experiences of African American children that were examined in this study. Hence, this portion of the literature review centers on the following subtopics: (a) attitudes toward learning, behavior, and school adjustment; (b) school achievement and learning styles; (c) relationships with teachers and peers; and (d) keys to success—strategies that work.

Attitudes Toward Learning, Behavior, and School Adjustment

The term *attitude* was operationally defined as the student's way of thinking, feeling, or acting toward a situation (i.e., school, learning, structure, and rules) (Lomotey, 1990). Likewise, the phrase *school adjustment* was used to describe how students make the transition from the home environment to the school setting. In seeking to provide an explanation for Black children's attitudes toward learning, behavior, and school adjustment, researchers have suggested a number of theories. Some related studies are discussed here, in an effort to better understand the perceptions of urban African American families and the teachers of their children.

Luster and McAdoo (1994) examined factors related to the achievement and adjustment of young African American children in the early grades. They used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and included all African American children between the ages of six and nine for whom data were available. The writers addressed three central questions:

1. What factors contribute to individual differences in the cognitive competence of African American children in the early elementary grades? In particular, what
2. factors distinguish between African American children who are doing well on measures of cognitive competency (i.e., those in the top quartile) and those who are experiencing problems (i.e., those in the bottom quartile)? and
3. How does the context of the children with the most favorable scores on measures of adjustment differ from children with the least favorable scores? (p. 1080)

Luster and McAdoo reported findings consistent with those from earlier studies by Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, and Someroff (1999), Rutter (1978), and Werner (1985). They wrote,

> There was a positive relation between the number of risk factors children were exposed to, and the probability that they were experiencing academic or behavioral problems. Favorable outcomes in the cognitive and social-emotional domains (i.e., scoring in the top quartile for this sample) were associated with high scores on an "advantage index."
> (p. 1080)

The authors indicated a need for more studies on successful African American children.

Ketzetzis, Ryan, and Adams (1998) examined the relationship between family processes and children's school-based social adjustment, using a sample of 161 fourth-grade and 151 seventh-grade children. Of particular interest were the direct and indirect associations among general family relations, school-focused parent-child interactions, child personal characteristics, and school adjustment. According to the findings of their path analysis, child characteristics (exclusive of self-esteem) had the most consistent and direct association with school social adjustment. A variety of parent-child interaction factors and family-life factors also were found to predict adjustment indirectly. Ketzetzis et al.'s work has implications for the present study because it shed light on issues pertaining to the school adjustment of African American children.

In her summary of the predicament of Black children, Peters (1981) indicated,

> When the Black child from the lower class home goes to school at age four or five, he or she discovers that the behavioral rules have changed.

In the classroom, there are attractive things to explore, and also a new emphasis on taking turns, sitting still, and specific times for physical activity. The child is often lost, punished, put down, or ridiculed for inappropriate behavior. (p. 32)

School Achievement and Learning Styles

The school achievement and learning styles of urban African American children have been the subject of a heated debate. On the one side are those who blame the families for failing to adequately prepare their children to succeed. On the opposite side are those who blame the schools for not meeting the special needs of Black children. Some reports focusing on the variables examined in the present study are included here to provide a framework for projecting future directions for research, policy, and practice.

Ogbu (1978) argued that the problem of low achievement levels of Black children should be viewed within an ecological framework in which schooling is a culturally organized means of preparing children for adult roles in the social and economic life of their society or social group. He maintained that, within this framework, Blacks have not generally been encouraged to strive for high achievement or been rewarded for attaining academic excellence. Ogbu concluded that efforts (integration, Head Start, Follow-Through, and so on) to improve the academic achievement of castelike minorities, including Blacks of lower economic status, have been inadequate. Ogbu (as cited in Lomotey, 1990) posited:

1. Perceptions of Whites have led them to provide Blacks with inadequate schooling and to communicate attitudes in school settings that do not encourage learners to maximum efforts.

2. Black perceptions generate disillusionment about schooling and a lack of perseverance toward schoolwork.
3. Blacks often adopt survival strategies that are incompatible with requirements of the school setting.
4. Perennial conflict and mistrust between Blacks and the schools interfere with the willingness of Blacks to comply with rules and standards.
5. Schools resort to adopting a defensive posture toward Blacks. (p. 131)

Comer (1985) advocated empowering the learning environments of Black children. His contentions were based on a study of the Yale Child Development Center's school development program. The overall goal of the program was to improve students' academic achievement by focusing on two subordinate goals: "(a) students' psychological adjustment and skills; and (b) the school climate, the attitudes and interactions of staff, students, and parents" (p. 127). Comer concluded that the program was effective in improving the academic performance of low-income, minority-group children. He added that the improved attendance and enhanced social performance on the part of teachers, parents, and students suggested that the program met the social and psychological needs of all involved. Finally, Comer argued,

> Obviously, school programs cannot compensate for the economic and resultant family stress conditions experienced by too many Blacks, but schools attuned to Black community history and needs represent one of the best opportunities to prepare more Black youngsters for successful performance in school and life. Good schools can provide support for families of current students and, in turn, the families of these students in the future. (p. 138)

Slaughter (1988) argued that the school success of African American children is largely a function of economic and social stability in the family. Family intervention to benefit the learning and the development of children is a

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recent phenomenon. Slaughter stated that many of the early intervention programs were based on a false set of assumptions, such as intellectual deficit, self-hatred, low self-esteem, and familial dysfunction. These assumptions have been critically evaluated and found to be lacking in evidence. Slaughter further maintained that "the purpose of educational intervention with Black children is to ensure that the children remain developmentally on course" (p. 113). She cited the research of Spencer (1983) and Johnson (1987) to support her belief that, when Black parents teach their children about the positive aspects of their heritage, the children are more likely to have more adaptive racial coping strategies and higher academic achievement.

Spencer (1985) explored the interfacing of social indicators (i.e., economics, cultural values) as an important aspect of Black children's growth, their achievement experiences, and psychological development in desegregated school environments. The subjects for the study were a subsample of a larger sample of third, fourth, and fifth graders in one of four rural counties. The children were in desegregated schools and classrooms. All 22 teachers were females; two of them were Black. The 445 children were nearly equally divided by gender and race. Although this study was conducted in rural schools, the results are significant to the present study because they support this researcher's belief that the achievement patterns of African American children are different from those of children of other races. Spencer found, among other things:

1. Significant differences in achievement by race, no significant differences by race on personality measures.
2. A different predictive pattern of achievement by race.
3. Significantly different patterns of teacher expectations, and interactional patterns.
4. Positive responsiveness to intervention. (p. 108)

According to Spencer, several lessons can be learned from an overall review of the results of his research: (a) Black parents intervene less than is ideal; (b) Identity and competence appear to be inextricably linked and are mediated by institutional bias; (c) The data suggest a number of questions for future research (i.e., tuning-out, turning-off, and dropping-out behavior); and (d) More research is needed on the behavior of minority students, as well as more cognitive-process-oriented studies (p. 108).

Ford (1992) described the social, cultural, and psychological factors that can influence achievement among African American students, by gender and academic program (gifted and nongifted). The research focused on

> the importance of social, psychological, and cultural factors and their perceived influence on achievement (or lack thereof) among African American students in general, and gifted African American students in particular. The paradox of underachievement is also described, in which students support the American achievement ideology (success ensues with effort and hard work), yet do not put forth the effort necessary to do well in school.

Ford described four theories of achievement and motivation, and discussed the major shortcomings of each one. The author also defined underachievement and expressed her beliefs concerning "the American achievement ideology" and African American students, as well as "the paradox of underachievement.

The findings from Ford's study that have implications for the present

research are as follows:

1. Academic programs rather than gender explained the achievement orientation of African American students.
2. Like their female counterparts, the African American males in the sample supported the American achievement ideology, yet their mean GPA was significantly lower than the GPA of the females sampled.
3. The males reported low levels of effort more frequently than the females.

Ford acknowledged that the generalizability of the findings was limited due to

the restricted sample population.

Boykins (1986) maintained that Black children achieve best in a

curriculum that capitalizes on their cultural learning style. According to the

author, this cultural learning style is characterized by excitement, liveliness, and

physically stimulating activity. He also concluded that the academic

performance of Black children is enhanced when teachers employ a variety of

such activities. Based on his studies, Boykins identified the following nine

interrelated dimensions of African American culture: "spirituality, harmony,

movement, verve, affect, communalism, expressive individualism, oral tradition,

and social time perspective" (pp. 203-204). Boykins argued that instruction in

most public schools is not developed to accommodate the cultural orientations

and learning styles of African American children. He also reported that a number

of other scholars have pointed out that "schools are rather monotonous places

for Black children, who are socialized in a conversely different environment"

(Akbar, 1976; Hale, 1982; Silberman, 1970). From his 1977 research, Boykins

concluded that "affective stimulation and vervistic stimulation are necessary for some Black children to be motivated to achieve in an academic setting" (as cited in Hale, 1982, p. 79).

Irvine (1990) stated that Black students are subjected to school failure because of their race, social class, and culture. She believed that it is difficult to disaggregate the complex interplay of these variables because they are highly interrelated. However, Irvine clarified her position by explaining that she did not claim that all Black children were the same, or equally at risk for school failure, or that they exhibit behavior that reflects the operation of an incongruent culture. Irvine cited other researchers who have maintained that race and inequality contribute to the negative school experiences that many African American students have. One example the author cited is: "According to Ogbu (1988) race has its own unique influence on the school experiences and outcomes of Black children and similar minorities which is not explained by reference to socio-economic or class struggle" (p. 164). Irvine concluded the discussion by stating that, "In all Black school settings, social class, not race, is often the ascendant variable which is used to place these students in instructional groups, evaluate their behavior, and dispense their discipline" (p. 18).

Relationships With Teachers and Peers

The relationships between African American students and their teachers and peers have been examined by numerous researchers seeking answers to the question of why growing numbers of these students are characterized as

being at-risk for academic failure, dropping out of school, falling below grade level, being suspended or expelled, and being labeled educably challenged. Relationships in this case were operationally defined as the conditions that exist between Black children and the people at school. Among these people are teachers, other personnel, classmates, and other students who attend the school. The term *conditions* refers to the way these people feel about, interact with, and respond to each other in the school setting. Some of the research that has addressed relationships between African American students and their teachers and peers is discussed here to support the researcher's argument, based on the symbolic-interactionist theory, that a common set of symbols has emerged to shape or give meaning to the perceptions, actions, and interactions of African American families and their children's schools. Included in that common set of symbols is relationships between African American students and their teachers and peers.

In Black and White Styles in Conflict, Kochman (as cited in Irvine, 1990) made the following general statements about Black students and their relationships with teachers and school personnel:

1. Black students may not maintain constant eye contact with teachers as do White students. Often Black children are accused of not paying attention when they are.
2. Due to cultural mores related to the sharing of personal information, Black students often become hostile and recalcitrant when teachers and administrators ask questions that the students consider intrusive or improper.
3. Black students are more likely than White students to challenge or test school personnel if the students perceive that those individuals are not sincere or fair.

4. Due to cultural norms, Black students tend to exhibit behaviors that are high-key, animated, and demonstrative. When these students present their ideas and behavior in this high-energy style, teachers consider them lacking in self-control and aggressive. (p. 29)

Holliday (1985) asked 24 teachers to rate 45 Black students on academic and classroom behavior. The students also rated themselves on these traits. The author concluded that the children's achievement was minimally influenced by their own perceptions, but it was significantly influenced by their teachers' perceptions. Holliday based the significance of his findings on the number of other researchers whose findings supported his.

Relationships with teachers are high on the list of variables that influence the school experience of African American students. Teacher expectations, teacher-student interactions, cultural synchronization, students' perceptions of teachers, and effective teachers are among the aspects of student-teacher relationships that have emerged in the literature with the greatest implications for the present study (Garrbuldi, 1992; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990; Strickland, 1987; Wilson, 1987).

Rosenthal and Jacobson's work Pygmalion in the Classroom (as cited in Irvine, 1990, p. 44) popularized the concept of teachers and self-fulfilling prophecies. From their study, conducted in an elementary school in a lower-class community, the authors concluded that teachers gave preferential treatment to the students they perceived as more likely to succeed. Thus, the raised teacher expectations contributed to the enhanced performance of those students whom the test identified as late bloomers.

Summary

This section of the literature review undergirded the researcher's response to Subsidiary Research Question 6: What are the perceptions of urban African American families, and teachers, regarding the school experiences of the fifth-grade students? Using the symbolic-interactionist lens of the conceptual framework and this related literature, the researcher examined and described the common set of symbols and understandings that have emerged in the education of African American children to foster the development of the perceptions and actions of the families and teachers participating in this study.

Keys to Success for Urban African American Students—Strategies That Work

A number of recent studies and reports have focused on keys to success and strategies that foster African American students' achievement and successful school adjustment. Among the writers most frequently referred to in the literature are Hale (1994), who recommended an Afrocentric curriculum; Edmonds (1979); and Goodlad (1984), who advocated changes in schools. Two recent studies are included in the ensuing discussion as current examples.

In their 1998 study of successful African American males, Hrabowski et al. demonstrated that young Black men can achieved academic success despite the roadblock of racism, the temptations of crime and drugs, and the popular culture that values being "cool" over being educated. The authors looked at males who were achieving at the highest levels of success. The sample was drawn from students in the Meyeroff Scholar Program; the majority of the young men were

from working-class and middle-class families with varying levels of parental

education. The findings were based on data collected from more than 200

interviews of students and their families. The parents also completed a

questionnaire inquiring about their parenting practices. The major purpose of

this study was to identify attitudes, habits, behaviors, perspectives, and

strategies that educators, professionals, and society members can use when

working with Black males.

Some of the major findings of Hrabowski et al.'s study that have

implications for the present research are as follows:

1. Examples of successful parenting were found in many different
   types of family structures—two-parent, single-parent, and parents of
   diverse educational levels.
2. Critical ingredients appear to be active parental involvement in the
   child's life—loving, encouraging, challenging, and supporting.
3. The family's number one priority is the child(ren).
4. Strategies that motivate some do not work for others.
5. Listening to, and talking with, children is critical.
6. Providing positive adult role models to interact with children daily
   significantly affects academic and social behavior. (pp. 201-203)

Furstenberg, a distinguished sociologist, and his colleagues released the

results of a group of MacArthur Foundation Series studies of urban families and

adolescent success (Furstenberg et al., 1999). Focusing on how and why some

urban youths are able to overcome, rather than succumb to, social

disadvantages, the authors challenged many of the myths and misconceptions

about life in the inner city. This qualitative study was based on more than 500

interviews, survey results, and case studies of families in urban Philadelphia,

Pennsylvania. Participants in the study were drawn from a random sample of

residents with listed telephone numbers, and correlated with the 1990 census. African Americans were overrepresented in the sample. In presenting the findings from these studies, the authors described in detail the creative means inner-city parents used to manage the risks, opportunities, and strategies they developed to steer their children toward resources that fostered positive development and led to success.

Furstenberg et al.'s study is closely related to the present research because it also focused on urban families and how they influence the education of their youths. Several of the same variables were used in both studies, such as parenting matters, family routines and involvement, family structures and processes, parental education, and the students' academic performance, behavior, and adjustment. Likewise, both studies used similar conceptual frameworks and interviews of families to obtain their perceptions.

Chapter Summary

The literature review was organized according to the following themes: (a) Black Families: History, Culture, and Theory; (b) Urban African American Families: Structure, Parenting Styles, and Home Environments; (c) Family Involvement in Schools; and (d) School Experiences of African American Children. These were reviewed to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of urban African American families' involvement in the education of their children. The literature was further examined to gain a better

understanding of the influences of family involvement on the school experiences of urban African American children.

The research was critiqued based on the supposition that the majority of it concerns urban African American family involvement and the school experiences of Black children from the perspectives of educators, researchers, and scholars, thus neglecting the perceptions, actions, and interactions of the participants, as well as the naturalistic contexts of the homes and schools. The review of literature supported this supposition and revealed that many studies have been based on national surveys that focused on such family elements as structure, socioeconomic status, education, and occupations. Some other researchers have used the deficit-theory model to compare low-income Black families with middle-class White families. The contribution of such studies is that, in evaluating urban African Americans' involvement in the education of their children in isolation, that involvement has been characterized as less than desirable and ultimately responsible for the unsuccessful school experiences of these children. The limitation of such research is that it assumes cause and effect without the benefit of a first-hand examination of the families' perceptions and actions. Hence, there is a need for relevant and current research, such as this present study, that includes the perceptions of families and students. Research like this is also needed to investigate and describe the involvement of urban African American families in schools from within the naturalistic contexts of their homes and schools.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The researcher's primary purpose in this study was to investigate and describe the perceptions and actions of urban African American families regarding their involvement in the education of their children. A further purpose was to determine how these perceptions and actions influenced the school experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters.

The research design and methodology used in the investigation are described in this chapter. The appropriateness of qualitative methods (grounded theory, ethnography, and case study) to this investigation is explained. The field research experience, including the sample and settings, is discussed, and the three data-collection methods (participant observations, interviews, and review of school-related documents) used in the study are delineated. Ethical considerations, field procedures involved in conducting the study, and the pilot study are discussed. Issues of access, the researcher's orientation, recording and management of data, and reporting of the findings are set forth.

Research Design

The researcher employed qualitative methods to conduct an applied basic research study designed to investigate and explain how urban African American families perceive and actualize their involvement in the education of their children and the influence of these perceptions and actions on the school experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings in an attempt to make sense of or interpret them in terms of the meanings people bring to them. This type of inquiry process was suited to the present study, in which the goal was to investigate the problem through the perceptions of the participants. Furthermore, qualitative research methods allowed the researcher to examine the perceptions, actions, and interactions of the participants in the two natural settings of the subjects (the homes and schools).

This study focused on the urban African American family, which was the primary unit of analysis in investigating perceptions of their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade students. Likewise, the fifth graders were the focus of the examination of the influence of their families' involvement in their school experiences. Patton (1990) stated that specifying the unit of analysis means that the primary focus of the data collection is on what is happening to the groups or individuals in a particular setting, and how they are affected by the setting. Hence, this researcher focused on the learning-related involvement of the families at home and in the schools, and on the school experiences of the fifth-grade students.

Additional evidence of the fit between qualitative research methods and the present study included the following:

1. This was a naturalistic inquiry examining real-world situations (family involvement in the school experiences of the fifth-grade students) as they unfold naturally without predetermined constraints on outcomes.

2. The researcher employed inductive analysis to delve into the details and specifics of the data to discover important perceptions, actions, interactions, and relationships by exploring responses to open-ended questions rather than testing theoretically derived hypotheses.

3. The investigator used detailed, rich case-study description, in-depth inquiry, and direct quotations capturing the personal perspectives and experiences of the families and persons involved in the youngsters' school experiences.

4. The researcher had direct contact and close association with the people, situation, and phenomenon under study (family involvement and school experiences of fifth graders). The researcher's personal experiences and insights were an important part of the inquiry and were critical to understanding the phenomenon.

5. The researcher treated each of the eight families as special and unique by examining and capturing the details of the individual cases; cross-case analysis followed from comparisons and contrasts of the individual families studied.

6. This research involved examining African American family life in the social, cultural, historical, traditional, and contemporary contexts, and questioning the possibility of making meaningful generalizations about these families over time and space.

7. The flexible design of qualitative data-collection methods (observations, interviews, and review of school-related documents) allowed the researcher to reschedule appointments and revisit interviews to verify information. Qualitative methods are especially useful in studies such as this one, which led the researcher to examine what people do, know, think, and feel by observing, interviewing, and analyzing documents (Patton, 1990, p. 40).

The qualitative case study method also was appropriate to this investigation, which relied on a few cases and many variables (Creswell, 1998). Case studies also are particularly useful when the purpose of the research is to gain a better understanding of some special people, a particular problem, or a unique situation; such studies enable one to identify cases that are rich in information, rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from them (LeCompte, Millroy, & Priessle, 1992). In the present study, the "special people" were the contemporary urban African American families. The problem centered on families' perceptions of their involvement in the schooling of their fifth-grade children. Furthermore, Patton (1990) indicated that case studies are particularly valuable in investigations such as this, when the researcher aims to capture group or individual differences or unique variations from one family or setting to another. Accordingly, the case study method was especially congruent with this

research because it provided the researcher with a mechanism for presenting an intensive, rich description of the families, their involvement, and the school experiences of their fifth-grade students.

The Sample and Settings

The participants for this research included a purposefully selected sample of eight urban African American families. At the time of the study, each family had a fifth-grade student attending one of five inner-city elementary schools in the Yorktown (pseudonym) public school district. This urban school district served approximately 25,000 students, the majority of whom were African Americans. Patton (1990) described purposeful sampling as the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which the researcher can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The sampling technique involved purposefully selecting families with fifth graders representing both genders; low, average, and high achievement levels; varied family structures; and parents or guardians with varied occupations and educational levels.

The sampling process included several steps. The first step involved making initial contacts with school personnel to identify potential families for the sample. The researcher's previous experiences illuminated the need to request the assistance of a contact person at each school who was familiar with the students and their families. Several visits to the schools and meetings with the contact persons resulted in a list of 20 potential families to whom letters of

invitation to participate and consent forms were distributed. Through the combined efforts of the researcher and the contact persons, 12 families consented to participate in the research. From this group, five families were selected according to the specified sampling criteria. Three additional families were later added to the sample to provide a balance in terms of such criteria as gender and academic performance of the fifth-grade students. Composition of the family and the educational level and occupation of the parents/guardians were taken into consideration, although selection of participants was based on the principles of stratified purposeful sampling and logistical considerations. Accessibility to classrooms and homes for observations and interviews, willingness of teachers of the fifth-graders to participate, and diversity in the parent-involvement climate in the schools were all factors in the selection of the eight families who constituted the sample.

Data-Collection Methods

The data-collection methods used in this study were qualitative and ethnographic in nature; they included participant observations, structured tape-recorded interviews, and a review of school-related documents, as described below. Using an ethnographic approach, the investigator immersed herself in the cultural context of the families she was studying. During this process, the ethnographer listened, recorded, and observed, thereby generating a cultural portrait of the families.

Participant Observation

The initial gathering of information for this investigation began with participant observation, in which the researcher observed the culture-sharing group by becoming a participant in the school setting. This involved volunteering to serve as a tutor and/or teacher aide in classrooms for the first few visits. In accordance with the goals of participant observation, this process helped the researcher become familiar with the setting, its participants, and their verbal interactions and behaviors. Participant observations also allowed the participants in the study to get to know and trust the researcher.

After the initial observations, the formal observations began. During this process, the researcher carefully and systematically observed and consciously recorded, in detail, many aspects of the situation. The participant observations allowed the researcher to observe, first-hand, the actions and interactions of the fifth-grade students with their peers and teachers in the school setting. Other variables on which the researcher focused included the students' attitudes toward learning, work habits, and behavior. The case studies were developed from the researcher's field notes.

In-Depth Interviews

The second data-collection method involved one-on-one structured interviews with the students, parents of the students, and teachers of the students. The intention was to interview each participant twice; however, because of time constraints, that was not possible in every instance. In all, 47 interviews were conducted. In an effort to collect the data in a natural setting,

the researcher conducted one-hour interviews with teachers at the school (two per participating teacher) and the parents (two one-hour interviews each) in the home. For the students, with two exceptions, two 45-minute interviews were conducted with each participant, one at the school and one at the home.

The researcher elected to use a standardized open-ended interview, which entailed preparing a list of open-ended questions for each group of participants listed above. The questions were organized around the variables examined in the study. The use of standardized interview protocols was especially useful for examining perceptions because it enabled the investigator to ask the same questions of all participants and gain their points of view on the variables the study was designed to explore (i.e., family involvement, student performance, attitude toward learning, and so on). Copies of the interview protocols are included in the appendices.

Review of School-Related Documents

The third data-collection method involved use of the unobtrusive method of reviewing documents, which did not require the subjects' presence. These data are referred to as physical evidence. The types of documents and the information contained in each one are shown in Table 3.1. The researcher reviewed the documents in the school setting, where these records were stored in confidential files.

Table 3.1: School-related documents and types of information contained therein.

Document	Type of Information
Students' 5th-grade report cards	Grades for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd marking periods Current record of citizenship and attendance Teachers' comments Parent's/guardian's signature
Students' daily work portfolios/ folders, work books, journals, etc.	Short- and long-term assignments Samples of daily work and ongoing projects Specific subject-area notebooks, etc.
Students' cumulative file folders	Previous year's records of academic progress Attendance and citizenship Samples of students' work Standardized test scores: Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP), Math and Reading, 4th grade, Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT), selected subject areas, grades 2-4 Comments of previous teachers
Students' cumulative reports (CA 60's)	Previous year's grades, attendance, and citizenship Standardized test scores (MEAP Writing and Science, 5th grade) Record of promotion or retention Number of schools attended Special-services referrals Health information
Schools' records of attendance at functions and parent visitations	Sign-in logs of attendance at open houses, parent-teacher/student-led conferences, school council/ PTA meetings, parent workshops, volunteering

Ethical Considerations

All of the data collected for this study were transported in locked

briefcases and stored in locked files away from the school property. The

confidentiality of the participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms

and the exclusion of names or any descriptors that might reveal the identity of

the school or a person. Gender and grade-level performance ratings were noted

as a means of verifying that the sample represented a cross-section of the

district's student population. The researcher transcribed the interview tapes with the aid of a technical assistant. The data were coded according to rudimentary coding schemes, in which codes were assigned and data sorted into bins and files (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Field Procedure

Qualitative field procedure is the process of gathering data in and around the circumstances, or social setting, being studied for the purpose of analysis (Lofland, 1973). In this section, the field procedures employed in the study are explained. Preparations for beginning the field work are described, the pilot study is reviewed, and the general plan of action is presented. The section closes with a narrative of initial field experiences and issues.

In compliance with Michigan State University policy, the researcher applied for and received approval from the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS). The sensitive nature of field work is reflected in the university committee's exacting requirements, which obligate the researcher to stipulate the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. Copies of the approved application and consent forms are included in the appendices.

In accordance with the request of the researcher's graduate committee, a pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the instruments and data-collection methods. From the pilot investigation the researcher compiled and submitted a case-study narrative to her committee chair. Following a subsequent feedback meeting with the chair, the researcher made minor

revisions to the interview protocols and developed a detailed plan of action for continuing the field work.

The initial step in this plan of action was to improve the researcher's understanding of field research methods and her competence with effective strategies. Four steps were taken to meet this need. First, the researcher enrolled in an independent study involving the completion of a comprehensive research project. The second step included doing extensive readings of the works of noted researchers and scholars, and reviewing dissertations related to the chosen topic. The third step involved meeting with the committee chair to review effective strategies. The fourth step of the plan of action involved establishing a time line.

The initial groundwork for the field study began early in 1999. The actual data-collection process, including preparation and the pilot study, extended over a five-month period from February through June of the same year. The data transcription and development of case-study narratives took place during July and August 1999. The process of analyzing the data and describing the findings was ongoing, extending from September through December. This process, along with writing and revising drafts, continued into the early months of 2000.

Field Study

The plan for this research was informed by a pilot study of one family, which the investigator conducted in February 1999. The focus of the study was on four variables: family background, family and home environment, family and school environment, and school experiences of the students. For each of these

variables, the question was asked: What are the perceptions and actions related to this family's involvement in the learning of their fifth-grade student? Further, the influence of the pilot family's involvement was pursued.

The pilot study was undertaken to test the research methods and field procedures of the study. The pilot family was selected using the purposeful sampling criteria specified for the study. The objective of the pilot study was to collect data that could be used in the ensuing investigation. Likewise, the researcher followed the methodology and field procedures designed for the study.

The process began with initial contacts and visits to the schools to obtain access and consent of the participants. Next, the researcher carried out observations in the school setting. During these observations the researcher took thorough field notes and reviewed relevant school-related documents. The researcher tape recorded and transcribed the interviews with the student, parent, and teacher. She visited the family's home and made some final modifications and clarifications to the interview questions. In this fashion, the researcher identified themes and patterns that appeared relevant to how this urban African American family perceived and actualized their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade child. How the family perceived the influence of their perceptions and actions also was examined. The final part of the pilot study involved writing up the pilot case study. The researcher compiled the case study according to the identified themes and patterns and reflected on lessons learned from the pilot study.

Based on the case-study report of the pilot family and the recommendations of her dissertation chair, the researcher made minor revisions to the interview questions and observation protocols. The pilot study made the researcher aware of a need to strengthen her interviewing skills. Thus, in preparation for entering the field to begin the data-collection process, the researcher practiced interviewing close friends and family members, making a conscious effort to take copious notes and minimize her own comments. In an effort to enhance her knowledge of effective and appropriate research strategies, the investigator reviewed the writings on qualitative research methods by a number of scholars in the field. These sources are included in the list of references.

Access and Researcher's Orientation

This researcher's orientation, which consisted of 27 years as a teacher and administrator in the school district, was helpful in gaining access. The researcher's familiarity with rules and regulations governing access to and handling of information contained in confidential files also was an advantage. The researcher was well known by many of the principals, secretaries, and social service field workers of the schools included in the study, which also helped facilitate gaining access. When the researcher first approached the superintendent of schools, he assured her of his full cooperation with and support for the project. The researcher sent letters seeking written permission to the principals of selected schools and those individuals identified as potential participants for the subject sample. Before data collection began, the research

project had been approved by all gatekeepers and participants, as well as UCRIHS. Copies of the letters of invitation to participate and copies of letters of consent are included in the appendices.

Data Management and Recording

In qualitative research, data analysis requires a strategic plan for categorizing, coding, labeling, filing, storing, and retrieving huge volumes of information generated by the observations, field notes, interviews, and review of school-related documents. After consulting several respected sources (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990; Rudestam & Newton, 1992), the researcher developed a plan for managing and recording the data. This plan was, at times, impossible to follow. Daily routines often stretched into weekly chores.

The extensive volume of data collected required the researcher to spend numerous hours sorting, filing, and labeling information. Color-coded files were prepared to store the data collected from each of the participating families. The researcher initially attempted to complete the data transcription and development of each case study before beginning the next one. Time constraints, however, made this impossible. It was necessary to schedule and reschedule observations and interviews to mesh with the participating families' home and school activities and events. Consequently, the researcher was involved in field work on two or three students during the same period. This further complicated the data-management and recording process. The review of documents often required additional trips to schools when access to them could not be arranged at the time of observations and interviews.

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Treatment and Presentation of Data

This portion of the dissertation contains the data presented in case studies of the eight families (Chapter IV). The final chapter includes the conclusions, discussion, and implications for families, educators, researchers, and policy makers. Chapter V concludes with the researcher's reflections.

Summary

This chapter contained a description of the research methodology. The research design and rationale were explained, and the conceptual framework and research questions were identified. Data sources, settings, and collection methods were discussed, followed by a review of ethical considerations and field procedures. The pilot study was described, and issues of access, the researcher's orientation, and data management and recording were elucidated. The treatment and presentation of data in the following two chapters also was explained.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The primary purpose in this study was to investigate and describe the

perceptions and actions of contemporary urban African American families

regarding their involvement in the education of their children. A further purpose

was to determine how these perceptions and actions influenced the school

experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters. To accomplish this, the researcher

investigated the complex interactions and relationships among the families, the

students, and the schools. More specifically, the researcher examined the

interactions between the fifth-grade children and their families, and between the

families and the schools. The researcher's goal was to gain a better

understanding of the factors and circumstances that contribute to how

contemporary urban African American families perceive and actualize the

family's involvement in the education of the children. The research also was

undertaken to gain a better understanding of how these families perceived that

their actions enhanced and/or inhibited the school experiences of their fifth-

grade youngsters.

It should be noted that this chapter is written in the first person to convey

the relationship of the author to the participants. However, Chapters I, II, III, and

V are written in the third person.

The Context

The interviews, observations, review of school-related documents, and field notes from home and school visits provided the database of case studies for this research. The data were collected between February and June 1999. Beginning in early January 1999, the researcher contacted the superintendent of schools, requesting permission to conduct the study in the school district. Next, several principals of elementary schools were sent letters, seeking their permission to recruit research participants at their school sites. In subsequent visits and telephone calls to the schools, the researcher obtained a contact person at each of the sites at which the principal consented to participate. With the aid of these individuals, eight families at five different elementary schools were selected. The area in which the family members lived and worked, and the child attended school, is described in the following paragraph. A brief overview of the school district and the community is provided to enable the reader to appreciate the setting from which the sample was drawn. Following this description of the setting, the case studies of the eight families are presented. The chapter concludes with an overview of the findings and a chapter summary.

The Setting

The study was conducted in an urban, inner-city school district that serves approximately 25,000 students. The school district is among the largest in the state. At the time of this inquiry, the urban elementary schools that the participating fifth-grade children attended ranged in size from 305 to 615 students. All of the families in the sample lived in one- and two-story single-

family dwellings located in the inner city. All but two of the children lived within walking distance of their schools. Those two students were transported to magnet-school programs in which they were enrolled. This school district is located in a small industrial town in the Midwest.

The Families and Their Fifth Graders: Eight Is Enough

The fifth-grade students and their families are introduced in this section. Comments are restricted to general demographic information. The rich, descriptive details about each unique family are furnished in the case studies. Because in all cases the researcher interviewed the students, their teachers, and their parents separately, the descriptions of the families are composites of the perceptions of the students, the parents/guardians, the teachers, and the researcher's own observations.

The interactions and relationships between the fifth graders and their families and between the families and their children's schools, as well as details relative to the school experiences of the youngsters, are discussed in the case studies that follow. All names of individuals and schools used in this study are pseudonyms.

The sample population for this research included eight families with students who, at the time the data were collected, were in the fifth grade. Four of the students were females, and four were males. All but one were 11 years of age; Paula, the exception, was 12 at the time. Of the eight families, two were headed by single mothers, two were headed by single fathers, two were headed by grandparents, and two were nuclear families. Table 4.1 contains additional information about the families.

Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics of families in the sample.

Family	Family Composition	Parent/Guardian's Level of Education	Occupation	Student's Achievement Level
Paula's family	Grandmother-headed; one sibling	Completed h.s.; some college	Retired factory worker	Average
Darien's family	Grandparents-headed Grandfather: Grandmother Father: Cousin, aunt	Completed h.s. H.s. dropout	Retired factory workers	Low
Ronald's family	Intact family Father: Mother: 4 siblings	Completed h.s. 2 years college	Factory worker Salon owner/ cosmetologist	High
Tyrone's family	Father: Mother: 2 siblings	Completed h.s. B.S. degree	Factory worker Registered nurse	Average
Kala's family	Single-mother-headed 8 siblings	Completed h.s.; trade school	Housewife (AFDC)[a]	High
Leesa's family	Single-mother-headed 4 siblings Maternal grandmother	Completed h.s.	Housewife (AFDC)[a]	Average
Shelly's family	Single-father headed 1 sibling	Completed h.s.	Factory worker, skilled trades	High
Junior's family	Single-father headed 7 siblings	Completed h.s.; military; trade school	Para-professional	Low

Notes: The names used for all participants in the study are pseudonyms. All fifth graders except Paula were 11 years old; she was 12 years old.

[a]AFDC = Aid for Families with Dependent Children.

Case Study 1: Kala's Family
(Household Headed by a Single Mother)

"I want to be one of those people right on top."

While attending a women's conference one weekend, I sat next to a long-time friend and associate, Mrs. Rose. In response to her questions about my retirement, I shared with her the nature and status of my dissertation research. I also related my frustration that the family I had hoped to use in my pilot study had notified me earlier that day that they had changed their minds about participating. We discussed the time constraints and difficulties inherent in gaining access to families who would be willing to take part in a research project of this nature. During the course of our conversation, Mrs. Rose said she knew a family she was certain would cooperate, and she volunteered to contact the teacher and the family for me. The following Monday I met her at the school, and she introduced me to the teacher and the student. She also called the parent and asked her to call me so that I could arrange a meeting with her to discuss the details of her participation in the study.

Initial Meeting With the Student
and Gaining Consent

When Mrs. Rose arranged for me to meet the potential student for this pilot case study, she brought the youngster into her office, where I was waiting. She said, "Kala, I have someone I would like you to meet; she's a friend of mine who is a retired principal. Before she retired, she was the principal at Westfield

School. Do you know anyone who went to Westfield?" The student said she

had a cousin who attended that school. Mrs. Rose then said,

> Since Mrs. Muldrew has retired she is working on a special project at the
> university and would like some students from our school to work with her.
> I told her about you and your family because I think you would be
> excellent for her research project.

At our very first meeting, Kala impressed me as a friendly, personable,

articulate, and astute youngster. Because children are taught at home and

school to beware of talking to strangers, I was surprised at how readily she

communicated with me at that first meeting. Following our formal introduction, I

shared with Kala the part that students and families would play in my research

project, and how her family could become involved. Afterwards, I asked if she

thought it was something she would like to do. She eagerly responded, "Yes."

When I asked if she thought her mother would be willing to participate, she said,

"I can ask her, but I'm sure she will." I spent about 20 more minutes telling her

about myself and letting her ask me questions about Westfield, the school where

I had been principal, going to college, and my family. Kala shared with me that

her oldest sister was in college and that she also wanted to attend college and

become a math teacher. I gathered from our conversation that Kala was fond of

her sister and proud of her family.

It took several attempts for me finally to meet Kala's mother, Mrs. Proud.

Both Kala and my contact person, Mrs. Rose, asked Mrs. Proud to call me at

home. When she did, she gave me her telephone number and made an

appointment to meet me when she brought Kala to school the next day. She

was unable to make that meeting, as well as two subsequent appointments.

Each time she gave plausible reasons for not being able to come (e.g., she had to take the baby to the doctor). Kala kept insisting that she was sure her mother would agree to let their family participate in the study. Consequently, I gave Kala the letters of invitation to take home to her mother. The next day I received a call from Mrs. Proud; she inquired about the kinds of questions I would ask Kala. After I had shared the student-interview questions with her, Mrs. Proud met me at the school and signed the consent forms. During the interviews, I had the distinct impression that Kala had probably received some coaching on the responses she gave. Thus, I tried to confirm some of the information she shared with me at our initial meeting.

The Family and Home

Kala's immediate family unit consisted of a single mother and eight siblings. According to Kala, her father did not live in the home but was very involved in caring for the children. Mrs. Proud appeared to be in her late thirties or early forties. She seemed active and energetic, stepping briskly as we walked through the school. She moved at a fast pace and appeared somewhat carefree and happy for a mother withe the responsibility of eight children. Each of the four times I met with her, she exhibited a positive, warm, and friendly attitude. She described her occupation as a housewife and homemaker. When asked about her educational level, she had this to say: "I had two years of college. I also had technical training, wherein I had begun working as a construction worker and a rod buster. I eventually retired from working construction."

Kala's mother described her family as follows:

I have eight children. There are five girls and three boys. My five daughters are: Carla, 20 years old, who is a second-year student at a local college; Kala, 11 years old; Jessica, 6 years old; Jillian, 2 years old; and Mia, 7 months old. My three sons are: Elijuan, 8 years old; Jamar, 7 years old; and Imani, 5 years old. We are basically a close family. We have a lot of family days, church days, and a lot of activities that we do as a family or with other kinfolk. We're just an average family that wants to make it, to make a difference in this world.

When I asked Kala to describe her family, she had this to say:

Well, I have a bigger sister, she's 20; she coached me this year in girl's basketball. I have a little brother named Elijuan; he's kinda quiet around people, and he doesn't speak much, and when he's around people he knows, he talks a lot. And my little sister Jessica, she's the same way, they favor each other. My little sister Jessica looks exactly like my big sister Carla; she's very good at work, in her classroom. She had great marks on her last report card; her teacher says she is an outstanding student and that, as far as she can tell, she should make it to be anything she wants to be. And my little brother Jamar, he's very bright. He doesn't like to be bossed around; you can tell when you're doing something he doesn't like and he stops it right then and there before anything goes farther. My little brother Imani, he's only in kindergarten, and he loves to play. He gets along nicely with other people, and he helps my mom to take care of my baby sister. Her name is Mia, and all she does is sit around and sleep all day. That's my family . . . and we all live in the same house.

Kala appeared to be most proud of her sister Carla, who was a second-year student at a local community college. She seemed to take great pride in talking about how Carla coached the girl's basketball team and how much she wanted to follow in Carla's footsteps and also go to college.

Kala went on to describe her father as follows:

Well, he doesn't live with us, but he takes care of us, even with all the things he does. I see him daily, I see him every day; I saw him yesterday, I saw him this morning. He is gone when I go to school, but he stays home and watches my little sister. I mean, even though my father doesn't live with me . . . it doesn't matter to me because I know he loves me when he is there . .. and he's still gonna love me as much because he's told me so. Therefore, I have no worries about my father and my mother getting into a disagreement; they do not argue around us. I've never heard my

mom and my father argue around us. If my father has something to say, he will say it calmly. I have never heard my father curse, or my mom. I mean . . . he is everything a father should be.

It seemed that Kala felt compelled to convince me that her father was a worthwhile person. At our initial meeting, she said that her father did not live with them but was always there for them. She spoke of a time when her mother had taken the baby to the hospital and her father came right over to stay with the rest of the children. The mother did not say much about the father. Once she indicated that he had come up to school to play a game of basketball with them. When I pointedly asked Mrs. Proud whether Kala's father was involved in her schooling, she had this to say: "Yes; one year he was going to do a science project for them, but the teacher had taken ill or something. This was when Kala was in third grade, and so the project was put on hold, but he was willing and able to come and participate."

