RETHINKING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF SINGLE AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS

By

Tracey L. Jones

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Special Education-Doctor of Philosophy

2016

ABSTRACT

RETHINKING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF SINGLE AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS

By

Tracey L. Jones

Federal law stresses shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement. Yet, there is minimal regulation regarding what parental engagement programs must actually look like. As a result many school districts fail to consider nontraditional constructs of parental engagement that honor the available cultural capital, human capital, and social capital of families with divergent structures. Marginalized parents are often described as apathetic, unresponsive and uncaring about their children's education. Female-headed households, in particular, have been linked with poverty, limited English proficiency, decreased supervision, and low educational attainment.

While research has established the benefits of parental engagement fewer studies have focused on how single parent families perceive their role in shaping their children's education. This phenomenological study uses in-depth interviews to explore the phenomena of parental engagement from the perspective of 10 single African American mothers of elementary school age children with or without disabilities. Findings suggest that regardless of education, wealth, and or cultural background parents have an innate desire to help their children succeed academically. Parents' practices around parental engagement were analogous to Epstein's framework for six types of engagement that include 1) parenting 2) communicating 3) volunteering 4) learning at home 5) decision making 6) collaborating with the school community. However, practices were distinguished by the parent's ability to use capitals acquired through socialization rather than through formal learning. This study adds to strengths

based narratives that support setting policy and practice that move away from the one-size fit all model of parental engagement.

For Joseph, Joshua, Jeremy

Thank you for giving me the courage to succeed, and believing in me when I doubted myself. Your words of encouragement, unwavering support, and enduring understanding have allowed me to grow both personally and professionally. For, it is your love that has allowed me to realize this goal.

Love Always,
Tracey

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This researcher would like to thank all of the people that have traveled with me from beginning to end during this long journey.

To Dr. G. for being a mentor, friend, and supporter who inspired me to take this road. I hope that you are watching from above.

To Dr. Troy Mariage and Dr. Susan Peters for making this experience one of the most memorable journeys I will ever take. Your support, friendship, and tireless energy are a true inspiration. Thank you for never losing faith in me.

To my parents, Don and Gwen, for helping me to become the person I am today. Your positive examples have been a guiding principle in my life.

To my moms, Patricia and Ailean, for accepting me as your child, surrounding me with love when I needed it most, and watching over me over the years. Your kind deeds and unshakable faith have been worth more than you will ever know.

Finally to my committee members, Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews, Dr. Calabrese Barton, Dr. Summer Ferrari, and Dr. Sonya Gunnings-Moton for choosing to use their time and energy to actively participate in my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Parental engagement (PE) provisions as prescribed by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) stress shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement. These provisions include the development of local parental engagement plans that are intended to address local needs and improve parent's ability to affect their own children's educational outcomes. Central to NCLB is the notion that when parents are meaningfully involved children do better in school. Parents of students receiving Title I services are required by law to be involved in the development of district and school policies. Local school districts and schools are encouraged to engage in conversations that aid in developing policies and practices that support and facilitate community specific parental engagement.

Parental engagement policies include a number of actions and processes. Epstein (2009, 2011) developed six levels of parental engagement that are often used as a framework to develop parental engagement strategies at the local level. The levels include 1) basic parenting obligations 2) school-parent communications 3) parental engagement in school volunteering 4) parental engagement in school decision making 5) parental engagement in home-based learning, and 6) parental engagement in school community collaborations. In an effort to involve all families, effective parental engagement programs attempt to provide activities that address each of these levels, as growing data supports a positive correlation between parental engagement and the rate of educational attainment regardless of ethnic or socioeconomic background (Epstein, 2009, 2011).

Based on mounting evidence, researchers and reformers alike, have exalted parental engagement as a remedy to the academic ills associated with students at –risk for nearly twenty

years. Yet teachers and principals often describe low income or ethnic minority parents as being unresponsive, uncooperative, and uncaring about their children's education (Lynn, et. al. 2010; Wilkerson & Kim, 2010; Sturges, 2005). These stereotypic perceptions may lead to fewer meaningful parent- school interactions, and thwart efforts to create parental engagement programs that support mutual respect (Christianakis, 2011, Harry, 2008).

Although parental engagement programs are mandated there is minimal regulation regarding what the programs must actually look like. Hence, traditionally marginalized families may still be subject to peripheral participation in family engagement programs. Ultimately this lack of attention to differentiation among families may tacitly support school failure (Munn-Joseph, 2008; Bryk &Schneider, 2004).

For example, over the last two decades there has been a decline in two-parent families across all racial and ethnic groups in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002, 2014). Urban children, in particular, often live in single parent headed households that are disproportionately affected by growing poverty in the United States.