Kala stated that her extended family consisted of her grandmother, Jean, and her husband, step-grandfather Jessie, who was the pastor of their church; her Aunt Toni and 14- and 16-year-old cousins Valisa and Tamilia, who occasionally baby-sat her. According to Mrs. Proud, her mother lived one block over from her, and her sisters lived within walking distance from her home. She described an older sister who frequently came to her home and helped out with her family, and a younger sister with two daughters, who also assisted her. Mrs. Proud referred to the latter as being very busy, but said that sister's two daughters did interact with Kala's family. She said, "At times, you know, we have family outings in which we take other family members. . . . We might all go

skating, two or three families go skating, two or three families go to the beach or to . . . anything . . . to the Expo or things such as that or downtown."

In one of our conversations, before the interview, Kala mentioned that she often went to her grandmother's house. I asked Kala whether she thought her grandmother helped her be successful in school. She responded:

> My grandmother does encourage me. She says, "You have to go and knock on opportunity's door. Opportunity is not always going to fall in your lap." She has always told me, "You've got to go out and grab what you need and what it is that you want." She did not mean that you go out and take a candy bar from the store, but she means when you need something you can always get it for yourself, which means you go out there and get an education for yourself, and not have anybody do the work for you because that's giving them more knowledge and then what are you left with? You're going to be a store clerk. That's not that much money.

The Home

On Friday, April 2, 1999, I was finally granted permission to visit Kala's home. It was a brief visit. I was invited to have a seat in the living room, which was modestly furnished, clean, and neat. Kala and her mother were the only family members visible during my visit. I could hear a television and other children talking in the next room, but none of them came into the living room. Once, the mother commanded the children in the next room, "Turn that television down." Another time she told them to quiet down. When the phone rang, she told Jessica to answer it. Once, Mrs. Proud looked in on the other children and told her son Jamar to "Take that glass in the kitchen."

Kala sat next to me on the couch, and Mrs. Proud sat across from us in an upholstered rocking chair. The only reading material in the room was a Bible

and two magazines. Kala seemed glad to see me and was eager to recite her Easter speech for me; this she did with great expression. She asked her mother if she could show me her Easter attire. Although Mrs. Proud hesitated, she finally agreed. I anticipated that this would bring out the other siblings, as they, too, would want to show and tell, but that did not happen. Kala's mother seemed somewhat ill at ease, so I did not stay long. However, she assured me that they would be glad to meet with me again when they returned from their trip. They had plans to leave on the Monday after Easter, to visit her brother in Ohio.

The Student

Kala, the subject for this pilot case study, was 11 years old at the time of the inquiry. She was a fifth grader at Timar Elementary School. Kala was neat and well groomed, and her clothing was appropriate, modest school attire. Most of the time she wore denim jeans with zippered pockets, a plaid cotton shirt, and low-top tennis shoes with bright-orange laces. Other times she was dressed in a T-shirt and cotton pants, but not of the designer quality that some of her classmates were wearing. Her hair was neatly arranged and adorned with bows.

In addition to being friendly and personable, Kala apparently had a positive attitude toward her family and school. She was unusually well mannered and courteous, often responding to my questions with "Yes, Ma'am" or "No, Ma'am." She was articulate, warm, and readily remembered my name. She seemed to feel quite comfortable with me. Although Kala was uninhibited, many of her responses to my questions seemed rehearsed. Some of her responses did not exactly pertain to the question; I did not get the feeling she was being

evasive, but rather sort of rambling on, which is characteristic of children her age. For example, I asked her, "When it's time to have conferences with the teacher [Miss Martin], what about those times?" She responded, "Conferences? ... Miss Martin ... I go to church with Miss Martin a whole lot, and when she comes over my mom asks her how I'm doing in school and whether I'm falling back on my classwork, and I did admit to it."

Kala's Work Habits and Academic Performance

My observations and review of documents confirmed a great deal of what the teacher, the principal, and my contact person, Mrs. Rose, told me about Kala. They described her as an honor-roll student with model behavior. Frequently, she was called upon to read a message or famous quotation on the public-address system during morning announcements. During one classroom observation of an English lesson, I noted that, when Kala was called to the chalkboard, she answered the questions using complete sentences and appropriate punctuation. Her handwriting was neat and clear. She worked independently and remained on task, even though there occasionally were minor distractions going on around her. The boy who sat at her right frequently stopped his work to play with a yo-yo, which he slyly took out of his desk. Kala seemed aware of this but said nothing. At one point, when the teacher instructed the class to stop what they were doing, take out the social studies book, and prepare to listen to her directions for the assignments, some students hesitated, but Kala did so immediately. The teacher commented, "I like the way Kala is ready."

When Miss Martin reviewed the social studies assignment with the class, she asked Kala to read part of the introduction to the lesson; she read fluently, and with expression. The teacher explained the writing activity that the students were to complete after reading the text silently. Again, Kala did as she was directed. Upon completing the social studies assignment, she went to the files on the counter and placed her work on the shelf labeled *social studies* On the way back to her seat, she stopped by Miss Martin's desk and took a sheet of clean paper from the tray. Then Kala returned to the task of completing the assignment she had begun earlier, just as the teacher had instructed the class to do.

My review of Kala's individual student records consisted of looking at her test scores; report cards; CA-60's, which are data profiles of the student; and cumulative folder. On her current report card she had all A's and B's, few absences and tardies, positive teacher comments, and excellent citizenship ratings. All grades from her fourth-grade year, which was spent in a neighboring school district, were missing from Kala's records. According to Miss Martin, these grades had not been received. Multi-age progress reports included positive teacher comments, such as "Kala is a joy to have in my class," "She is an excellent student," "Keep up the good work helping her at home," and "She grasps new concepts quickly and works hard." Both schools that Kala had attended credited her with good behavior, regular attendance, a positive attitude, and excellent academic progress.

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Kala's Behavior and Peer Relationships

Kala appeared to have a good relationship with the other students in the class, but basically she worked independently. I noted that she seemed to deliberately ignore the inappropriate behavior of one student who tried to distract her during a group activity. During gym and outdoor play periods, she actively participated in group games. Kala's interview responses reflected some instances of students' calling her "proper." In her words, "I do not like it when they call me 'proper' or 'Miss Goody-Two-Shoes.'" I also observed that she seemed eager to be friends with the girls in her group and willingly assisted other students who asked for her help with various assignments.

Kala's Relationship With Her Mother

Kala expressed positive opinions of her mother. On one occasion she said of her mom, "My mother, she is the best." Even when Kala discussed the chores that her mother had the children do at home, the somewhat restrictive schedule that governed the family's time at home, and a time she had to care for the baby when her mother was ill, there was no hint of resentment. She seemed to appreciate the fact that her mother, a single parent, had the responsibility of caring for eight children. Once, Kala said that she commented to a girl in her class, "And I was, like, my mom had made it to the meetings that she could. I know if you knew what our family was like, and my mother had eight kids, and you do not live with me . . . you'll get the picture."

Kala proudly discussed how her mother taught her and her siblings things like manners, respect, and appreciation for having a roof over their heads. She

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took pride in reporting that her mother had done well in school. Another time, Kala alluded to being inspired to go to college because her mother and her oldest sister, Carla, had gone. In her own words, "I want to go to college, and the reason why is because my mom and my big sister made it to college. . . . My goal is making it to college, and I believe that I should try to follow that pattern if I want to succeed at something." She followed this comment with a story about a person who owned a store, as compared to one who was a store clerk. Kala concluded with "I wanna be one of those people right on top."

At our initial meeting and also during the interviews, Kala referred to the things her mother taught them at home. Her respect and admiration for her mother were obvious. Kala made only one comment that was not so positive, and it was this declaration that she repeated more than once: "I DO NOT want children of my own when I grow up!"

Kala's Perception of the School and Teacher

Kala expressed some very mature ideas relative to her feelings about school. For example, she said, "School is a place where students go to learn, and not to go around fighting or getting into a big talking thing. . . . I would like to talk to my friends, but at the same time I would like to get my work done. I like school." When I questioned her about what she thought her mother expected of her at school, she said, "She sends me to school to learn, not to play, not kid around . . . and not to get in a mess at school." She described a "mess" in adultlike terms, referring to it as "getting involved in that little circle or web that they are spinning because you don't know if you might get kicked out for this."

Kala also indicated that her mother said she had excelled in school and wanted her children to do well also. Kala proudly shared a story about her mother's report card, which had all A's.

In commenting about her teacher, Miss Martin, Kala said,

> I don't know if anybody else in my class likes school! Maybe they're just bored. But my teacher, Miss Martin, I feel that with her, she's my friend, I can tell her everything, not family business, but in school if I'm having any trouble or I'm having trouble with somebody. . . . I'm not bad.

Kala said she sometimes attended church with Miss Martin and that her brothers came along. In response to other questions about the teacher, Kala left the subject of her present teacher and began discussing her previous year's teacher, whom she apparently liked very much.

Kala indicated that she wanted to be a math teacher, just like Miss Martin, and that her previous teacher also had inspired her to want to teach. She was defensive about comments that students had made about both Miss Martin and the previous teacher. She stated,

> Miss Martin is fun. She can play, and at times she can be a little mean, but that's only because we make her that way. And I would get upset too if I kept asking the class to be quiet please; then I would get kinda irritated by that. So I don't blame her. I know that I am at school to learn. And what makes me want to be like Miss Martin is because she can play, talk, laugh with you all day, but when it comes down . . . and these are hard words . . . when it comes down to us working, we work, but then we still want to play at the same time and when she says, "Cut out the playing," it is cut out. So Miss Martin . . . she plays with us a lot, but sometimes it is just all business.

Kala's Perception of Her Family's School Involvement

It is difficult to understand and characterize Kala's feelings about her family's school involvement because they were, at times, contradictory. Once

she talked proudly and extensively about how she enjoyed school and was happy about her family's school involvement, especially her big sister's coaching the girl's basketball team, on which she played. When asked about the ways in which she thought her mother was involved in school, Kala said that Mrs. Proud attended parent conferences, Title I meetings, and PTA meetings; visited her classroom; went on field trips; occasionally stopped kids from fighting; and advised the peer mediators. Kala concluded that her mother had participated in many school-related activities since the time her big sister had started school.

Kala's responses suggested that, because her mother was very involved, there was some jealously among certain youngsters in her class. When I asked whether she thought her mother's school involvement was enough, she replied, "It's enough." Then she chattered on about some girl who made derogatory comments when Mrs. Proud came to school. When asked how it made her feel when her mother came to school, Kala responded, "It makes me happy, but the other people are sometimes looking mean. It just clashes, I guess."

Kala's Perception of the Family's
After-School Involvement

Kala gave a detailed account of her daily schedule of after-school activities. She was excited about her enrichment classes, which included drama on Mondays and Tuesdays, open gym on Wednesdays and Fridays, and Delta sorority youth activities on Thursdays. She indicated that her weekend schedule included Saturday choir rehearsal and church on Sunday, when the whole family worshiped together. When I asked about homework, Kala did not say that her mother or anyone else helped with it, but she explained that her mother had

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bought her a child's laptop computer to help with problems she did not understand.

Mother's Perception of the Student and the Teacher

It was not easy to get a clear picture from the interviews and observations of how Mrs. Proud perceived her relationship with Kala. However, she was obviously proud of her daughter's excellent academic achievement and participation in extracurricular activities. Some responses to questions led me to believe that Mrs. Proud felt a need to protect Kala; perhaps this is one of the reasons she transported her to and from school and enrichment activities. I did observe that Mrs. Proud readily and openly displayed affection for Kala, showering her with hugs and kisses. Her conversation also indicated that she saw herself as being responsible for teaching her children the importance of education, responsibility, respect, and good behavior.

Kala's mother seemed to view the teacher in a very positive light. Mrs. Proud believed that Miss Martin was trustworthy because she permitted Kala and her brothers to attend church with her. Kala's mother also mentioned trying to help Miss Martin with difficult students and said she felt comfortable stopping by the classroom at any time. Mrs. Proud had only good things to say about Kala's teacher.

Mother's Perception of the Family's School Involvement

When asked how she thought Kala felt about her family's school involvement, Mrs. Proud had this to say:

You know, Kala is so happy sometimes that she's shouting it. You can see it in her. You can see it when she plays her instrument. I see it when she utilizes herself and puts forth her best effort, and I want that same thing for that other child as well, and that's what hinders.

During the interviews, Kala's mother included a variety of things about her school-involvement activities. In addition to taking her daughter to school almost every day, she frequently stopped in to communicate with the teacher about Kala's progress. Mrs. Proud attended parent meetings, workshops, honors assemblies, student performance programs, and field trips. Stopping an occasional fight in the hallway, mediating disputes on the playground, and giving pep talks to the peer mediators and Kala's class were among the school involvement roles with which Mrs. Proud credited herself. In answer to my question about whether she volunteered to help out in the classroom, she did not give a direct response, but said that one student in Kala's classroom was having difficulty, and "we really worked hard to help him have a successful school year."

When I asked Kala's mother to describe what, if any, meaning her school involvement had for Kala's academic performance, attitude, and adjustment, she responded:

> I believe so. I can feel the difference. If I put myself in my daughter's position and I am in elementary and my parent is being involved with me, it is totally different, and I know the joy. . . . The other day, to give you a good example, she said, "Mom, if you come up to the school and come to this workshop, then we can sign up for a pizza" . . . put their name on a list for a party or something . . . and so I told her that I wasn't feeling well, but I might consider coming up there. And when I got up there in the workshop, I felt better and I stayed and signed up. So later I didn't tell her that I had done that, but she brought it to my attention that the staff, the teacher or someone, had informed her, and the smile on her face, that instant smile, that instant gratification, that was pleasing, that was encouraging.

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During the interviews, Mrs. Proud also talked about parental involvement being important, even in high school, to help children reach their achievement potential and realize their dreams. She said she let her kids know that "school is important because it makes or breaks your future." She indicated that she looked forward to being involved and was amazed that the great Timar school spirit had not rubbed off on other parents and hadn't influenced them to participate more.

Her actions and interview responses indicated that Kala's mother apparently thought it was very important for families to be involved in the school experiences of their children. When asked to reflect on her own parents' involvement, she said more than once, "I would have wanted more." Mrs. Proud described her parents as shopworkers who were divorced when she was six years old. She credited her mother with having taken her to practices, banquets, and other activities and, basically, being as dedicated as she could be with a full-time job and six little children. Mrs. Proud vividly described being influenced during her elementary school years by a woman who walked her children to school every day to keep other kids from picking on them. She recalled that her own mother could not do that because she worked nights and would be in bed asleep when it was time to walk to school. Kala's mother also mentioned that her parents could not get time off from their factory jobs to participate in school activities like parents can today. She discussed feeling somewhat deprived because of her parents' lack of involvement and intimated that some of the children in Kala's class might feel the same way about her family's frequent presence and participation in school-related functions.

Mrs. Proud was very complimentary about the attitudes of the principal

and staff at Kala's school toward family involvement. She indicated that they

provided many opportunities to become involved. When I asked her what more

she would like to do, she responded:

> Well, actually, we had spoken on it, the children and I. . . . Brook Avenue
> church has entered into a contract with Timar, and we are going to start
> mentoring programs, and the church actually is behind it. So I look
> forward to becoming involved with that program, which will help to mentor
> boys and girls, and I'm excited about that.

The only other instance of family involvement in school that Mrs. Proud referred

to was her daughter Carla's coaching the girl's basketball team. She also

mentioned that once Kala's father had planned a classroom science lesson but

had not gotten to implement it.

Mother's Perception of the Family's After-School Activities

Kala's mother described their after-school involvement as a regular

routine that included daily enrichment activities for Kala. Kala was enrolled in

piano lessons, choir, dance, and drama classes, and she also participated in the

Delta sorority's youth enrichment club. Kala's mother gave this account:

> Our routine is 5 o'clock is homework time, every day, seven days a week,
> homework! And sometimes on Friday, the ones that didn't choose to do
> their homework have Saturday and Sunday to get it done, but basically
> week-day homework must be done that night. Now about 5 o'clock, 6, 7,
> possibly at those times I'm cooking dinner, and we're having dinner
> shortly after it is prepared and we're cleaning up the kitchen and then
> everybody is sitting, watching their programs, and then shortly before they
> go to bed, at 9, they try to get their school clothes ready. So generally,
> they'll do their washing . . . the boys wash on Fridays, the girls wash on
> Saturdays, and my college student washes on Sundays. So, basically,
> after they get that done, by 9 o'clock the house should be clean, so
> basically that's what we try to do. Even though I've been accused of
> having been a little too strict, it's just that narrow time slot right there that

doesn't allow a lot of flexibility. That's why, generally, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are our family days.

In addition to homework, some of the things the Proud family did at home that supported learning included having fun singing and practicing Easter speeches on the karaoke machine. They had an organ that the children played, and they attended church worship together.

Mrs. Proud also indicated that Kala's extended family members were sometimes a part of their after-school activities. She stated,

> At times, you know, we have family outings in which we take other family members. . . . We might all go skating, two or three families go skating, two or three families go to the beach or to some other place, Expo or things such ás that, or downtown to [the university] or the YMCA. . . . Four families, maybe five or six families, we all go to the YMCA.

Kala's School and the Teacher

Kala attended Timar Elementary School, located on the far northern end of the city. According to the principal, the school's population was approximately 480 students; with the exception of 10 or 12 Hispanics and Caucasians, all of the students were African Americans. The school served students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The building was a very old one, but it was relatively well maintained. The grounds near the entrance and play area were free of rubbish; the hallways were also clean and highly polished. Attractive displays, welcome signs, and motivational slogans adorned the walls of the hallways and classrooms.

The building climate appeared to be orderly, as evidenced by events taking place in according with rules and well-established procedures. This was

most noticeable because I was observing the school during those early spring days when the annual severe-weather drills were taking place.

Kala was a member of a self-contained fifth-grade class of 27 students, 15 girls and 12 boys. The classroom was neat and well organized, with an arrangement suitable to the activities that were taking place. The teacher's desk was near the chalkboards, with students' desks in paired rows facing her. Small-group instruction was conducted in a corner near the windows, where students sat on chairs around a half-moon table. Near the rear of the room were five computers, stationed in clusters of two or three. A large television monitor was mounted in the corner, near the computer terminals. Materials and supplies were neatly arranged and easily accessible. Students placed their completed work in labeled cubicles on the counters. They obtained clean paper from a tray on the teacher's desk, and a can containing sharpened pencils sat nearby. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, and copies of Roget's Thesaurus were on shelves above the counters. The learning environment was colorful and attractive, with bulletin boards, charts, and displays, as well as an area labeled *Excellent Work*.

The disciplinary climate was orderly, with routines that appeared to be well established. Students raised their hands for a turn to read or respond to the teacher's questions, and they generally seemed alert and attentive to assigned tasks. When the teacher occasionally reminded a student of the rules, the child readily responded. Even though the classroom was unusually warm at times, the students were generally well behaved.

Miss Martin was a second-year teacher who seemed to be very young. At our first meeting, I discovered that she was very warm and friendly. She

displayed a genuinely pleasant, cooperative, and accommodating attitude during all of my interactions with her. Miss Martin had been highly recommended to me as a possibility for the study by both the principal and my friend, Mrs. Rose, who was the contact person. They described her as a very competent, concerned, and caring teacher who always tried to involve parents in the learning experiences of their children.

Teacher's Perception of the Student

Miss Martin was very complimentary about Kala. In her description of what the youngster was like, the teacher's comments mirrored those I had noted in my review of records from Kala's previous teachers. Miss Martin characterized Kala's work ethic in this manner:

> Kala is a hard worker. She normally stays on task. She's very smart; she easily catches on to things. I don't have to explain a concept several times to her before she will catch on to it. She's pretty quiet. She likes to work alone, independently. She likes to help others, so if she sees that there's another student who's maybe having a problem or who's not catching on as quickly as she is, she doesn't hesitate to help that student. So basically, that sums it up.

The teacher went on to say that Kala had a very positive attitude toward school, and unlike some of the other students, she did not need to be pushed to do her work. According to Miss Martin, Kala was also very responsible about her homework and classwork. She stated, "Kala is always making sure that her work is done correctly." It was obvious from the interviews and observations that the relationship between Kala and her teacher was a close one. Kala attended church with Miss Martin, helped her with a number of tasks in the classroom, and was frequently chosen by the teacher to represent the class in special school activities.

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The Teacher's Perception of the Parent

Miss Martin described Kala's mother as a "very involved parent" who attended parent meetings and conferences, helped chaperone the class field trips, and made sure that her daughter completed homework and school work. The teacher seemed to be most impressed by the fact that this mother had eight children and still found the time to bring her daughter to school almost every day and to participate in parent activities at the school. Miss Martin continued to describe Kala's mother by saying,

> I do know that she has several other brothers and sisters who all attend different schools. Kala is the only child at Timar Elementary School. Mrs. Proud is very involved with every one of her children. I also know she often runs from school to school. She is always here for any program, any honors assembly. She brings Kala to school every morning, and she always stops in to speak to me to make sure there's nothing happening that she needs to work with Kala on at home. I know she's very adamant about Kala getting a good education and making sure that, as the parent, she does all that she possibly can to make sure that Kala gets a good education and that this becomes a reality.

The teacher also explained that Kala's mother did not wait for the school to contact her about Kala. Instead, she made the extra effort to stay in touch with the teacher and the school.

The Teacher's Perception of the Family's
School Involvement

When asked about the family's school involvement, Miss Martin indicated that she knew nothing about the father, but she was well acquainted with the mother's participation. She was also aware that Kala's big sister, Carla, helped to coach the girl's basketball team. Other school involvement for which Miss Martin gave Kala's mother credit included (a) recognizing that Kala had great potential and encouraging her to strive for excellence; (b) having high

expectations for her daughter's behavior and achievement; (c) showing an interest in other children and trying to encourage more parents to get more involved in school; and (d) attending parent meetings, workshops, honors assemblies, and school programs. Miss Martin also said she thought that perhaps Kala was such an exceptional student because of her family's support.

The Teacher's Perception of the Family's After-School Involvement

When asked about the Proud family's after-school involvement, Miss Martin had this to say:

> I guess immediately after school, they have to do homework, before they can watch any TV. They have to get their homework done. Kala has mentioned this several times because I only give homework Monday through Thursday, but at her home, even on Fridays they have to do homework. Therefore, if they don't have any homework to do, her mother is finding something for them to work on that relates to school. . . . And before they can watch any TV, that's something that the whole family has to do—sit down and do their homework together. Then, something else that I think is nice, they sit down and eat dinner together. Many families don't have time for that anymore. This is the time where the family talks about what happened in school, or how their day was, so that makes relationships a little better. Yes, Kala talks about her family all of the time.

Miss Martin also said that Kala frequently talked about some other things they did outside of school. Some of the activities they participated in were skating, going to movies, swimming at the YMCA, and helping their mother with cooking and other household chores. The teacher did not seem to know of any other at-home activities that Kala's family engaged in to support learning. However, she did indicate that the family attended church and apparently believed in Christian values, as evidenced by Kala's good manners, courtesy, and respectfulness.

Conclusions

The family in this pilot case study was one in which education was valued and good behavior was encouraged and supported through both in-school and out-of-school family involvement. Kala, the fifth-grade student on whom this case study centered, was a model student in terms of school performance, attitude, and adjustment. Her interactions with peers were appropriate, and she was well thought of by her teacher, principal, and other staff members. I found her to be a cooperative, friendly, and willing participant. She acted very mature and responsible for her age.

Case Study 2: Leesa's Family
(Household Headed by a Single Mother)

"I want to be a doctor because I care about people."

Initial Meetings

Leesa's family was recommended to me by Mrs. Jones, the principal of Daily School, whom I had known for some time. She had been my assistant principal for three of my last years as a principal. I invited her to lunch one day and told her about the nature of my research. She immediately expressed an interest in learning more about the study and left our lunch armed with letters of invitation and consent forms. She promised to find some families at Daily School who would be willing to participate in the study.

A few days later, Mrs. Jones called me to say that Leesa's mother had consented to have her family participate. Later that same day, I went to the school to collect the signed consent form. Mrs. Jones called Leesa's homeroom teacher, Mrs. Williams, to the office and introduced us. Mrs. Williams invited me

to accompany her to the classroom to meet Leesa. Following our introduction, I gave Leesa one of my cards and asked her to have her mother call me so that I could arrange to meet her.

Leesa's mother, Ms. Brown, called me later that same evening to say that she would be coming to school the next day to talk with the principal about a fight that had taken place between Leesa and another student on their way home from school. Ms. Brown indicated that she would see me if I could meet her at the school the following day. Because we did not know what time Mrs. Jones could see Ms. Brown, I arrived at the school at 9:00 a.m., the beginning of the school day.

While waiting to meet Ms. Brown, I meandered around the building, getting a feel for the school's culture (see description of the school). After a while, I entered the classroom to observe. Shortly after 10:00 a.m., the principal asked Mrs. Williams to send Leesa to the office. Later, she explained to me that the purpose of Leesa's office visit was to participate in a conference regarding the fight she had with another classmate while returning home from school the day before. Shortly thereafter, the teacher went to the door, where Leesa and the other student were standing with their mothers. Mrs. Williams briefly spoke with them.

When the two students returned to the classroom and had taken their seats, the teacher called me out to the hallway and introduced me to Leesa's mother, Ms. Brown. During our brief conversation, I reminded her of the purpose and focus of my research and informed her that I would begin observing Leesa at school that week. We scheduled times to conduct the parent and student

interviews. Ms. Brown assured me that I was welcome to visit their home, and I did so on three occasions. The first time, I took Leesa and her little sister home; their mother had given them permission to stay after school to complete the second student interview. The second and third visits were for the purpose of interviewing Ms. Brown. Several times, I observed Leesa in the school setting, in the classroom, in the lunch room, and on the playground, and I accompanied her class to an assembly on character education.

The Student

The student who was the focus of this case study was a somewhat shy 11-year-old girl named Leesa. At the time of the study, she was a fifth grader at Dailey Elementary School. Leesa was a bit smaller than her classmates. Her hair was always well cared for and neatly arranged. She wore clothing that was similar to that worn by her classmates, but it was not the name-brand or designer type of apparel that is popular with many students in urban schools. Each time I observed her, Leesa wore denim jeans or casual slacks, a T-shirt, and a red, white, and blue jacket. Everywhere she went, Leesa carried a transparent plastic bag that was fashioned like a backpack but was only large enough to carry small objects such as pencils, pens, money, and other keepsakes. This must have been a current fad because several of the other girls also carried similar transparent bags.

Leesa's Family

At the time of the study, Leesa's family consisted of her mother, who was the head of the household; a 25-year-old brother who was employed; a 17-year-

old sister who was in high school; and a 10-year-old sister who attended the same school as Leesa did. The children's maternal grandmother also lived with the family. The extended family, who occasionally helped care for Leesa and her younger sister, included some aunts and uncles (her mother's siblings) who lived in the same neighborhood. No mention was made of Leesa's father. I met Leesa's younger sister during my visit at the school because the two children met after school each day to walk home together. The grandmother and I had several conversations when I telephoned or visited their home. I did not have an opportunity to meet Leesa's older siblings. Leesa's mother described their family in this way: "We are a Christian family, and we believe in children and families working together. We are a close family; basically, we talk things out and do things together."

Leesa's Mother

Ms. Brown appeared to be in her forties. She was talkative and intelligent, but she used substandard English to express herself. She had graduated from high school and taken some classes in trade school. At the time of the study, she was not employed, a situation that she blamed on an injury to her knee and arm. Ms. Brown was pleasant and cordial each time I met with her, but I had the feeling she was keeping me at a distance or that there was something she did not want me to know. She gave a somewhat muddled response to my question about the way her parents' school involvement compared with her own. She described the meaning that parent involvement has for the child's school performance, attitude, and adjustment as follows:

To me it is very important because I always say a parent brought a child into the world, a parent teaches the child to grow up, therefore a parent's involvement has to be important because I tell my kids that the parent is the first teacher.

Extended Family

Leesa's grandmother, who lived with them, was very cordial and talkative. I had spoken with her on the phone and was formally introduced to her on my first visit to their home. Her actions revealed that she was definitely interested in the interview process. When the grandmother received a call during my visit, Ms. Brown asked her to take the telephone into the kitchen so as not to interrupt the interview. However, the grandmother came out of the kitchen and stood in the doorway, obviously listening to what was being said in the interview. Ms. Brown and the grandmother exchanged looks, and the latter returned to the kitchen. A little while later she walked through the living room, where the interview was in process, and paused to look out the front door. She appeared to be trying to give Leesa's mother a signal. I took the hint and shut off the tape recorder. Ms. Brown explained that her ride had arrived and she needed to leave for an appointment. We agreed to finish the interview the following morning.

Leesa's grandmother apologized to me for her daughter's having to leave and then chatted with me as I packed up my equipment. She asked whether I was still working in the schools and commented on how things had changed since she raised her children. Naturally, I was interested in her point of view. She said that many of the problems in schools today are a result of the no-paddling laws and of young parents defending their kids when they misbehave. I

mentioned that Leesa had told me her grandmother occasionally came to the school to check on the girls if their mother was unable to come. The grandmother smiled and said, "That's what families are for. . . . They should stick together and help to raise the children to do what's right. The school can't do it all." She also said that she had not received much education and that her husband had always been the one to help their children with homework and to attend their school programs. She added, "But then it was not like it is now, with so much trouble in the schools."

As I prepared to leave, I speculated that it would be beneficial to interview Leesa's grandmother. However, I resisted the temptation to ask for permission because interviewing her had not been part of my initial agreement with Leesa's mother. Perhaps the grandmother might not have spoken so freely if she were being tape recorded.

The Home

The Brown family's home was located in the far-northwestern area of this urban school district. The neighborhood was populated primarily by low- and middle-income families. The home was five or six city blocks from the school, which was easily within walking distance. When I visited Leesa's home, the neighborhood appeared well kept, with manicured lawns, flowers, and trees. The Browns' house and most of the others on that street were in good repair. Sidewalks were clean and free of debris.

I made three trips to Leesa's home and was invited in twice. Each of those times I was asked to take a seat in the living room. This room was furnished with a couch, two occasional chairs, a coffee table, and a television

mounted in an entertainment center. The furniture evidenced a great deal of wear. Leesa had said in her interview that the family had a big computer, but I did not see it, nor did I notice any books, magazines, or other materials that would support learning, although they might have been in other parts of the house.

Leesa's Personality, Attitude, Citizenship, and Peer Relations

The first day I observed Leesa, she appeared to be shy and was somewhat self-conscious. I sat facing the table that Leesa shared with one other girl and two boys. The table was situated near a wall at the opposite end of the room from the teacher's desk. The two boys took advantage of every opportunity to socialize when the teacher was preoccupied with helping individual students. Leesa grinned at their conversation and antics. Several times I noticed her watching both the teacher and me out of the corner of her eye. Because I knew that Leesa was aware that I was there to observe her, I tried to focus on the teacher and other objects or children in the classroom in an effort to minimize her discomfort. At times, it appeared that Leesa enjoyed the attention I was giving her. Clearly, she had told her seatmates that I would be taping an interview with her. This was brought to my attention when the class lined up to make the transition to their other teacher. A girl who sat across the aisle from Leesa's group asked me why I would be interviewing just Leesa and not her.

For the most part, Leesa appeared to be interested and involved in her school work. She was attentive when the teacher gave directions and raised her

hand to respond to questions. She exhibited a pleasant attitude, and her talkative nature blossomed as she became more comfortable with me. For example, Leesa was more open and articulate during the second interview than during the first one. I was amazed at how insightful her comment was when I asked what lessons her family had taught her about school. She replied,

> I mostly know about that myself. She tells me it's important. Like, you know . . . if I don't go to school I can't go to college, or get a free permit to go to college. You know, sometimes when you are in the tenth grade, if you get all straight A's you can get a free permit to go to certain colleges . . . and when I grow up I want to be a doctor, so I know I have to stay in school.

Leesa beamed when she spoke of wanting to be a doctor. Naturally, I wanted to hear more about that. I asked why she wanted to become a doctor. Again, the depth of her answer amazed me. She said, "Well, it's just like . . . I care about people. I want to be able to take care of people, do things for them and try to save their lives. . . . I don't like to see people hurt and almost dying and somebody can't help them."

During one observation, I noted that when the class was returning from the lunch room, a girl from Leesa's class was talking with a boy about a problem her little brother had experienced during lunch recess. I overheard Leesa exclaim, "I saw the whole thing!" Just about that time, the teacher began ushering the class to their seats. Leesa commented to the boy as he passed the girl's seat, "I'll tell you all about it after school." She seemed to think it was important to share what she know about the incident.

Leesa also told me that she got along with her friends pretty well, but "There's some kids that get an attitude real quick." She went on to say that her mother had told her just to ignore that kind of conflict. I was surprised by this

response because Leesa had recently had a fight with another youngster after school. According to Mrs. Williams, Ms. Brown vehemently insisted that the fight was the other girl's fault because she had jumped Leesa first; thus, Leesa was simply defending herself. The teacher said this must have been Leesa's account of the incident because her mother had not been there to witness what had happened. Leesa's citizenship grades, all 2's and 3's, were another indication that Leesa had difficulty with her attitude and peer relations.

Work Habits and School Performance

During classroom observations, I noted that Leesa did not always work consistently at completing her assignments. Her class was involved in several activities in which students had to leave their work briefly and return to complete it. At the beginning of the day, when Leesa's group received instructions for their morning assignments, she began immediately. Following trips to the office, the restroom, and a character-education assembly, Leesa returned to her seat and resumed her work. Occasionally, I observed that Leesa and the three students seated with her were slyly talking and playing while continuing to give the appearance of being busy with their work. When I looked at specific assignments that she had done, it was apparent that, although Leesa followed the teacher's directions, she put only minimal effort into the exercises. Her writing was a sloppy version of the cursive that the teacher insisted that they do because printing would not be accepted. For example, in her paragraph about the family's Mother's Day celebration, Leesa carelessly traced over her printing to transform the letters to cursive writing. Her sentences using the spelling words were simple as compared to the more complex ones that some of the

other students read aloud when they were asked to share their work. The teacher also made sure that I noted the many unfinished assigned pages in Leesa's reading workbook.

The review of Leesa's school records included an examination of her current report, the CA-60, and her cumulative folder containing test scores and work from previous years. Her grades on the current report card for the first, second, and third marking periods included one B- in science (her best grade), seven C's, and seven D's. During her fourth-grade year, the first year that students at Dailey School receive letter grades, Leesa received her best grades (B's) in language arts. Her grades in other subjects ranged from C's to D's. In many areas on the multi-age primary K-3 progress reports, Leesa received a rating of P (Progressing); in few areas was she rated M (Mastery). Teacher comments on current and previous report cards frequently indicated that Leesa needed to put forth more effort, study and get help at home, and improve her attendance. Her citizenship was consistently given 3's and 2's, representing average and good behavior, respectively. Dailey was the third school that Leesa had attended, having been enrolled on February 7, 1995, during second grade. Leesa's Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) scores reflected an overall performance rating of "low," with a 295 on Story Selection and 281 on Information Selection (a score of 300 or above is satisfactory).

The teacher explained that she was able to monitor students' daily work and could require students to complete or correct their assignments at recess or during free time. During my observation the following Monday, I glanced at Leesa's seatwork while she was having a turn at the computer. The sentences

that she had written for her spelling words were simplistic for a fifth grader. Although she had been careful to use appropriate punctuation and capital letters, the Mother's Day paragraph that was her creative writing assignment also did not meet the usual standards of quality. She had written it in pencil, then traced over the words in ink. When Leesa returned to her seat, I asked if she had finished with her work; she responded matter-of-factly, "Yes."

Leesa's Relationship With Her Mother and the Family

Leesa apparently admired her mother and liked it when she visited the school. The youngster's face beamed with admiration when she talked about her mother. She gave several examples of the things her mother taught the children at home. For example,

> My mama teaches us to have manners and don't say "huh"! Don't talk back to our elders and clean up behind ourselves. In school she tells us to do what the teacher says. If the teacher makes a mistake, you just tell them we did this the last time or something.

Leesa also mentioned that her mother had told her and her younger sister to have their own mind and not just do what everyone else did. Although she did not seem to know much about her mother's school experience, Leesa did know the names of schools she had attended and that the math her mother had been taught was different from what Leesa was now learning in elementary school. Leesa also was unsure about her grandparents' involvement in her mother's education. She knew that her grandfather (who was deceased) had worked in a factory, and she thought that her grandmother (who now lived with them) had stayed home to take care of the children.

Leesa described her mother's expectations for her and her sisters at school in the following way: "Be the best that we can be and try to do our best and don't try to be hard because your friends are hard." Leesa said that her mother was involved in school because she loved her children. This was another indication that the child had a close relationship with her mother. Further, Leesa said she was happy that her mother had brought some long slacks to school for Leesa to wear on a field trip. Not thinking about the trip, Leesa had worn shorts to school that day. Another time, Leesa said her mother always came to see the principal or the teacher if she had a problem at school.

I recall how Leesa's face lit up when she said that other kids in the school called her mother "mama"; she went on to say,

> My mother can just walk up to the door, and some of the kids will go to the door because they heard her. And if somebody has been bad and they know my mama, she'll like tell them, "You better start acting right in school, or I'm going to tell your mama on you," and then they will straighten up.

Leesa's pride in her mother's popularity with her schoolmates was evident during this conversation.

Leesa's Perception of the School and Her Teacher

When I asked how she felt about school, Leesa responded,

> I think it's nice. I've been going here to Dailey School since I was in the second grade, and I could have another choice to go someplace else, but I didn't want to leave here. . . . Our principal is nice, and I like my teacher very much. All the teachers I've had since I've gone here have been nice to me.

Leesa beamed when she talked about her school. She said the thing she liked most about Daily School was that the teacher was not mean. She did not holler

at the pupils or punish the whole class when a few children did something wrong.

Because I had accompanied Leesa's class to one of their assemblies on character education, I asked her what the principal's message meant to her. Leesa's explanation led me to believe that she understood the message, as well as the meaning of the signs posted around the building, which said, "Let Us Grow Up In Peace."

Leesa's Perception of Her Family's
Involvement In and Out of School

Leesa exhibited great pride in her family and their involvement both in and out of school. In our discussion about her mother's involvement in school, Lisa said, "She does a great deal. When I was in the third or second grade, she would come to school and go on field trips with us. She has not done that this year because of her injury."

The Dailey School children's choir, which her mother had initiated and once directed, seemed to be the greatest source of Leesa's pride in her mother's involvement. The child's face glowed as she described how her mother had ordered pizza for their choir at the end of the previous year, when they had finished their last song. There was a sad look on her face when she said, "Now she came up here and tried to get the choir started again, but they didn't approve it. Last year they approved it."

Leesa also said that her mother had come to school sometimes just to visit her teachers. When I asked whether her mother helped out in the classroom, Leesa responded, "Not this [year]." In our discussion of Ms. Brown's

attendance at school parent meetings, Leesa said, "Sometimes she comes when she can make it. Only times when my mom can't make it is when she doesn't know it, or she just forgot about it."

Leesa credited her grandmother with picking up her report card or attending conferences with the teachers whenever her mother could not come. She continued by saying that when she and her sister came home after school, their grandmother would ask them, "How was school?" and "Do you have homework?" Leesa described how her grandmother encouraged her to go to school if she was angry or just didn't feel like going: "[My grandmother] said, 'You have to go to school! The more days you miss, the more you might flunk.' So that's how she encouraged me to start and keep going to school. Now I don't miss school unless I'm sick."

When I tried to find out more about Leesa's family's support or encouragement for academic achievement, her responses were vague. I did not detect any indication that the family emphasized getting good grades or producing quality work. Leesa's description of her family's after-school activities was brief. Basically, she said, "I do my homework before I go outside. . . . I have to. . . . I go down the street to my friend's house . . . and last Tuesday I went over to my cousin's house." When I encouraged Leesa to share more with me about the routines at home, she finally said, "On Saturdays, my little sister and I have to wash dishes, clean up the kitchen, straighten up our room, and we might be doing some extra."

I continued to pursue the subject of the Browns' after-school activities, but Leesa seemed hesitant to discuss the subject. However, she did say that they

sometimes played school; she and her sister were the students, and someone else acted as the teacher; I am uncertain whether it was her mother or her big sister. Leesa also said they had a big computer at home and would be getting another one. In response to my questions about what her family did on weekends, Leesa said, "We sometimes do kid stuff on Saturdays. . . . And then sometimes on Saturdays we just go outside and play with our friends. . . . Once my friend's mother took us to Playland at McDonald's." Leesa said that was practically all they did after school; they never went skating, to movies, or anything like that.

Leesa's Mother's Involvement In and Out of School

Much of Ms. Brown's discussion of her own involvement in the school concerned paid positions at the school. For example, she referred to having been paid to direct the children's choir, which she started through a grant the school received. In addition, she mentioned her employment as a lunchroom attendant. She also had tried to get hired to work in the classrooms as a substitute teacher or paraprofessional. She apparently thought that not having been hired to work at the school was a barrier to her being more involved. Both Leesa and her mother indicated that Ms. Brown did attend some school activities and occasionally stopped in the classroom to talk with her child or the teacher. I gathered from the discussion that Ms. Brown wished that she could continue to keep the choir going and be paid to direct it. She did not explain why she was no longer working with the choir, but Leesa said the choir had not been approved for the current school year.