Likewise, dominant discourses link single parent families with poverty, limited English proficiency, decreased supervision, and low educational attainment (McLanahan, 2010). While low educational attainment has traditionally been associated with cultural and cognitive deficits among minorities, recent research identifies income related factors as one of the main influences. The current educational reform legislation neglects to consider the implications of demanding parental engagement from families that may not be positioned to " *meaningfully participate"* (Jenson, 2013). Coleman (1991) states, "The effective functioning of schools has depended on the effective functioning of the family and community. What makes some ghetto schools

function poorly is that the communities and families they serve are weak, lacking the social capital that would reinforce the school's goals" (pp.13, 22).

Developing an understanding of how inner city single parents perceive parental engagement is vital to understanding the complexity of requiring all parents to participate in the business of schooling (Kozol, 2005).

Pilot Study

Numerous studies have supported the theory that constrained choices may act as a barrier to education for urban students (e.g., Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Bourdieu, 1998; Wilson, 1996; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbush, 1995). Yet the literature to support the idea that urban students can achieve against the odds is comparatively limited (Ream & Palardy, 2008; Milne & Plourde, 2006; Meier, 2004; Peacock, 2002; Snowman & Biehler, 2000, Lezotte, 1992). Coleman (1988) found that immigrant Asian mothers with limited education were able to increase their children's academic success by investing in quality study time with them. Ream and Palardy (2008) found a positive association between Parents Help Student, a construct of parental social capital in which parent-child conversations surrounding what their child does in school and what their child is studying produced positive educational outcomes regardless of social class.

These seminal studies motivated me to conduct an exploratory pilot study to examine the effects of social factors on mother-child relationships that exist in urban settings, and to discover how the mother-child relationship (availability of psychological capital) contributes to the child's academic success in an urban context. One mother from a mother-only household, whose child attended an urban public school (Bentler Academy) situated in the heart of a small transient community located in Northwest Detroit, was selected for a series of in-depth interviews. The

mother was an unmarried female parent with no live in male/female companions, and at least one child between 8 and 11 years old. The child had been enrolled at the third grade level during the 2007-08 school year, and had attended Bentler Academy during the previous school year as well. Using information gathered through the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and the Harvard Family Research Project, a semi-structured question format was used to conduct four interviews with each lasting one to one and a half hours in length.

The interviews took take place over the month following the 2007-2008 school-year. Data gathered through the interviews expounded on the mother's perceptions around social constraints and how or whether these constraints affected her parenting practices in relation to her children's educational expectations (e.g. Does your present employment situation allow you to spend quality time with your child, i.e. completing homework?) Questions also focused on life events that contributed to or detracted from the family's overall well-being or psychological capital (e.g. What other dependable adults help to care for your child when you are not available?).s Life events were defined in terms of disruption in employment, death, illness, social supports, psychological resources and or support networks. Findings indicated that available forms of psychological capital were mediated by the mother's decreased social capital and human capital. Thus, this study raises another pertinent question: If federal laws demand shared accountability between parents and schools, how can strong responsive family school relationships be fostered in the current context of changing family structure and economic challenge?

Statement of the Problem

I have been an educator in an urban setting for over twenty years servicing students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. In that time I have had the opportunity to observe the phenomena of parental engagement through the lens of teacher, researcher, child study coordinator, strategic planning facilitator, and parent. Hence, my numerous roles in education have made me privy to several changes in the population that I service: 1) decreased numbers of students being raised in two parent families; 2) increased numbers of students with chronic behavioral and or academic problems, in the absence of Individual Educational Plans (IEP's); 3) increased numbers of students taking prescribed medication with and without IEP's; 4) increased numbers of students dependent upon free and reduced lunch; 5) decreased numbers of parents attending scheduled parent teacher conferences; and 6) increased numbers of students with chronic absenteeism. In brief, there appears to be a need for educational communities servicing students at risk for failure to mediate the effects of poverty and to empower divergent families by broadening the context of family- school relationships

Purpose of the Study

Current educational policy institutionalizes the utility of parental engagement in effecting individual student achievement. Yet despite mounting research, parental engagement has not been shown to be successful in counteracting minority group failure, raising educational standards and improving general outcomes for all (Wilkerson, 2010; Abdul-Adil, 2006; Gonzales –DeHass, 2003; Bourdieu, 1998; Wilson, 1996; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbush, 1995). These outward signs of inequity in education are often thought to be the result of parental apathy, especially among ethnic and/or divergent families. However, most of the literature that supports the benefits of parental engagement is based on the lived experiences of middle and upper class

families with little attention being given to the struggles of families with divergent structures and or families with low socioeconomic status (SES). In order to understand the effects of single parenting and/or limited resources it is important to give a voice to parents who are marginalized by current parental engagement constructs. What is desperately needed is a phenomenological study that more fully understands the construct of parent engagement from the perspective of minority, low income, single-parents.