Ms. Brown gave only a brief description of the family's after-school activities related to learning. Some of her comments about homework were mentioned earlier. I noted that her opinions on the subject supported what Leesa had already told me. Ms. Brown said,

> Well, when the kids come home I give them a choice. They can either go ahead and eat their dinner and then do their homework, or they can come right in, do their homework and then eat something. It depends on how hungry they are. . . . There are no outdoor activities until homework is done.

Ms. Brown indicated that she thought homework and home support for learning were important, but she did not allude to any other ways in which she structured the family's home time to support the children's learning. Because Ms. Brown described her family as a Christian one, I asked her about their spiritual orientation. I was curious because Leesa seemed to take great pride in the fact that her uncle was the pastor of their church. Her mother sang at church, as did Leesa and her younger sister. Ms. Brown agreed that the family was very active in church. She also said she thought that

> A spiritual home environment helps the child's mind to be more settled. It teaches them how to handle other kids and cope with different things in school, so they can sit there and work and focus on what they are doing instead of on other things that take the mind away.

Ms. Brown also said she thought that the family's spiritual background helped her children learn respect and responsibility. She indicated that her children could go anywhere, and she did not have to worry about how they were going to act because she had received good reports. According to her, "People say to me, 'I can tell your children go to church.'" Apparently, church-related activities were the primary focus of the family's after-school involvement. However, Leesa's mother did say that she bought her children different things

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and took them to a variety of places so they would have many diverse experiences outside of school. She did not go into detail about what those experiences included.

On the subject of opportunities for family involvement at school, Ms. Brown said she thought there should be more activities that included both parents and students. Concerning parent involvement in school, she asserted,

> I feel that parents should go to school and get to know their child's teacher and know something about what the child is doing, instead of waiting until the last minute to come to the school. I've seen parents come to school and they didn't even know who their child's teacher was.

Ms. Brown also said she thought it was important for parents to attend parent-teacher conferences and ask questions if there were things they wanted to know.

Ms. Brown believed homework was important to keeping the child's mind occupied and focused on school work instead of always on playful things. She discussed the family's out-of-school activities that supported learning as follows: "Homework must be done before they can play; when there is no homework, you find something for them to do. We also have reading times when we just get books and read."

It was obvious from our conversation that Ms. Brown perceived that Leesa felt good about her involvement. She said, "My kids love it, and they are very upset if I cannot come to anything. They love for me to be there with them. They're so proud when I'm there. All over the school I am Mama. . . . I'm everybody's at the school."

Ms. Brown also thought her involvement was helping her children grow and learn how to handle different situations and make the world a better place in which to live. She spoke of trying to do constructive things and being a role

model for her children. Throughout our conversation, Ms. Brown had little to say about Leesa's teacher or the school administrators. However, she did say that the parent leaders at the school needed to be better coordinated in order to reach all parents and get them involved in the school.

The School

At the time of this study, Leesa attended Dailey School, which was located in the northwestern quadrant of this urban school district. The school, which served prekindergarten through fifth grade, was primarily a residential/ pedestrian school; a few students were transported in for special education classes. For the most part, Leesa's peers were her neighbors and students with whom she had attended Dailey School for the three years that she had been enrolled there. The facility was a single-level building with more modern features, such as an auditorium, than most of the older buildings in the district. Compared to most of the inner-city schools in the district, Daily was relatively clean and free from rubbish. According to the school's annual report, the focuses of the school's administrators and staff were positive human relations and improved school climate. This focus was evident in the character-education assemblies facilitated by the principal, the opening ceremony that included the Pledge of Allegiance, and the school's pledge: "I will take pride in myself and everything I do. I will display good character at all times. I will strive to be the best that I can be, and will work for higher academic achievement."

Leesa's class included 28 fourth and fifth graders, 13 girls and 15 boys, all of whom were African Americans. The students were seated at tables in groups of four, five, or six. The room appeared congested and much too small

for all of the furniture, equipment, supplies, and students. However, despite all of the clutter (which included a large terrarium, a 30-gallon aquarium, and several green plants), the teacher managed to negotiate her way around the room, working alternately with fourth and then fifth graders. She closely monitored the students' work habits and behavior. The classroom climate was tightly controlled, and students were not allowed much freedom of movement. Every day the chalkboards were filled with a variety of seatwork activities for which individual groups were held accountable.

Leesa's Teacher

Leesa's teacher, Mrs. Williams, was very serious and firm with the students; she seldom smiled. When she occasionally did smile, it resembled a grimace. However, despite her stern demeanor, Mrs. Williams treated the students with respect and dignity. This was evident from the tone of voice in which she spoke to them and the way she pulled them aside to discuss their misbehavior or inadequate performance privately. She exhibited genuine concern for helping children realize their academic potential. The teacher maintained a highly structured classroom with clearly established rules and organized routines. She did not yell at or threaten the youngsters, but she displayed a low tolerance for nonsense.

Mrs. Williams was always cordial to me and welcomed me to visit her class as often as I liked. Based on the interviews with this teacher, my observations, and the review of students' records, I concluded that she placed a high value on academic achievement and good citizenship, a philosophy that did not appear to be as important to her team-teaching partner and the teacher who

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had taught the class the previous year. Mrs. Williams conveyed this idea in a conversation about the adjustment she had had to make in students' behavior when they came to her class from a less structured setting.

The Teacher's Perception of Leesa

Mrs. Williams described Leesa as an "average" student who had the potential to do better in school. She expressed confidence that middle school and maturation would help Leesa improve. In addition, she stated,

> I've seen progress in the last month where I wasn't getting it at the beginning. You know, as far as putting her first [and] last names and the date on paper, and having legible handwriting and all that, I am still struggling with her [about] that. She still needs to put forth a little bit more effort.

The teacher further described Leesa's schoolwork ethic as needing improvement—that is, coming to school prepared with pencils and ready to listen and pay attention. She mentioned frequently having to redirect Leesa and keep her on task. According to Mrs. Williams, Leesa was somewhat social and definitely wanted to be part of the popular groups at school. In the same discussion, the teacher said she thought it was important for Leesa to be in an environment where she could have peace. She had witnessed Leesa's difficulty with the turmoil in the classroom next door during the previous year. According to Mrs. Williams,

> She was having problems last year to the extent that she was crying and not wanting to go into the classroom, so the mother would spend time with her in the mornings, encouraging her to go into the room. And I think the mom requested a change of rooms and was threatening to have Leesa go to another school . . . but it worked out for her to stay.

The teacher also said she thought Leesa liked school, wanted very much to be accepted with the girls and possibly the boys, and got along well with her peers, especially her seatmates.

When we discussed the teacher-student relationship, Mrs. Williams hinted at some problems:

> When I look at her, with her age group, the fifth grade . . . they're loving you one day and the next day we're the enemy. I don't know why it is like that. . . . A couple of times she rolled her eyes at me. It's like she did it for that little group back there to see. It's as though she was saying, "I can do this and get away with it because I'm average, I'm not the teacher's pet." It's just something about growing up that they do that. So the last time, I think she's done me that way three times, the third time I said, "Next time that you do that [roll your eyes], I'm going to contact your mom."

Mrs. Williams continued this characterization of Leesa by saying she was the type of student who would subtly defy the teacher to impress her peers, and then go home and tell her mom a different story. She indicated that Leesa knew her mother would be ready to come to school and defend her against any wrong she perceived that the teacher might have done or said.

The Teacher's Perception of Her Relationship
With the Family and Their School Involvement

According to Mrs. Williams, "My relationship with Ms. Brown has been average. She's, I think, working now during the day; because last year I had Leesa's little sister, and [their] mother was up every morning dropping them off and I think it is a good relationship." The teacher said that Ms. Brown was a single parent, and she had never met or heard anything about Leesa's father. She had also met Leesa's grandmother, who had come to school for parent conferences and the fall open house.

In our discussion of Ms. Brown's involvement at school, Mrs. Williams alluded mainly to her involvement the previous year, when she had started the choir, helped with the Education Day parade, helped the girls in the classroom, and worked as a lunchroom aide. The teacher commented that Ms. Brown had not gone on field trips with the class this year, nor had she helped out in the classroom.

Mrs. Williams's perception of the focus of Ms. Brown's involvement was evident in the following:

> With the incident that happened last Friday [the fight after school], it was more the mother being concerned about the social aspect. When I talked with her on the telephone, she was more worried about my perception of what this incident would do to Leesa's citizenship.

Mrs. Williams went on to say that when the parents of the two girls who had been involved in the fight came to school for a conference, Leesa's mother was still dwelling on the social aspect of the situation. According to the teacher, Ms. Brown had asked, "Are you girls going to be friends?" The teacher also mentioned more than once that Leesa's mother was the type of parent who was always ready to come to school to challenge the teacher whenever her child reported she had been wronged. Mrs. Williams stated that Leesa's mother responded much more quickly to such situations than to the teacher's reports about the child's academic difficulties.

In addition, the teacher indicated that, although Ms. Brown did have Leesa do homework regularly, she did not seem to encourage the child to strive to improve her grades, her penmanship, or her attendance. There appeared to be no emphasis on quality or doing anything beyond what was required. Mrs. Williams stated that the Brown children had a history of poor attendance, almost

to the point of the family's being reported to Child Protective Services. Leesa's teacher also expressed her philosophy about parent/family involvement in the child's school experience. She believed that the focus of parent involvement should be on the academic rather than the social aspects of school. For example, she said,

> The role of the parent in the child's education is to be concerned about academics, I think, more so than the social aspects. I have one daughter, who is a fourth grader, and I am more concerned about what grades she brings home and getting with the teacher to have her really buckle down with the academics. I don't want her to be a holy terror in the room, but I want to appear to the teacher that I'm more interested in her academics than her social life.

The ideas that Mrs. Williams expressed in those comments were part of a theme that recurred throughout her interviews.

Conclusions

Leesa was a sensitive and perceptive 11-year-old fifth grader who loved school. She dreamed of growing up to become a doctor because she cared about people and wanted to help them. She was the third oldest of four siblings who lived together in a household headed by a single mother. Leesa's 83-year-old maternal grandmother also lived with them. Maternal aunts, uncles, and cousins formed Leesa's extended family network. The family was actively involved in the community worship center, where Leesa's uncle was the pastor.

At the school Leesa attended, character education and the peaceful coexistence of students were emphasized. Leesa's classroom was highly structured, and her teacher placed great emphasis on academic achievement. The relationship between Leesa's mother and her teacher appeared to be somewhat strained. The teacher expressed her belief that Ms. Brown was more

concerned with Leesa's social well being than her mastery of the appropriate skills for her grade level. During the current school year, Leesa's mother had not been as involved in the school as she had been in previous years. She attributed this lack of involvement to a recent injury she had sustained. However, she did visit the school frequently and responded to issues and problems involving Leesa.

Ms. Brown thought there should be more activities for parents and students at Leesa's school. She also thought the school personnel needed to do a better job of reaching out to parents to get them involved. The three areas in which Ms. Brown expressed a desire to be involved (choir director, lunch aide, and teacher aide) were paid positions. The family's after-school-activities structure included time allocated for completing homework and engaging in some learning-oriented experiences. Other than church-related activities, the family did not appear to have set routines designed to build character or support academic growth, nor was there evidence of participation in enrichment and extracurricular activities. Leesa perceived that her mother's school involvement was sufficient and that it helped her. She took great pride in the fact that other children at school thought so much of her mother that they called her "Mama."

Leesa's academic performance was considered low-average. Over the years, her teachers had suggested that she was capable of producing much better work through greater effort on her part and additional assistance and encouragement from home. A poor attendance record was also noted on Leesa's records.

Case Study 3: Darien's Family
(Household Headed by Two Grandparents)

"Some day, I can carry the ball—because my grandparents will be gone."

The student at the center of this case study is Darien, a fifth-grade boy who was living with his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Bailey, at the time of the research. They had temporary custody of him. Darien's family was recommended to me by Mrs. Rice, my contact person at Ferndale, where he attended school. When I explained to Mrs. Rice my need to include a variety of family types in the sample for my research, she told me about Darien, a student who was being reared by his grandparents, and said she would introduce me to them.

I arrived at the school on the scheduled date and waited to meet the grandparents. Soon, Mrs. Rice ushered a mature woman into the community room where I was waiting, and introduced Mrs. Bailey to me. Mrs. Bailey told me that her husband had dropped Darien at the school earlier and must have forgotten our appointed meeting and gone to the doughnut shop, where he routinely stopped after dropping their grandsons at school each day. Mrs. Rice left Mrs. Bailey and me to get acquainted while she looked around to see if Mr. Bailey might still be somewhere in the school.

I gave Mrs. Bailey a brief overview of the research, and she spoke positively about the possibility of the family's participating. She explained that their family was unusual because, in addition to raising two grandsons, they had two adult children (Darien's father and a daughter) living in the home. According to Mrs. Bailey, neither of these individuals would get a job. She continued:

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We are so tired of buying food and having lazy grown-ups eat it up. So I buy my food and take it over to my mother's house and put it in her refrigerator. That's why Mr. Bailey goes to the doughnut shop to have coffee—because he can't keep any at home. These grown-up kids of ours drink it all up.

Mrs. Bailey and I talked for quite some time before Mrs. Rice returned and announced that she had not found Mr. Bailey anywhere in or around the school. We agreed to reschedule the meeting with both grandparents for the following Monday. I gave Mrs. Bailey copies of the letter of invitation and the consent forms to take home and review with her husband.

In accordance with our agreement, I arrived at the school on Monday to meet with Mrs. and Mrs. Bailey. After waiting for an hour, I told Mrs. Rice that I had to leave for another appointment but that I would return later that day. When I returned that afternoon, Mrs. Rice took me to the classroom to meet Darien and his teacher. The teacher agreed to participate and signed the consent forms. Darien seemed pleased to meet me and said he thought his grandparents were at home if we wanted to call them. He did not know why they had failed to show up at school for our scheduled meeting, but he did say his grandfather had dropped him off at school that morning.

Afterwards, Mrs. Rice called the Baileys for me. She spoke with Mrs. Bailey, who apparently gave no reason for missing our appointment that morning. Mrs. Rice explained that I needed to know whether she and Mr. Bailey had discussed participating in the research. Mrs. Bailey said they had done so and had signed the requisite forms. Mrs. Rice asked whether I could stop by their home to pick up the signed forms; Mrs. Bailey said "Yes" and hung up the telephone before Mrs. Rice could say anything more. As a result, I was

somewhat reluctant to go to the Baileys' home, but Mrs. Rice assured me that it would be all right and that I should not be alarmed because Mrs. Bailey sometimes acted strangely. Still feeling somewhat uneasy, I went to the Baileys' home. Mrs. Bailey answered the door and invited me to come in and take a seat. Mr. Bailey was seated, but he rose to his feet and extended his hand when his wife introduced me.

During my brief visit with the Baileys, I explained the research to Mr. Bailey, and he said he was willing to participate in the project. They told me it would be all right to begin observing Darien in the classroom as soon as I could arrange it with the teacher. I asked the grandparents if we could schedule a time for me to return to their home to conduct the interviews with them. Mrs. Bailey assured me that I could come at any time, but I replied that it would be better to schedule a time that we could all be sure to save for that purpose. We had set a date and time, and I left an appointment card with them as a reminder.

The Student

When the research was conducted, Darien, the subject of this case study, was a personable 12-year-old boy. He was short and stockily built, with a handsome, smooth, round face and brightly shining eyes. His short hair was always brushed neatly. Most of the time he was dressed in a T-shirt, sweat pants, and classic name-brand, high-top tennis shoes. His shirts usually were adorned with the logos of well-known sports teams, such as the Detroit Pistons or the Los Angeles Lakers. Although Darien's clothes were apparently expensive, he showed little concern for how he wore them. His tennis shoes were frequently untied and laced only half way up. Once I observed that Darien

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returned from noon recess with a large rip near the neck of his shirt that had not been there earlier. He did not seem to be concerned about it.

Darien's Personality, Attitude, and School Adjustment

It was easy to get to know Darien. At our second meeting, he warmed up to me. In an effort to establish rapport, I brought him some markers, a ruler, and pencils. He seemed pleased to receive these items and immediately went to sharpen some of the pencils. He did not seem to mind that I was sitting next to him to observe how he was doing his school work. Apparently, he welcomed the attention I was giving him as he occasionally leaned over to ask me a question about his work. When I explained to him how to find the answers or tried to help him understand the process, he gave his classmates a look that seemed to say, "See, I have a helper."

During each of my visits to observe Darien at school, he seemed glad to see me as he flashed his big smile. More than once, he asked me whether I would return the next day; he seemed to look forward to the little trinkets I usually brought him. It was a chore getting him to give conclusive responses to the interview questions. Sometimes I had to ask the same question two or three times to get a substantive answer. Many times he responded, "I don't know."

The first time I scheduled an interview with Darien, I went to the school to try to meet him at dismissal time because his grandfather had told me that Darien sometimes went to a friend's house after school. Consequently, I waited for the boy in the parking lot. When he saw me, he came over to where I was standing by my car, talking with his principal. I told him I had been given

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permission to take him to McDonald's for a treat, and he again flashed that big smile. Darien and I had a long conversation over hamburgers and shakes. Afterwards, we went to his house for the first interview.

When I asked Darien to describe how he felt about school, he responded, "I like it, but sometimes I don't want to go because they keep making me mad." While encouraging Darien to tell me more about his problems at school, I learned that he thought he often got into trouble because other people caused it and blamed it on him. When I pressed him for examples, he told me, "On the day the fifth graders went to the middle school for orientation, the special education teacher yelled at me, and I yelled back at her. Then she grabbed me around my neck, so I pushed her." According to Darien, because of that incident the principal suspended him for nothing as it had been the teacher's fault.

I scheduled Darien's second interview on one of the days that he had been suspended from school. When I arrived, I found that Darien was not at home; neither of his grandparents knew his whereabouts. Mr. Bailey thought he had recently seen Darien in the back driveway working on his bicycle, but the youngster was no longer there. Mr. Bailey volunteered to search for Darien. Within a few minutes he returned with the boy, saying he had been down the street in front of the hardware store. According to Darien, he had gone there to buy a yo-yo. I asked Darien if he had forgotten our appointment, and he said, "No, but I didn't know what time you would be here."

As I began setting up for the interview, Darien stood there playing with his new toy until Mr. Bailey commanded, "Sit down and put that away!" Darien did as he was told, but as I began asking him questions, I could see that he was

more interested in a television show than he was in the interview questions. Seeing my frustration, Mrs. Bailey suggested that Darien and I move our interview to the dining room table, in the next room.

Perceptions of Darien's Personality, Attitude, and School Adjustment

In my observations, I noted that Darien usually appeared to be happy and carefree at school. Occasionally, he became angry and pouted when the teacher denied his requests to sharpen his pencils or go to the computer. He frequently was restless, inattentive, and not on teacher-assigned tasks. Instead, he often left his seat to go to the pencil sharpener or bookshelves. He also seemed to have difficulty sitting in his seat properly. At times he slouched down in the seat, got up on his knees on it, or knelt on the floor in front of it. Darien spent a great deal of his class time squirming and wiggling around and seldom paid attention when the teacher gave instructions. As a result, he generally had to ask Mrs. Henry or a classmate what the assignment was and how to do it.

I observed that Darien had some minor problems with his peers; he would reach over and thump or hit a classmate, or take a pencil or piece of paper from another child's desk, and when the other youngsters complained, Darien teasingly returned it. Basically, he just seemed mischievous. I questioned Darien concerning his feelings about school. In response to my question about what expectations he thought his grandparents had for him at school, he said, "They want me to get an education." When I asked him why he thought they wanted him to get an education, he responded, "If I get my education I can get a better job and have my own house and a bad car."

Apparently, Darien liked Mrs. Henry; I frequently observed that he maneuvered his way to her side. On the playground he went over to stand by her; in the classroom he often sprawled on the floor near her desk. Several times he pouted when his teacher denied one of his numerous requests. These pouting episodes did not seem to last very long, though. Generally, within a short time, Darien appeared to have forgotten the earlier incident and again called on his teacher to help him.

When I asked Mrs. Henry to describe how she perceived Darien's relationship with his grandparents, she gave this response:

> Darien manipulates his grandparents. I mean no disrespect to them because I think it is wonderful that they are trying to help out with Darien's school experience. . . . Darien knows that they love him, so he takes advantage of that. . . . I feel that they want him to do well, and if not they uphold him when he is wrong, but there are no consequences and they do not hold Darien responsible for his misbehavior. . . . He makes the decisions . . . it's like he is the adult in charge.

In response to my question about Darien's attitude toward school, Mrs. Henry said, "Darien acts as though he likes school, but he doesn't want to go by the rules. When he disobeys the rules, he refuses to accept punishment. Then he gets angry when he is suspended." I continued this line of questioning by asking Mrs. Henry to tell me about her relationship with Darien. She informed me:

> I am not sure how he feels about me . . . but he seems to crave all of my attention all of the time. . . . Even when he knows how to do the work, he comes and asks me questions, just to get my attention. He wants to have immediate reinforcement for every little bit of work that he does. . . . When I refuse to give in to him, he pouts and often will not do anything more.

Mr. Bailey, Darien's grandfather, indicated that he thought Darien liked school but did not understand its importance. He said, "The people at the school

are always saying he doesn't take school seriously enough. I keep telling him some day he will wish he had."

Perceptions of Darien's Work Habits and Performance

In response to my request for a description of Darien's work ethic, Mrs. Henry stated,

> Darien's work habits are inconsistent and sporadic. At times he is on task, and at other times he does everything but his work. His attention span is short, and he is constantly seeking my attention and help. When I refuse to give it to him and try to make him work independently, he gets angry and pouts.

I noticed that Darien often was inattentive when the teacher gave directions. Once, he was playing with a toy on his desk after he had been instructed to take out specific items to begin a special project. Later he approached the teacher and asked, "What do you want us to do with this page?" Later on I observed that Darien had been talking and playing most of the afternoon. At one point he asked the teacher if he could go to the computer. She asked whether he had completed his work. When he responded that it was almost done, she told him he could not go until he had completed the work and had her check it. Darien groaned loudly but made no effort to finish his work.

At the end of the day, the teacher called the names of all the students whose work was on her desk and told them to prepare to go home. She did not call Darien's name. He kept saying, "I turned in all of my work." For a while she ignored him and kept talking to other students. He repeated his assertion more loudly. Finally, the teacher said, "Darien, I don't have your English or your spelling." Darien went to the teacher's desk and began looking through the

basket. When he did not find his paper, he returned to his seat and continued looking for it. After a while he found his incomplete English paper crumpled up on the floor. He attempted to give it to the teacher and join the dismissal line. However, the teacher instructed him to return to his seat and finish his English and spelling assignments. Darien became visibly upset, stormed back to his seat, and threw all of his books on the floor. Several other students were working, but Darien refused to get busy. He kept saying, "My grandfather is outside waiting for me." About ten minutes later, Darien still was not working. All but one other student had handed in their papers and left. The teacher told Darien she had to go to her after-school class and that he could go home, but he would receive E's in English and spelling for that day. Darien did not seem to care; he shrugged his shoulders, picked up his book bag, and left the room.

In my review of Darien's records, I found that his report card reflected a record of poor performance in the early grades. He was retained in kindergarten, lifted in the third grade, and received letter grades of D, E, and S in his fourth- and fifth-grade years. Some examples of his teachers' comments are: "Darien needs help with reading at home," "Darien has a difficult time staying on task," "Darien must try harder to become an independent worker," and "Darien is absent far too much to keep up with his class."

On the fourth-grade MEAP test, Darien received an overall rating of "Low," indicating that his scores in each category totaled less than 300. His Metropolitan Achievement Test scores for first, second, and third grade reflected achievement levels that were six months to one year or more below the norm. Darien had changed schools three times since entering kindergarten. His

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attendance records were incomplete but showed that in three years he had been absent 35 or more half-days. His citizenship grades were all 3's and 4's, representing *average* and *fair,* respectively.

The Family and Home

At the time of the study, Darien's immediate family unit consisted of his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Bailey, and his father. His father's sister, Karla, and her 11-year-old son, Marlon, also lived in the household. Darien's mother lived in the same city but not in the house with Darien. Although Darien said he did see his mother occasionally, there was no evidence that she was involved with his care or education.

According to both Darien and his grandmother, he had two other siblings, a ten-year-old brother and a six-year-old sister, who were in foster care. I visited Darien's grandparents' home several times and saw his father on two of those visits. Once when I arrived at the Baileys' home, he was seated in a large recliner in the living room, watching television. After Mrs. Bailey answered the door and invited me in, she introduced us. I extended my hand in an effort to shake his, but he ignored the gesture and started to leave the room. I said, "Mr. Bailey, I would like to talk to you about your son, Darien, and the family's involvement with his school experience."

He paused momentarily, gestured toward his parents, and said, "Talk to them; they know more about him than I do." Then he hastily left the room. The second time I saw Darien's father, he was again seated in the living-room recliner when I arrived. As soon as his mother, Mrs. Bailey, invited me in, he immediately left the room without even acknowledging my presence.

During another visit to the Baileys' home, I met the other family members who lived in the household: Darien's aunt, Sissy, and her son, Marlon. At the time, Marlon was also a fifth grader at Ferndale School. According to Darien's teacher, Mrs. Henry, his grandfather was the only reliable and responsible link between the school and the home. She also said that the grandmother usually smelled of alcohol and acted strange when she came to the school, and that his mother's and father's involvement was basically nonexistent.

Mr. and Mrs. Bailey were generally very receptive to me. When they learned that I was a retired principal who was conducting research for a university project, they seemed eager to discuss their concerns about Darien with me. They also asked me many questions about how they could more effectively handle the numerous problems they were having with Darien at school. It was much easier to communicate with Mr. Bailey than with his wife. He appeared to be a soft-spoken, kind, and gentle man who had genuine concern for his grandsons. According to several staff members, including the principal, the secretary, and my contact person at Ferndale School, he was in the building almost every day. In addition to the interviews, I had several talks with Mr. Bailey at his home and at the school. During these talks he told me he felt an obligation to do his very best for Darien and Marlon because the other family members were too wrapped up in their drinking and drug habits to support the boys.

During my talks with Mr. Bailey, he also said that Darien's mother had been in and out of drug-treatment facilities and had lost custody of Darien's other two siblings. The courts had awarded temporary custody of Darien to him

and Mrs. Bailey because the child had spent most of his life with them. Mr. Bailey complained that he and his wife also were taking care of both Darien's father and Marlon's mother. He described them as "two sorry adults," neither of whom had a job or a place to live. He did not seem to mind providing for his grandchildren but indicated that he thought his two adult children should be on their own.

Every time I saw or talked with Mr. Bailey, he displayed an attitude of friendliness, courtesy, and cooperativeness. Perhaps his parenting style can best be described as permissive. He seemed to relate to Darien in a very loving and caring manner, but there was an absence of rules, restrictions, or controls. Instead, the grandparents essentially allowed Darien to make his own decisions. For example, when Darien had a problem with a teacher at school and was given detention, he refused to report for detention and was suspended from school for three days. When I arrived at the school to observe Darien and learned of the suspension, I went to the Baileys' home in the hopes that I could interview the boy while he was out of school. When I arrived at the home, Mrs. Bailey informed me that Darien and his grandfather were at the doughnut shop. She said something to the effect that Mrs. Bailey was just "spoiling" Darien.

Mr. Bailey described himself as a retired General Motors factory worker and his educational level as completion of high school. He indicated that his parents had been very involved in his school activities; they also had checked on how he was doing in school. In Mr. Bailey's estimation, his involvement with the schooling of his own children and his grandsons had been much greater than his parents' had been because Darien's problematic behavior frequently

necessitated his presence at school. When asked whether he believed that parental involvement had meaning for the child's school work, attitude, and adjustment, Mr. Bailey responded:

> I think it would make them [the school staff] have more input with the child when they know there's parents or grandparents involved. . . . I know that it is important to be involved with Darien's learning, but I would just like to know if there's anything I could do to show him the importance of learning because he doesn't have much time. He thinks he does, but he doesn't have much time to get himself prepared for life.

Mr. Bailey said that he did not perceive any barriers to his and his wife's involvement with Darien's school experience; rather, he thought that the school staff encouraged their participation. His primary concern was that school officials had not tried to find some alternatives to frequent suspensions as a means of handling Darien's inappropriate behavior.

Darien's family lived in an attractive, modest home on the northwestern side of this urban city. The house was a two-story, medium-sized structure with white aluminum siding. I visited the Baileys' home several times, and on each occasion we sat in the living room. The furnishings in this room included a big-screen television that occupied almost an entire wall, a davenport flanked by a coffee table and two end tables, a large recliner, and an occasional chair near the front door. A curio cabinet containing family photographs and other keepsakes sat in a far corner of the room. The furniture was modern and looked fairly new. All of the windows were covered with stylish vertical blinds, and the carpeting was a soothing seafoam green. The colors blended well, giving the room a sense of harmony and order. Three large trophies stood on the television. Darien told me that he had won them in wrestling and chess.

Darien's grandmother, Mrs. Bailey, was the first of the family members I met. Her personality is difficult to describe. My initial visit with her at the school was the only time I saw her in that setting. At her invitation, I visited the family's home several times. I noted that, when we were alone, Mrs. Bailey was very talkative and outgoing; she volunteered information without my soliciting it. However, when others were present, she was more reserved, and her responses to my questions were short and curt. Mrs. Bailey's tendency to be quiet and reserved was most noticeable when Mr. Bailey was present.

For example, Mrs. Bailey's participation in the interviews was very limited. On the morning we reserved for the first interviews, I arrived at the Baileys' home at the scheduled time. When I rang the doorbell, Mrs. Bailey invited me in and indicated that I should sit in the occasional chair by the door. She sat down on the couch across from me, and Mr. Bailey sat in the large recliner. After we exchanged greetings, I informed them that I had come to do the interviews as we had agreed. Mr. Bailey nodded his head in agreement, but Mrs. Bailey did not respond. She kept her eyes focused on the television, on which the "Jerry Springer Show" was blaring. As I took my notepad and recorder out of my briefcase, I noted that Mr. Bailey gave his wife what appeared to be a warning look and said, "Why don't you turn the television off?" Glaring at him, she went over to the television and turned it down, but she did not turn her attention from it. By that time I had begun to feel like an intruder, and I said, "Perhaps I have come at a bad time. If this is a time when you usually watch television shows, I can come back later." Mrs. Bailey spoke up and said, "Oh no, it's all right, we

can do it now." She then went over and turned the television off, but she did not seem to be pleased about it.

As I reviewed my introduction to the interviews and attempted to make eye contact with her, Mrs. Bailey was still focused on the television screen, although the set was not turned on. During the interviews, she gave a few curt answers but allowed her husband to respond to most of the questions. When I specifically directed questions to her, she gave brief answers and clammed right up again. Mrs. Bailey did not say very much to indicate her parenting style or her educational level. However, during my repeated attempts to involve her in the interviews, she did respond to my question about her involvement with Darien's education in this manner: "I've been involved with them all of my life [laughing]–all my children and my grandchildren." She also responded to my questions regarding her feelings about the meaning of parents' and guardians' school involvement for the child's performance, attitude, and school adjustment. She said, "Yes, it [is important] because it gives the kids an upper lift if they know that their parents, the grandparents, or the family is there with them."

When I asked Mrs. Bailey how she thought Darien felt about their involvement in his school experience, she said she thought he was pleased. She added, "He thinks of us more as his parents than he does his real parents." In response to my question about whether she perceived that they had been confronted with some barriers to their school involvement, Mrs. Bailey said, "I don't because you know if the parents don't do it, their real parents, somebody has to step in for the kids." Although she claimed she had always been involved with the school experiences of her children and grandchildren, she gave no

indication of what that involvement entailed. However, from my conversations with Mr. Bailey and Darien, I learned that Mrs. Bailey had participated in some conferences with the teacher and the principal.

When we discussed the family's after-school involvement and support for Darien's learning, Mrs. Bailey agreed with her husband that they had no set rules or home structure for learning. She also said that Darien never wanted to do his homework and always claimed he did not have any. Mrs. Bailey responded to my questions about the family's after-school activities by saying that Darien went swimming and played soccer, baseball, and chess.

The School

When the study was conducted, Darien attended Ferndale School, which was located at the northern end of the city. Most of this urban school's student population lived within walking distance of the school. The school served approximately 490 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The student population was primarily African American, with few Caucasians. Ferndale's mission statement, displayed on a large banner in the hallway, read as follows: "The Mission of Ferndale School Is to Provide a Positive and Supportive Environment That Fosters High Academic Expectations for All Students . . . So That Each May Become a Resourceful, Productive and Self-Directed Citizen." Every morning, the students began the school day by participating in a schoolwide opening ceremony, which included the pledge of allegiance and the Ferndale Students' Pledge: "I pledge to show excellent behavior, citizenship, work habits and do my best at all times so that I will be successful in life."

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The climate at Ferndale seemed to be somewhat unsettled. Some classrooms were completely separated from the main office and were located on the other side of the gym, which created a fragmented atmosphere. At times, hall traffic was quite congested, and occasionally groups of boisterous middle schoolers roamed the halls near the end of the day. One warm day when I was observing at the school, students in a classroom located near the parking area yelled out of open windows, trading insults with middle school students who gathered near the building. I also witnessed several other incidents that seemed to indicate that the learning environment at Ferndale School was rather loosely structured. For example, the volunteers who tutored students in the hallways often were disturbed by students running in the halls and yelling loudly as they passed from one classroom to another.

The Classroom

Darien's classroom also appeared to lack structure. The students were allowed unlimited freedom of movement. At times they congregated at the bookshelves, around the computer, or near the coat racks at the rear of the room, talking or laughing out loud. The students were quite tall and large for the small tables at which they sat, and they often stuck their legs and feet out into the aisle. This added to the congestion and made moving around the room difficult. The placement of books and materials was much like the seating arrangement—in need of improvement. This was apparently the norm, and both the teacher and the class seemed to be comfortable with it.

The Teacher

Describing Darien's teacher, Mrs. Henry, is a challenge. Her personality, demeanor, and attitude differed from those of most other elementary school teachers with whom I had worked. She was informal and candid in her interactions with the students. Her classroom-management strategies and teaching style also are difficult to characterize. After observing Darien and another student in her class who was also a member of the sample for this research, I am still not sure I have captured the essence of Mrs. Henry's teaching style. During the observations, there were days when Mrs. Henry exhibited genuine concern for meeting the academic and emotional needs of her students. For example, I was impressed by her involvement in the after-school tutorial program that she coordinated on Mondays, her fitness program, the drill team, and the chess club. At other times, I was confused by her apparent lack of sensitivity to incidents that occurred, such as the one mentioned earlier while on the fifth grade's orientation trip. According to Mr. and Mrs. Bailey, Mrs. Henry had given the special education teacher the responsibility for supervising Darien. A problem that arose between Darien and the teacher resulted in his being suspended.

However, Mrs. Henry was the same teacher who took Darien and other students from her class to church with her and involved them in a summer enrichment program there. She sponsored an end-of-the-year cookout for her entire class, and they enjoyed a great time together. Mrs. Henry also invited her minister to spend several days in the classroom, teaching the students to play the hand bells; they later presented two selections at the awards assembly. In

addition, this teacher participated in a special "bonus bucks" project, the proceeds of which she used to purchase home-learning labs (books and materials) for each of her students.

In light of the information presented above, I had difficulty characterizing Mrs. Henry's relationship with her students. It appeared to be both inconsistent and contradictory. Her philosophy about parent involvement was that more active parent participation in school and school-related activities was needed. She indicated to me that parents should take a firmer stand on their children's inappropriate behavior at school, poor attendance, and inconsistent work habits. According to Mrs. Henry, that was the kind of parent involvement from which students would obtain the greatest benefit.

The Teacher's Relationship With Darien's Family

According to Mrs. Henry, her relationship with Darien's family had been punctuated with problems. She discussed an instance in which she and the principal had attempted to involve Darien's father in their efforts to avoid giving the boy another suspension from school. The father refused to cooperate, and their efforts failed. Mrs. Henry also described another occasion on which she sent home a request for parent volunteers to help chaperone a field trip for Darien's class. She told me she had made it clear that, because of his problematic behavior, Darien would be excluded from the trip unless an adult member of his family could accompany them. According to Mrs. Henry, she did not receive a response from the family, but on the day of the trip, Darien's father

and his aunt arrived at school prepared to go on the field trip. In Mrs. Henry's
words,

> When I discovered that the two of them had alcoholic beverages in paper
> bags and alcohol on their breath, I called them aside and informed them
> that, due to district policy regarding such matters, I could not allow them
> to go on the trip.

At that point, Mrs. Henry said, the two became very upset, swore at her in front
of the class, took Darien, and left the building.

Mrs. Henry continued to share her perceptions of Darien's family by
saying that, as far as she knew, Darien's mother had been in and out of drug
rehabilitation for most of the two years that Darien had been in her classroom.
She said that, early in the school year, Darien's mother had visited their class
and informed the teacher that she was now "clean" and was back to living in the
city permanently. After learning about Darien's problems at school, his mother
promised to check on him regularly and spend time helping the teacher with him.
However, Mrs. Henry said, "That is the first and last time I ever saw that woman."

It was obvious from Mrs. Henry's description of Darien's grandparents and
their parenting style that her relationship with them had not been as cooperative
as she would have desired. She indicated that she thought Mr. and Mrs. Bailey
had good intentions and wanted Darien to do well in school. Yet, they did not
take responsibility for ensuring that he improved his work habits and behavior at
school. She continued:

> Darien's grandfather will come up to see me when I request a conference,
> and it's always the same story. He will say that he is going to get on
> Darien. Yet, when Darien refuses to stay after school to complete his
> work, Mr. Bailey doesn't make him stay. I have told both of the
> grandparents that I suspect that Darien has a learning disability, and he
> has been retained and lifted before, but they will not agree to have him
> tested for special education.

Apparently, Mrs. Henry was frustrated by the lack of support from Darien's parents and his grandparents' failure to accept her recommendations for solving the youngster's school problems. She went on to say:

> I think they expect him to do well, but I don't know how, because they don't do the very things that will help him to do better. They seem to think that the school should do it all. They think they know that Darien has problems, but don't understand how serious his problems are. . . . Maybe they think that loving him and taking care of him will make the problems go away. . . . Darien probably acts out to see if anyone will pay attention to him. He acted so much better when my pastor took him under his wing and provided controls and structure. Darien liked the program so much that he keeps asking, "When is that church thing going to start?"

Perceptions of Darien's Family's In-School Involvement

When I asked him to describe what his grandparents did when they came to his school, Darien replied, "My grandpa and my grandma, they come to my classroom. They talk to the principal and my teachers. . . . My grandpa brings me to school every day, and sometimes he brings me money to buy ice cream, popcorn, and stuff."

Darien also told me that his father and mother were not involved with his school. In answer to my question, "Why do you think they are not involved?" Darien replied, "My dad is always high and my mom, she doesn't care." Darien admitted that he wished his mother and father would come to school sometimes, but he said he felt good when his grandparents were there. Continuing this line of questioning, I asked, "Why does it make you feel good?" Darien replied, "Because they are where I can see them. . . . My grandpa comes to help me." I asked Darien why he thought his grandparents went to the trouble of trying to

help him in school. His response was, "Because they love me. . . . They tell me that they love me all of the time."

Perceptions of Darien's Family's
After-School Involvement

The following dialogue is a review of the questions and responses pertaining to Darien's family's after-school involvement taken from the interview with his grandparents:

Researcher: Describe your family's after-school routine and activities.

Mr. Bailey: He seems to be very involved in things like helping other kids go around selling stuff. Sometimes I think that's not a good idea, but it's still involvement to learn how to do things and meet people.

Researcher: Mrs. Bailey, will you respond to that question?

Mrs. Bailey: He goes swimming; you know, he goes to stuff like. . . .

Mr. Bailey: He plays soccer, chess, and sometimes he plays computer games.

Mrs. Bailey: Well, you see, they just have a Playstation upstairs . . . but it's just like a computer because it's on television.

Researcher: How do you structure your family's home time to support Darien's learning?

Mr. Bailey: I think that's something that we'll have to establish . . . some activities for him after school.

Researcher: What about homework? What happens when he has homework?

Mrs. Bailey: He always says he doesn't have any, but the teacher tells us that he should be doing it. When we tell him about it, he will say he does not have his book or he is not sure what to do. . . . He's just lazy . . . but we tell him about it.

Soccer, chess, swimming, and softball are among the things that Darien listed as his after-school activities. When I asked him to tell me about some of the things other than sports that he was involved in after school, he smiled and said,

> I play with my computer games, you know, Playstation; then sometimes I go to my friend's house and we sell Kool-Aid. . . . Sometimes I just watch television. . . . On weekends I ride my bike, go over to my friend's house to play basketball, and sometimes just watch TV.

This line of questioning continued as follows:

> **Researcher:** What kind of things do you do at home that might help you in school?
>
> **Darien:** I don't know.
>
> **Researcher:** Do you read books, play learning games, do crossword puzzles, or those kinds of things?
>
> **Darien:** Sometimes I read comic books, but I don't like word puzzles.
>
> **Researcher:** What about when you have homework? When do you take care of that?
>
> **Darien:** Sometimes I do it at school. . . . If I forget, or maybe I don't have no one to help me . . . or sometimes I forget to bring it home from school.
>
> **Researcher:** What kinds of things do your grandparents teach you about respect and responsibility?
>
> **Darien:** They tell me that I should be good at school and don't talk back to the teacher.

Conclusions

Darien, the 12-year-old fifth grader at the center of this study, was a pleasant and personable youngster. He lived with his grandparents, to whom the courts had awarded temporary custody. Darien seemed to be very fond of his grandparents and talked about them as if they were very special to him. He also said he got along well with his cousin, Marlon, who lived with them.

Darien's father, an unemployed high school dropout, lived in the household at times, but he apparently had no desire to participate in the rearing or school experiences of his son. Darien's grandparents demonstrated sensitive and caring attitudes toward him and were apparently very concerned about his well-being and school experience. However, Mr. and Mrs. Bailey admitted that they were not prepared to deal with their grandchildren, yet they thought that if they were not involved in Darien's school experience, no one else would be. They were either unwilling or unable to establish and enforce rules for Darien's school behavior, attitude, and performance. Instead, the grandparents allowed Darien to make his own decisions about whether he would follow school rules or accept the consequences for failing to do so. When Darien was suspended from school, he was still allowed to ride his bicycle, play video games, go to the doughnut shop with his grandfather, and watch television. This is how he used his time, instead of completing the homework his teacher said she had assigned him.

A review of Darien's records reflected poor performance ratings in his earlier years. He had been retained in the third grade and was receiving failing grades on his fifth-grade report card. His standardized test results indicated below-grade-level performance. His citizenship and attendance also were rated low. Darien received three failing grades on his final fifth-grade report card, so he was not eligible for promotion. However, he was lifted and permitted to participate in the year-end awards assembly with the other members of his class.

Darien had apparently earned a reputation as a rebel at Ferndale School, and his teacher and some other staff members accused him of not taking school

seriously. There were indications that the Ferndale administration had tried some other consequences for Darien's inappropriate behavior, and having found those ineffective, had resorted to suspending him when they thought his behavior warranted it. Darien's relationship with his teacher, Mrs. Henry, was problematic, as evidenced by the many complaints she had about him. She maintained that Darien wanted too much attention from her, he did not want to abide by school rules, and he manipulated his grandparents to get his way. Mrs. Henry described Darien's grandparents as loving, caring, and concerned, but apparently unable to understand the seriousness of Darien's problems. More than once, Mrs. Henry referred to the fact that she had recommended that Darien be evaluated for possible special education placement, but the grandparents had refused to give their permission.

Notes from observation visits at school and home suggested that Darien sought attention and usually responded positively to persons who gave it to him. There were also times when he engaged in negative attention-seeking behaviors that caused problems in his relationships with peers, substitutes, and other staff members.

At the time of this inquiry, Darien was energetic, active, and playful. He was obviously not working up to his academic potential. When he settled down and worked at his assignments, he was able to complete them. Several times he did not finish his work because he simply was not putting forth the necessary effort to finish it. Usually, Darien tried to find someone to give him the answers, copied work from classmates seated near him, or searched for a shortcut to completing his assignments. In spite of his problematic relationship with his

teacher, Darien was apparently quite fond of her, as evidenced by the way he tried so hard to be near her and called on her so frequently. It was also obvious that he loved his grandparents very much and depended on them for his care and keeping. He believed that his grandparents loved him but said he understood that they would not always be there to take care of him and that he would have to take care of himself some day.

Case Study 4: Junior's Family
(Household Headed by a Single Father)
"The Teacher's Helper"

Initial Meeting

Mrs. Rice, my contact person at Ferndale School, recommended the Wilson family to me as possible participants in this research. She recommended their family because I had told her of my need to find a single-parent family headed by the father in order to provide some balance in the sample. Mrs. Rice informed me that Mr. Wilson was employed as a paraprofessional in the Title I program at Ferndale School. In explaining their family history, Mrs. Rice indicated that the mother had lived in the home some time ago, but was no longer involved with the family. She stopped short of sharing any additional information, saying it was confidential. However, she did arrange for me to meet and talk with Mr. Wilson. After hearing about the purpose and focus of the study, Mr. Wilson willingly agreed to have his family participate.

Later that same day, Mrs. Rice took me to the classroom to meet Mr. Wilson's son Junior, and Junior's teacher, Mrs. Henry. On the way to the classroom, Mrs. Rice warned me that Junior frequently had problems relating to

strangers and might not be as personable and receptive as his father had been. I soon understood what she meant. When she introduced us, I extended my hand and Junior just stared at it and studied my face. Finally, Mrs. Rice said, "Aren't you going to shake Mrs. Muldrew's hand?" Junior slowly reached out toward me, and I clasped his hand in a firm handshake. I informed Junior that I had just spoken with his father, who had given me permission to include their family in a special project I was working on as a requirement of the university I was attending. I told Junior this meant that I would be spending time in the classroom observing and interviewing him and his teacher. Junior did not seem to be comfortable with this prospect, so I did my best to assure him that I would make the experience a pleasant one. I made an appointment with Junior's teacher to begin observations the following week. Mrs. Rice and I then left the classroom.

The Student

At the time of this research, Junior Wilson, the focus of this case study, was an 11-year-old fifth grader. He was the third child in a family of eight children and lived with his father, Mr. Wilson, and six brothers and sisters. It was not easy getting to know Junior. At first he was very quiet and appeared to be unfriendly and withdrawn. When I tried to initiate a conversation with him, he would not talk; rather, he responded in grunts or by shaking or nodding his head.

I frequently observed Junior with his head down or resting in his hand as though he was engaged in deep thought. He sat near the back of the classroom; he did not appear to belong to the group of youngsters with whom he was seated, as he sat with his face turned away from them. At times Junior sat

straight up in his seat and gave his complete attention to the teacher's instruction. However, these times were few. Usually, he appeared to be far removed from the people and events going on around him. Junior seemed determined to keep his distance from me, so I made several trips to his classroom, each time bringing a token gift such as a pencil, ruler, or pad of paper in an effort to establish a positive relationship with him before conducting the interview. When I tried to sit next to him, Junior seemed very uncomfortable. If I sat across the room and observed him from a distance, I would glance in his direction and see him watching me. Junior did not seem very comfortable with the teacher either, and a few times when he was aware that I was observing him, he played with and teased his seatmates. Junior appeared to be a somewhat unhappy and ill-at-ease youngster. He was also having difficulty with academics, and according to his teacher, he was on the borderline of failing fifth grade.

Junior's Family and the Home

As stated earlier, Junior was the third oldest child in a family of eight brothers and sisters, three girls and five boys. When I asked Mr. Wilson to describe his family, he responded,

> I am the father of eight children; seven of them live with me. I have a daughter, my oldest daughter, that lives in Tennessee, and the seven children that live with me are Marcus, 14; Junior, 11; Jordan, 10; Darius, a girl, 9; Dwayne, 7; Somali, 6; and Forest, 5.

When I asked Junior to describe his family, he used his fingers in naming his brothers and sisters as he counted them off.

The Wilson family lived together in a modest, wood-framed two-story house. Mr. Wilson explained that Marcus and Junior shared a bedroom, with twin beds. The two girls had the same arrangement. The remaining three boys had a bedroom furnished with a bunk bed and one single bed. All of the children's bedrooms were on the second floor, whereas Mr. Wilson's bedroom was off the front hall leading to the living room and dining area. The kitchen was directly behind the dining area.

Personnel at Ferndale School expressed considerable admiration for Junior's father. My contact person, the principal, the school secretary, the librarian, and the Title I staff all had high praise for the fine job he was doing in rearing his children. The first time I met Mr. Wilson, he was cordial, gentlemanly, and cooperative. He took a special interest in this research and said he would like to go back to school someday. He described his educational level as "some college and lots of military training." As stated earlier, he worked as a paraprofessional at the school his children attended. Mr. Wilson described his family of origin as large, and headed by his mother and stepfather. He was the oldest of eight siblings. Concerning his parents' involvement in his schooling, Mr. Wilson recalled that his mother had been involved as often as she could in the early years, but not much after he was in second grade. He said his stepfather had not been involved at all. Consequently, Mr. Wilson indicated that he had tried hard to surpass his parents' involvement.

During one of our conversations, Mr. Wilson explained that he had been forced to let Junior's mother go because her drug-abuse problem had threatened to cause him to lose his children. He told me that his wife had been in and out of

treatment several times, but each time she had reverted to "her old habits." He continued by saying that she had not been in the family home at all during the current school year.

The Extended Family

According to Mr. Wilson and Junior, their extended family was limited to a maternal grandmother who lived a couple of blocks away from the Wilsons. Mr. Wilson said, "Generally, she does many things to help out." Two of Mr. Wilson's nieces lived with the grandmother, and they, too, helped out. Other support networks included the Title I parent group and the Ferndale School staff, who were loyal supporters of Mr. Wilson and his children. They frequently provided the family with clothing, food, and other essential items.

The School and the Teacher

Junior attended Ferndale School, located in the northern end of the city. Most of this urban school's student population were neighborhood children who lived within walking distance of the school. The school served approximately 490 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The student population was primarily African American, with very few Caucasians. Ferndale's mission statement, displayed on a large banner in the hallway, read as follows: "The Mission of Ferndale School Is to Provide a Positive and Supportive Environment That Fosters High Academic Expectations for All Students . . . So That Each May Become a Resourceful, Productive and Self-Directed Citizen." Each morning, the students began the school day by participating in a schoolwide opening ceremony, which included the Pledge of Allegiance and the Ferndale

Students' Pledge: "I pledge to show excellent behavior, citizenship, work habits and do my best at all times so that I will be successful in life."

The climate at Ferndale seemed to be somewhat unsettled. Some classrooms were completely separated from the main office and were located on the other side of the gym, which created a fragmented atmosphere. At times, hall traffic was quite congested, and occasionally groups of boisterous middle school students roamed the halls at the end of the day. Once, on a warm day, students in a classroom located near the parking area yelled out of open windows, trading insults with middle school students who gathered near the building.

I also witnessed several other incidents that seemed to indicate that the learning environment at Ferndale School was rather loosely structured. For example, the volunteers who tutored students in the hallways often were disturbed by students running in the halls and yelling loudly as they passed from one classroom to another.

Junior's classroom also appeared to lack structure. The students were allowed unlimited freedom of movement. At times they congregated at the bookshelves, around the computer, or near the coat racks at the rear of the room, talking or laughing out loud. The students were quite tall and large for the small tables at which they sat, and they often placed their legs and feet in the aisle. This added to the congestion and made it difficult to move around the room. The placement of books and materials was much like the seating arrangement--in need of improvement. This was apparently the norm, though, and the teacher, as well as the class, seemed to be comfortable with it.

Describing Junior's teacher, Mrs. Henry, is a challenge. Her personality, demeanor, and attitude differed from those of most other elementary school teachers with whom I had worked. She was informal and candid in her interactions with the students. Her classroom-management strategies and teaching style are also difficult to characterize. I was puzzled by some of her actions. There were days when Mrs. Henry would exhibit genuine concern for meeting the academic and emotional needs of her students. For example, I was impressed with her involvement in the after-school tutorial program that she coordinated on Mondays, her fitness program, the drill team, and the chess club. Other times, I was confused by her apparent lack of sensitivity to certain incidents that occurred, such as a fight that evidently happened when she left the class unattended. Supposedly, Junior was attacked by another student, whom he then hit in the nose, drawing blood. Mrs. Henry recommended three-day suspensions for both students, even though there had been no adult supervision when the incident took place.

However, Mrs. Henry was the same teacher who took students from her class to church with her and involved them in a summer enrichment program there. She sponsored an end-of-the-year cookout for her entire class, and they had an enjoyable time together. Mrs. Henry also invited her minister to spend several days in the classroom, teaching students to play the handbells; they later presented two selections at an awards assembly. In addition, this teacher participated in a special "bonus bucks" project, whose proceeds were used to purchase home-learning labs (books and materials) for each of her students.

Mrs. Henry said she had an excellent relationship with Junior's father. According to her, they worked well together as a team in after-school activities, and Mr. Wilson occasionally covered her classroom when she was called to the office. Both Mrs. Henry and Mr. Wilson were complimentary about each other. Junior also seemed to be fond of his teacher and enjoyed being her "special helper." For example, at a cookout, Junior helped Mrs. Henry by turning the hotdogs on the grill while she placed them in the buns. At the year-end fifth-grade awards assembly, Junior helped her by collecting the bells when the class had finished playing them.

Mrs. Henry said that her philosophy about parent involvement was that more active parent participation was needed in school and school-related activities. She indicated that parents should take a firmer stand on their children's inappropriate behavior at school, poor attendance, and inconsistent work habits. According to her, that was the kind of parent involvement from which students would benefit the most.

Perceptions of Junior's Work Habits

During the interviews, Mrs. Henry, Junior's teacher, expressed concern about his academic skill development, which she said was far below that of most of the fifth graders she had taught. According to her, his work habits were inconsistent and he produced very little work whenever substitutes were covering her classroom. Mrs. Henry continued by saying, "Junior is struggling with fifth-grade work. His skills are below grade level, and his reading is extremely low. Often he does not understand the assignment, but will not ask for help."

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Likewise, Junior's father indicated that his son's lack of academic improvement was disturbing to him. Mr. Wilson said he felt bad that his many home and work responsibilities prevented him from spending quality time with Junior to work with him individually. Mr. Wilson also commented on his perception of Junior's performance in this manner:

> Both Junior and my oldest son got off to a slow start in school. It's especially hard for me to work with other children and help them and then see how he's struggling. He does get Title I services, but I'd like to have more time to work with him one on one. At home, you know, it's kind of hard when I have seven people in the house claiming my attention.

During my observation visits in Junior's classroom, I spent some time working with him on assignments and reviewing his records and daily class work. I noted that his reading skills were deficient, and as a result he often was unable to understand the instructions for assignments in reading, science, social studies, and language arts. He seemed to be unable to decode words by using the letter sounds or to identify a word by reading the context of the sentence. On one of my visits to the school, Junior was visibly upset when I arrived for the interview. The teacher was absent. The substitute informed me that Junior had played around most of the day, and she had told him to remain after school. The substitute permitted me to take Junior out of the room and help him calm down and complete his work. I decided to postpone the interview and tackle the classwork. Junior has great difficulty reading and following directions for his social studies assignment.

A few days later when I went to Junior's school for an observation, the teacher was again absent. The male substitute informed me that Junior had done very little work. Junior appeared to be having a hard time managing his

anger. I took a seat beside him to try to get him started with the math assignment (multiplication of fractions). Junior said he did not understand the process and claimed that the teacher had not explained it. Later that week, I decided to visit Junior earlier in the day to determine whether his work habits would be different from when I had observed him in the afternoon. At this early morning visit, Junior was working quietly and consistently on his assignments. The teacher was there that day. Junior smiled and seemed pleased when I complimented him for being on task. This pattern continued for the hour that I spent in the classroom.

The review of Junior's individual cumulative records, report card, and daily work portfolio furnished documentation of his attendance, citizenship, and academic performance, as indicated by standardized test scores, the assigned letter grades, and teachers' comments. Entries on Junior's record indicated that he had changed schools at least four times. There were also several months during his early grades (first, second, and third) for which there were no records of attendance, as noted by the word "unknown." In other years, Junior had missed an average of approximately 46 days per year. However, his attendance had shown improvement in the third, fourth, and fifth grades. The records also indicated that this was Junior's fourth year at Ferndale School. According to the records, Ferndale was the fourth school that Junior had attended. Junior had been lifted from third grade to fourth. His record of multiage (first through third) grade skill development indicated many areas in which he had made little progress and/or needed help.

A review of the standardized test results only provided information pertaining to Junior's performance on the Metropolitan Achievement Test in his first- and second-grade years. These scores indicated grade equivalents below the current grade level in each subject area. For example, Junior's second-grade reading score was 1.7 (first grade, seventh month). Junior's records did not include scores for his third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade years. During Junior's fourth- and fifth-grade years, his final grades were D's and C's in the core subjects (math, reading, and science) and S's for the other subjects, such as music, art, health, and physical education. Junior received report-card citizenship ratings of 2's and 3's, which indicate good and fair behavior, respectively. A teacher's comment on Junior's fourth-grade report card was: "Junior's work habits are inconsistent. One day he works hard, and on other days he puts forth very little effort. He needs to practice reading and math at home." On his fifth-grade report card, another teacher commented: "Junior started the year out doing well; now he seems to have lost interest in work. Junior is struggling, especially in reading and math."

Perceptions of Junior's Personality, Attitude, and Peer Relationships

In the interview, Mr. Wilson mentioned that Junior sometimes was upset at school, perhaps because he was "a little bit too close." I had a long talk with Junior when he was suspended for fighting. During this conversation, he told me that there were times when students in the class had "picked on" him about his father's working at the school, and that he had not retaliated. However, this time he said he had not been thinking and just hit the other boy. Junior said that he

had friends with whom he sometimes played after school and on weekends. However, he claimed that some of the kids at school were "always trying to start fights."

It is difficult to characterize Junior's perceptions of his relationship with his father because of his limited conversation and the way his moods kept changing. When I finally maneuvered Junior into the interview session, getting him to answer the questions was a problem. Most of the time, he responded by shaking or nodding his head, grunting "yep," "nope," or "uh-huh." Occasionally, I probed for answers, reminding Junior that the recorder could not pick up the nodding or shaking of his head. However, despite all my efforts, Junior's responses were very limited, and I was able to engage him in only one tape-recorded interview. I noted that Junior talked more freely when he was not being tape recorded.

Apparently, Junior thought he had a good relationship with his teacher. He said he was learning many things at school, and wanted to be a policeman when he grew up. Responding to my questions about his relationship with his father, Junior said he thought his dad took good care of him and his siblings, expected them to do well in school as he had done, advised them not to do drugs, and encouraged them to show respect for grown-ups and to take care of their behavior.

Among the limited responses that Junior gave to the interview questions was a frequent "It's okay." In response to my encouraging him to tell me if there were special things he liked at school, Junior said, "No." Once Junior indicated that he got along with his classmates "pretty good." On another occasion he

said they sometimes picked on him, and some of them were always trying to start fights.

Junior's teacher, Mrs. Henry, described the boy's personality as somewhat moody and unpredictable. She went on to say,

> Junior seems to have a great deal of hostility and low self-esteem. I try to draw him out by making him my special helper, giving him jobs, trying to build his self-esteem, and make him feel good about himself. Sometimes it helps; other times it doesn't. It just depends on what kind of mood he's in.

Mrs. Henry continued by relating that she tried many things in order to reach Junior, and sometimes she thought she was making progress. According to her, "Then all of a sudden it feels like he's pushing me away." She said she had taken him to church with her and invited him to the summer Fine Arts Academy at her church. During this time, she said, her pastor took Junior under his wing and worked with him for a while.

Junior's teacher also described his relationship with his peers and others as problematic. In her words,

> It seems that Junior has problems with the substitute teacher when I'm out. He got into a fight yesterday when I was not here. He's not here today as he was suspended. Junior has a great deal of anger and does not handle it well. I've tried to help him with that; also I referred him to the training for conflict mediation. I thought perhaps it would help him, and that being a mediator would boost his self-esteem.

In response to my questions about how she perceived Junior's relationship with his father, Mrs. Henry had this to say:

> There are times when Junior shows open hostility towards his dad. He will come to school angry, shut down, and will not talk. I think perhaps he blames his dad for his mother's absence. It's hard to tell what he's thinking, since he doesn't talk much.

Most of the responses and comments that Mrs. Henry shared about Junior's attitude and relationships indicated that he apparently had problems relating to others, especially if he did not know them well.

Perceptions of Junior's Family's In-School Involvement

In response to my questions about the ways in which Junior saw his father being involved in school, he named "tutoring and helping to teach other children" and attending parent meetings, workshops, and conferences. Continuing this line of questioning, I asked Junior how he felt about his father's involvement at school. He responded, "Good, because it lets him know how I'm doing at school." Junior also said he thought that his father was involved because he cared about him.

Mr. Wilson related that he had always tried to be involved in his children's education, even before coming to work at the school they attended. He also indicated that he was not sure just what, if any, influence his in-school involvement had on Junior's school performance, attitude, and adjustment. He continued,

> Actually, I wonder sometimes, but I know in the long run that it is [having an influence]. I wonder, I guess, because I'm right there, constantly there, and maybe I can't see the change or the progress, but I'm always getting compliments whenever they go out with friends, or when we go out in public places, how well behaved my children are.

According to Mr. Wilson, his involvement apparently had had some effect on his children's school adjustment because his oldest son had never been in trouble when he attended Ferndale School, where his father worked. In Mr. Wilson's words, "Now at middle school, he's having all kinds of problems."

Junior's father perceived that the greatest barrier to his family's school involvement was probably his job, which required him to be at work at the same time the children were in school. Mr. Wilson continued his explanation by saying, "Even though I am right in the school, I am not able to actually participate with them the way I would like to, as I have specifically assigned duties." He also commented on the fact that, at times, his dual responsibilities as both father and mother also made it impossible for him to be as actively involved in his children's school experiences as he would like to be.

Junior's teacher, Mrs. Henry, described her perception of Mr. Wilson's involvement in this manner:

> Mr. Wilson is a very involved parent. He not only works here, he volunteers many hours of his time to help out with special activities for the kids. He is our chess coach, assistant coach for soccer, baseball, and track. He also helps me with the math tutorial program, and just generally helps out anywhere we need him. He is a good parent. As I told you before, Junior's father is a single parent. The mother has not been in the home at all this year.

Mrs. Henry also said that she was currently in her second year as Junior's teacher, and she gave his father credit for always contacting her to see how his son was doing. According to the teacher, Mr. Wilson requested information about Junior's homework or other make-up assignments, as well as special projects. Mrs. Henry continued by saying, "Mr. Wilson helps with any behavior problems Junior is having. Of course, having him right here in the building is a great help." When I asked her if she had anything more to share about Junior's father's involvement in school-related activities, Mrs. Henry reiterated her opinion of Mr. Wilson in this manner: "As I said, I think he is a wonderful parent. I really admire the fact that he supports the school's rules and policies and he

does not expect special treatment or privileges for his kids because he works here."

Perceptions of Junior's Family's After-School Activities and Home Support

Junior listed the following among his family's after-school activities: "We help clean up around the house, go to the store with my dad, and help with the laundry and cooking." In response to my questions about homework and school-related learning activities, Junior answered, "We do that before we go to bed." He added that they sometimes played outside or went over to his friend's house on the next block because he had a basketball hoop. When I asked about other games Junior and his friend played after school, he replied, "Football." Junior referred to his family's weekend activities as cleaning up and playing outside. Because Junior did not mention spirituality or anything about his family's attending church, I encouraged him to tell me more about the times he went to church (Summer Arts Academy) with his teacher. His response was, "It was okay." I urged him to tell me how he liked singing in the choir and playing with the orchestra at his teacher's church. Again, his answer was, "It was okay."

Junior's father, Mr. Wilson, described their family's after-school routines and activities in this way:

> After school, I usually have them do their homework first, then eat, and try to pick up things around the house, get clothes ready for the next day, and depending on what time of year it is, maybe they will get a chance to go outside, or maybe not. Being in the school helps me to know that it is important for them to read, do math, or study something every day, so we have study time. During this time there is no TV, just studying. I have different reading materials, math books, games, and different things for them to do that relate to learning.

In response to my questions about what specific after-school enrichment programs the family participated in, Mr. Wilson frowned as he recalled the difficulty of trying to meet the needs of all his children. According to him, keeping them all from getting scattered after school was a problem that he solved by keeping them with him when he helped out with the after-school programs. For example, on the days he assisted Junior's teacher with the tutorial program, all of his children had to be there for tutoring. Mr. Wilson added that the same rule applied to the chess program and the drill team. The whole family was involved. He continued,

> On the days when I help with baseball, soccer, and track my children who are not participating will go over to my mother's, or my nieces will stay at my home with them until I have finished. When we attend the competitions like the chess tournaments, baseball games, and track meets, the whole family goes unless one of them has a cold or is sick. In that case, that one will stay with my mother.

Junior's teacher, Mrs. Henry, indicated that she did not know much about the home as a learning environment, but she expressed great admiration for Mr. Wilson's faithfulness in following up with her on Junior's homework. She said, "Sometimes when Junior fails to copy his assignments accurately from the board or forgets what pages in the book I had told the class to do, Mr. Wilson will call me or stop in the next day to get the right information." Mrs. Henry also praised Mr. Wilson for keeping the children clean and in school every day. In response to what after-school activities Junior participated in that supported or enhanced learning, Mrs. Henry mentioned the tutoring program, the drill team, and the chess team. She added,

> Junior has told me that sometimes the family will have school at home and his father will be the teacher. Several times I have given Mr. Wilson discarded workbooks and other materials to take home for his children. I

try to help him as much as I can because I know he doesn't make much money as a paraprofessional, and I'm not sure what other resources he has, but he seems determined to help his children to be successful in school.

Conclusions

This case study was a challenge for me as I attempted to obtain information. Junior, the focus of the case study, was classified by school standards as a low-achieving child. He had apparently experienced some problems with social and emotional adjustment. Evidence indicated that drug addiction had deprived the family of their mother and consequently had forced Mr. Wilson to take on the role of both breadwinner and caregiver. He exhibited the characteristics of an astute, patient, and devoted father. Mr. Wilson admitted that he sometimes felt overwhelmed, but he desperately wanted his children to get a good education and willingly made sacrifices to ensure that he was involved in their school experiences. He also used what limited resources he had, along with his own training and expertise, to provide home-structured experiences that supported the children's learning. For example, he told of taking home discarded books and other learning materials from the school to help his children "build their skills." Mr. Wilson did acknowledge the support and help of his mother, his two nieces, and the school staff. However, he indicated that it was primarily his responsibility to care for the children and maintain the home. The condition and appearance of the home and children showed that he took his responsibility seriously. According to Mr. Wilson, school and community networks, such as the church and the neighborhood block club, also provided support for his family.

As stated earlier, Junior apparently felt close to his teacher but did not readily warm up to strangers, such as the many substitute teachers who frequently covered his classroom. I spent a great deal of time trying to establish rapport with him, in hopes of getting him to open up and share more information with me. During the short time I worked with Junior, I was able to gain his trust. I did become well enough acquainted with him to be able to recognize signs of anger, sadness, insecurity, and frustration in him. One might hypothesize that these emotions were perhaps partially responsible for Junior's inability to be more successful academically and socially.

The evidence also suggested that Mr. Wilson's daily presence in the school had been helpful when situations occurred in which Junior became upset or frustrated. Junior's teachers indicated that they had occasionally sent for his father to come to the classroom to calm him down. When the time comes for Junior to enter middle school, he might have some difficulty adjusting to the fact that his father is not in the same building as he is. He will encounter a larger student population, more challenging assignments, and less personal attention from teams of teachers who instruct large groups of students in shared time blocks. Mr. Wilson mentioned that, when his older son left elementary school for middle school, he had frequent suspensions, and several poor-work notices were sent home. He feared that Junior might experience the same thing.

Junior appeared to have a network of supporters that included a concerned and involved father, extended family members, and church and community contacts. Granted, his mother was absent from the home at the time of this inquiry, and there had been some family problems. However, the father

had apparently tried to provide Junior and his siblings with some stability and structure. Mr. Wilson's school involvement, although not as great as he desired it to be due to job constraints, appeared to be positive and consistent.

In addition, the staff at Ferndale School seemed committed to supporting Mr. Wilson's efforts to keep his job and care for his family. For example, I observed that, when Junior was suspended for the fight referred to earlier, he was allowed to serve an in-school suspension and to work with the lunchroom staff in order that Mr. Wilson would not have to lose time from work to stay home with his son. In contrast, another student in the same class was required to serve his suspension at home.

Case Study 5: Shelly's Family
(Household Headed by a Single Father)

"She has intrinsic motivation."

Initial Meeting and Gaining Access

Shelly Carter, the focus of this case study, was an exceptionally talented fifth-grade girl whose teacher characterized her as a student with "intrinsic motivation." Shelly was recommended to me by a friend who was on the staff at her school. When I shared with this friend my need to find a single-parent family with a father-headed household, she immediately thought of Shelly. We discussed the possibility of getting Shelly's father and her teacher to consent to participate. My friend suggested that I call the teacher as she would probably be glad to assist me. I stopped by the school to see her. Incidentally, the teacher, Mrs. Dobson, had been a staff member at the school where I had recently been

the principal. After I explained my study to her, she said she would be willing to participate, but she indicated that it might be more difficult to get Shelly's father to agree because he had total responsibility for Shelly's care and schooling, as well as a job that required him to work many long hours.

After Mrs. Dobson introduced me to Shelly, I remembered that she had been a student in the accelerated program before it moved from my former school to the present location. Realizing that I knew Shelly's father, I decided to see if he would participate. The teacher volunteered to talk to him about the study when he picked Shelly up at the end of the school day. When I stopped in later to see Mrs. Dobson, she told me that Mr. Carter had declined, saying he just did not see how he and Shelly would be able to fit another thing into their busy schedules. However, she encouraged me to call the father as she thought I might persuade him to participate. I decided to give it a try. When I called Mr. Carter, I assured him that I could work around their busy schedule and would conduct the interview process as expeditiously as possible. If necessary, we could omit the home visit and I could meet him at a place of his own choosing. He finally agreed to take part in the study!

The Student

This case study centers on an 11-year-old honor roll student who, at the time of the study, was enrolled in an accelerated program for academically talented students. Shelly and her father, Mr. Carter, lived alone. Other family members included an older sister with two daughters about Shelly's age. Most

of the time I saw Shelly, her appearance was neat, well groomed, and appropriate for the school setting. She was wearing clothes sporting popular brand names such as Nike, Fubu and Tommy Hilfiger. Her tennis shoes were Air Jordans. Shelly usually wore her hair neatly combed back from her face in two large braids or ponytails. Shelly's personality, attitude, and school adjustment fit the profile of the kind of student every teacher and principal would like to have. In addition to Shelly's teachers, several other staff members, including the librarian, secretary, and her former teachers, had positive things to say about her. My examination of Shelly's school records failed to reveal even a hint of criticism about this student, and my background and experience made me aware that this was quite unusual.

During my observations, I noted that Shelly exhibited courtesy, self-confidence, and behavior appropriate to the school setting. As I observed Shelly, I saw a student who was unusually quiet, reserved, and serious in the classroom. Basically, she appeared focused on and actively involved in the learning experiences. On one occasion, several youngsters in her class laughed out loud when the student who was reading aloud mispronounced a word; however, Shelly did not alter her solemn expression. At times, she appeared somewhat bored or preoccupied during the class activities, but she remained quiet and involved with what was going on.

On the playground, Shelly appeared athletic, as demonstrated by her active participation in basketball, double-dutch (jump rope), and other physical activities. I also observed that Shelly's solemn demeanor became more lively

outside of the classroom. She openly displayed her jovial feelings by gaily body-bouncing and dangling her lunch pail over the railing as she walked in the line on the way to the lunchroom. Shelly's relationship with her peers appeared to be somewhat unusual, in that she primarily stayed to herself. However, Shelly did interact with her classmates when her teachers directed her to do so. Most of the time in Mrs. Dobson's classroom, she was seated at a table with one other student with whom she apparently had no interactions. On other occasions, I observed Shelly at a table with three girls who were working together on a project. She appeared comfortable with the process. I also noted times when the class was engaged in cooperative learning, "Pair and Share" activities, and Shelly readily involved herself with a partner and followed through on the assigned task. During such activities she generally took a leadership role.

Shelly's citizenship had been repeatedly rated "1," the designation for excellent behavior. Attendance records indicated that Shelly had perfect or regular attendance every year since she began school, with just one or two tardies. She had remained in the same accelerated program and changed schools only once—when the school district transferred the entire staff and student population to their present location at Hoyle School.

Work Habits and Performance

"Thirty years from now it won't matter what shoes you wore, how your hair looked, or the jeans you bought. What will matter is what you learned and how you used it." This quotation was posted on the bulletin board in Mr. Tucker's

classroom. When I read it, I thought how appropriately it described the phenomenon that was occurring with Shelly. She wore stylish designer clothing, as do many other students in urban schools, but years from now that is not what she will be remembered for. Most likely, she will be remembered for what she learned and how she is using it. No doubt her teachers will not soon forget Shelly as they expressed admiration and appreciation for the consistency with which she exhibited exemplary work habits and produced work of superior quality. The following are examples of their comments:

> **Mrs. Dobson:** Shelly's work is top quality. She takes an awful lot of pride in it.

> **Mrs. Tucker:** Shelly consistently follows directions, works independently, and produces excellent work.

As I completed the reviews of Shelly's records and related school documents, it occurred to me that I had found exactly what a researcher would expect to find in the records of an "all-A honor roll" student, a repeat "Citizen of the Month," and a model learner. In addition to the A's that Shelly received in the core subject areas (math, language arts, reading, social studies, and science) on her fourth-grade and fifth-grade report cards, she also had S's in art, physical education, music, and health. The following are examples of teachers' comments from Shelly's report card:

> Shelly continues to be a very self-directed learner who shows enthusiasm for learning new material. She sets high standards for herself and classmates. (1st Marking Period, 1998-99)

> Shelly continues to make excellent progress in all areas of learning. She did a great job on her book poster and Black History Hall of Fame projects. (2nd Marking Period 98-99)

Shelly's Family and Home

According to Shelly, her extended family included a loving and concerned father, a 34-year-old married sister whom she admired as a role model, and two nieces about her own age. She said that when she went over to her sister's house, she had someone to play with. She admitted, "Sometimes I get bored, but my dad is nice and my sister and her family's pretty nice." These family members and the people at her day care center were what Shelly called her "support group." According to Mr. Carter, "That's basically it. We live quite a distance from Shelly's sister, so she stays with my daughter's family every other weekend. She gets to visit her great-grandmother, my maternal grandmother, every other weekend."

Shelly's school records indicated that her mother was deceased. Shelly was first enrolled in the program in August 1994 by her father, who was listed as her guardian. He flashed a proud smile when he said, "Everyone in the family wanted my Shelly, but I refused to give her up. Most people don't think a man can raise a girl by himself and I did have a hard time combing her hair, but she can do it herself now!" As stated earlier, Shelly's father initially was reluctant to participate in this study. He was afraid that it would be too time consuming, given the family's tight schedule. According to Shelly, they had to be at day care by 5:30 each morning in order for her father to report to work at 6:00 a.m. Shelly was transported to school by the day care center, and her father picked her up after school. When he worked overtime, the day care center picked her up and she remained there until her father came for her. Perhaps he decided to

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participate in this study in spite of their busy schedule because I was someone

he knew. During the interview process, he was pleasant and cordial. He

characterized their family and kin structure much the same way as Shelly did.

Mr. Carter described his education and occupation as follows:

> My education consists of just high school. I graduated from Southwestern
> in 1964. I was planning to go to college and I was capable, but life kind of
> got in the way and so I ended up having a little girl and having to go to
> work. I got a job at GM, and this is my 34th year with General Motors. I
> am what they call an assembler, but with a little extra pay on it. You
> know, we inspect and stuff.

He recalled that his parents had not been very involved with his schooling. Mr.

Carter's mother had finished only eighth grade; a single parent, she worked

outside the home. Her mother, his maternal grandmother, had completed only

the fourth grade. Thus, he had been the first high school graduate from his

family, and he thought, "That was all they wanted of me. Had they insisted on

college, that's what they would have gotten. That's why I want college

for my Shelly." Mr. Carter indicated that his family had encouraged him, thinking

he was quite bright. He also said he had done well in school. In describing the

difference between his family's involvement in his education and his participation

in Shelly's, he had this to say:

> My mother worked and my grandmother got us off to school. If there was
> a problem at school, or maybe a concert or something in which I was
> involved, usually my mom didn't come. My granny was usually sick. So I
> was on my own. I wanted them to be proud of me, but they didn't get there
> too often. But I'm here for my Shelly!

Mr. Carter expressed great pride in Shelly's achievements, commenting

that "All of the teachers love her." He went on to say, "I have the attitude that I

should be involved in everything that she does. . . . I just try to be there." He believed that family involvement was a big advantage for a child's school experience. He was complimentary of the teachers and other staff members at Shelly's school and did not perceive that there were any real barriers to parent involvement. He did, however, admit that he sometimes felt a bit out of place because not many other fathers were involved at school.

The Home

Because Shelly and her father kept such a tight schedule, I was unable to visit their home. During my interviews with Shelly, Mr. Carter, and Shelly's teacher, I gathered some information about where the family lived. Mrs. Dobson said,

> I took her to a concert one time and we had to drive her home afterward. She anxiously showed me her home, which was very nice. She was proud of the playground, which her dad had built for her. She has everything she needs. He provides her with everything she needs to support learning.

Mr. Carter described their residence as being located on the south side of town in an area where there were many nice, older homes. I told him I was curious about the playground he had built his daughter. He replied, "She is quite athletic, so I made her a place to play basketball and a jungle-gym type of set-up."

One day when I arrived for my observation visit, Shelly had just finished printing out a report on the computer. She shared it with me, and I complimented her for the excellent job she had done. I asked how she had

managed to develop such great computer skills. She told me that she spent a great deal of time on her computer at home.

Mr. Carter expressed appreciation for the learning experiences Shelly had in the accelerated program and had positive things to say about opportunities for parent involvement. He indicated that he thought it was his responsibility to support Shelly's learning by setting aside time for homework assignments and special projects. When asked how he thought Shelly felt about his involvement, Mr. Carter said it was important to her that he be present when she played basketball or soccer, or when they shared grades at the student-led conferences. He continued, "When Shelly leads the conferences, she is just always so proud to show me all of her A's. She's a good artist and also shows pride when she shows her art work to me."

Mr. Carter looked wistful as he discussed wanting to be more involved in Shelly's schooling by volunteering and going on field trips. He said his demanding work schedule got in the way and he could not make all of the meetings, but he tried to get to enough of them "to know what's going on." He summed up his feelings about the family's school involvement with this comment: "The kids, no matter how ambitious they are, have to feel that they have a support system. They have to feel that the family's behind them, even if it's just the dad." At the conclusion of the interview, I couldn't help thinking that here was one great dad who was proud of his daughter, had high expectations for her, praised the staff and school she attended, and did his best to provide support for her learning, both in and out of school.

Shelly's Perceptions of Her Relationship With Her Father

It was evident that Shelly had a close relationship with her dad, who served as both father and mother figure. When I asked Shelly about her relationship with her father, she said, "I live with my dad and I like living with him because he gives me opportunities to say what I want to do." With an expression that reflected great admiration, she continued,

> I know the trouble he goes through trying to get me to school. We have to be up real early, and we usually have a tight schedule. I have confidence in myself that I can do things right in school, but the support he gives me helps greatly.

Shelly's teacher, Mrs. Dobson, also perceived that Shelly had a close relationship with her dad. In her words, "She's very close to her dad. You can see it when they come to school together for events. It's obvious that she has a great deal of respect for him." From all indications, here were a father and daughter who admired each other a great deal, and had a positive and close relationship.

Shelly's Perceptions of Her Relationship With Teachers and Feelings About School

My observations of Shelly's classroom behavior reflected a relationship between student and teacher that was characterized by mutual respect and admiration. Shelly apparently took her teachers' directions seriously and immediately followed through on them. She never questioned or showed any sign of resentment about the authority of her teachers. Shelly's adherence to classroom rules and the standards of behavior her teachers established was

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apparent in the way she raised her hand for a turn to read or respond to questions and refrained from engaging in disruptive behavior. I also noted that Shelly addressed her teachers respectfully when she wanted to ask a question or obtain permission to do something. Although her comments about her teachers in the recorded interviews were limited, Shelly told me during one of the observation conversations that she enjoyed the accelerated program because the teachers went out of their way to provide many different activities to help students learn. When I asked Shelly how she felt about school, she answered, "Well, I look forward to coming to school and I like it. Sometimes, when I have something to do after school, such as soccer practice or something, I don't like having a lot of homework, but I like learning new things."

I asked Shelly what she wanted to do after high school and what goals she had for herself when she grew up. Without hesitation, she informed me that she wanted to go to college and study to become a pediatrician.

The Family's Involvement in School

Shelly's father was virtually the only family member who was involved in her school experiences. Mrs. Dobson did say that whenever Shelly had been involved in programs or received awards at assemblies, her older sister and nieces had come to school to support her. The teacher described Shelly's father's participation as follows: "He usually makes it to the important things." She made this comment as we discussed her understanding of Mr. Carter's dual role of father and mother and his demanding work schedule. During this

discussion, it occurred to me that for someone her age Shelly had an unusually mature understanding of the necessity of her father's limiting his in-school involvement to certain "important things." I asked her to describe what her father did when he came to school. She said, "Oh, well, he's usually very interested in my work and all I've been doing, what we are probably going to do next, and specific things that we're learning about in that subject." Shelly's father alluded to her desire for him to be more involved in school-related activities when he commented,

> My daughter says that there's only a certain few men who volunteer to go on field trips each time. She was always wanting me to go, but she said, "I understand, Dad, that you have to work; but if you ever have the time off, I just want to see my dad there once."

The Family's After-School Activities

The Carters' busy after-school schedule involved several activities. Shelly spoke of having to go to day care on the days when her father had to work overtime. When he arrived to pick her up, they stopped to get something to eat or they went home and cooked dinner. Mr. Carter indicated that when they arrived home each day they had to get the mail and feed the dog. Some days he was tired, but if Shelly had basketball, track, soccer, piano lessons, or other activities, they would just have to go to them. He said, "Our after-school routine is jam-packed. She is very athletic, but if she has homework she gets right on it. Then she can go to her other activities or go outside and play." Mr. Carter also mentioned that he was a great lover of books and that because Shelly was such a good reader, he frequently bought her books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and

the like. He seemed so pleased to tell me about how ambitious and curious she was.

The School

Hoyle Community Education Center, the school that Shelly attended, was located on the north edge of the downtown area of this urban city. It was situated near a university campus, a city market, and a community college and cultural center. Hoyle was a modern building with state-of-the-art architectural design and a brilliant reflective-glass exterior. The school building featured clusters of open classrooms with carpeted floors and modular furniture. The school served kindergarten through fifth-grade students who lived in the Hoyle School attendance area, as well as kindergartners through fifth graders who were selected for an accelerated program for academically talented students through a designated screening process. The school's population ranged from 650 to 735 students. "Treat Others the Way You Would Like to Be Treated" was Hoyle School's motto. The school's mission statement was: "To educate children to become quality producers and good citizens."

Hoyle School provided a stimulating, attractive environment. According to the teacher, the focus was on improving Hoyle students' academic achievement. She indicated that they had a dedicated and committed staff who worked well together. The teacher also said that creating a positive school climate was another of the school's goals.

I noted that, at Hoyle School, parent involvement differed from that of most other schools in this urban district because it was enhanced by the inclusion of the accelerated program. From past experience, I was aware that parent involvement was a major component of that program. In addition to the usual monthly parent advisory council meetings, there were regularly scheduled meetings of special-interest groups, such as chess club parents, soccer moms, and so on. In an effort to involve parents with their children's learning, parents were asked to assist with homework, as well as special assignments that required students to do extensive research and produce visual representations of their findings. The students then presented these finished products to their class. Parents were also encouraged to sponsor or take an active role in fund-raising projects, career and business fairs, recruitment of additional parent volunteers, and other such endeavors to promote the school's program. Ongoing activities included tutoring, health screening, chaperoning field trips, and collecting grocery receipts and soup labels to obtain special equipment for the school.

Hoyle School communicated with parents through its annual report, shared at the fall open house, a bi-monthly newsletter, and special bulletins as needed. Individual students' progress was shared with parents by means of mid-marking-period progress reports, report cards, and parent-teacher and student-led conferences.

The Teachers

At the time of this study, a team of two teachers, Mrs. Dobson and Mr. Tucker, instructed the 25 fifth-grade students in Shelly's class. Both teachers were willing to provide information for the study. Mrs. Dobson was selected for the interview because she was Shelly's homeroom teacher and had taught her for the past three years. Mr. Tucker allowed me observe Shelly in his classroom and showed me her work, school-related documents, and other pertinent information.

Mrs. Dobson's interactions with her students appeared to be caring and concerned. She did not raise her voice; rather, she spoke kindly and softly. Her instructions were clear, concise, and specific. Two or three times during my observations, she used the overhead projector to introduce the lesson. The learning experiences in which she involved the students were challenging and required the use of critical thinking skills. They also reflected planning, organization, and structure. Mrs. Dobson circulated about the classroom and monitored the students' progress with their assignments. Her methods of checking and collecting work indicated that she set high standards and held students accountable for following directions, producing quality work, handing in assignments on time, and keeping their behavior under control. I noted that when occasionally the noise level escalated above whispers, Mrs. Dobson would say, "Class, give me five!" All students would immediately raise a hand and display five fingers spread apart, and a sudden hush would fall over the room. She was also attentive to the students' requests for help.

Having supervised the implementation of this type of accelerated program for academically talented students, I understand that consistent and meaningful parent involvement is a primary component of such a program. Thus, I was not surprised to hear both teachers say that they firmly believed that frequent and significant in-school involvement by parents, combined with substantial out-of-school support for learning, were essential ingredients of student success. Mrs. Dobson, both a teacher and the mother of two children who had gone through the program, had this to say about parent involvement:

> Over the years, we [she and Mr. Tucker] have watched children who really needed their parents' support to do the research, projects, and other extra requirements in this program and didn't have it. Looking at several of those students now, we can see that they are basically raising themselves, and they are just really struggling. Many of them don't have the maturity. They think they know it all, and their parents don't step up and assume parenting responsibilities. They let the kids run the whole show, and that is a real problem.

When she was asked in what ways she thought teachers could encourage parent involvement, Mrs. Dobson indicated that she believed the main thing was to be positive with parents. She mentioned that some parents were reluctant to become involved because they had had negative experiences in the past. She went on to say,

> I think teachers need to develop a team relationship with parents and let them know that we are here to help children. We want to give some solutions to parents, and not just complain—solutions that will help us all work together as a team.

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Teachers' Perceptions of Shelly

Most of Mrs. Dobson's perceptions of Shelly were included in earlier references to Shelly's work habits and academic performance, as well as her relationships with others. A few other specific comments that the teacher made about Shelly are included below to shed more light on this child whom she called a "model student."

> She's very self-directed and inquisitive and expresses a great deal of empathy as we are studying different subjects. . . . She is quite mature for her age and never complains about having to go to bed early at night in order to get to day care at 5:30 a.m. each day.

When I first approached Mr. Tucker, the other teacher, about observing Shelly during his class time, he said, "You are working with a very special student."

Teachers' Perceptions of Shelly's Father

Mrs. Dobson described Shelly's father as a single dad who had complete custody of her. She said, "I have observed that he is very kind to her, but firm. [He is] extremely supportive and proud of his daughter." Both teachers praised Mr. Carter's involvement with the school and his support of his daughter. Mrs. Dobson talked about how Mr. Carter expected and encouraged Shelly to do her best in school but did not seem to pressure her. She also surmised that he wanted Shelly to have an educational experience that would challenge her to go beyond what was considered average or normal. More than once, Mrs. Dobson commented that she thought Shelly's father would make an excellent role model for other parents.

Teachers' Perceptions of Mr. Carter's
Out-of-School Involvement

Home support for learning was a crucial element of the accelerated

program in which Shelly was enrolled. The program often necessitated that

parents would become involved in the assigned extra projects by taking students

to the library for research and supporting their completion of a presentation-

ready product. Mr. Tucker, Shelly's science and math teacher, described the

superior quality of the projects she had produced for his class. He said it was

obvious that, even with a high-achieving student like Shelly, completing projects

of this quality would not be possible without parent support. Making sure that

Shelly did her homework was another aspect of Mr. Carter's out-of- school

involvement. Both father and daughter mentioned that Shelly's homework was a

top priority in their after-school routine.

Conclusions

Shelly was a highly motivated 11-year-old fifth grader who excelled in a

program for academically talented students. Shelly was the only child in a home

headed by her single father. The close bond between father and daughter was

evidenced by their mutual respect and admiration for each other. Shelly's older

sister, who had two daughter's about Shelly's age, and a paternal grandmother

made up this student's extended family and kin network. Shelly sometimes

spent weekends with them and also accompanied them to church. In the

observations, Shelly seemed quite mature for her age and expressed

appreciation for the sacrifices her father made in fulfilling the roles of both father

and mother. She did not complain about the inconveniences this entailed, but rather took them in stride. She appeared to be well adjusted, and her teachers gave her attendance, citizenship, attitude, and peer relations excellent ratings.

Shelly's father took great pride in her achievements, and despite a demanding work schedule, he attended and supported most school-related activities in which she was involved. He also structured their after-school time and activities in a way that supported Shelly's learning. Mr. Carter expressed regret that certain job constraints did not allow him to be more involved. However, Shelly's teachers rated his involvement highly and considered him an excellent role model for other parents to emulate. Her current and previous teachers described Shelly as a well-rounded student who not only was an all-A honor roll student but also was an artistic, creative, and athletic youngster who enjoyed participating in soccer, basketball, baseball, and track. Shelly believed that her father's presence and support helped her strive to do her best.

The modern school that Shelly attended provided an atmosphere that promoted learning, as evidenced by the bright and colorful surroundings. Many attractive displays, charts, banners, and other visuals adorned the hallways and classrooms. A large, glass-enclosed atrium contained many live green plants and a huge blue-carpeted staircase that served as a forum for small-group assemblies and meetings. I attended the fifth-grade awards assembly, which took place on this staircase, and saw Shelly's father in attendance, proudly snapping pictures. Over the atrium hung a mammoth architecturally designed

replica of a dragon, the school's mascot, created in the school's colors—bright orange and royal blue.

Shelly's teachers provided challenging learning experiences in a highly structured classroom setting. They apparently had an excellent relationship with Mr. Carter and welcomed and appreciated his involvement. Parent involvement was a major component of the program, and the teachers indicated that they felt responsible for making such involvement a priority.

Case Study 6: Ronald's Family
(Household Headed by Two Parents)

"My parents cheer me on."

Initial Meeting

This case study centers on Ronald, a high-achieving fifth grader who was the second sibling of a nuclear family. I first met Ronald when I went to see his teacher, Mrs. Fizzer, about the possibility of working with some students from her classroom. The teacher had invited me to explain my study to her students and ask them whether they would volunteer to take a letter of invitation and permission forms home to their parents. When I had finished my brief presentation, several students raised their hands, but Ronald must have been the first. The teacher chuckled at his eagerness as she distributed the letters. She and I both emphasized that participation in the study was completely voluntary, but it would necessitate family members' cooperation regarding the interviews and permission forms.

A few days later, Mrs. Fizzer called to tell me that three students had returned signed permission forms. On the day that I arrived at the classroom to pick up the forms, Ronald made sure that I understood that he was the first one in the class to return his. He certainly was eager to be included. Because Ronald was the first student from a nuclear family to obtain parental permission, I was happy to include him. He might provide a contrast to the other boys in the sample. Mrs. Fizzer had also told me that Ronald was an excellent, well-rounded student. I sent a note of thanks to Ronald's parents and asked them to call me so that we could schedule the interviews. Ronald's mother responded within a few days, and we made the necessary arrangements. During our telephone conversation, I reviewed the purpose and process of the study and answered her questions concerning the time commitment.

The Student

Ronald had one of the most beautiful smiles I had ever seen, and he flashed it frequently. He was jovial and pleasant each time I observed him except for the one day he was not feeling well and had his head down on the desk. Ronald was tall for his age and was athletically built. As stated earlier, he was excited about participating in the study. He proudly described his home life and family, and seemed to appreciate the part that his extended family and church family played in his life. Ronald said that math was his favorite subject in school, but that science was boring. He also indicated that he loved to play basketball and enjoyed his instrumental-music class, in which he played the

bass and snare drums. Ronald appeared to be a happy, well-adjusted student who enjoyed school and the successes he experienced there.

The Family and Home

Ronald's family consisted of the father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Adams, and their four sons. The oldest son was Reginald, 14 years old; the second son, Ronald, was 11 years old; the third son, Richard, was 9 years old; and the youngest son, Raymond, was 4 years old. Ronald grinned when he told me that he did not have any sisters. He said, "My mother is the only girl at our house." Both of the parents worked, the three older boys attended school, and the four year old attended a day-care facility. Mr. Adams described himself as a second-shift factory worker at a plant about 50 miles out of town. He continued, "I'm on the road a great deal and work long hours. I have a high school diploma, but I didn't go any further in school."

I visited the Adamses' home on three occasions. Only Mrs. Adams was present for the first interview. During the two interviews, both parents were present. Mr. Adams was rather quiet and reserved. Mrs. Adams was more verbal and did most of the talking. When I was setting up the tape recorder and taking out my note pad in preparation for the first interview, she sat down on a loveseat across from me. Mr. Adams sat in a recliner near the doorway. Because the two of them were seated so far apart, I was not sure the recorder would pick up both of their voices. When I started the initial interview, Mrs. Adams sensed my dilemma and motioned for her husband to come and sit on

the loveseat next to her. He did so, and I proceeded to interview both of them.

The same seating arrangement was used for the second interview.

Ronald's Father

Mr. Adams, Ronald's father, described his family of origin as follows:

> I came from a big family in which both parents were present. I had four brothers and a sister. My mother was basically there most of the time. She was there all of the time. My father worked second shift, so many times we did not see him every day, but my mother was always there.

When I asked Mr. Adams how he recalled his parents' involvement with his education, he indicated that his mother was as involved as she could be, with all her children and an invalid mother to care for. In his words:

> When I was growing up, I was an honor roll student so I would receive many different accolades, and there would be special events to attend. My mother would be there [and] my father would praise me and everything. He would say, "Well, son, I have to go to work. I have to take care of this family." Basically, my mother was my backbone as far as going to school and always being there to tell me right from wrong.

When I asked Mr. Adams to compare his involvement in the education of his children to his parents' involvement in his school experience, he said he thought that he and his wife were more involved than his parents had been. He discussed having wanted his father to be more involved, but understanding the situation. Then he said that, as a child, he had vowed, "When I grow up I will be more involved with my kids, so sometimes I feel like I am more involved with them."

As the interview progressed and Mrs. Adams tended to dominate the discussion, I kept redirecting questions to Mr. Adams. Once or twice, he

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responded, "She's covered it." I did learn from our conversation that Mr. Adams was apparently a father who believed that parents' involvement in the education of their children is important. He expressed the idea that both the students and the people at school try harder when they know parents are concerned. He went on to say that more parent involvement results in better school experiences for the children.

Ronald's Mother

Mrs. Adams appeared to be in her early forties. She was well-groomed and conveyed an attitude of self-confidence and professionalism. During the interview she was more talkative than her husband and usually took the lead in responding to the questions. Her responses to the questions I asked were astute and pertinent. She described her family of origin as follows:

> I am a product of a single-parent home. My mother raised five children of which I am the eldest. So, I was the co-care giver. We lived in this city along with aunts and uncles, except my one aunt who lives in Columbus, Ohio. We have a large family and most of us live here.

Mrs. Adams was a beautician and salon owner. In addition to her cosmetology training, Ronald's mother also had attended a local college of business for a few years but had not received a degree because she had another baby.

When asked about her mother's involvement in her education, Mrs. Adams said she recalled that her mother had always been there. She reflected on her mother's involvement in and support for the many plays, musicals, Brownies, Girl Scouts, and other activities in which she had participated. In comparing her mother's involvement with her own, she commented that her

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mother had "perfected" childrearing. Mrs. Adams said that, although she tried, her efforts did not measure up to those of her mother. Because she deemed parent involvement an important determinant of the school success of the child, Ronald's mother voiced her appreciation for the flexibility that self-employment allowed her. She stated that often she had been able to juggle her schedule so that she could attend some school-related activities and share in those traditional roles and responsibilities that school personnel define as constituting parent involvement. During this discussion on the meaning of parent involvement to the performance, attitude, and school adjustment of African American children, Mrs. Adams voiced her disdain for what she called "teachers categorizing Black kids." She continued by saying,

> They're going to be judged differently. One thing I don't allow teachers to do is categorize my kids. I had a misunderstanding with a teacher who wanted to categorize my oldest son. That's what many teachers will do with Black kids, put them in a group.

When I was finally able to redirect her to the interview questions, Mrs. Adams said she had not run across any barriers to parent involvement at Roper School, and she perceived that the staff was very receptive to such involvement. She spoke highly of Ronald's teacher and said her child was doing well in that room. Finally, Mrs. Adams had some definite ideas about the need for Black family values, including home structure, respect for elders, extended family support, a strong work ethic, and, especially, religion and prayer.

The Extended Family and Home

Ronald's extended family and kin support network comprised his paternal grandmother, his Uncle Brian (mother's brother), his Aunt Sheila (father's sister), and his church family. According to Ronald and his parents, these were the people who assisted with the care of the children in their family.

The Adams family's home was located on the far north end of the city. It was one among a row of moderate-sized brick homes all of which, had been designed and built alike. The living room, in which we met for the interviews, was furnished with a modern sofa, loveseat, and reclining chair. Matching coffee and end tables, along with other decorative accessories, created an elegant look. The decorating scheme continued into the kitchen and dining area, which were visible from where I sat. I did not see other rooms in the home, which, according to Ronald and his mother, contained the computer, encyclopedias, and other learning materials. The house was clean and orderly.

The School and Teacher

Ronald attended Roper Elementary School, which was located on the southeastern side of the city. Students from all over the city were bused or transported by car to this school, which had a Magnet program focusing on global education. The curriculum emphasized the study of various countries, their people, cultures, and languages. The student population comprised approximately 630 prekindergarten through fifth-grade children. In addition to the students who were transported to school, youngsters from the neighborhood

also walked to Roper, which was one of the few elementary schools in this urban district with a sizable representation of Caucasian students. The school environment was warm and inviting. Attractive hallway displays included flags of the different continents that were the focus of the curriculum. Each wing of the building was named for a particular continent, and the flags of that continent were displayed to designate the area.

The classroom that served as Ronald's homeroom was an unusually attractive learning environment. Positive and motivational quotations were displayed on the walls, bulletin boards, and mobiles hanging from the ceiling tiles. Bright, colorful charts, posters, and many stuffed animals graced the window ledges, bookshelves, and corner stands. There were also a large collection of books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, board games, and listening centers at one end of the room. Instructional equipment such as computers, the overhead projector, and a typewriter were at the writing center. In the center of all of these items were groups of tables and chairs, where 29 fourth and fifth graders were seated. The teacher's desk was at one end of the room, near the chalkboard. She rarely used her desk, but generally circulated around the room, occasionally sitting down next to an individual or group of students to assist them or check their work. The room had very little unoccupied space, but the class did not seem to mind. They maneuvered through the maze and appeared comfortable in spite of it all.

Ronald's Teacher

Ronald's teacher, Mrs. Fizzer, impressed me as a teacher who had genuine concern for her students and their academic progress. She exhibited a caring and understanding attitude. She was very friendly and displayed warmth in her relationships with the students. I noted during my observations that she talked to the students like most mothers would address their own children. For example, on one occasion she said, "Harold, my child, take your foot off of that chair!" She set standards and expected students to meet them or face consequences such as the loss of recess time or other privileges. Mrs. Fizzer was stern, but she had a pleasant personality and a sense of fairness, which she displayed in her daily instructional techniques. The students seemed to adore her, and they moaned and groaned when she informed them that she would be gone for a day or two and that a substitute would be in charge. She planned more than enough learning experiences for the students and made it clear what they should do when they had finished all assigned work.

Mrs. Fizzer appeared to work hard to divide her time equally between her fourth- and fifth-grade students. The use of peer tutors and cooperative learning groups also helped her accomplish the goal of providing learning support for everyone. Mrs. Fizzer seemed to enjoy teaching and evidently devoted a great deal of energy to planning and preparation, as evidenced by the conducive learning environment she had created, and the many challenging learning experiences she provided. Mrs. Fizzer had an interesting way of describing her philosophy of family involvement in the education of their children. According to

her, family involvement should be in a support role, but not necessarily in the building every day. She said she thought it was more important for families to provide moral support, structure at home, and clearly communicated expectations for school success.

When I asked her how she could encourage more parent involvement, Mrs. Fizzer said:

> I can encourage more parents to become involved in school by keeping them informed of their children's progress (good or not so good), respectfully requesting their support with activities that have meaning for academic achievement, and refraining from burdening them with the "bake the cookies, send the punch, sell the candy" routines. I feel that, as educators, we need to find meaningful ways to involve parents in the decision-making and leadership aspects of schools.

Perceptions of Ronald's Attitude, Relationships, and School Adjustment

Ronald flashed his big smile as he described his feelings about his school and teacher in this manner: "I like my teacher because she's doing a good job, and she's teaching me. She's doing a great job of making me get my education. I have a whole bunch of friends in my class. I don't have fights or problems like that at school." Ronald also told me that his goal was to finish high school and go to college to become a professional basketball player. I encouraged him to tell me more about his plans for adulthood. He said that if he did not succeed at becoming a professional basketball player, his "back-up plan" was to become a doctor.

Ronald's teacher referred to him as a "really neat student." According to her,

He is respectful of adults and gets along with both boys and girls. Lately, I have noticed that he shows more interest in the girls. He has many friends, including his brother who is about a year younger than him. They share a very close bond and are often seen with each other at school.

Mrs. Fizzer continued by saying that she believed that Ronald liked school as he was present every day and "doesn't ever want to go home when he is not feeling well." Ronald's teacher also said he had a very good attitude, and when she challenged him about being too playful, he just smiled and said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Fizzer." The following are some of Mrs. Fizzer's other comments about Ronald's personality, attitude, and school adjustment:

> One of the things I admire most about Ronald is his pleasant personality. He always seems happy and has that great big smile.

> Ronald acts as though he is very devoted to his parents. He seems proud of his mother, who owns her own beauty salon.

> Ronald is a really neat student.

Ronald's Work Habits and School Performance

As stated earlier, Ronald's teacher described him as

An excellent well-rounded student who works well independently and in a group. He is very concerned about keeping up with his work. When he goes out of my class for music, he tries to make up all of the work he missed. I had to tell him, "Ronald, you can't do my work in another teacher's class."

Mrs. Fizzer also explained that Ronald seemed to know what was expected of him and took his school work seriously. According to her, Ronald was sometimes playful and liked to have fun,' but he always showed enthusiasm for getting good grades. In her words, "He will often ask me, 'What did I get on my spelling test?' before I have had a chance to correct the papers."

A review of Ronald's report card, cumulative folder, and CA-60 provided documentation of his work habits and performance. Among the comments on his fourth- and fifth-grade report cards were these statements: "Ronald is doing well in all academic subjects," "Ronald continues to do well in all phases of my classes," and "Ongoing improvement. Ronald does excellent work."

At the time of this inquiry, Ronald had been at Roper School for four years. He had attended two other schools during his first grade and kindergarten years. His fourth- and fifth-grade report cards recorded letter grades of A's and B's in the core subjects of math, reading, social studies, and science. Letter grades for art, music, health, and Spanish were all S's, and Ronald's citizenship was rated excellent, as indicated by 1's for all marking periods.

Ronald's CA-60's reflected a good attendance record for his second- through fifth-grade years (kindergarten and first grade were not available). During his second- and third-grade years, Ronald missed 14 half-days of school. For his fourth- and fifth-grade years, he had a perfect attendance record.

The standardized test scores recorded on Ronald's CA-60's reflected satisfactory or excellent performance. For example, on the fourth-grade MEAP test results, he received an overall rating of satisfactory, which requires a score of 300 or more. In the story selection, his score was 340; the informational-section score was 305; and his knowledge about reading was rated high. The Metropolitan Achievement Test scores for the second- through fifth-grade years indicated an annual grade-equivalent gain of six months to one year in each of

the subject areas (reading, math, language arts, science, and social studies). Ronald's highest fifth-grade score was a 7.7 in social studies, and his lowest score was a 4.5 in reading.

During one classroom observation, Ronald's group was silently reading a selection from the social studies book. He was apparently preoccupied with another assignment. The teacher asked him to answer a question about the reading selection. He smiled shyly and admitted he had not been paying attention. Mrs. Fizzer instructed him to plan to explain the passage to the class when silent reading time was up. He responded, "Yes, Mrs. Fizzer," and got busy reading. During another classroom observation, I noted that when the teacher told Ronald and another student that it was time for music class, he went directly to his book bag, which was hanging on the coat racks near the wall, and retrieved his drum sticks. The two boys carried the big drum out of the room together. When he returned from the class, Ronald immediately began working on the assignment that he had left when he went to music class.

At the year-end fifth-grade honors assembly, Ronald received the following awards: A/B Honor Roll, Perfect Attendance, Citizenship, Citywide Musical Participation, and Principal's Award.

Perceptions of Ronald's Family's
In-School Involvement

Ronald said he perceived that his parents were involved enough. He credited them with helping him with math homework, going on field trips with his class, and coming to get his report card and holding conferences with his

teacher. Ronald also said, "If I get in trouble, my mom comes up to see what I have done. I feel proud because my parents come to school to check on me and see how I'm doing because they want me to pass." In response to additional questions about the in-school involvement of his parents, Ronald said he thought that they were involved because they wanted him to get A's and B's, avoid failing a grade, go to college, and get a good job. Ronald concluded his perceptions of his parents with this comment: "I feel my parents think I'm doing well in school, and they cheer me on."

Ronald's mother, Mrs. Adams, explained her philosophy on parent involvement in this way:

> I think that a family should be involved in schools at all levels. Parents should communicate with their children, find out what they are doing in school, and let them know that as parents they care because the children are interested in letting parents know.

Some of the ways that Mrs. Adams actively involved herself in Ronald's school-related activities were referred to in the section describing her. She also gave a detailed explanation of how happy she thought Ronald was when she picked up his report card or attended one of his musical performances. She referred to her son's happiness in this way: "Ronald is just such a happy child most of the time that when I attend his programs and he looks up and sees me, his face just lights up when he knows I'm there." Mrs. Adams expressed her desire to participate in the discipline of her children with this comment: "I want teachers to call me first if there's a problem with my kids, before putting my child aside in a group. I

won't allow any teacher to put my child aside in a category, because that's how statistics go."

According to Mrs. Adams, at one time she was Cub Scout leader for her son's troop, but she gave it up because she thought the boys needed a man who could teach them masculine things. Among the other school-related activities that Mrs. Adams said she enjoyed were the Mother's Day luncheon, the new student-led conferences, and helping to chaperone field trips with her younger son. She concluded her perceptions of the family's in-school involvement by saying that she thought that prayer should be brought back into the schools to help curb some of the violence, and that more small-group parent meetings should be planned to allow time for parents to exchange ideas.

As stated earlier, Mr. Adams's responses to the interview questions were not as explicit as those of his wife, and some of his comments were alluded to in the section describing her. Ronald's father was emphatic about his philosophy regarding the importance of families' involvement in the education of their children. He expressed that philosophy in this manner: "I think this is always important, just basically being there. The teachers and the children try harder when they know you are involved." Mr. Adams did say that he helped out with fundraising and went on morning field trips when he could return in time to get to his second-shift job.

Ronald's teacher's perception of the way his family was involved in school-related activities was reflected in these comments:

I have had Ronald for two years now, and my relationship with his parents has always been positive. Whatever I ask them to do, they always come through. They have informed me that they both work, but will help out whenever needed. They have also told me that they expect their children to be responsible for doing their best work and taking care of their behavior at school.

Mrs. Fizzer also gave Ronald's parents credit for attending parent meetings and conferences, picking up his report card, and responding to the school's requests for assistance with fundraising and other special programs and events.

Perceptions of Ronald's Family's After-School Activities and Home Support

Ronald described his family's after-school involvement in these comments:

I go to Heavenly Ministries Church. I go to kids' church where they teach us about God. We write about and read the Bible. We have dance-a-thons, and on Fridays we go to Bible Study.

When I get home, I go on the computer or do my homework, and then practice basketball. On weekends we go bowling, skating, or bike riding in the park.

When I go on the computer, I do my math, put patterns together, and stuff like that, and we also have a Sony Playstation.

According to Ronald's mother, she tried to give her children structure at home, but sometimes she felt guilty because she was not always able to complete the routines because things happened unexpectedly. Mrs. Adams also talked about how things were more demanding now than when she grew up, but she added, "I always try to give them structure for what they do at school." She also gave a detailed account of the family's rule of "homework first." In her words, "At times when the boys don't have assigned homework, they think, 'Well,

we'll just watch TV,' but we always say, 'No, read a book or something,' and I tell my baby boy who can't read yet to write his name."

Ronald's mother said she did not reward her sons for doing well in school, but tried to instill in them the value of doing well because they want to, and because they will be rewarded in the end. Other values she mentioned were pride in achievement, courtesy, respect, and making good decisions. Mrs. Adams continued by describing how she told Ronald that he needed a good education, even if he did want to be an athlete. It was apparent from her responses that both parents worked at creating a home environment that supported school learning. For example, Mrs. Adams made this comment:

> When I buy gifts, I buy books for my children, and my sister's, and my cousin's children. Books, crayons, paper, and things to learn. They need to learn. I give my kids books at Christmas, birthdays or anytime. They have shelves of books downstairs, and they have book shelves in their rooms. I believe that what you plant into a child's life is what they give back in return.

Ronald's father indicated that his second-shift job and the long drive to that job made it difficult for him to be involved in the family's after-school activities. However, he did say, "I try to get most of the weekends off when I can to spend time with my family." Mr. Adams also described how he supported Ronald's involvement with the basketball league at the community fieldhouse, and his son's participation in activities at the YMCA in previous years. He continued by saying:

> If the boys have a half-day, I am still at home and I take care of them. Usually the first thing they do when they come home is their homework. We have video games, music cd's, and things like that. Sometimes the

kids want to buy more, but we try to limit that. We try to teach them the value of education.

During one of my conversations with Ronald, he explained that sometimes when he got a ride home from school, he took one of his instruments home to practice. According to him, the brothers would grab a tambourine or some maracas and have a jam session. Ronald said his mother did not mind as long as the boys remembered to play their music in the basement and did not disturb the neighbors.

Conclusions

In addition to parent support, Ronald had extended kin, church family, and community-based networks to nourish his socialization and development. He boasted of many friendships among his peers and apparently adored his teacher. Family relationships seemed positive, and expectations appeared to be clearly communicated. Ronald gave the following description of the family members' roles: "My mom cleans around the house, and my brothers and I can help clean up. My dad helps do stuff around the house, and my parents help me with homework things that I need to understand."

At the time of this inquiry, the school that Ronald attended welcomed parent involvement but did not appear to consider it high on the list of priorities. Ronald's teacher also said she feels she defined parent involvement differently most other educators did. She acknowledged that she appreciated home support and positive expectations more than she did the frequent presence of

parents in the building. She gave Ronald and his family very high marks in this regard.

Ronald and his brothers lived with both their mother and father in a comfortable and lovely home. The evidence indicated that Ronald was a happy, well-rounded student who had an excellent academic and citizenship record at school. At the fifth-grade awards assembly, he received certificates for A/B Honor Roll, excellent citizenship, and perfect attendance for the entire school year.

Ronald's parents both reportedly had done well in school, and their own mothers had been involved and supportive. They were concerned and provided support and involvement in school and school-related activities, as well as a structured home environment that supported learning. Both parents worked, but they apparently arranged their schedules to accommodate involvement in their children's school experiences.

Case Study 7: Tyrone's Family
(Household Headed by Two Parents)

"My school is the best!"

Initial Meeting

One morning as I visited the office of my contact person, Mrs. Sims, a parent came in to turn in some proceeds from the fifth-grade candy sale. Mrs. Sims said, "I'm glad you came because Mrs. Muldrew, the research lady that I spoke to you about, is here and I want you to meet her." Mrs. Sims introduced

the two of us, and we spoke briefly before Mrs. Thomas had to leave for work. She apologized for having to leave and told me that I could call her and set up an appointment to discuss my research project with her family.

At our appointed meeting, Mrs. Thomas listened with interest as I explained the part that families would play in my research. She signed the consent form and apologized for her husband's absence, explaining that he had a previous commitment that she had not remembered when she made the appointment for our meeting. Because Mr. Thomas had not signed the consent forms, I asked Mrs. Thomas if she thought he would participate in the interviews. She assured me that both of them had discussed the possibility of their family's being included in the study when Mrs. Sims initially contacted them. Apparently, it was at that time that Mrs. Sims had told the Thomases that she had recommended them for the study because of their consistent involvement in their children's school experiences. Mrs. Thomas said that Mrs. Sims had been so convincing that both she and her husband had agreed to participate. However, she said they had some concerns about the time constraints imposed by their demanding work schedules.

I expressed my appreciation for their willingness to assist me and explained that I would arrange to conduct the interviews at their convenience. I assured her that I would make the interviews as brief as possible and take no more of their time than was necessary. Before leaving the home, I informed Mrs. Thomas that I would like to begin Tyrone's classroom observations the following day if she would give her approval. She agreed that I could go ahead with the

observations, and she and her husband would notify me when I could interview the two of them.

The Student

The focus of this case study is an 11-year-old fifth-grade boy named Tyrone. A big winning smile, which he flashed frequently, and a rugged build were among Tyrone's most noticeable physical features. Tyrone generally dressed in denim jeans or casual pants, T-shirts or sweatshirts, and high-topped Nike shoes. He was well groomed, and his pants were appropriately fitted and belted at the waist. During the interviews, he frequently glanced at the black watch on his left wrist. Although he responded to my interview questions without hesitation, he volunteered very little additional information. His interactions with me were pleasant, cordial, and respectful every time I was with him. For example, he opened the door and stood back to let me enter first. During my observations, I noted that Tyrone usually sat near the front of the room in each of his three classrooms, and there seemed to be nothing unusual about his attitude or behavior. He eagerly participated in class discussions and activities, and seemed especially fond of physical games such as basketball and relays.

I ate lunch with Tyrone's class one day, and with his permission sat down next to him. During our conversation, he shared with me that he always brought his lunch as he did not like the food served in the cafeteria. Tyrone soon finished his sandwich, apple, chips, and a fruit drink and seemed eager to join the line of students preparing to go outside for lunch recess. He exhibited an

abundance of energy as he bounced and danced around in the line. When the group was dismissed, Tyrone waved good-bye to me with a big smile.

When I asked Tyrone to describe his family, he told me that he lived with his father, mother, and six-year-old sister, Sabrina. I encouraged him to tell me more about his family so that I could get to know them better. He said, "My father works at a General Motors factory, and my mother is a nurse at the hospital." In response to my question of who took care of him and his sister besides the parents, Tyrone told me that whenever their parents went out of town or to something for grown-ups only, he and Sabrina stayed with their maternal grandparents. He also told me that sometimes the two of them stayed with their aunts and uncles who had some kids about their ages, and also a godmother whom he referred to as "Big Mama." On the subject of family lessons about respect, responsibility, and spirituality, Tyrone had this to say:

> They tell me to respect other people's things and don't break them or tear them up. . . . They say I should always use good manners, like, "Say please, thank you, and excuse me" . . . and, you know, don't talk back to grown-ups.

Tyrone described their after-school activities in this manner: "Sometimes my mother picks us up and takes us to our classes. When we don't have classes, I play basketball. Then, if I have my homework done, I can go on the computer or watch TV." In response to my questions about the family's weekend activities, Tyrone explained that most of the time his mother did not have to work on weekends, and they could go shopping, to movies, and to church, but he had to clean his room before riding his bike or playing games.

According to Tyrone, his parents helped him with homework and bought him instructional tapes so he could read better. An example of something Tyrone said his parents told him about school is as follows: "They told me that if I can do well, I can get a scholarship like my cousin Brandon. He's going to college to be an engineer." At that point, I asked Tyrone what he wanted to do after high school. He said his first choice was to play professional basketball or join the Navy, but he really wanted to have his own restaurant some day.

During the second interview with Tyrone, he shared with me his perception of his school, his teachers, and how he felt about his parents' involvement in his schooling. When asked how he felt about his school and teachers, Tyrone had this to say:

> I like school. . . . My school is the best. . . . I like it when we have team competitions in spelling, sign language, and math facts. . . . Each team tries to score higher than the other. . . . I like my teachers; they are nice, but if you don't get your work done there will be some trouble.

Tyrone said that most of the times his parents came to school they talked to his teachers about his work. He said that if the teacher called about any problems, his father or mother would come right up to the school. Going on field trips and helping with Mr. Rogers and Boy Scouts were the other things Tyrone said his father did at school. In response to my question about how he felt about his parents' involvement, Tyrone had this to say:

> I like it when they come to my school . . . like when it's my birthday. My mother brings treats for the whole class. I think it helps me when my parents come to pick up my report card. . . . Then I can see my grades because some kids don't get their cards if their parents won't come and talk to the teachers.

Tyrone continued by saying that he thought his teachers were glad when his parents came to school, and if he played around and did not finish his work, his teachers would say, "Tyrone, I'm going to call your parents." Later, Tyrone recalled that the previous school year his teacher had not liked his mother, and they were always yelling at each other. Tyrone indicated that he thought his parents were involved because they wanted him to be good and keep his grades up.

The Family and Home

In their interviews, both Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were outgoing and articulate, and they seemed knowledgeable about schools and current educational issues. Mr. Thomas seemed pleased to inform me that he was a member of the school superintendent's task force, whose responsibility it was to monitor the effect of charter schools on the public schools in that urban district. He mentioned that his appointment to the task force had been initiated during a conversation he had with the superintendent on the golf course one day.

Mr. Thomas described his family of origin as follows: "I grew up in a family in which there were two sisters, my mother, and myself. I was the youngest, and my father died during that time, so my mother finished rearing us as a single parent." He indicated that both of his two sisters lived in distant states, and because his mother had died recently, he did not have immediate family members living in the area. Mr. Thomas recalled that his mother always had been involved in his school experiences. In his own words, "She had to

work, but found the time to get to that school and let those teachers know that she sent me there to get an education, and not to clown."

In comparing his own school involvement with that of his mother, Mr. Thomas said he was able to be more involved because of his job flexibility as a skilled tradesman at a General Motors plant. He explained that he had finished high school and some college before attending the General Motors program to become a journeyman electrician. When asked about his views on the meaning of parents' involvement to the educational experiences of their children, Mr. Thomas drew this analogy:

> Participating in your child's education is like investing in the stock market: The more you put into it, the more you get out of it. When you invest in your child's education now, that investment pays dividends on down the road.

When I asked Mr. Thomas to elaborate on the meaning he thought that parents' involvement had for the school performance, attitude, and adjustment of their children, he said that such involvement lets the child and the school know that the parents are concerned. He also said he believed that the schools would try harder to meet students' needs if more parents would get involved and be in the schools to see what was going on. According to Mr. Thomas, his own school involvement included volunteering to help with fundraising, field trips, Boy Scouts, the Mr. Rogers program, career day, and any other activities in which his children were involved.

On the subject of opportunities and barriers to parent involvement, Mr. Thomas discussed the abundance of opportunities that many parents fail to take

advantage of. He recalled that several times scouting activities and trips had to be canceled or postponed because there were not enough parents to supervise the group. Mr. Thomas continued by saying:

> The only barrier to parent involvement that I see is when parents want everyone on their own terms. . . .The complaints I have heard are that the teachers didn't talk to parents when they wanted them to stop what they were doing and discuss some issue. . . . Sometimes I think parents don't want to accept the responsibility to meet the schools halfway. I see education as a partnership. . . . The parents and the schools are in this business together.

Mr. Thomas also said he would like to see more parenting classes to help parents understand their responsibilities toward their children and the school. He also suggested using parent contracts, such as some private academies have, which require parents to sign a commitment to be involved in their children's schooling. Mr. Thomas also mentioned that he attended some school board meetings and believed that "more parents should be at these meetings and hear what the schools and teachers are faced with. Then, maybe they will understand what parents need to do."

In reference to their family's after-school involvement, Mr. Thomas said they were active church members and attended worship and church programs on Sunday. He had already mentioned many of Tyrone's activities, which included Boy's Club, basketball, and some classes at the art institute. He said Mrs. Thomas was primarily responsible for helping the children with homework and for driving Tyrone and his sister to music and art classes because her work day ended earlier than his.

Mr. Thomas indicated that he believed Tyrone appreciated his school involvement and often volunteered his services. For example, when the teacher asked for some fathers to go on the year-end trip for fifth graders, Tyrone suggested that his father would go. Mr. Thomas said he thought that Tyrone would like him to become more involved with the baseball team, but his work schedule would not permit it.

On the subject of Tyrone's perception of his out-of-school involvement, Mr. Thomas said that he sometimes played one-on-one basketball with his son or joined in a game with Tyrone and his friends at their backyard hoop. According to Mr. Thomas, Tyrone had been very shy and unsure of himself when he first started school, but the boy was now more self-confident and willing to try new things. Mr. Thomas thought that a great deal of this improvement had been a result of their parental support and involvement.

Tyrone's mother was not as verbal as her husband, but she readily responded to the interview questions. She was friendly, but very soft-spoken and reserved. She was courteous and articulate. Mrs. Thomas described her occupation and educational level in this manner: "I finished high school and went right into nurse's training. I am currently employed as a charge nurse at the local medical center." According to Mrs. Thomas, she was the youngest in a family of seven children; both of their parents were in the home. She explained that two of her sisters and one brother lived in the area, and the other members of her family lived out of state. In Mrs. Thomas's words,

We are a very closely knit family, and our sisters help each other with our kids. Our brother is a long-distance truck driver, so he is out of town most of the time. We usually all get together on holidays and birthdays. . . . My mother and father are retired and live about two streets over from us, and if neither my husband nor I is available, Tyrone and Sabrina can always go over to their house.

Mrs. Thomas said her mother had been more involved than her father in her school experience, usually attending PTA meetings, school programs, and the like. She also stated that her mother had been a "homeroom mother," who helped out with parties, baked cookies, and collected milk money for the teacher. Mrs. Thomas recalled that her mother would sew costumes for her operettas, plays, and Halloween parties, and her father would attend the programs in which she was involved.

Mrs. Thomas indicated that her mother had participated more actively in school-related activities than she herself did because her mother had not held a full-time job. Mrs. Thomas continued by saying that her involvement was different from her mother's, as times had changed and the family's needs were not the same. In response to my questions regarding the nature of her participation in school-related activities, Mrs. Thomas said that she and her husband attempted to divide the responsibilities for their involvement with the children. In her words, "He usually checks on the kids at school and participates in the meetings more than I do. Sometimes both of us can go . . . but I am basically responsible for taking the kids to after-school functions." In describing her in-school involvement, Mrs. Thomas referred to a time when she was one of

the parents who helped to organize the school's "Career Day," at which she presented information about her profession.

Mrs. Thomas explained the family's after-school involvement by pointing to a weekly planner that she kept posted on the refrigerator. She said that the children had activities almost every day, except for Thursdays, "our free day." She explained,

> My husband and I feel that it is important to involve the children in activities outside of school. . . . But at times, our schedule is rather hectic when we include school and church activities, homework, and the art and music classes. There is hardly any time when we are not busy.

Mrs. Thomas explained that, at times, Tyrone had to complete his homework before going to school in the morning, because they were late getting home from some event the night before. When I asked how she thought Tyrone felt about their involvement, she indicated that he was glad about it and would be even happier if his parents were at school more. She went on to say, "He's always asking me, 'Are you coming up to school today?'" Apparently, there was also some involvement from extended family members, as Tyrone's mother spoke of her mother taking their younger daughter, Sabrina, to a preschool story hour, and taking both children to the library to check out books. She said her parents also came to school for programs involving Tyrone and Sabrina.

Responding to my questions about the role and meaning of family involvement, Mrs. Thomas said she believed it was the responsibility of all parents to be involved and show concern by responding to the school's requests for help with their children. Mrs. Thomas went on to say, "I always make sure

that the school has several numbers at which they can contact family members in case of emergencies, or just to let us know about our children's school experiences." Mrs. Thomas said she thought that more parents at Cottage School were involved than what some of her friends and relatives indicated was the case at their children's schools.

Tyrone's family lived in a large brick and aluminum-sided, tri-level home on the south side of this urban city. Most of the homes in this neighborhood were large, well-kept family dwellings. The lawns were neatly manicured, with trees and shrubs bordering the yards and lining the walkways. Each time that I visited the Thomases' home, I noted that the interior was neat and orderly. When I arrived for the first visit, Mrs. Thomas greeted me at the door and invited me into the foyer, where she took my coat and showed me to a seat in the large sunken living room. Furnishings in the room included a modern overstuffed couch, a chair with an ottoman, a tall floor lamp, a piano, two end tables, and a coffee table. Right off the living room was the dining area, in which a table was set with linens, crystal, and china. During visits when the interviews were conducted, I was invited into the family room. According to Mrs. Thomas, this room was where the family spendt most of their time. It contained a fireplace, a giant-screen television, two large recliners, and an occasional table. The entire south end of this room featured a built-in wall unit containing books, plants, figurines, and collectibles. The book collection included dictionaries, a Roget's Thesaurus, the Encyclopedia of Black History, and an array of other books,

magazines, and videotapes. The room was bright, colorful, and attractive. At the north end of this room, sliding-glass doors led to a patio.

During our discussion of the family's after-school activities, Mrs. Thomas showed me the family's game room on the lower level of the home. This room contained two computers, a television, a pool table, and a large wall unit with bookcases and shelves filled with board games, family photographs, and memorabilia.

The School and the Teachers

Tyrone attended Cottage Community School, which was located at the southern end of this urban school district. The building was a single-level structure designed with closed classrooms. A rectangular courtyard contained huge beds of blooming flowers. When I mentioned the beautiful grounds, the principal told me they were planted and maintained by parents and community block clubs. The interior of the building was also attractive, with colorful hallway bulletin boards and displays. A large, bright-orange banner hanging in the community room read, "Failure Is Not an Option." Near the main office was another eye-catching sign: "Conflict Mediation Is Practiced Here." Other displays included a "Student of the Month" bulletin board and an "Attendance Honor Roll."

Approximately 430 students in prekindergarten through sixth grade made up Cottage School's student population. As in most of the elementary schools in this urban district, a majority of these students were African American. The

annual report of Cottage School (which was shared with parents and the community at the fall open house) contained the following mission statement: "Cottage Community School, in cooperation with parents and community, will provide quality education for all students." The fact that 96 percent of parents and guardians participated in school-related activities was also highlighted in the annual report, which included a list of 35 events and activities in which parents and guardians were involved. In addition to the annual report, Cottage School sent out a bi-weekly newsletter and occasional bulletins as announcements or reminders of special issues or events.

The three classrooms in which Tyrone spent the school day were located close to each other at one end of the hall. The class spent two hours a day with each of their three teachers, rotating from one classroom to the next. During the observation visits, I observed that the students moved easily from one room to the next in what appeared to be a well-established routine. All three classrooms had similar disciplinary climates. Students generally entered the room and went directly to their seats. As they received their assignments, they began working to complete them. Classes proceeded with minimal interruptions. Students raised their hands to ask or answer questions, and they responded respectfully to their teachers' directions. For the most part, I observed this same type of behavior on the playground, in the lunchroom, and in gym classes. During the spring music program, students also entered the auditorium in a quiet and orderly manner as they filed in from their classrooms. There were some muted exchanges of conversation as students from different classrooms greeted each

other and the members of the performing group made their way to the stage. As soon as the curtain opened, though, absolute silence fell on the auditorium. The students listened courteously as their peers played, and they applauded at the end of each selection.

The three teachers who shared instructional responsibilities for Tyrone's class were Mrs. Ham, Mrs. Bee, and Mrs. Cee. The three of them taught different subjects but used similar instructional strategies and maintained the same type of disciplinary climate. Mrs. Ham's personality was pleasant and bubbly. Her interactions with the students were warm, friendly, and spiced with her famous sense of humor. She had the ability to get students to work hard and like it.

While observing in Mrs. Ham's classroom, I noted that she emphasized students taking responsibility for their behavior, completing and handing in assignments, and cleaning up their area. For instance, one day toward the end of the class period, Mrs. Ham called the students' attention to all of the scraps of paper on the floor. She said, "Let's pretend we are all vacuum cleaners." As she began making a humming noise, the students joined in the pretense and the floor was soon free of paper. However, she did this without embarrassing or demeaning the students. Even when she checked the roll, requesting that students account to her for all due and past-due work, she protected the students' right to privacy. All students who had completed work to turn in were instructed to put it in the basket, and the student helper checked the appropriate column alongside their names. Those students who were missing assignments

needed to see the teacher privately and individually to explain why they had not turned in their work.

Mrs. Ham was also positive in her choice of words when describing Tyrone's work habits, attitudes, and behavior. She said, "He works slowly in my class, but can be counted on to follow through and complete assignments, even if he has to take them home and return them the next day." She continued by saying,

> Tyrone is a pleasant student. . . . When I look at him, he always has that big smile. . . . He has a good attitude about his work. He doesn't moan and groan when I tell him he has missing assignments. He just wants to know what has not been turned in. If he can't find it in his folder . . . he prepares to do it over.

Among her instructional strategies, Mrs. Ham frequently used the overhead projector to introduce and explain concepts. Afterwards, she facilitated class participation by asking students to give examples or respond to questions. Mrs. Ham generally concluded her instruction with individual activities to be completed in class or as homework assignments. She was receptive to parents' involvement and support for learning, and she indicated a willingness to go the extra mile to encourage parents and guardians to support their children's learning experiences. She said I was welcome to visit her classroom any time I would like. According to her, she subscribed to an open-door policy, allowing parents and family members to visit the classroom at any time.

Mrs. Bee was not quite as outgoing as Mrs. Ham, but she openly discussed Tyrone with me. She shared her views on Tyrone's work ethic,

attitude, personality, and adjustment. During the observations, I noted that she moved about the classroom and sat with each student individually, reviewing his or her work and making recommendations for improvement. Her attentiveness and sensitivity to the students' needs were impressive. For instance, she did not allow students who had finished their writing assignments to disturb the ones who were still working. Instead, she encouraged them to help each other edit their work. When Mrs. Bee discovered that students were talking and playing, she said, "This is a teaching experience and there will be no visiting. Your visiting hours are from 3:00 p.m. until 9:00 a.m." When I asked her to describe Tyrone's work ethic, Mrs. Bee had this to say:

> He has problems with organization; often he cannot find his papers, and he is quite easily distracted by what is going on around him. At times he is just "star-gazing," and I will have to get his attention and remind him to get busy on the task at hand. . . . He is basically a good   student, but will now and then get into minor trouble . . . exhibiting impulsive behavior. . . . He likes to read books about "Star Wars," and the other day I caught him reading from one when he should have been completing his work. He was very apologetic, and implored me not to tell his parents.

Mrs. Cee was the third teacher in the triad of instructors for Tyrone's class; she taught math and science. She, too, was friendly and receptive, as demonstrated by her granting me the privilege to observe her class when she had the students who were involved in my study sample. Her instructional strategies involved first demonstrating with the overhead projector and then having individuals and pairs of students present examples to the class. She frequently used cooperative learning activities. Mrs. Cee was curious about my study and asked many questions.

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Mrs. Cee gave this description of Tyrone's work ethic:

He wants to do good work. . . . He tries to comply with all of my requests, but he seems to have trouble getting started, . . . although I must say that he did a neat science project on the speed of light. . . . He had a little help from his father, but he did a nice job of explaining it to the class.

When asked about Tyrone's personality and attitude toward school, Mrs. Cee

explained that she considered him an "average" student with good behavior, and

said she had no problems with him in her classroom.

Teachers' Perceptions of Tyrone's Family's Involvement in School and in School-Related Activities

Tyrone's three teachers gave the following interpretations of the school-

related involvement of his parents:

Mrs. Bee: I recall that both parents attended the middle school orientation meeting, and I have seen the two of them at other meetings and programs.

Mrs. Cee: His father helps out with the baseball team, and he's really good with fundraising. He takes those boxes of candy to his workplace, and they just disappear. Before you know it, he comes back for several more cases.

Mrs. Ham: Tyrone's father is usually the one to come to the school to check on him. Mr. Thomas is a very concerned and dependable parent. In fact, he's going to help chaperone the fifth-grade's year-end trip. . . . They make sure that he does homework or special projects. . . . Tyrone's parents are very supportive. . . . If they are notified of a problem, or just suspect a problem, they are at the school to see about it.

Documentation of Tyrone's Work
Habits and Performance

A review of Tyrone's individual cumulative records and report card reflected letter grades of B's and S's for his fourth-grade year, except for one C in spelling. Final grades for the fifth-grade year were all A's, B's, and S's. His citizenship was rated with 1's and 2's, representing excellent and good, respectively. Some examples of teachers' comments on the report cards are: "Tyrone occasionally has difficulty grasping math concepts," "Tyrone has been working hard, but he has problems getting organized," "Tyrone is showing great improvement in social studies," "Tyrone would get more work completed on time if he were not so easily distracted," and "Tyrone has difficulty expressing his thoughts in writing."

Tyrone's attendance records indicated an average of 10 half-days missed per year since entering pre-kindergarten in 1993. Cottage School was the only school that he had attended. On the fourth-grade MEAP test, Tyrone received an overall rating of satisfactory, which means that he had a score of 300 or more in each category. Similarly, his Metropolitan Achievement Test scores reflected a gain of six months to a year from the first through the fourth grade. At the year-end awards assembly, Tyrone received the following awards: A/B Honor Roll, Journal Contest Winner, Most Improved in Academics and Responsibility, and the Crim Walk Participant Certificate.

All three teachers thought that Tyrone received positive benefits from his parents' involvement in his school activities. He was obviously pleased whenever they came to school.

Conclusions

Tyrone Thomas, the focus of this case study, was an 11-year-old fifth grader who asserted, "My school is the best!" He and his little sister, Sabrina, lived with their two parents, who were employed professionals. Like their son, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were complimentary about Cottage School. The Thomas family lived in a modern, attractive home on the south side of this urban city, within walking distance of the school. Their neighborhood appeared to be stable, and the grounds were well kept.

Tyrone's parents provided their children with many of the items that support learning, such as computers, musical instruments, recreational equipment, board games, books, and a reference library. Further, Tyrone and his sister apparently enjoyed many other activities that enhanced their academic growth, such as enrichment classes, private lessons, family vacations, and religious, social, and cultural events. The family also had the support of networks that assisted the parents with socialization, nurturing, and child care. These networks included the extended family, godparents, and the church family.

During the interviews, Tyrone said he liked school and expressed admiration for his teachers. Apparently, he had a clear understanding of what

his parents expected from him at school and was pleased about their involvement. His teachers described Tyrone as a good worker but not a very fast one. Consequently, they characterized him as an "average" student with good behavior. His records reflected good citizenship and attendance. He made the honor roll for the final semester of fifth grade. Tyrone's willingness to try hard and his positive attitude are two attributes that his teachers praised. The principal, teachers, and other staff members gave Mr. and Mrs. Thomas high marks on parental involvement.

Case Study 8: Paula's Family
(Household Headed by a Single Grandmother)

"She marches to a different drumbeat."

Initial Meeting and Gaining Consent

Paula Parks, a unique 12-year-old fifth grader who lived with her paternal grandmother at the time of the research, was the focus of this case study. One of her teachers at Cottage School, Mrs. Bee, described her as "one who marches to a different drumbeat." I first met Paula when I was standing on the playground talking with her teacher about another student. The class had been taken to the playground for a Crim fitness walking exercise. As the students walked around the soccer field, Paula left the line and came over to where the teacher and I stood. She curiously studied me and finally asked me whether I was a substitute. Before I could respond to her question, Mrs. Bee introduced us and explained to Paula why I was there.

Paula warmed up to me, and the two of us immediately engaged in a conversation. The youngster asked me whether I had children of my own. I told her I did, but that they were adults now. I also told her I had five grandchildren. Paula wanted to know how old my grandchildren were, and she told me she lived with her grandmother. When I admired Paula's shoes and dress, she smiled shyly and proudly explained that her grandmother had bought them.

After Paula had resumed her walking activity, the teacher told me she was a very unusual little girl who had gotten off to a slow start, but really had shown improvement since her grandmother has been caring for her. I listened with interest as Mrs. Bee shared with me what a special person Paula's grandmother was. I told the teacher of my interest in finding another grandparent-headed family to provide balance for the study sample. Mrs. Bee advised, "You should talk to Paula's grandmother. She's such a nice person, I'm sure she would be willing to participate. In fact, I'll bet you could find her helping out in the office right now."

Taking the teacher's advice, I went to the office and introduced myself to Paula's grandmother. She greeted me warmly and told me her name was Mrs. Parks. I asked if we could talk for a few minutes when she had the time. Mrs. Parks said she was covering for the office clerk just until she finished her lunch break, so she expected to be available momentarily. She suggested that I wait for her in the community room, and she would join me shortly thereafter.

When Mrs. Parks arrived, I briefly explained my research project to her. She listened carefully. Apparently, parents' and guardians' involvement in the

educational experiences of their children was a topic about which she was passionate. As Mrs. Parks and I talked about our parents and how we had been brought up, we discovered that we had many things in common. Our conversation lasted for a while, and we related to each other so well that it seemed as if we had known each other for years. Mrs. Parks readily agreed that she and Paula would participate in the research study.

The Student

Paula was a charming 12-year-old fifth-grader whom the principal described as "delightful, but different." Several other persons with whom I talked also indicated that Paula was a unique student and very much an individual. This charming and personable youngster was somewhat taller and looked more mature than most of her classmates. She usually wore denim jeans, a T-shirt, and traditional white tennis shoes and socks. She was unusually articulate and interviewed well. At times her answers did not pertain specifically to the question, but provide helpful information. In response to my question about what Paula thought her family expected from her at school, she replied:

> I think they expect me to be respectful to the staff and my peers, and they want me to do my work and not talk. I think they want me to improve in all of my subjects, and when I fail a test or something, they tell me to try again and do better next time. That's about it.

Later in the interview, Paula recalled some other advice her grandmother had given her about how to avoid fights, get along with her peers, and handle disappointments. She went on to say, "I feel like going to school is like going to my house, but it's really not my house. I enjoy going because I have lots of

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people there." The preceding was Paula's response when I asked her how she felt about school. Continuing the discussion of Paula's feelings about school, I asked her to tell me about having been selected Student of the Month. She promptly corrected me, saying, "You mean Student of the Year!" Hoping to get Paula to talk about her pride in this achievement, which earned her recognition in a local newspaper and the church bulletin, I encouraged her to tell me more. Surprisingly, she said she was not happy that day, but was really disappointed because her father and mother had not come to see her get the award. According to Paula, the parents of the boy who was named the male "Student of the Year" had been there to see him.

Paula also talked about how glad she was to have her grandmother always there for her. When asked how she thought the teachers felt about Mrs. Parks's involvement, Paula said, "They think it's wonderful that she's active with me."

Paula's Grandmother (Her Legal Guardian)

At the time of this study, Paula lived with her paternal grandmother, Mrs. Parks, and occasionally spent time with her father. Some unusual circumstances, the details of which Mrs. Parks did not want shared, surrounded the grandmother's having been awarded custody of Paula. Several staff members at Paula's school indicated that both the child's behavior and her academic growth had improved greatly since her second grade year, when she had begun living with her grandmother. According to the grandmother, at first

Paula's parents would periodically take her to live with them for a while. During those times, support for her schooling did not continue. Instead, Paula's attendance and achievement suffered.

It seemed obvious that Paula had a close relationship with her paternal grandmother. There was a look of admiration on Paula's face when she told me of the lessons her grandmother had taught her, the things Mrs. Parks did for her, and the expectations she had for her granddaughter in school and at home. For example, Paula said, "My grandma, she's really nice. Sometimes I forget to pick up my things behind myself, but she always reminds me." For the most part, Paula had only positive things to say about her grandmother.

During my observation visits at Cottage School, I discovered that several other persons agreed with Paula that Mrs. Parks was indeed a very special grandmother. In fact, she seemed to have her own fan club. The principal said, "Mrs. Parks is one of our greatest supporters. She not only helps out here at the school, but often is the one parent or guardian that I can find to represent our school at citywide meetings."

My second meeting with Mrs. Parks convinced me that it would be easy for me to become a member of her fan club. She greeted me with such warmth and friendliness that it seemed as though I was her long-standing friend. She openly conversed with me before and after the interviews, and gave explicit responses to my questions during the interview process. Mrs. Parks's parenting style can be described as authoritative, meaning that she was controlling but warm, receptive, and rational in her relations with Paula (Baumrind, 1966). Mrs.

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Parks indicated that her expectations for Paula closely resembled those that her own parents had held for her. Apparently she provided a structured home environment in which courtesy, respect, responsibility, and spirituality were emphasized. When I asked what lessons her grandmother and father taught her at home, Paula had this to say: "They tell me to always say "Hi" to someone, say Hi every day; don't slouch in my chair. Be a lady. Don't pay anyone to be your friend and . . . to have good manners, don't just go up into someone's face all the time."

Evidence of Mrs. Parks's parenting style was also apparent in the interviews with teachers and my observation notes. For example, Mrs. Ham, one of the teachers, said, "She [Mrs. Parks] doesn't make excuses for her granddaughter. She insists that Paula does the work that is required of her." Another teacher, Mrs. Cee, told me that the grandmother often came to the room at the end of the school day and had Paula stay there to complete unfinished math assignments or copy them down to be completed at home. Similarly, on one occasion when I stopped into the office to return my visitor's pass, Paula was there because she had received a small scratch on her arm in gym class and was pleading with her grandmother to allow her to be excused from school and accompany her home when she finished office duty. Mrs. Parks emphatically denied that request. Instead, she found a first-aid kit, cleaned the scratch, covered it with a Band-Aid, gave Paula a hug, and sent her back to class with the assurance that she would be fine. When Paula began to protest, her grandmother smiled and said, "I'll see you after school, Paula."

Mrs. Parks described her occupation and educational level as follows:

I am a retired General Motors worker. I worked in the shipping office until I retired. It was a very good and interesting job. General Motors was good to me. I was raised in Columbia, South Carolina, and attended Booker T. Washington High School and Benedict College. I did not receive a degree, but I also went to the junior college here for about a year and a half.

When asked about her parents' involvement with her schooling, Mrs. Parks indicated that they had been actively involved. Her father had been a minister and had attended Benedict College, as had her oldest sister. She described her mother as a homemaker who had been involved with the schooling of all her children. According to Mrs. Parks, she had the type of parents who supported the teachers and the school system. They were not like many of the parents today, who come to school to argue with the teachers about their children even when the youngsters are clearly wrong.

In response to my questions about her view of the meaning of parents' and guardians' involvement to the school experiences of their children, Mrs. Parks had this to say: "I feel that it does have meaning because if parents will get involved, visit the schools more often, and talk to the teachers, they will know exactly what their children are doing. The schools can't do it all."

During my observations and interviews with Mrs. Parks, I perceived that she was genuinely committed to being involved with Paula's school experience, as well as with the school experiences of other children. She demonstrated that commitment by spending many hours helping out in the school. She frequently substituted for the office clerk, teachers, teacher-aides, and lunch aides, and

spendt many volunteer hours helping with special projects. She was quite outspoken on the subject of child rearing and the education of children. Mrs. Parks also said that she told Paula that, without an education, she would not have very much of a future. She indicated that she did not perceive any real barriers to parents' and guardians' involvement at Cottage School. She said that not all teachers were the same, but it was up to families to get involved and refrain from displaying a negative attitude if teachers failed to give them the time or the answers they expected.

Extended Family and Home

According to Mrs. Parks and Paula, the youngster had a large extended family and kin network consisting of people with whom she interacted. Paula and her grandmother described the child's father, whom she visited often. In Paula's words:

> I live with my grandma, but sometimes I go over to stay with my dad. My mom and my dad were married, but they split up. Sometimes on weekends I go over to my mother's house, if she comes to get me, but sometimes she can't make it because of her job.

Paula also referred to her maternal grandmother, who was a Buddhist, and her maternal grandfather who sometimes took her places. She also named four cousins with whom she interacted. Similarly, Mrs. Parks explained Paula's extended family in this manner: "Paula lives with me, but she does go to her father's house to visit him often. The two of them have a very close relationship, but it's not the same between [her] and her mother."

Mrs. Parks continued by describing how Paula enjoyed visiting with her mother's younger sister, who was a year or so older than herself, but she seldom got to see her. Mrs. Parks also referred to another of Paula's aunts, Berta, whom she visited occasionally. This aunt's husband was a minister, and they had four children who were near Paula's age. According to Mrs. Parks, still another aunt, Shirley, was very supportive; she took Paula shopping, bought her things, and came to the school for Paula's honors assemblies and programs. Paula seemed proud of her extended family and looked happy when she described the good times she shared with them.

The Parks family's home was located on the south end of the city, on a street lined with large oak trees and a row of older homes. Despite the obvious age of these homes, they appeared to have been well preserved. This family's home had a neatly manicured lawn and what looked like a freshly painted exterior. Inside, a homey atmosphere was created by the fireplace, French provincial furniture, and many decorative crafts, family heirlooms, and keepsakes. Mrs. Parks delighted in showing me through the entire house, which was clean, neat, and orderly. There appeared to be a place for everything, and everything seemed to be in its place. Paula's room was quite impressive, complete with a decorative stand on which rested a collection of dolls, including a variety of Barbies. There were shelves containing many stuffed animals, books, and toys. A computer was stationed in one corner, along with a boom box and many puzzles, board games, and assorted learning materials. When we left her room, Paula led me to the backyard, where she had a swing and a

playhouse. Mrs. Parks teased Paula about the playhouse, which she did not use any more because she thought she had outgrown it. Paula's response was a big grin.

The School and the Teachers

Paula attended Cottage Community School, which was located on the south end of this urban school district. The building was a single-level structure designed with closed classrooms. A rectangular courtyard contained huge beds filled with blooming flowers. When I complimented her on the beautiful grounds, the principal told me they had been planted and were maintained by parents and community block clubs. The interior of the building was also attractive, with colorful hallway bulletin boards and displays. A large, bright-orange banner in the community room read, "Failure Is Not an Option." Near the main office was another eye-catching sign: "Conflict Mediation Is Practiced Here." Other displays included a "Student of the Month" bulletin board and an "Attendance Honor Roll."

Approximately 430 students in prekindergarten through sixth grade made up Cottage School's student population. As in most of the elementary schools in this urban district, the majority of these students were African American. The annual report of Cottage School (which was shared with parents and the community at the fall open house) contained the following mission statement: "Cottage Community School, in cooperation with parents and community, will provide quality education for all students." The fact that 96 percent of parents

and guardians participated in school-related activities was also highlighted in the annual report, which included a list of 35 events and activities in which parents and guardians were involved. In addition to the annual report, Cottage School sent out a bi-weekly newsletter and occasional bulletins as announcements or reminders of special issues or events.

The three classrooms in which Paula spent the school day were located close to each other at one end of the hall. The class spent two hours per day with each of their three teachers, moving from one classroom to the next. During the observation visits, I noted that the students moved from one room to the next with ease, the structure for this transfer routine obviously being well established. I observed that the disciplinary climates in all three classrooms were similar. Students generally entered the room and went directly to their seats. When they received their assignments, they began working to complete them. Classes proceeded with minimal interruptions. Students raised their hands to ask or answer questions, and they responded respectfully to the teacher's directions. For the most part, I observed this same type of orderly behavior on the playground, in the lunchroom, and in gym classes. During the spring music program, students entered the auditorium in the same manner as they filed into their classrooms. There were some quiet exchanges as students from different classrooms greeted each other and the members of the performing group made their way to the stage. As soon as the curtain opened, though, absolute silence fell on the auditorium. The students listened courteously as their peers played, and they applauded at the end of each selection.

The three teachers who shared instructional responsibilities for Paula's class were Mrs. Ham, Mrs. Bee, and Mrs. Cee. The three of them taught different subjects but used similar instructional strategies and maintained the same type of disciplinary climate. Mrs. Ham's personality was pleasant and bubbly. Her interactions with the students were warm, friendly, and spiced with her famous sense of humor. She had the ability to get the students to work hard and like it. While observing in her classroom, I noted she emphasized that students should take responsibility for their behavior, complete and hand in assignments, and clean up their area. However, she did this without embarrassing or demeaning the students. For example, when she called the roll, requesting that students report to her for all work that was currently or past due, she used a process that protected the students' privacy. She directed all students who had completed work to put it in the basket, and the student helper would then check the appropriate column beside their names. Mrs. Ham instructed students who were missing assignments to see her privately and individually to explain why they had not turned in their work. Among her instructional strategies, she frequently used the overhead projector to introduce and explain concepts. Afterward, she facilitated class participation by asking students to give examples or respond to questions. Mrs. Ham generally concluded her instruction with individual activities to be completed in class or as homework assignments.

Mrs. Ham was also positive in her choice of words when describing the students, their work habits, attitudes, and behavior. Examples of this are

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included in the description of Paula's personality, attitude, and school adjustment. She was receptive to parent involvement and support for learning, and she indicated her willingness to go the extra mile to encourage parents and guardians to support their children's learning experiences. She invited me to visit her classroom any time I wanted to and said that parents were welcome to do the same.

Mrs. Bee was not quite as outgoing as Mrs. Ham, but she openly discussed Paula with me. She shared her views on Paula's work ethic, attitude, personality, and adjustment. I observed that she moved about the classroom and sat with each student individually, reviewing their work and making recommendations for improvement. Her attentiveness and sensitivity to the students' needs were impressive. For example, on one occasion, she observed that Paula appeared to be having difficulty with a young boy who sat behind her. The teacher went over to investigate and found that both Paula and the other student were reluctant to discuss the problem. Mrs. Bee said quietly, "All right, I sense that there is a problem here. Now you have the option of letting me help you solve it or working it out yourselves, but the disturbance must stop." That is just one example of the tact and diplomacy Mrs. Bee used in working with the students.

Mrs. Bee's comments about Paula were very descriptive. For example, she mentioned Paula's having shown so much improvement recently by becoming more focused and attentive, whereas the child had previously been withdrawn, preoccupied, and unmotivated. Mrs. Bee said she thought that the

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improvement had been a result of the stability and caring support provided by Paula's grandmother.

Mrs. Cee was the third teacher in the triad who worked with Paula's class. She was the math and science teacher. She, too, was friendly and receptive, allowing me to observe her class whenever she had the students who were in my sample. She was curious about my study and asked many questions. Her instructional strategies involved first demonstrating with the overhead projector and then having individuals or pairs of students present examples to the class. She frequently used cooperative learning activities.

Perceptions of Paula's Personality, Attitude, and School Adjustment

According to Paula's teachers, she seemed to like school; she had a good sense of humor and a unique way of expressing herself. As I talked with Paula and observed her interactions with the other students, I noted that she was quite verbal and that her responses were mature for a girl her age. For example, I asked her about the home routine when she had homework. She informed me that her homework had to be done before she went out to play. I inquired whether this was her grandmother's rule. She responded, "No, I have just matured a little more."

When I asked her about lessons she had learned from her grandmother regarding spirituality, Paula replied, "I'm kind of like in the middle, or mixed up or something. My grandmother on my mother's side is Buddhist, they believe in a different God, and my grandma on my father's side is spiritual to God."

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One of Paula's teachers, Mrs. Ham, described her personality and attitude in this way:

> Paula is a very lively child. She has a good sense of humor. She is quite charming and personable. I think she likes school and I predict she will probably eventually become an actress. She likes an audience. When Paula stands up to read in class, she makes sure that everybody is quiet before she starts. She seems to enjoy being very dramatic in her reading.

Another of Paula's teachers, Mrs. Bee, characterized Paula as "truly an individual. She has a unique way of expressing herself. She has some friends, but does not involve herself in the usual cliques." Mrs. Cee, Paula's math and science teacher, said she thought that Paula was capable of being an excellent student, but in her words, "At times Paula acts as though she expects to be babied." It seems that Mrs. Cee thought this was Paula's way of getting people to focus their attention on her.

Perceptions of Paula's Work Habits and Performance

Information pertaining to Paula's work habits and performance was obtained from a review of her cumulative records and report cards. Since entering prekindergarten, Paula had changed schools five times. Information about Paula's school attendance during the period from November 9, 1993, through March 18, 1995, was unavailable. Her attendance records indicated that there were three years (prekindergarten, kindergarten and third grade) in which she missed 30 or more half-days of school. Paula also missed 15 half-days in first grade, 3 in second grade, and 10 in fourth grade. Her current records showed that, in the final weeks of the current school year, Paula had

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missed only five days. During her fourth- and fifth-grade years Paula received A and B letter grades and maintained honor roll status. She has a 100-percent homework-return record. At the end-of-the-year awards assembly for fifth graders, Paula received certificates for honor roll, regular attendance, Crim fitness walk, and most improved student.

According to my review of her CA-60 cumulative record, Paula's fourth-grade MEAP test results reflected a satisfactory overall rating, which means that she had obtained a score of 300 or above. Her story selection score was 340, the score for informational selection was 345, and her knowledge of reading was rated high. Paula's citizenship was rated good and excellent for her fourth- and fifth-grade years, respectively. During her kindergarten year, Paula was retained, but she had been promoted every year thereafter. On Paula's cumulative records, her Metropolitan Achievement Scores reflected the following growth from the fourth-grade year to the fifth-grade year: reading, 12 months; math, 4 months; language, 2 months; basic battery, 5 months.

When asked about Paula's work habits and performance, Mrs. Ham had this to say:

> Sometimes her sense of humor and liveliness interferes with her work habits, but when I give her that "You need to get back to your work" look, she'll do it. I usually don't have to ask her twice. She responds very well if I just signal her up to my desk.

Another teacher, Mrs. Bee, said, "She is a bright, creative, and artistic student. Often she writes stories that are imaginative, but strange and far out." Mrs. Cee stated, "She processes math concepts very slowly, and requires a great deal of

direct instructions. I try to keep her near me, so I can give her eye contact, as she tends to let her mind wander."

During my observations, I noted that Paula was on task most of the time. However, on one occasion during her math class, Mrs. Cee asked Paula to go to the overhead projector and demonstrate the next problem for the class. Paula said she was still working on it. The teacher reminded her that she had been given ample time to complete the assignment. Paula then raised her hand and said that she did not understand the problem. Mrs. Cee instructed her to pay attention as the other students demonstrated the process. Paula appeared to be observing the demonstration but had not written anything on her paper. Consequently, when the class ended, Paula had not completed the assignment. Mrs. Cee announced that all students who have not completed the assignment should report to her after school. It was obvious that Paula was not happy about Mrs. Cee's request, but she did comply.

The following are examples of teachers' comments taken from Paula's fourth- and fifth-grade report cards: "Paula is doing much better," "Paula has become more serious about her work," "Paula has gained more confidence and is working well," and "Paula has settled down and is doing much better work."

Perceptions of Paula's Family's
In-School Involvement

The in-school involvement of Paula's grandmother, Mrs. Parks, was referred to in the segment describing her. Some additional perceptions will contribute to a broader understanding of the family's involvement in school and

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school-related activities. Mrs. Parks was usually in the building each time I visited to conduct observations or interviews. Some days she spent the entire school day there. I noted that there days when Mrs. Parks had signed in on the volunteer roster for the lunch period only, or for two or three hours for the Book Fair. Among the other volunteer hours that appeared on the roster for Mrs. Parks were picture day, health screening, and the candy sale.

In response to my question about what meaning she thought families' involvement had for the performance, attitudes, and school adjustment of their children, she made many salient comments. For example, she said:

> Of course! I have seen children that are doing quite well, and perhaps their parents say, "Well, he/she is doing fine, so I don't have to go to the school," and they don't come. Yet, it makes the children sad when there are programs, conferences, and school activities that they are involved in, and no one from their family is there. I know because Paula went through that and she was a very sad child, but now she is smiling and happy and her teachers are talking about her new attitude. It changes the child's attitude, and I'm sure it changes the aptitude.

Some areas of in-school involvement about which Mrs. Parks expressed strong feelings regarding family responsibility were keeping children in regular attendance, monitoring schoolwork and homework, making sure that learning does not stop when the children leave school, and what she referred to as "planting a seed" that will be passed on to future generations.

When I asked Mrs. Parks to describe what she did in Paula's school, she gave this response:

> Right now I'm working with Cottage School wherever I'm needed, whether it is substituting or being a lunch volunteer. I check with the teachers to see how Paula is doing. I'm involved with all of the children because they know I will make them get a hall pass and also stop them   from fighting.

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I haven't gone on many field trips, but I'm in the office so the teachers know I'm here and that they can talk to me any time.

Paula responded to my question about the ways in which she perceived that her family was involved in her school in this way:

My grandma is involved in school by being in the office as a substitute secretary, substituting for teachers, and being a lunch aide. Usually my father and mother come to school to get my report card and for the conferences, but my grandma attends the meetings. They [my family] always come to see me when I have programs and get awards and things like that.

On the subject of Paula's family's involvement in school and school-related activities, the teachers commented:

Paula's grandmother is wonderful. She is very supportive. She doesn't make excuses for her granddaughter. She does work in the school often, which is nice.

Once when Paula had hurt herself and was out of school, Mrs. Parks came and got her things and the work. She assured me that she would see that everything was caught up.

Mrs. Parks is very helpful, and she has good intentions. She is very involved, and I think it makes a big difference because Paula is one of those kids who would not do well without that support.

Perceptions of Paula's Family's
After-School Activities

In response to my questions about her after-school activities, Paula had this to say: "When I get home after school, once I would just go home and eat strawberries, but now I just get on my homework. I ride my bike, then go over to my friend's house and we play Sega Saturn, Nintendo or Playstation." Because Paula had told me she had a computer, I continued this line of questioning by asking her to tell me what kinds of things she did on her computer in the home.

She told me that she played some games, but also had some educational programs. Paula described her weekends as the times when she visited her other grandmother, "the one that is Buddhist," or she went over to either her father's or her uncle's house. She explained that she attended church with Grandmother Parks and participated with the choir and ushers. However, Paula indicated that she was not sure how she felt about spirituality because her two grandmothers had different beliefs. When I asked Paula more questions about the activities that she and her grandmother participated in after school, she told me, "It's mostly church things, and we read together, do our meditation, and have our heart-to-heart talks."

Paula's Grandmother Parks explained their after-school routine in this manner:

> After school, she can have dinner or a snack, then it's homework and chores before she goes out to play. After she gets her bath and settles down, we do our reading and talk before she goes to bed. At our church, Paula has tutoring and Bible study on Tuesday nights. They also have crafts and make things. She takes part in the choir, the usher board, and Christian youth fellowship.

Mrs. Parks continued the discussion by saying that sometimes, when the weather was nice, Paula was able to go out and play unless she had chores to do. In that case Paula had to clean her room or do the other chores before she went out to play, or come in early enough to do it. Mrs. Parks also indicated that she believed that homework was important because it was a review of schoolwork. In her words, "It is more practice and will help the material to stick in their minds. It also lets the parents know what their children are doing."

Paula's teachers shared their perceptions of her family's after-school involvement in this way:

Mrs. Ham: I'm not sure, but I believe Paula probably has access to things like the library and the museum. I know that her grandmother is very concerned that she has a well-rounded education, and that she takes it upon herself to go find out what she needs to know and not just wait for someone to tell her.

Researcher: What expectations do you feel the grandmother has for Paula at school?

Mrs. Ham: I think her grandmother expects her to do her best and be obedient to the teachers. She expects her to get her work done, and if she doesn't get it done, she had better have a good reason. Mrs. Parks does not make excuses for her, and will not accept excuses from her.

Mrs. Bee: I believe that Paula's grandmother expects her to do well, and she does more than just talk about it. She really does those things that will help Paula do well.

Mrs. Cee: It's obvious that Mrs. Parks has high expectations for Paula. I remember times when she has made sure that Paula made up her school work and would even come to the school to get it.

As stated earlier, I observed that the Parks home had many games, books, a computer, and other materials that helped to create an environment that supported learning.

Conclusions

Paula's family was headed by her paternal grandmother, who was her legal guardian. They lived in a modest, well-maintained home on the south side of the city. Paula was the only child born of very young parents who were married shortly before her birth and soon went their separate ways. She felt close to her father and visited him often, but was apparently somewhat

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estranged from her mother. Paula occasionally visited and interacted with an aunt and cousins about her age, but she spent the majority of her time with her grandmother, whom she described as being "really nice." Paula also perceived that her grandmother taught her many lessons about learning respect, responsibility, and spirituality.

Paula was a bright-eyed, warm, and receptive youngster who loved attention, especially from adults. Her teachers described her as different, individualistic, creative, and charming. Paula was still being encouraged to improve her academic performance and work habits, and one teacher reported that the child had shown great improvement since her grandmother had taken over her care. She was named the "1998-99 Title I Student of the Year" and was very proud of that honor. Paula said her goal was to become a scientist when she grew up, but she wanted to start out working at a department store.

At the time of this inquiry, Mrs. Parks was like a staff member at Paula's school and was in the building almost daily. She served as a substitute office clerk, teacher aide, teacher, lunchroom aide, and volunteer. Mrs. Parks's other school involvement included attending meetings and school-related activities, participating in parent-teacher conferences, and visiting the classroom. According to Paula, her father and mother were also involved in her school experiences, but that claim was not corroborated by any other data source.

The family's out-of-school involvement was structured to include routines that supported school-related learning and participation in church-related

activities. There was no evidence that Paula took part in the after-school enrichment activities offered at Cottage School.

Paula's teachers and other staff members at Cottage School were highly complimentary of her grandmother. They credited her with making a big difference in her granddaughter's school attendance, attitude, and performance. Finally, the evidence indicated that Paula's school experience was enhanced by the change in her home environment and the support and involvement of her grandmother.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In this study, the researcher investigated perceptions, actions, and relationships of eight urban African American families relative to their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade children. The study also investigated the students' perceptions of how their parents, extended family, teachers, and peers influenced their school experiences. In essence, the researcher found that these families had skills and strengths that they used to overcome multiple barriers in order to participate in the school experiences of their children. The analysis of the data, responses to the research questions, conclusions, implications, and reflections are the focus of this chapter.

Conclusions

The process of analyzing and interpreting the data for this study was guided by inductive analysis, which Patton (1990) defined as "a process of analysis in which the patterns, themes, and categories emerge out of the data" (p. 390). He further stated that researchers may use "analyst-constructed typologies" (p. 393) to reflect a classification scheme used by people in the setting under study. Marshall and Rossman (1995) described analyst typologies

as "those created by the researcher as reflecting distinct categories, but not generative of separate language categories" (p. 114). In this case, the researcher applied a typology to naturally occurring variations in observations. Alasuutari (1995) delineated a qualitative data-analysis process in which the researcher groups related indicators under particular umbrellas (p. 130). This process provided a rationale for grouping the 18 symbols, factors, and indicators in this study under the umbrellas of three themes, which are discussed in the following pages. In the literature, the term "theme" was defined as a motif or subject for development. LeCompte et al. (1992) stated that, "in qualitative ethnography, themes are used (a) to capture the variability of, spontaneity, and creativity of human social interactions, [and] (b) to organize patterns of regularities amid chaos and complexity" (p. 94). It should be noted that, in this study, there was considerable overlap among the three themes and their components.

Primary Research Question

How do urban African Americans perceive and actualize their involvement in the education of their children, and how do these perceptions and actions influence the school experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters? The data analysis revealed that:

1. Against all odds, the eight families in this study participated in the education of their children. For example, in Kala's and Junior's families, there were seven and eight children, respectively, in households headed by single

parents. Although they had full households, the parents participated in school activities, as shown in Figure 5.1. Both Darien and Paula resided in households headed by elderly grandparents who frequently visited and volunteered in the school; their biological parents provided little or no support. Shelly's father, a single parent, was employed full time in a profession that required him to work many hours; however, he was very active in the school. Despite these circumstances of each family, the parents or guardians were perceived to be involved.

Students/Parent	Perceptions of Parents' Participation
Kala (Single Mother)	Mother makes informal visits to the school almost daily. She attends parent meetings, parent-teacher conferences and programs. Helps with most field trips and monitors Kala programs.
Junior (Single Father)	Father works in a school. Assists with after-school programs, frequently monitors Junior's progress, requests homework and make-up assignments, and supervises completion of work.
Darien (Grandfather & Grandmother)	Grandparents visit the school frequently. Attend some parent meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and support school rules.
Paula (Single Grandmother)	Grandmother works and volunteers in the school, visits the school almost daily. Monitors Paula's progress and supervises homework and make-up work, supports school policies.
Shelly (Single Father)	Father attends and supports most school-related programs, parent-teacher conferences, monitors Shelly's progress, supervises homework, and supports after-school activities.
Tyrone (Father & Mother)	Father's job flexibility allows him to be more involved than the mother. He supports fundraisers, assists with field trips, attends special meetings and programs. Serves on superintendent's task force.
Leesa (Single Mother)	Mother visits the school frequently. States her involvement was recently limited due to an injury. Previously assisted with field trips, attended some parent meetings and parent-teacher conferences. The grandmother substituted for mother at some school functions.

Figure 5.1: Perceptions of parent participation/involvement (N = 8).

2. The parents perceived that their participation provided support for the performance, attitudes, and behavior of the youngsters. Parents indicated that

they participated in their children's education more than their own families had done when they were students in school. According to the parents' recollections, their mothers had been the primary participants in their schooling. The parents also perceived that their frequent visits to the school and informal contacts with teachers provided support for the school experiences of their youngsters. It was also the parents' perception that the students felt good about their participation in the schools.

3. There was a discrepancy between the ways in which parents, teachers, and administrators perceived parent involvement and participation. Parents perceived that their participation was adequate, considering their circumstances. There was evidence to support the researcher's conclusion that teachers and administrators perceived that the parents' participation met their expectations. Teachers and administrators structured parent involvement programs to elicit peripheral participation. The perceptions of the parents and teachers were not congruent with the research and literature distinguishing between involvement and participation (Dauber & Epstein, 1986; Scott-Jones, 1995). For example, Dauber and Epstein found that "parent involvement is strongly limited to the actions and practices of the teachers" (p. 104).

4. The students thought that their parents' participation was adequate and supportive. Further, these perceptions and actions had both positive and negative influences on the school experiences of the fifth-grade youngsters. These statements are grounded in the data presented under Themes 1, 2, and 3. Likewise, the related literature and research supporting these findings was referred to in the analysis and in the discussion of the themes.

<u>Subquestion 1: Parenting, Kinship, and</u>
<u>Black Family Values</u>

1. **What are some traditional Black family cultural factors that appear to enhance or inhibit the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children?** The data consistently supported the researcher's conclusion that there is a common set of traditional African American cultural factors that both enhance and inhibit the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children. To respond to this question, the researcher applied the lens of the symbolic-interactionist theory informed by Blumer (1969), thereby inquiring what common set of symbols has emerged to give meaning to Black family interactions with schools.

Interwoven throughout the data is a common set of six Black family strengths and values that were prevalent in the eight families in this study, and were representative of those symbols. These strengths and values included (a) extended family and kin support and strong kinship bonds; (b) emphasis on the importance of education; (c) spirituality and strong religious ties; (d) adaptability of family roles; (e) family rules, roles, and responsibilities; and (f) students exhibit respect and admiration for parents. In addition, the presence of these strengths and values in the data is documented by citing specific examples (see Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4).

These Black family strengths and values have been documented in the related literature and research (Billingsley, 1968, 1992; Hale, 1986; Hill, 1972; McAdoo, 1997). As stated earlier in this dissertation, Hill (1972) noted five major strengths of Black families: strong kinship bonds, strong work orientation,

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adaptability of family roles, high achievement orientation, and strong religious orientation (p. 37). Subsequent researchers have substantiated Hill's work. Furthermore, Peters (1988) found that African American parents place a high value on developing the self-esteem of their children. Many Black parents instill the values of love, respect, pride in self, and pride in the race as a means of preparing their children to survive in a racist society (Hurd et al., 1995).

In discussing African American family values, Sudarkasa (1997) referred to some of the values that other scholars of Black family life had identified as important through their research. She further identified seven values that emerged from her research as guiding principles for interpersonal relations in African American families. The "Seven R's," as Sudarkasa called them, are respect, responsibility, reciprocity, restraint, reverence, reason, and reconciliation (p. 32).

In the present research, evidence of the six Black family strengths and values was uncovered, in some measure, in all of the families in the sample. Therefore, it was concluded the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children is influenced by traditional Black family strengths and values.

Extended family and kin support: Strong kinship bonds. It was found that, among the families participating in the present research, there was a noticeable tendency to rely on the support of extended family and kin networks. The support that these kin networks provided included such services as occasional child care; rides for students to and from school, church, and recreational activities; assistance with child rearing; and help with laundry,

cooking, and housekeeping. With regard to Leesa's family, the grandmother lived in the household with the family and helped out in a number of ways. With one or two exceptions, the other families reported living close to their extended family and kin support networks (see Figure 5.2).

Kala	My aunt Toni, my grandma Jean, the pastor of our church, Elder Jackson, which is my grandfather, my great grandmother, Jessie Williams, my cousins Valisa, TamiliatheseÃÂ aren't people that are the same ages as me, they wouldn't let nobody harm me or anything like that. They have came to sit for me before. My grandmother lives on the next block, and my aunts and uncles live three or four blocks away. I could walk to their houses. At times we have family outings where we take other family members. We might all go skating, to the beach, downtown, the Expo. Two or three families might go.
Leesa	My grandmother lives with us, and sometimes when nobody can be home with us she'll stay home with me. Mostly everybody takes care of me, like my big sister. My aunt and my uncles help out too, and if my mother is not home and it's an emergency the school calls them and they come and get us and we stay over at their house.
Junior	Junior's father: Junior's grandmother lives a couple of blocks away. She does quite a bit to help out. Two of my nieces live with her, and they help me as well. Junior: My grandmother helps take care of me. She lives here in the city, and sometimes I go and spend the night with her.
Tyrone	Sometimes my sister and I stay with my grandmother, and sometimes we stay with "Big Mama," who is my godmother.
Ronald	My grandmother, my uncle Brian, and sometimes my aunt Sheila pick my brothers and sisters up from nursery school.
Paula	Mrs. Parks: Every once in a while Paula visits her maternal grandmother, who has a daughter about a year or two older than Paula, whom she loves to be with but seldom gets to see.
Shelly	Mrs. Dobson: Shelly is very involved with her older sisters, and visits them often as they have children around her age that she can interact with.

Figure 5.2: Extended family and kin support (N = 8).

As mentioned earlier, Billingsley (1968, 1992) used the term "extended families" to refer to "households in which family members, such as grandparents, reside with nuclear families" (p. 94). This symbol has been reiterated by several authors writing about Black families (Martini & Martin, 1978; McAdoo, 1988, 1997; Nobles, 1988; Stack, 1974; Taylor et al., 1997). A few of these studies were cited in the literature review. They are referred to again here to substantiate the prevalence of the strengths and values regarding extended family and kin support in the lives of Black families.

Sudarkasa (1997) reported that studies of African American families have indicated that they, like their African ancestors, accept responsibility for a wide range of kin, if for no other reason than that they consider it their duty to do so. Sudarkasa concluded that African Americans traditionally have accepted responsibility for a much wider network of kin than is typical of Americans with a nuclear-family orientation.

Emphasis on the importance of education. The data revealed that all eight families in this study gave the impression that they emphasized the importance of education to their fifth-grade children. Excerpts from the interviews included in Figure 5.3 are evidence of this conclusion.

It was also documented in the data that at least five of the eight parents not only emphasized the importance of education, they demonstrated their belief in the concept. These five parents and one grandparent had all returned to school after getting married and starting a family to further their education and to improve their job skills. For example, Ronald's mother attended business school

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and later completed a cosmetology course before opening her own beauty salon. Tyrone's mother described how she began working at the hospital as a nurse's aide, then entered college, completed the training program, and became a registered nurse. Shelly's father completed the training to become a skilled tradesman in the factory. In addition, both Kala's mother and Junior's father indicated that they had attended trade school, and Paula's grandmother had attended junior college.

Kala	They tell me to never give up, and if I want to do something I must keep trying until I get it.
Leesa	My mom tells me it's important. If you don't go to school you can't go to college, and when I grow up I want to be a doctor, so I know I have to stay in school.
Darien	If I can get my education I can get a better job and have my own house and a bad car.
Junior:	He tells me to do better in my schoolwork. He always tells me he wants me to get an education.
Tyrone	My parents told me if I do well in school I can get a scholarship like my cousin Brandon. He went to college to be an engineer.
Ronald	They expect me to do my best and try not to fail. They also tell me to study hard for my tests.
Paula	Mrs. Parks: Without your education you don't have much of a future.
Shelly	Mr. Carter: My family didn't encourage me to go to college, but if they had I would have gone. That's why I want college for my Shelly.

Figure 5.3: Emphasis on the importance of education (N = 8).

Johnson (as cited in Billingsley, 1992) documented the high value African Americans place on education. From her study of 50 successful Blacks born during the half-century after the Civil War, Johnson concluded,

> The Reconstruction autobiographies revealed parents, communities, and organizations initiated a variety of activities that resulted in schooling for Black children. These activities ranged from mothers taking in laundry to

pay tuition for children, and fathers risking their lives in order that children might go to school, to communities meeting for the express purpose of building a school. (p. 329)

Likewise, Morris (1992) stated that "research indicates that many African American families, even those of low income, have high educational aspirations for their children" (p. 104). She further stated that empirical data indicate that African American children from poor circumstances can succeed in school (Blau, 1981; Clark, 1983; Scott-Jones, 1987). Willie (1981), Lightfoot (1981), Peters (1981), Irvine (1990), and Ford (1996) are among the researchers and scholars who have supported the premise that Black families emphasize the importance of education. Irvine implied that all parents value education for their children, but noted that the aspirations of Black parents have been described as "culture-specific, compelling, and passionate" (p. 105). She further posited that Black parents have come to understand that "the only way out of poverty for their children is through education" (p. 106).

Honig (1987), in the statement that follows, also presented evidence of the importance that Black families attach to education: "African American parents overwhelmingly support high standards, tough courses, and more homework for their children; and they realize that the ability to compete, both in school and in the job market, is their children's greatest chance to achieve lifelong success" (p.12).

Spirituality and strong religious ties. Six of the eight families in this study made it known that they placed a high value on spirituality (see Figure 5.4). At least three of these families, Kala's, Leesa's, and Paula's, indicated that their

spiritual leaders were members of the extended family. Apparently, two of the teachers who were interviewed also believed in the importance of spirituality to the socialization of children as they took some of their students to church with them. Those families who acknowledged strong ties to the church suggested in their interviews that they derived considerable comfort, guidance, and inspiration from participating in a variety of church-related activities.

Kala	Saturdays I have choir rehearsal. Sundays we all go to church, sometimes my little brother and I go to church with our teacher. I'm very involved in the church, my grandmother, grandfather, we all go to church faithfully.
Leesa	Ms. Brown: Oh yes, spirituality is very important, because if you've got that environment, it helps the child's mind to be more settled.
Darien	Mrs. Henry: Sometimes Darien and other students go to church with me, and they have taken part in a summer enrichment program there.
Junior	Mrs. Henry: I take Junior and Darien with me to my church sometimes, and they both have participated in a summer enrichment program that is run by our minister.
Tyrone	They tell me that families are good to you, and they do stuff for you, and they say respect is when you treat others like you want to be treated.
Ronald	I go to church at Kingdom of Heaven Ministry. I go to the little kids' church, and they teach you about God.
Paula	Mrs. Parks: I am a Christian woman, and at my church they have a person to tutor the children. Paula comes to Bible study with me on Tuesday nights, and then she goes to the fellowship hall for Christian Youth Fellowship. They teach them, in their language, about the Bible, and they do crafts and things. Paula: I'm kind of in the middle or mixed up, because my grandmother on my mother's side is a Buddhist, they believe in a different God, and my grandma on my dad's side is spiritual to God.
Shelly	Sometimes I go to church with my older sister.

Figure 5.4: Spirituality and strong religious ties (N = 8).

It was noted that, in addition to spiritual support, the churches these families attended provided both human and social capital for these African American families. Among the services provided by the churches were academic tutoring programs, computer classes, day care and latchkey programs, after-school and summer arts camps, and youth leadership classes. This awareness of the efforts of the Black church to support family education of families is not new. June (1991) chronicled many such initiatives in Black churches, including classes dealing with parenting, hands-on science, resumes, careers and job skills, suicide prevention, peer pressure, teen pregnancy, and numerous other social issues.

Traditionally, spirituality and strong religious ties are common threads that run through the characterization of African American culture. A strong religious orientation is one of the Black family strengths identified and analyzed by Hill (1972) and later substantiated by a number of other scholars and researchers. Among the writers who referred to the importance of religion to Black families are Billingsley (1992), Hale (1992, 1994), June (1991), McAdoo (1985, 1988, 1997), and Taylor et al. (1997). The term "spirituality," in this discussion, refers to a devotion to religion and Christian principles. Additional literature has been cited supporting the ideology that spirituality and strong religious ties are interwoven throughout the fabric of the Black family. Billingsley (1997) reported that, over the centuries, the church has become the strongest institution in the Black community. He further stated that, in these communities, the church functions as more than a religious institution; it functions in numerous other

capacities, including community service, family counseling support, leadership and advocacy training, and the promotion of scholarship and education. Likewise, Sudarkasa (1997) indicated that "among African Americans, after the family the church has been the strongest institution and continues to be one of the strongest institutions today" (p. 36).

Furthermore, Hale (1982) described how Black child rearing and socialization are linked to a strong religious orientation. As a point of emphasis, she quoted the following excerpt from a 1975 speech by Na'im Akbar: "Black women didn't know nothin' 'bout Dr. Spock, but they did know the Bible, raise up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" (p. 52). In addition, Ellison (1997) indicated that an expanding body of literature has linked religious participation and beliefs with various family attitudes and practices, including but not limited to child rearing and socialization.

Adaptability of family roles. Adaptability of roles is another of the Black family symbols that emerged in this study. The data indicated that three males had assumed the role of both mother and father. They were Junior's father, Shelly's father, and Darien's grandfather. Likewise, the two single mothers, Leesa's and Kala's mothers, and Paula's grandmother all had assumed the role of mother and father (see Figure 5.5).

The phrase "adaptability of family roles" is used in the Black family literature to refer to the ease and flexibility with which African Americans have learned to adjust and modify their attitudes and responsibilities to fit whatever situation they face. Comer and Poussant (1994) described the adaptability of

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family roles as a cultural tradition born of the necessity for Blacks to prepare their children to form a bicultural existence. However, they stated that, in the early years after slavery, African American women frequently had to assume the role of family breadwinner and work outside the home because it was difficult for Black men to obtain jobs. The men, in turn, remained at home to take care of the children and do the housekeeping.

Kala	We get ten minutes to clean up two rooms, the kitchen is me and my big sister, Carla, we take turns, my little brother has to clean off the table, my little sister puts the silverware away, and my other brother sweeps the floor.
Leesa	They teach us to have manners, don't talk back, to clean up behind ourselves, and in school to do what the teacher says.
Junior	My father says not to do drugs.
Tyrone	They tell me to respect other people's things and don't break them or tear them up....They say I should always use good manners, like, [say please, thank you, and excuse me]...and don't talk back to grown-ups.
Ronald	Mrs. Adams: I always try to give them structure at home.
Paula	I think they expect me to be respectful to the staff and my peers, and to do my work and don't talk. They want me to improve in all my subjects.

Figure 5.5: Family rules, roles, and responsibilities (N = 8).

Hale (1992) revisited Hill's (1972) declaration of the five Black family strengths, which include the adaptability of family roles. Hale continued her discussion of this theme by describing how Nobles (1974a, 1974b) related this same concept to the African principles of cooperative work and collective responsibility. According to this analysis, in Black families relations are egalitarian. Not only are the women frequently employed while the men share the responsibility for homemaking and child care, but older children also

participate by sharing in the care of young siblings. In these families, children often work outside the home to contribute to the financial support of the family.

There is no shortage of research and literature on African American single mothers. However, there is a scarcity of writings on the positive roles played by a growing number of single African American fathers. Instead, there is a tendency for writers and researchers to focus on the numbers of absentee fathers. However, McAdoo (1992) provided a theoretical perspective for understanding the roles African American fathers play in their families. Ecological theorists have considered the context in which African American fathers play the roles of provider, protector, shared decision maker, child socializer, and supporter of his spouse. From an ecological and historical perspective, despite economic, employment, and educational barriers, African American fathers are no different from fathers in other ethnic groups in terms of the roles they play within their families. Better evaluations of the interactions between African American fathers and the various institutions with which they come in contact will help human service practitioners develop better services and programs.

Family rules, roles, and responsibilities. In analyzing the data for this study, this researcher discovered that at least six of the families tended to organize the family interactions around specific rules, roles, and responsibilities. It was apparent in the interview responses that four of these families operated according to a complex system of scheduling that required family members to take responsibility for their assigned roles. This apparently helped the family

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function in a timely and efficient manner. For instance, Shelly and her father had what they described as a "tight schedule" (see Figure 5.5). Similarly, Kala's family, with eight siblings living in the household, also intimated that their family's schedule was highly structured so that the needs of all family members could be met. Junior and his father also implied that rules, roles, and responsibilities were a priority at their home.

In addition to those examples included in Figure 5.5, some other comments made by participants provide evidence that family rules, roles, and responsibilities were a recurring theme in these families. For instance, Paula's grandmother stated that her rule was that homework and chores must be done before play. Shelly's father, also, discussed their after-school routine, which included sharing the responsibility for household chores and care of the pets. Darien was the only student in the group who did not appear to have any rules, expected roles, or responsibilities at home.

Given my own personal experience of growing up as the tenth child in a Black family of 11 siblings, the importance of specific rules, assigned roles, and responsibilities is a familiar concept. This practice involves every family member, except the babies in arms, taking an active part in the family's work load. Even the toddlers and preschoolers are trained to put away their toys, books, and playthings. Further, in the Black culture, this is a sophisticated system in that the older siblings generally learn how to perform every task in the household. Thus, when a member of the family is unavailable due to marriage,

illness, or military or other obligations, another sibling takes over that person's responsibility.

Furthermore, related research and literature has documented the tendency for Black families to emphasize rules, roles, and responsibilities in the home. Barbour and Barbour (1997) described how family rituals, roles, and routines help to prepare children to be successful in the school setting, which also is structured. Holliday (1985) discussed some lessons that can be learned from Black children who must adapt to different sets of rules, depending on the people with whom they are interacting and/or the place in which they are involved.

<u>Students show respect and admiration for parents</u>. The data include several instances in which the tendency for students to show respect and admiration for their parents and grandparents was apparent. For example, Shelly gave this description of her father: "My dad is nice. I like living with him because he gives me opportunities to say what I want to do." When asked how she felt about her mother, Kala responded: " My mother, she is the best!" Among Paula's positive comments about her grandmother was this statement: "My grandmother is nice; she takes good care of me and helps me to understand how to solve my problems." Ronald was also very complimentary of his parents, saying, "My parents are great, they cheer me on!" Darien indicated that he could depend on his grandparents to see about him, but said he knew that someday when they are no longer with him he will have to carry the ball for himself.

Billingsley (1992) noted that respect ranked high among the values that guided behavior within African American families and communities. It governed the behavior of children, not only toward their parents but also toward all elders with whom they came in contact (p. 84).

The tendency in Black families to emphasize respect was also addressed by Nobles (1988), Comer and Poussant (1992), and Hale (1987). For instance, Sudarkasa (1997) stated that "when Africans came to America, they retained respect as a fundamental precept on which their families and communities were built" (p. 33). She further described how younger people showed respect to grown-ups and elders by the way they addressed them (i.e., Uncle, Aunt, Mister, Miss, Mrs.) and treated them with courtesy and honor while in their presence (p. 34).

The inclination for African American families to emphasize children and young people showing respect for their elders is another one of the traditional cultural strengths and values that some families still practice today. Many contemporary African American families teach respect on a different level because they think the ways in which respect was taught years ago are old-fashioned and inappropriate today. For instance, very few children today are still being taught to say, "yes Ma'am, and no Ma'am," as was the practice in the older families.

Summary. In summary, the degree to which the strengths and values were present in the families differed from one family to another. For example, Kala's family and Junior's family, with large numbers of children, appeared to be

more structured than some of the others. Extended family support also was more prevalent in some families than in others. Leesa's grandmother lived in the home with the family and was, thereby, able to provide constant extended family support. From the overall picture, Darien's family appeared to be more different from than similar to the others.

The researcher concluded that existence of the six Black family strengths and values in these eight families enhanced family functioning, family competence, and family relationships. These strengths and values also enhanced the family's ability to support and participate in the school experiences of the fifth-grade children. For instance, the social support provided by extended families and kin provided human capital that enabled the families to be more productive (Ogbu, 1981). The tendency of these families to emphasize the importance of education, in most cases, served to clearly communicate to the fifth-graders that their parents expected them to succeed in school. Those families that had strong religious ties benefited from the support of the outreach programs and members of the church. Some of the churches in this urban area even participated in community partnerships with schools.

Finally, adaptability of family roles, family rules and responsibilities, and the students' respect and admiration for their parents are family values that, when practiced in the home, generally enhance the student's ability to be more successful in adjusting, functioning, and producing in the school setting.

Implications. The conclusions drawn from the data pertaining to the traditional Black family cultural factors that enhance or inhibit parent involvement

in the education of their children raise some questions that have implications for families, educators, researchers, and policy makers. The questions concern such issues as cultural and human capital in families and schools, racial socialization of urban African American children as a coping strategy, perceived discrimination based on races and classes in schools, and the roles of churches and other community groups in the education of their children.

Implications for families include such challenges as socializing their children to learn about and have pride in their race, culture, and heritage. Spencer (1985) recommended that if families use racial socialization to motivate students to reach their highest achievement potential, it should be presented in such a way that it will not be interpreted as an excuse for not doing their best (racial socialization was defined and described in the review of literature). Ogbu (1981) explained how cultural and human capital in Black families enhances family functioning and provides needed support. His work supports the practice of maintaining close ties with extended families and kin networks. Finally, the traditional Black family strengths and values can be used to help prepare children for successful adjustment to the school setting.

In the case of educators, the implications center on involving teachers and practitioners in training to increase their awareness of traditional cultural factors that enhance and inhibit the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children. The literature and research of Kaplan (1992), Scott-Jones (1988), and Epstein (1986) suggests that educators should be responsible for providing training for those parents who are not equipped to assist their children with learning at home.

Implications for researchers include a need for more study pertaining to such topics as (a) strengths and competencies of urban African American families and (b) comparisons of urban African American families with those of two and three decades past. Identification of those parenting practices that are most closely related to successful school experiences is important.

Subquestions 2-5: What Is Authentic Involvement?

2. **How do urban African American families perceive that their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade children is influenced by current family ecological factors?** It was found that urban African American families perceived that their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade children was both positively and negatively influenced by current family ecological factors.

3. **How do urban African American families perceive that they structure after-school activities and the home environment to support school learning?** The families perceived that their after-school activities and home environments supported learning. However, when these variables were examined using the ecological-psychology lens and Epstein and Lee's (1995) model for family and home support for learning, a discrepancy was found between the families' perceptions and actions.

4. **How do urban African American families perceive that they negotiate their involvement in school and school-related activities?** The families perceived that they negotiated their involvement in schools and school-related activities using their family strengths and resources to overcome obstacles and circumvent family and school-related barriers.

5. **How do African American families, and teachers, perceive that schools encourage family involvement in the formal education of their children?** The data reflected that the families and teachers in this study perceived that the schools encouraged family involvement in the education of their children.

Family participation in schools and related activities. In analyzing the data pertaining to the above questions, the researcher used the ecological-psychology lens informed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The process involved examining the three nested structures of each of the eight families. As stated earlier, the structures include (a) the macrosystem (informal support networks; (b) the mesosystem (family participation and interaction with schools, churches, and work places; and (c) microsystem (the family culture, interactions, parenting, and daily home life).

From this investigation, the researcher identified six ecological and cultural factors that positively or negatively influenced the involvement of the eight families in the education of their fifth-grade children. Some of these six factors are family, culture, and home related, whereas others are family, school, climate, and personnel related. These six factors include (a) family participation in school and related activities, (b) relationships between parents and teachers, (c) family and home environment support for learning, (d) family participation in after-school activities, and (e) family satisfaction with schools and teachers. These factors are grounded in the data, and each of them is described with accompanying documentation in the pages that follow.

Ecological factors these families perceived as positively influencing their involvement in the education of their fifth-grade youngsters included (a) extended family and kin support; (b) school climate that promotes and encourages family involvement; (c) family skills, strengths, and values that enabled them to participate against all odds; and (d) family after-school interactions and activities that helped to build character and reinforce school learning.

On the other hand, the families identified some ecological factors that had a negative effect on their involvement in their children's education. These factors included (a) the socioeconomic characteristics of the family and community, (b) the family size and structure, (c) the absence of adequate social support, and (d) teacher practices of involving parents. The data from the present study provided evidence of family and home support for learning through the families' daily routines, rituals and traditions, their sharing of interests and skills, providing stimulating home environments, and participating in after-school involvement during school-related activities. Some examples of their comments on the subject are included below:

Junior's teacher: Mr. Wilson is a very involved parent. He not only works here, he volunteers many hours of his time to help out with special activities for the kids. He is our chess coach, assistant coach for soccer, baseball, and track. He also helps me with the math tutorial program, and just generally helps out anywhere we need him. He is a good parent.

Kala's mother: Right now I'm working with Cottage School wherever I'm needed, subbing or as a lunch volunteer. I check with the teachers to see how Paula is doing. I'm involved with all of the children. I haven't gone on many field trips, but I am in the office. The teachers know I'm here, and they can talk to me anytime.

Darien:	My grandpa and my grandma come to my classroom. They talk to the principal and the teachers. My grandpa brings me to school every day, and sometimes he brings me money to buy ice cream, popcorn, and other stuff.
Ronald's mother:	I was Cub Scout leader for the boys, but I gave it up because I felt they needed a male to teach them "manly" things. I still go to the meetings. I attend all the parent meetings, and the conferences to pick up Ronald's report card.
Ronald's teacher:	Ronald's parents attend meetings and conferences, pick up report cards, and respond to any request for assistance with fundraising and other special events.
Shelly's teacher:	Whenever there's a program, Mr. Carter has always been here for it. He's always been very positive whenever we've had parent/teacher conferences.

The nature and value of family participation in school-related activities were addressed in the works of Epstein and Lee (1995), Scott-Jones (1995), Ryan (1995), Kaplan (1992), Chavkin (1993), Batey (1996), and others. The authors described patterns of family participation, school-family involvement programs, teacher practices of involving parents, home-school communication, parent-teacher interactions, benefits of family involvement, and barriers to family involvement in schools. Based on the documentation from the data and the implications from the literature, it was concluded that all eight families in the study were regular participants in school-related activities.

Relationships between parents and teachers. Aside from a few hints of some potential tensions, the relationships were agreeable and seemingly positive. The data provided examples of parents expressing their support for the teachers, and teachers indicating their satisfaction with the cooperation of the parents. An exception was Leesa's teacher, who expressed some concern

about the mother's tendency to be more focused on the social aspects of her daughter's school experiences than the academics. Similarly, Darien's grandfather indicated that he thought the school needed to find alternatives to suspension for his grandson and other students who frequently behaved inappropriately. This grandfather said he understood that the school had a responsibility to discourage children's acting out, but he thought it was unfair to keep these students out of classes, which caused them to fall further behind in their work. One other comment was made by Ronald's mother regarding a previous teacher "stereotyping" her son according to what she referred to as "some statistics."

Notwithstanding the participation of these families, based on a comprehensive review of the literature and the researcher's past experiences as a parent, grandparent, and educator, some pertinent questions are raised relative to definitions and descriptions of parent involvement. The questions are as follows: "What is authentic involvement?" "What is peripheral involvement?" and "How is involvement distinguished from participation?" The term "authentic" is defined in the dictionary as something's being real and genuine, and actually being what it seems or is claimed to be. The term "peripheral" is the opposite of authentic, and was operationally defined here to refer to superficial involvement, or involvement that is outlying and surface in nature.

In this study, peripheral involvement included such family contributions as sending Kleenex, cookies, and juice for the class, and supporting school fundraisers and millage campaigns. The researcher argues that, based on the tendency for families to engage in "peripheral," as opposed to "authentic,"

involvement in both the homes and the schools was a recurring theme that was noted in examining the home environments and the in- and out-of-school involvement of the eight families. According to the definitions and descriptions portrayed in the family involvement literature (Epstein & Lee, 1995; Kaplan, 1992; Ryan, 1995, Scott-Jones, 1995), to be involved suggests support, whereas participation stands for action and potential change. Thus the term "peripheral involvement" may be used to categorize support for and participation in school-related activities and programs. On the other hand, "authentic participation occurs when parents influence or attempt to influence decision making in areas of substantial impact such as personnel, programs, school policy, and budget" (Kaplan, 1992, p. 132).

Family and home environment support for learning. The importance of family and home environment support for children's school learning has repeatedly been validated in the literature (Barbour & Barbour, 1997; Berger, 1994; Entwisle & Alexander, 1990; Epstein, 1986; Procidano, 1992; Scott-Jones, 1995). For instance, Morris (1992) declared that "family life shapes African American students' behavior, school adjustment, and achievement in the context of ecological and cultural factors" (p. 113). This statement underscores the importance of the family and home to children's school experiences.

Although many researchers have acknowledged the significance of the roles families and home environments play in children's school experiences, the message is not universally accepted. Personal experience has made the researcher aware that some African American families still believe that education is the sole responsibility of educators and the schools. However, the data from

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this study indicated that most of the participating families apparently saw a need to provide family and home support for learning.

The literature contains a variety of models for family and home support. Scott-Jones's (1995) model was used in this study as a guide for evaluating the participants' family and home support. The model of family interactions and school achievement includes the following four levels of family interactions that may contribute to children's school performance: valuing, monitoring, helping, and doing (p. 77). Figure 5.6 contains evidence of the family and home support provided for the fifth-grade students in this study.

Kala	Mrs. Proud: I cook dinner and then we clean up the kitchen. After they do their homework I let them watch television for a while.
Leesa	When we come home we have to do our homework, and my mother will ask me how was school, and I tell her all about it.
Darien	I play with my computer games, then I go to my friend's house and we sell Kool-Aid; sometimes I just watch television. On weekends I ride my bike and go over to my friend's house to play basketball.
Junior	Mr. Wilson: If he has homework he has to do that first; if they don't have any, sometimes I bring things home for them to do. Then we have dinner and they help clean up. After that they have to get their clothes ready for the next day.
Tyrone	My mother and father tell me I have to do my homework first, and then I can go outside and play.
Ronald	When I get home I go on the computer to do my homework, and then practice basketball. On weekends, we go bowling, skating, or bike riding in the park.
Paula	When I get home after school, I get right on my homework. Sometimes I ride my bike, go over to a friend's house and we play on the computer. On weekends I visit relatives and go to church.
Shelly	Mr. Carter: Our after-school routine is jam packed! She is very athletic, but if she has homework she gets right on it; then she can do her other activities or go outside and play.

Figure 5.6: Family and home environment support learning (N = 8)

<u>Family participation in after-school activities</u>. Recreation and enrichment activities played a major role in the lives of the participating families. Leesa and Paula were the only two students who did not appear to be involved in the after-school enrichment activities provided at the school or community center. However, they were both involved in outreach programs at their churches. Among the concerns that families addressed pertaining to participation in after-school and community activities was the issue of safety. For example, Leesa stated that she did not stay after school because her mother had instructed her to find her younger sister each day at dismissal, and the two of them were to come straight home from school together. This mother's concern for the safety of her two little girls, who were 11 and 8 years old, is understandable considering the circumstances. The school was located next to a middle school that dismissed students a half-hour earlier than Leesa's school. Consequently, older students often hung around the elementary school to make sport of teasing the little children. The distance from the school to the family's home was approximately four blocks. Leesa said an older brother drove her and her sister to school in the mornings and occasionally picked them up in the afternoon because their mother did not have a car. Likewise, Paula's grandmother indicated that she walked Paula to school every day and usually accompanied her home, like many of the other parents. There was no indication that Paula participated in the after-school activities provided by the school.

Triangulation of the data revealed that Junior's father was actively involved with him as a teaching assistant in the after-school reading and math

tutoring class, a volunteer for the chess team, and a sports activity coach. According to Junior's father, that was one of the ways he could spend some time interacting with all of the children.

Family satisfaction with schools and teachers. To say that the families were completely satisfied with the schools and teachers would be misleading, as there were one or two instances in which parents expressed dissatisfaction. For instance, Leesa's mother was dissatisfied with not being given a paying job at her daughter's school. Likewise, Darien's grandfather expressed his displeasure with the way the school kept suspending his grandson for inappropriate behavior. Ronald's mother alluded to a problem she had with a previous teacher, but said she was pleased with her son's teachers during the current year.

However, the majority of the parents and children indicated that they were satisfied with schools and teachers. Examples of some of their comments are included below:

Ronald: I like my teacher, and I think she's doing a good job of making me get my education.

Kala: I want to be a teacher like Mrs. Miller, because she's a good teacher. Sometimes she lets you have fun. Then, at times, she is strictly business. . . . Sometimes she takes me to church with her.

Shelly's   This is a great school. The teachers are very dedicated.
father: They go out of their way to give the kids great learning experiences.

Parental pride in student achievement. The data reflected that, among the eight families in this study, there was a tendency for parents to exhibit pride in their children's achievements. For instance, Kala's mother proudly described how many extracurricular activities her daughter was involved in, while still keeping her honor roll status. Paula's grandmother provided copies of newspaper articles featuring her granddaughter as the "Title I Student of the Year." During the year-end fifth-grade awards program, Shelly's father endeavored to photograph her each of the several times she received an award. He also expressed his pride regarding her participation in sports and enrichment activities. Ronald's mother seemed delighted to share the family's experience of attending the citywide musical program in which he performed.

The importance of family nurturance and support for achievement is grounded in the parent involvement literature (Berger, 1994; Clark, 1983; Entwisle, 1992; Epstein, 1987; Kaplan, 1991). In addition, McAdoo (1997) defined the term "nurturance" as "the expression of warmth and positive feelings of the parent toward the attitudes and behavior of the child" (p. 154). The Black family literature (Billingsley, 1992; McAdoo, 1997; Taylor et al, 1997), also has documented the tradition of African American families exhibiting pride in achievement and success. The importance of verbal praise was documented in studies conducted by Clark (1983), Hale (1982), Baumrind (1972), and Barbour and Barbour (1997). Likewise, some authorities, especially in the field of psychology, have cautioned parents against the overuse of verbal praise as this often results in its becoming meaningless.

Summary. There are inherent problems with the exploration of perceptions. Unless specific criteria are assigned to the term "involvement," the perceptions of each of the interviewees could be different. There are also numerous definitions and interpretations of the term "involvement." There was general agreement among the students, parents, and teachers in this study about the degree of involvement of the eight families in school and school-related activities. It was also apparent in the analysis of data that in the home environments it appears that more emphasis is placed on providing materials, equipment, and artifacts than on parents spending quality time working with children on learning-related tasks. Perhaps more study would improve our understanding of this phenomenon. Family and home support was evidenced by the "homework-first rules" that were operative in most of the households. Likewise, there was general consensus among the participants that the schools welcomed and even encouraged family involvement. Close examination of the parent involvement initiatives and programs in the five schools revealed that they were structured primarily to elicit peripheral involvement.

Implications. The perceptions of African American family involvement pertaining to (a) the influence of ecological factors, (b) family after-school and home environment support for learning, (c) participation in school-related activities, and (d) school support and encouragement of family raises some pertinent questions. Given the findings of the present study and the review of current research and literature, the investigator proposes the following implications.

The analysis challenges the literature and research that suggests that urban African American parents are not interested or involved, are unconcerned or incapable, and do not value education. Hence, the researcher proposes some implications for families, educators, researchers, and policy makers.

The analysis of this study supports the research and literature maintaining the premise that many urban African American families have strengths and skills that enable them to actively participate in and support the education of their children (Clark, 1983; Hurd et al, 1995; Morris, 1992). Further, the analysis showed that among the eight families there was a tendency to promote traditional African American cultural values that contributed to positive and successful school experiences for their fifth-grade youngsters. Thus, the analysis raises questions about those family practices and interactions that promote positive and negative student attitudes, behavior, and school performance, and challenges families to focus their energies on those that will have a positive impact.

The analysis challenges the literature and research that has attributed the prevalence of underachievement and problematic school experiences among urban African American children to limited family involvement, inadequate childrearing and socialization, and the children's lack of motivation to succeed. Consequently, the analysis raises questions for educators concerning (a) the school culture, teaching quality, teacher practices for involving parents, and the school's role in aiding the development of self and cultural identity; (b) finding meaningful ways to involve urban African American families in leadership,

decision-making, and advocacy roles in schools; (c) providing professional training and development that sensitizes and prepares staffs to meet the needs of students and families of diverse backgrounds and cultures; and (d) developing and implementing curriculum that incorporates African American culture and history, and addresses the unique learning styles of these urban children.

In the analysis, limitations were discovered in previous studies of African American families' involvement in the school experiences of their children. These limitations are offered as challenges for future researchers. Although there are a number of areas in which more research on African American families is needed, six areas of need are presented here. Their selection was based on their relationship to the present study. These areas are (a) qualitative and theoretical research; (b) research on Black family strengths; (c) research from perspectives of African American families; (d) studies of African American families and schools in context; and (e) African American families, schools, and contemporary issues.

Although the last two decades have given rise to a considerable increase in the numbers of research studies based on theoretical constructs, there is still a need for more investigations focusing on the involvement of contemporary urban African American families in the education of their children. Spencer et al. (1985) stated, "More research is needed that seriously questions the applicability of conventional theories, measures, and methods to the study of Black child development" (p. 309). Similarly, this investigator perceives a need for future researchers to evaluate theories and approaches to determine the

appropriateness of their underlying values and assumptions to the realities of Black families' involvement in their children's school experiences. The analysis in the present research raises questions about the use of culturally biased models in which minority, poor, single-parent, and female-headed households are viewed as deficient in the study of Black families.

In family research, the variables most commonly studied are such ecological factors as socioeconomic status, race, family size, family structure, place of residency, and parents' level of education. Studies focusing on these family factors invite challenge because they tend to treat these factors as family weaknesses. Thus, more research focusing on family strengths and values is needed, especially as it relates to the school experiences of Black children. Spencer et al. (1985) intimated that the school experiences of Black children continue to be difficult for many youngsters. The author maintains that their achievement levels are too low, and dropout rates too high; there is a need to account for these facts.

Such opinions give rise to the question, What are the institutional, family, and/or individual factors that act to produce under-achievement among African American children? Thus, Spencer and associates included in the implications of their research a call for additional studies from the perspective of Black families, and focusing on families' involvement in the school experiences of their children. During the process of completing the analysis of the present study, the researcher concluded that there is a need to echo that call.

Another implication for future researchers is the need for more studies on how contemporary educational issues, as well as societal factors such as changing family demographics, school reform, charters, and vouchers, influence African American families' involvement in the school experiences of their children. There is also a need for more research on the strengths and competencies of Black families that enhance and support the education of their children. Taylor et al. (1997) recommended that "future research examining the supportive behaviors of the Black family, and other social networks, should explore ways to capitalize on the unique features of ethnographic approaches (e.g., kin maps and life history calendars)" (p. 318). They further suggested that ethnographic methodologies could be used to investigate a wide range of Black family learning support behaviors.

Another implication for research on Black families' school involvement is the need for more studies from the perspectives of these families and children. Many studies have been based on data obtained from outside the culture and context of the family and home. Similarly, Ogbu (as cited in Chavkin, 1993) called for researchers to study families from a cultural-ecological perspective. He maintained that the child-rearing strategies of racial and ethnic minority parents must be examined in the appropriate cultural context. Conducting studies from the perspective of the Black families and within the context of the naturalistic environments of their homes and schools, as opposed to comparing them with nonminority families, allows researchers to capture the diversities that exist among Black families.

This need for more studies from the Black family perspective also raises the issue of limited research on competent African American fathers. Current literature indicates that there has been a tendency for researchers to focus on Black family involvement as maternal involvement because mothers frequently are the family members who are at the center of the home-school connection. Similarly, research on African American fathers has dealt with absent or uninvolved fathers. However, changing family demographics have resulted in a growing number of African American family households being headed by single fathers. As was discovered in this research, there are some conscientious and responsible fathers who are successfully rearing children, supporting and participating in their education as well.

Future challenges for policy makers. Further, the analysis of the present research pointed to a need for future policies containing specific mandates for school districts to implement programs that provide parenting training and skill development experiences. The analysis also highlighted a need for policies that address equal opportunities and access for urban African American families in the current educational alternatives. These alternatives include, but are not limited to, public school charters, educational vouchers, and schools of choice.

Subquestion 6: School Experiences
of Fifth-Grade Students

6. What are the perceptions of urban African American families, and teachers, regarding the school experiences of the fifth-grade students?

There were some discrepancies between the perceptions of the families and the

teachers regarding the school experiences of the fifth-grade children. Further, the school experiences of the students were diverse. The participants were questioned about their beliefs and feelings concerning various indicators of the fifth-grade students' school experiences, such as (a) attitude toward school and learning; (b) work habits and performance; (c) relationships with teachers and peers; and (d) citizenship, attendance, and adjustment. Responses from the interviews were triangulated with the data obtained from the review of each student's individual records and the observation notes.

The data indicated that three of the students maintained exemplary achievement levels. Three of them were considered to be average achievers by their teachers; however, their records indicated excellent progress. The other two students were described as being low achievers. Specific information · relative to their work habits and achievement levels is provided in Figure 5.7.

Interwoven throughout the fabric of the data collected for this study was the tendency for the fifth-grade students to have diverse school experiences. The term "school experiences" refers to what happens to African American children in schools. It was found that there were more differences in the school experiences of these students than there were similarities. As stated earlier, the eight students attended five elementary schools in a large urban school district. The sample included one student each from three different schools, and two students from each of the two other schools.

Kala	Miss Martin: She's a hard worker. She normally stays on task. She's very smart, and she catches on very easily to everything. I don't have to explain it several times before she catches on to it.
Leesa	Mrs. Williams: I would consider her to be an average student. She could be better if she put forth more effort.
Darien	Mrs. Henry: Darien's work habits are inconsistent and sporadic. At times he is on task, and at other times he does everything but his work. His attention span is short, and he is constantly seeking my attention and help. When I refuse to give it to him and try to make him work independently he gets angry and pouts.
Junior	Mrs. Henry: Junior is struggling with fifth-grade work. His skills are below grade level, and his reading is extremely low. Often he does not understand the assignment, but will not ask for help.
Tyrone	Miss Ham: Tyrone is a pleasant student. When I look at him, he always has that big smile. He has a good attitude about his work. He doesn't moan and groan when I tell him he has missing assignments. He just wants to know what has not been turned in. If he can't find it in his folder, he prepares to do it over.
Ronald	Mrs. Fizzer: Ronald works well independently and in a group. He is very concerned about keeping up with his work. When he goes out of my class for music, he tries to make up all of the work he missed.
Paula	Mrs. Cee: She processes math concepts very slowly, and requires a great deal of direct instructions. I try to keep her near me, so I can give her eye contact, as she tends to let her mind wander.
Shelly	Miss Dobson: Shelly's work is very, very top quality. She takes an awful lot of pride in her work. She's very self-directed, and very inquisitive. She also expresses a lot of empathy as we are studying different subjects.

Figure 5.7: Varied work habits and achievement levels (N = 8).

For the purpose of this analysis, the similarities and differences in the school experiences of the students are organized according to the following five indicators: (a) attitudes toward school and learning; (b) attendance, citizenship, and adjustment; (c) work habits, performance, and achievement levels; (d) relationships with teachers and peers; (e) peer relations; and (f) school and classroom climates.

<u>Attitudes toward school and learning</u>. All eight students liked and enjoyed school. Each of them had goals and aspirations for the future. All of them were 11 years of age at the time the data collection began. Aside from these three similarities, all of the other categories reflect differences. Therefore, it was concluded that the eight students had dissimilar school experiences.

As stated before, all eight students liked school. However, there were vast differences in their attitudes toward learning. For instance, the three students whom teachers described as high achieving (Kala, Shelly, and Ronald) exhibited similar, positive attitudes toward learning, as evidenced by comments from the teachers' interviews, observation notes, and review of school-related documents. Some examples of comments are as follows:

Kala's teacher: She's a hard worker. She normally stays on task, and she's very bright. She catches on to things easily.

Ronald's teacher: Ronald is a really neat student. He takes pride in his school work and is very serious about it. He shows enthusiasm for getting good grades. He will often ask me, "What did I get on my spelling test?" before I've even had a chance to correct the papers.

When one of the teachers was asked to describe her student, she responded, "Shelly is a great student. She has intrinsic motivation." She explained that Shelly was a student who had it in her nature to love learning and was willing and eager to produce excellent work. Likewise, the three students whom the teachers referred to as average (Leesa, Paula, and Tyrone) also exhibited positive attitudes toward learning. Unlike the three former students, the latter group apparently experienced more frequent distractions and did not

appear to be as focused and task oriented. On the other hand, the remaining two students, Darien and Junior, were described by their teacher as low-achieving, and they displayed attitudes toward learning that were significantly different from those of the other six students. Although their attitudes could hardly be described as positive or negative, they can perhaps be called apathetic—that is, unconcerned, indifferent, sluggish, and lacking enthusiasm.

Attendance, citizenship, and adjustment. This indicator is grounded in both the data and the literature and addresses the patterns that were discovered in the main ingredients (attendance and adjustment) embedded in the school experiences of the fifth-grade students. "Attendance" is the term schools use to refer to the number of days a student attends school. It is recorded daily and tabulated in subtotals at the end of each marking period. Composite totals are recorded at the end of the year, as documented earlier in Figure 3.2 (Chapter III). Students' attendance is recorded on their individual report cards and in their cumulative records and folders. These records provided a broad overview of the attendance patterns of these students. Three of them (Tyrone, Ronald, and Shelly) had excellent attendance records dating back through their first-grade year. Kala's attendance was also excellent, but it was recorded only for her fifth-grade year because her previous records had not been forwarded by the transferring school. The other four students (Junior, Paula, Darien, and Leesa) had sporadic attendance patterns. Teachers indicated that all of them except Darien had recently shown improved attendance. Because of the overlapping

themes, additional information relative to the attendance patterns of some students is included in the analysis of other themes.

The term "adjustment" was operationally defined in this dissertation as a student's ability to make a smooth transition from the context of the home environment to the school setting. It includes citizenship and an ability to adapt to the rules, regulations, and processes at school. Again, data retrieved from the individual records of the students, observation notes, and comments from the student and teacher interviews were used in assessing students' adjustment. It was noted that those students who were described as high-achieving were also the ones whose citizenship was rated excellent. Kala, Shelly, and Ronald were also among the students with excellent attendance records. The data indicated that the citizenship of the three students described as average was rated excellent or good. The records of two other students, Junior and Leesa, evidenced occasional problems with fighting, which resulted in "closed classes" or suspension. On the other hand, Darien's records documented a number of suspensions for various violations of school rules, including fighting, disrespect to teachers, and refusal to serve detention time. Given this analysis, it was concluded that the attendance and adjustment of the eight students were diverse.

Work habits, performance, and achievement. The data reflected a range of work habits and performance levels among the eight students. The term "work habits" applies here to the way in which the students approached the completion of their daily assignments, group activities, special experiences such

as computer time, and so on. Due to the limitations of short-term observations, the students' portfolios, teachers' comments on report cards, and responses to the interview questions, which asked them to describe the students' work ethic, also were considered. Excerpts from the data are included in Figure 5.7.

The students who were rated high achievers worked well independently and in a group. However, most of the time the students who were called average also worked well. Of the eight students in this study, Darien and Junior were the ones who appeared to have the most difficulty with work habits and performance. Darien often left his seat to get materials of one kind or another. He was frequently out of his seat, crawling on the floor to get something he had dropped. Several times he was seen playing with toys in his desk. His attention span was very short, and he often did not listen attentively when the teacher gave directions. He continually asked her to explain to him what he should do. The teacher described Darien's work habits as "inconsistent."

Junior was another student in that same classroom whose work habits needed improvement. After working one-on-one with Junior on three or four different occasions, the researcher concluded that perhaps his poor work habits were due to a deficiency in his cognitive skills. His reading level was low, and he had problems understanding the directions for completing the work.

In summary, because of the researcher's recent review of the literature (Ford, 1996; Hillard, 1973; Irvine, 1990), she was uncomfortable with the use of the labels "high achieving," "average," and "low achieving." The above-mentioned authors and several other sources referred to the tendency of some

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schools and teachers to base the evaluation of students regarding their performance on standardized tests. This occurs despite the fact that research has shown minority children frequently do not score well on such measures.

   Teachers' and students' relationships. There was a tendency for the eight students in the sample to exhibit respect and admiration for their teachers. When the researcher inquired how the students felt about their teachers, some of them gave explicit statements. The following comments are excerpts from the data:

Leesa: I like the way the teachers aren't mean to you, and they don't holler at you. I like it when they don't punish the whole classroom for the actions of just one person.

Ronald: I like my teacher because she's doing a good job, and she's teaching me. She's doing a good job helping me to get my education.

Kala: I don't know if anybody else in my class likes school! Maybe they're just bored, but my teacher, Miss Martin, I feel that with her, she's my friend. I can tell her everything, not family business, but in school if I'm having any trouble I can go to her. When I grow up I want to be a teacher just like Miss Martin.

Even Darien, who had many other problems, appeared to admire his teacher.

   It was concluded that this indicator is grounded in the traditional Black family literature. As a general rule, African American children are taught to show respect for their elders, all adults, and especially those in authority such as teachers, ministers, and the like (Billingsley, 1992; Sudarkasa, 1997).

   Peer relations. The interview data and observation notes provided evidence of diverse relationships between these students and their peers. Four

of the eight students (Tyrone, Shelly, Paula, and Ronald) indicated that they had

good relationships with their peers at school. Some examples are as follows:

Tyrone: I've got lots of friends in school, and I hang out with my brother.

Paula: Going to school is like being at my house. I've got lots of friends,
             but I don't hang out with groups.

Shelly: I look forward to coming to school, and I have some good friends in
             my class that I hang around with. Some of them are on the soccer
             team with me.

Ronald's   Ronald is a really neat student. He is respectful of adults
teacher: and gets along very well with boys and girls. Lately, I've noticed he
             shows more interest in girls, but he has many friends, including his
             brother who is a year younger than him. They share a very close
             bond with each other at school.

In contrast, Kala talked about what she thought was some jealousy on the

part of one girl in her class. It was Kala's perception that the jealousy was

caused by her mother's frequent visits to the school, and her involvement with

the staff and students. Kala said she thought the girl was upset because her

own mother was not involved at school. When Kala discussed her feelings

about her relationship with the teacher and her classmates, she made a

statement about some of the other students in the class calling her "Miss Goody

Two-Shoes." Based on Kala's comments and the references from the

observation notes, the researcher concluded that there was, perhaps,

occasional friction between Kala and her classmates, although the teacher

emphasized how Kala willingly assisted other classmates with their work, and

there were no indications of fights during her recess.

Furstenberg et al. (1999) and Hrabowski et al. (1998) addressed the issue of less successful students' exhibiting negative peer pressure toward those students who are more successful. Other writers have alluded to the adolescent-group practice of referring to academically talented students as "nerds." Thus, Kala's situation was not unusual. Several studies have investigated the influence of peer pressure on high achievers.

The other three students (Leesa, Junior, and Darien) did appear to have occasional friction with their peers, which ultimately ended in fights. It should be noted that past experience has made the researcher aware that friction is common for students in this age group. They will fight today and be friends tomorrow. Based on these considerations, it was concluded that the majority of fifth graders in this study had good relationships with their peers.

School and classroom climates. The five schools involved in the study were diverse in a number of ways. Data were obtained from the observation notes and review of school-related documents. The location of the schools, the aesthetic quality, the disciplinary climate, and the academic atmosphere of the buildings were noted. The students and parents also were asked to describe how they felt about the schools.

The researcher also reviewed annual reports, school improvement plans, newsletters, school calendars, and other documents that contained information pertaining to the school culture. The purpose of examining the schools was not to compare one school with another, but rather to identify elements that might enhance or inhibit the involvement of urban African American families in the

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school experiences of their fifth graders. All of the schools exhibited an impression of being well maintained and crafted to create a stimulating learning environment. Like the classrooms, some schools appeared to be warmer and more inviting for parents and students than others.

Three exceptions were noted that may be considered somewhat different from the themes in other schools. The first was the principal's character-education program at Leesa's school, in which the students and parents appeared to be quite involved. The second was the accelerated program at Shelly's school, which included a strong family involvement component that entails parents' working closely with teachers and students on camping trips and special projects, and sharing their employment skills with the classes. The third was the somewhat unsettled climate at Darien's school. Perhaps the reason the researcher examined the climate of this school and classroom so critically was that it was the school that both Darien and Junior attended. They were the only two students who were rated as low achievers, at risk for retention in fifth grade, and they exhibited more than the usual difficulty with school adjustment.

Studies related to the school experiences of African American students, especially boys, have indicated that their behavior and achievement levels are greatly influenced by the classroom climate and teacher expectations. Understanding that both Darien and Junior had some family ecological concerns to contend with, the researcher questioned whether their school experiences could have been enhanced by a more settled classroom and school environment. For instance, Morris (1992) stated,

Teacher expectations and perceptions have a profound influence on student outcomes. Teachers, and other school professionals, can promote enabling behaviors by providing a positive school and classroom climate, accepting students' rights to their feelings, monitoring their progress, and establishing clear expectations and boundaries. (p. 110)

Summary. Based on the evidence presented by the data, the researcher concluded that the eight students in the study were either below average or exemplary. As noted on the demographic chart (Figure 4.1), the teachers had labeled three of the students "average." However, their performance, as documented on previous records and currently rated by the teacher, was not consistent with the description of an "average" student. Perhaps further study would provide information to either support or refute the opinions of the teachers. Scholars and researchers such as Hillard (1973), Irvine (1990), and Neisser (1990) have warned against labeling students based on their performance on standardized tests or some other narrowly prescribed criteria.

All but two of the parents expressed pride and satisfaction in the progress and achievement of their fifth graders. All of them indicated general satisfaction with the school experiences of the youngsters. The students were pleased with the involvement of their families. Most of them expressed positive feelings about their families' participation and visibility in their schools. Examples of how the students perceived that their families influenced their school experiences were given earlier in the discussion.

Among other factors that influenced the students' school experiences were (a) student relationships with teachers and peers, (b) the school and classroom culture, (c) the socioeconomic culture, (d) the roles and attitudes of

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peers and siblings, and (e) the quality of teaching. All of these factors and others raise questions for future investigations, for family and educational policy, and for the practitioners and primary caregivers of African American children.

Implications. Given the analysis of the data in this study, the review of literature, and the researcher's professional and personal experiences, some questions were raised that have implications for improving the school experiences of urban African American children. These implications have relevance for families, educators, researchers, and policy makers.

It was evident from the data in this study that the eight students perceived that their school experiences were helped by the involvement of their parents. Thus, families are encouraged to find out what types of involvement will have the greatest influence on student learning and concentrate their efforts in that direction. Likewise, the literature pertaining to the school experiences of urban African American children challenges parents not only to strengthen and increase their in-school involvement, but also to devote more attention to early intervention and a home curriculum that supports school learning (Barbour & Barbour, 1997; Berger, 1994; Clark, 1983; Hale, 1994; Lomotey, 1990). Further, the analysis of this research raises questions for families relative to the influence of parenting practices and family expectations on the school experiences of urban African American children.

Implications for educators are based on the perceptions of the eight students and their families regarding other factors that influenced the school experiences of the children. Educators are challenged to (a) devise programs

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that strengthen and improve teaching quality and attitudes, (b) help to build cultural identity, (c) encourage family and community support and involvement, and (d) ensure academic and social success for students of diverse backgrounds.

The analysis also raises some questions for future research exploring ways of improving the school experiences of urban African American children. The implications are that more studies are needed that address the following topics: (a) the effects of peer pressure and alienation on learning and performance. For example, exemplary students are stereotyped as "nerds, acting white, teacher's pet"; (b) the effects of racial socialization on students' school performance and attitude; (c) the effects of school and classroom climates and student-teacher relationships regarding the school experiences of urban African American children; and (d) the patterns and themes that are present in the family relationships, homes, and interactions of students who enjoy successful school experiences.

Finally, the analysis of the findings from this study raises questions that have implications for policy makers. Among the questions pertaining to local policies that directly influence the school experiences of urban African American children are those initiatives that pertain to (a) community programs to support learning, and wholesome recreational activities that build character and foster teamwork; (b) economic opportunities for parents; and (c) family access to child health and welfare services.

Relationship of This Study to Current Research

A goal of this researcher was to add to the current literature by examining perceptions and actions regarding the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children, and how this involvement influenced the school experiences of their fifth-grade youngsters. This study was similar in design, methodology, and findings to three other studies cited in the review of literature.

1. Clark (1983) studied poor families of diverse structures and concluded that the school success of poor Black children was not the result of the structure of their family income or the educational level of their parents. Rather, their school success was determined by the total family culture.

2. Hurd et al. (1983) examined strengths of African American parents and concluded that these families used their strengths to improve their situations and to support their child-rearing efforts, as well as the education and socialization of the children.

3. Schneider and Edelman (1983) researched several important issues related to the implications of family involvement for the school experiences of their children. The oversample of African Americans and other minorities in the study contributed to the relevance of its findings for urban African American families.

The present study contributed to the literature by presenting current information relative to (a) current family ecological and demographic factors, (b) current school practices and teacher policies regarding family involvement,

(c) current characteristics of the school experiences of African American children, and (d) positive urban African American male role models and participants in the socialization and education of their children.

Reflections

First of all, returning to the declaration made at the beginning of this dissertation, the researcher concludes that the indictment that has been handed down against urban African American families, blaming their perceived limited involvement in the education of their children for the problems many of the youngsters experience in schools, is unfair. The analysis of this study challenges that notion because it is clear from the comprehensive review of the literature and the data that the school experiences of these youngsters were influenced by the traditional Black family strengths and values, current ecological factors, the family's involvement in learning both at home and at school, and what happened to the fifth graders in the school environment. This broad range of influences includes the relationships between these families and the schools, the families and the teacher and classroom, the child and the classroom environment, the child and the teacher, and the child and the family/home.

It is also evident those researchers and scholars who have accused urban African American families of not being concerned about or interested in the education of their children because many of them are not involved at a level commensurate with their Caucasian counterparts have done these families a

great injustice. Research has indicated that it is a universal truth that most families, regardless of race, class, or color, want the best for their children. In the case of urban African American families, even those with low incomes have high educational aspirations for their children. Further, empirical data have indicated that African American children from poor circumstances can succeed in school with supportive families and school professionals, and methods, materials, and activities that address the unique aspects of their culture and learning styles. It is equally clear that a wide range of cultural, ecological, economic, and social tensions influence the involvement of urban African American families in the education of their children. Although they were not focused on in this research, racism, discrimination, and classism are high on the list of factors that impede the involvement of these families in the education of their children. Likewise, the lack of cultural synchronization between these families and their children's teachers can also have an influence.

Frequently, the emphasis of research and the topic of educators' complaints is urban African American families whose children are not succeeding in and adjusting to school. As a result, scholars often have overlooked families like most of those in this present research, whose strengths, values, and ecological factors have enabled them to participate in the learning of their children, and positively influenced the school experiences of those youngsters. The understanding that current family involvement is primarily peripheral, and not authentic, points to the need for changes in the way

educators define family involvement, as well as in the frameworks that guide school-involvement initiatives.

Finally, the fact remains that the involvement of contemporary urban African American families in schools and in the school experiences of their children is a complicated issue and should not be lumped into a single category or judged from a prejudiced perspective. In addition to the family-related tensions that impinge on the involvement of these families in the education of their children, the expectations, perceptions, and actions of school professionals also have an effect. The researcher's final word is a challenge to families, educators, researchers, and policy makers to remember that numerous studies have indicated that all children do better in school when parents and schools become partners in education. What happens in the family room affects what happens in the classroom. What happens in the classroom affects what happens in the schools. What happens in the school affects what happens in the nation. Therefore, regardless of our differences, preferences, perceptions, and problems, it is important for all stakeholders to work together to improve the school experiences of our nation's children, especially those urban African American children who begin the race behind most of the other runners.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE

ON RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS (UCRIHS)

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

February 11, 2000

TO: Maenette K. BENHAM
425 Erickson Hall

FROM: David Wright, Ph.D.
The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects
246 Administration Building

RE: **Renewal of IRB # 99-119** CATEGORY:1-B,C,D,E

Most Recent Approval: March 9, 1999

TITLE: CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT--HOW DOES IT AFFECT THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF THEIR CHILDREN

Our records indicate that this project was approved on the date shown above. As you know, UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year. **DATA COLLECTION CANNOT CONTINUE IF YOUR APPROVAL HAS EXPIRED.** If you are planning to continue your study, please return the enclosed green Renewal Application Form (fill in both sides!) to our office with a copy of your most recent consent form, if applicable.

New recommendations regarding consent language by our federal regualtory agency, the Office for Protection from Research Risk, may affect your consent form(s). **Please review the enclosed information sheet and, if necessary, revise your consent form prior to submitting your renewal.**

Feel free to contact our office if you have any questions about the renewal process or the new consent recommendations. NOTE: GREEN RENEWAL FORM HAS BEEN SENT TO RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR (ADDRESSEE ABOVE).

cc: Jessie Muldrew
1325 Eldorado Drive
Flint, MI   48504

OFFICE OF
**RESEARCH
AND
GRADUATE
STUDIES**

ty Committee on
search Involving
Human Subjects

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APPENDIX B

COPIES OF LETTERS OF REQUEST

Jessie M. Muldrew
1325 Eldorado Drive
Flint, MI 48504

December 11, 1998

Dr. James Ray, Superintendent
Flint Community Schools
923 E. Kearsley Street
Flint, MI 48503

Dear Dr. Ray,

You will recall that some time ago I spoke to you about my interest in conducting dissertation research in some Flint elementary schools. At that time, I promised to follow up with a written request.

I am hereby requesting permission to use three to four Flint elementary schools in which to conduct my study, the topic of which is "Eight Urban African American Families: An Exploratory Study of Parent Involvement." The purpose of the study is to extend and update the literature related to the relationship between families and schools and the implications for the school success of the students. I have a high and long-abiding interest in how schools and families can work together more closely to ensure that students achieve maximum performance, develop positive attitudes toward school and feel good about their school experience. I am well aware that this is also a priority with Flint Community Schools. Hence, I am soliciting your support for this research project.

My study is ethnographic in nature and will involve the use of qualitative data collection methods (observations, interviews and review of documents). Participation in the study will be strictly voluntary, and confidentiality will be protected via the use of pseudonyms and generic identifiers. A small sample population of six to eight African American students representing a cross-section of the district's student body, along with their parents/guardians and teachers will be needed for the study. Anecdotal notes will be taken during the observations, and the interviews will be tape recorded in order that information will be accurately reported.

I look forward to your response with the hope that you will consent to support my research efforts.

Sincerely,

Jessie M. Muldrew
(810) 733-3000

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Jessie M. Muldrew
1325 Eldorado Drive
Flint, MI 48504

(Date)

Dear Principals,

I recently retired from my position as elementary principal in Flint Community Schools. After twenty-seven years of service in the district as a teacher and administrator, I retired to pursue my lifetime goal of earning a Ph.D. degree. As part of my fulfillment of the requirements for the degree I am conducting a research study.

I have a high and long-abiding interest in how schools and families can work together more closely to ensure that students achieve maximum performance, develop positive attitudes towards school and feel good about their school experience. I have elected to conduct this study because of a strong feeling that knowing more about family involvement and its influence on the students school experience will help schools and parents do a better job with students. The superintendent of schools has granted permission for the study.

Your school has been recommended as one which meets the criteria for selection to participate in my study. I am requesting your permission to conduct the study at_____. Should you give your consent I will need to tape record interviews of the students, parents and teachers who consent to participate in the study, make school site visitations, and review school related records such as: attendance, test scores and report cards.

All information obtained in this study will be kept confidential and at no time will your identity be disclosed. Participation is strictly voluntary and individuals may feel free to choose not to respond to any questions during the interview, ask that the tape recorder be turned off at a given time, or withdraw from the study completely with no repercussions.

If you have any questions, or would like to know more about my study prior to consenting to participate, feel free to call me at (810) 733-3000. If you agree to participate, please sign and date the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided. Additionally, my adviser, Dr. Maenette Benham will be available to assist with questions and concerns. She may be reached at Michigan State University Office by calling (517) 355-6613 or Fax (517) 353-6393.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Jessie M. Muldrew
(810) 733-3000

Jessie M. Muldrew
1325 Eldorado Drive
Flint, MI 48504

(Date)

Dear Teachers,

I recently retired from my position as elementary principal in Flint Community Schools. After twenty-seven years of service in the district as a teacher and administrator, I retired to pursue my lifetime goal of earning a Ph.D. degree. As part of my fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting a research study.

I have a high and long-abiding interest in how schools and families can work together more closely to ensure that students achieve maximum performance, develop positive attitudes toward school, and feel good about their school experience. I have elected to conduct this study because of a strong feeling that knowing more about family involvement and its influence on the student's school experience will help schools and parents do a better job with students. I have already obtained permission from the Superintendent of Schools to conduct this study.

One of your students has been recommended as one who meets the criteria for selection to participate in my study. I am requesting permission to include you in the study, which will involve observation and a review of documents. Other Flint schools are also invited to take part in the study.

The study is ethnographic in nature and will involve the use of qualitative data-collection methods (observations, interviews, and review of documents). Participation in the study will be strictly voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity will be protected via the use of pseudonyms and generic identifiers. A small sample of African American families with 5th/6th grade students representing a variety of genders, achievement levels, family structures, and parents' educational attainment levels and the teachers of these students will be needed for this study. Anecdotal notes will be taken during the observations, and interviews will be tape recorded in order that information will be accurately reported.

Should you consent, your participation requires one tape recorded interview (approximately one hour per person), preferably at the school site, but it can be arranged at an alternate location if your choose. Data collection will also necessitate in-school observations and reviews of pertinent documents such as CA60's, report cards, attendance and parent and student-led conference records.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this endeavor by completing and returning the attached consent form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Should questions or concerns arise, I am available to provide answers upon request. Additionally, Dr. Maenette Benham, my adviser, will be available to assist in responding to questions or concerns. She may be reached at her office located in Erickson Hall by calling (517) 355-6613 or fax (517) 353-6393.

I look forward to your response with the hope that you will consent to support my research efforts.

Sincerely,

Jessie M. Muldrew
(810) 733-3000

Jessie M. Muldrew
1325 Eldorado Drive
Flint, MI 48504

(Date)

Dear Parents,

I recently retired from my position as elementary principal in Flint Community Schools. After twenty-seven years of service in the district as a teacher and administrator, I retired to pursue my lifetime goal of earning a Ph.D. degree. As part of my fulfillment of the requirements for the degree I am conducting a research study in the school that your child attends.

I have a high and long-abiding interest in how schools and families can work together more closely to ensure that students achieve maximum performance, develop positive attitudes towards school and feel good about their school experience. I have elected to conduct this study because of a strong feeling that knowing more about family involvement and its influence on the students school experience will help schools and parents do a better job with students. I have already obtained permission from the Superintendent of Schools to conduct this study.

Your family has been recommended as one which meets the criteria for selection to participate in my study. I am requesting your permission to include your family among those who will take part in this study.

Should you give consent, your participation will require several interviews, preferably in your home, but it can be arranged at an alternate location if you choose. Additionally, there will be several interviews with your child. You may request that an adult is present during you're your child's interview if you so choose. In-school observations and reviews of pertinent documents (i.e., report cards, portfolios, etc.) will also be required.

All information obtained in this study will be kept confidential and at no time will your identity be disclosed. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may feel free to choose not to respond to any questions during the interview, ask that the tape recorder be turned off at a given time, or withdraw from the study completely with no repercussions.

If you have any questions, or would like to know more about my study prior to consenting to participate, feel free to call me at (810) 733-3000. If you agree to participate, please sign and date the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided. Additionally, my adviser, Dr. Maenette Benham will be available to assist with questions and concerns. She may be reached at Michigan State University Office by calling (517) 355-6613 or Fax (517) 353-6393.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Jessie M. Muldrew

APPENDIX C

COPIES OF LETTERS OF CONSENT

Superintendent's Letter of Consent

I hereby approve the dissertation research study, "Eight Urban African American Families: An Exploratory Study of Parent Involvement," to be conducted by Jessie Muldrew beginning in February of 1999.

I have received and read the letter from Jessie Muldrew dated_____, which briefly describes the purposes and procedures of the research. The letter includes her name, address, and methods of communications in case I have any questions or concerns regarding the study.

I am aware of, and understand, that all interviews and data will be held in the strictest confidence and that the identity of the schools or individuals will not be disclosed in any form during the preparation or completion of this study. I also understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that individuals may choose not to respond to any question, and/or withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Jessie Muldrew
1325 Eldorado Drive
Flint, MI 48505
(810) 733-3000

UCRIHS
David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair
Michigan State University
246 Administration Building
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Committee Chair
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Michigan State University
425 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046
(517) 355-6613
Fax: (517) 353-6393
e-mail: mbenham@pilot.msu.edu

Principals' Letter of Consent

I hereby approve the dissertation research study, "Eight Urban African American Families: An Exploratory Study of Parent Involvement," to be conducted at _____school by Jessie Muldrew beginning in March of 1999.

I have received and read the letter from Jessie Muldrew dated_____, which briefly describes the purposes and procedures of the research. The letter includes her name, address, and methods of communications in case I have any questions or concerns regarding the study.

I am aware of, and understand, that all interviews and data will be held in the strictest confidence and that the identity of the schools or individuals will not be disclosed in any form during the preparation or completion of this study. I also understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that individuals may choose not to respond to any question, and/or withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Jessie Muldrew   Committee Chair
1325 Eldorado Drive   Dr. Maenette Benham
Flint, MI 48505   Michigan State University
(810) 733-3000   425 Erickson Hall
                                                                  East Lansing, MI 48824-1046
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David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair   Fax: (517) 353-6393
Michigan State University   e-mail: mbenham@pilot.msu.edu
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Fax: (517) 432-1171
e-mail: Ucrihs@pilot.msu.edu

Teachers' Letter of Consent

I agree to participate in the study entitled "Eight Urban African American Families: An Exploratory Study of Parent Involvement."

I have received and read the letter from Jessie Muldrew dated_____, which briefly describes the purposes and procedures of the research. The letter includes her name, address and methods of communications in case I have any questions or concerns regarding the study.

I understand that my participation in this study requires me to participate by taking part in a one-hour interview, and permitting the researcher to review pertinent records and conduct school site observations.

I am aware of and understand that all interviews and data will be held in the strictest confidence and that the identity of the school or individual will not be disclosed in any form during the preparation or completion of this study. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time, I may choose to not respond to any question, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Jessie Muldrew   Committee Chair
1325 Eldorado Drive   Dr. Maenette Benham
Flint, MI 48505   Michigan State University
(810) 733-3000   425 Erickson Hall
                                                          East Lansing, MI 48824-1046
UCRIHS   (517) 355-6613
David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair   Fax: (517) 353-6393
Michigan State University   e-mail: mbenham@pilot.msu.edu
246 Administration Building
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046

Parents' Letter of Consent

I agree to participate in a study of the influence of African American parents'/ guardians' involvement, in and out of school, on the performance, attitude, and adjustment of children.

I have received and read the letter from Jessie Muldrew dated_____, which briefly describes the purposes and procedures of the research. The letter includes her name, address, and methods of communications in case I have any questions or concerns regarding the study.

I understand that my participation in this study requires me to take part in a series of interviews. I also understand that it will necessitate my child participating in interviews. I am aware that the researcher will observe my child in the school setting and review his/her school work and records. I also understand that I may request that an adult be present during the interview if I so choose.

I have been informed that all interviews and information pertaining to my child, his/her school experience, and our family will be held in strictest confidence. I have also been assured that our identities will not be disclosed in any form during the preparation and completion of this study. I further understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time, I may choose not to respond to any question, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Jessie Muldrew   Committee Chair
1325 Eldorado Drive   Dr. Maenette Benham
Flint, MI 48505   Michigan State University
(810) 733-3000   425 Erickson Hall
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Students' Letter of Consent

I agree to take part in a study about how African American family involvement, in and out of school, affects the performance, attitudes, and adjustment of their children.

I have received and read the letter from Jessie Muldrew dated_____.
The letter, which describes the purposes and procedures of the research, has been explained to me by Mrs. Muldrew or another adult (my teacher or parent). The letter includes names, addresses, and methods of communications in case I have questions or concerns about the study.

I have been assured that all of the information which I share with Mrs. Muldrew about my school experience and my family will be held in strictest confidence. I have also been assured that our names will not be used on any forms during the preparation and completion of this study. I further understand that my taking part in this study is completely voluntary and that I may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off, choose not to answer a particular question, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions or penalty.

_____   _____
Signature of Student   Date

Jessie Muldrew
1325 Eldorado Drive
Flint, MI 48505
(810) 733-3000

UCRIHS
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APPENDIX D

MATRICES

Interview Matrix (Information pertaining to the participants' perceptions)

Students	Teachers	Parents
Contact Questions Related to Research Questions		
1. Describe your family.	1. Describe child's school work ethic.	1. Describe family/kin structure.
2. Describe how you feel about school	2. Describe what you know about the family structure and child-rearing practices.	2. What is parent's educational level, current occupation?
3. Who takes care of you besides your parent(s)?	3. What is student's relationship with parent?	3. How close do you live to extended family? How involved are they in child-rearing?
4. What lessons do your parents teach you about respect, spirituality, family, etc.?		
Research Question #1		
1. What stories do your parents tell you about their school experiences?	1. Describe the student's performance and attitude toward school.	1. Explain how you recall your parents'/guardians' involvement with your school?
2. What do they expect of you at school?	2. Discuss your relationship with parents/guardians.	2. Describe how your parents' school involvement compares to your own.
3. In what ways do you see your parents involved at school?	3. What expectations do you feel the parents/guardians have for the child's school experience?	3. Discuss what, if any, meaning you feel family involvement has for the child's school work, attitude, and adjustment.
4. Who else in your family is involved in your school? What do they do?	4. In what ways do parents involve themselves in the classroom, school, and community?	4. What are some stories of barriers that you have confronted to school involvement?
5. How do your parents encourage you in school?	5. Describe how you perceive the parents' role in the child's school experience.	5. Describe how/what you do in your child's class and school.
6. How do you get along with the students in your class?	6. Discuss the in-school involvement, or lack of, for this student's family.	6. What more would you like to do?
7. What do you like most/least about your school?	7. Describe your relationship with the student.	7. Describe your participation at school-related activities.
	8. Describe the student's relationship with peers.	8. Explain how you view the family's role in the child's school experience.
		9. Discuss your perception of the opportunities for family involvement at your child's school.

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Students	Teachers	Parents
Research Question #2		
1. Describe what you do after school.	1. Discuss your perception of how the student feels about home as a learning environment. Give examples.	1. Describe the family's after-school routines and activities.
2. Describe what you do on weekends.	2. In what ways have you observed the parents structuring their time to support school learning?	2. Explain your feelings about homework and home support for school learning.
3. Describe what your parents do to help you in school.	3. What activities do parents engage in that enrich learning?	3. How do you structure your family/house time to support your child's learning?
4. What lessons do your parents teach you about school?		
5. Is there anything more you would like your parents to do to help you with school?		
Research Question #3		
1. Describe what your parents do when they come to your school.	1. Describe how you feel about the parent's involvement and how it affects student performance. Give examples.	1. How do you think your child perceives your school involvement?
2. How do you feel when they come to your school?	2. What recommendations do you have for increasing parent involvement in education?	2. How do you think your child perceives your involvement in learning outside of school?
3. Why do you think your parents are involved, or not, at school? How does this make you feel?		3. In what ways do you think your involvement helps or hinders your child?
4. What do you think your teachers think about your parents' involvement in school?		4. How do you feel about your child's school experience?
5. In what ways do you feel your parents' involvement helps you or hinders you in school?		5. What, if any, improvements would you like to see made at your child's school?
6. Where would you like to be after high school? Why?		

Students	Teachers	Parents
Research Question #4		
1. In what ways would you like your parents to participate at your school? Why?	1. In what ways can teachers encourage parent involvement?	1. How do you think parents can become more involved?
		2. In what specific ways do you see them becoming more involved?

Note: Each interview concluded with this question: Is there anything more you would like to share with me about your family and the school?

Observations	Review of Documents
Research Question 1	
Parents: Evidence of involvement, participation, visitation	Parents: Involvement/participation records (volunteer sign-in logs, record of attendance at open house, parent-teacher/student-led conferences, attendance sheet from School Improvement Team (SIT), and Community Council meetings. Teacher records of parent participation.
Research Question 2	
Students: (at school) class participation, readiness for assigned tasks, use of time, quality of efforts, etc. Parents: (at home) family structure, home environment, parenting styles, types and socialization practices.	Students: (at school) portfolios or daily work folders, homework, attendance, current grades, citizenship, test scores, etc. Parents: (at home) family activities, routines, rules, home atmosphere, tools for learning.
Research Question 3	
Students: respect for school rules and authority, relationship to peers and adults in the school environment. Parents: attitude toward school, evidence of mind set.	Students: evidence of appreciation for school. Teachers: comments on report cards, notes to parents, etc. Parents: evidence of future plans to change or not (i.e., notes to teachers).
Research Question 4	
Does not apply.	Does not apply.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Teachers' Interview Protocol
(Information pertaining to participants' perceptions)

Research Question #1

1. Describe the student's performance and attitude toward school.

2. Discuss your relationship with parents/guardians.

3. What expectations do you feel the parents/guardians have for this child's school experience?

4. Describe the overall parent involvement picture for your classroom.

5. Do you perceive a difference in African American parent involvement and that of other groups?

6. Describe how you see that evolvement of African American parent involvement in recent years.

Research Question #2

1. How do you perceive the family's school support for this student's learning?

2. Describe how you perceive the student's relationship with his/her parents/guardians.

3. Discuss how you perceive that the student feels about the home as a learning environment.

4. Describe how you encourage, or not, parent involvement.

Research Question #3

1. Describe how you perceive the parent's role in the child's school experience.

2. Discuss the in-school involvement, or lack of, for this student's family.

3. Describe how you feel the above affects the student's work and attitude.

Research Question #4

1. Describe what you perceive as some implications of the family's involvement, or lack of same.

2. Describe how you see future parent involvement in public education.

Parents' Interview Protocol
(Information pertaining to participants' perceptions)

Research Question #1

1. Explain how you recall your parents'/guardian's involvement with your school.

2. Describe your parents' involvement with your school.

3. Describe how your parents' school involvement compares to your own.

4. Discuss what, if any, meaning you feel family involvement has for the child's school work, attitude, and adjustment.

Research Question #2

1. Describe the family's after-school routines and activities.

2. Explain your feelings about homework and home support for school learning.

3. Describe the learning games and/or tools you have in the home to encourage cognitive growth.

Research Question #3

1. Describe your participation in school-related activities.

2. Explain how you view the family's role in the child's school experience.

3. Discuss your perception of the opportunities for family involvement at your child's school.

4. Describe what you feel are some benefits/barriers to parent involvement.

Research Question #4

1. Explain what you feel your involvement, or lack of, means to your child's school work and attitude.

2. How do you see your child performing in school four years from now?

Students' Interview Protocol
(Information pertaining to participants' perceptions)

Research Question #1

1. Describe how you feel about going to school.

2. Explain how you think you are doing in school.

3. Tell me what you think your parents expect of you at school.

4. Do you think school is important?

Research Question #2

1. Describe your family and include all members of the household.

2. Discuss the after-school and home activities with your family.

3. Explain your relationship to parents and other family members.

4. What happens at home when you have homework assignments?

5. What things do your parents do in your home to help you with learning after school?

Research Question #3

1. Describe your parents'/guardian's participation at school.

2. Explain how you feel about their involvement, or lack of, at school.

3. Do you feel that parent involvement has meaning, or not, for your work, attitudes and behavior?

4. Do you feel your parents are more or less involved than other parents; how can you tell?

Research Question #4

1. Describe how you see yourself in the future (five years from now).

2. If you have children, will you be involved in their school?

3. What would you like to be when you grow up?

Observation Protocol: In School

Student's Number:_____Age:_____

School:_____

Grade Level of Student:_____Sex: M   F

Number of Years in this School:_____

School Demographics:

    Number of Students: _____

    Number of Administrators: _____

    Number of Teachers: _____

Description of School Environment:

Description of Classroom Environment: (How students organize desks, lockers, etc.)

Description of Student: (Work ethics, relations with other kids and teachers)

Review-of-Documents Protocol

Report Cards & Portfolios:

Grades   Attendance   Citizenship

CA60's:

MEAP Scores   MAT Scores   Grades

Attendance   # of Schools Attended

Parent/Student-Led Conferences:

Other Notations:

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