Parents' perceptions will be examined to illuminate any local policies and practices that fail to support a reciprocal relationship between all families and schools; insights gained from parents will also shed light on ways to develop nontraditional constructs of parental engagement that honor single mothers' available cultural capital, human capital, and social capital; in addition to gaining a better understanding of the perceived or actual paucity of parent participation.

Research Questions

In order to explore this phenomenon this case study will address the following questions:

1. What are African American single urban mothers' perceptions and practices surrounding their role in their children's education in and out of school?
2. What are African American single urban mothers' practices and or perceptions about interacting with schools?
3. What factors do African American single urban mothers' identify as the most significant obstacles mediating their parental engagement?
4. What are the resources or hidden strengths that are available to African American single urban mothers that may not be apparent to schools yet affect student outcomes?

Rationale for Qualitative Methods

The purpose of qualitative research is to gain understanding of a given topic from the perspective of the local population. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to extract complex textual descriptions of a particular phenomenon. The researcher uses these thick descriptions to paint a complex picture of a human problem. Thus by using qualitative methodology the researcher will be afforded an opportunity to delve into the phenomena of parental engagement from the perspective of the urban parent, giving life to voices that have been silenced in the literature and bringing marginalized families to the forefront of the discussion on educational policies and practices.

Significance of the Study

Why is this research important to American society? It has been a consensus among many critics that education is a means to do away with poverty. Education that began as a "public good" to ensure an intellectual society that could participate in government is gradually shifting to a "private good" that will help individuals secure employment in a competitive global market (Labaree, 1997). However, public school systems often fail to educate students from the most impoverished communities (Lynn, 2010, Darling-Hammond, 2008, 2009). There is a need for urban districts to understand parent's perceptions around parental engagement in order to connect with families in meaningful ways that effectively address the pursuit of educational and social equity.

Historically, meritocratic ideals have driven American life, supported market capitalism and a burgeoning middle class. Yet, modernization and cultural changes have left Americans scrambling to redefine their role in society. Many sociologists believe that this shifting balance between socioeconomic modernization and tradition has the ability to shape human values and to

determine how these values affect political institutions. This human development sequence can polarize a society and create an increased emphasis on survival values or broaden humanistic values that tend to nurture social justice perspectives (Inglehart, 2005). Research that supports a context of social justice is vital to maintaining American values.

Public education in its purest form was created to ensure an educated citizenry that would be better equipped to participate in democracy. Early reformers envisioned a united society with limited crime and poverty as public schools systems would meet the challenge of educating students from the most impoverished communities, and as Horace Mann (1957) stated "*equalize the conditions of men"*. Unemployment rates that exceed the national average have devastated many urban communities causing large urban districts to consistently lose students to suburban and charter schools. Accordingly, state aid has also continued to decline due to decreased enrollment, meaning that there is less funding to deal with populations that tend to need more rather than fewer services (St. John, 2005). Thus, in order to meet the rigorous standards of NCLB there is a need for urban districts to maximize resources, and develop parallel accountability reforms that address the specific needs of the populations they service.

Assumptions

It is assumed that all families regardless of socioeconomic status possess valuable capitals (social capital, cultural capital, and human capital), and that all parents want educational and socioeconomic success for their children. It is also assumed that schools currently operate under an educational system that serves to recreate social inequalities; devaluing the capitals and capabilities of divergent families and mandating parental engagement without attention to the ability of all families to meaningful participate in the actions and processes that currently define parental engagement.

Conceptual Framework

> We have a strong tendency to affirm that what is different from us is inferior. We start from the belief that our way of being is not only good but better than that of others who are different from us. This is intolerance. It is the irresistible preference to reject differences. The dominant class, then, because it has the power to distinguish itself from the dominated class, first, rejects the differences between them but, second, does not pretend to be equal to those who are different; third, it does not intend that those who are different shall be equal. What it wants is to maintain the differences and keep its distance and to recognize and emphasize in practice the inferiority of those who are dominated.
>
> Freire, 1998

This is a phenomenological qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research has several unique aspects that lend it to studying the phenomena of parental engagement. Qualitative research allows the investigator to understand the feelings, values, and perceptions that underlie and influence the behavior(s) of the respondents. This is accomplished through careful observing, recording, and interpreting of both verbal and non-verbal communications. Participants can be

more actively engaged than is normally found in quantitative research methods. In addition, the result of qualitative research is descriptive as opposed to dogmatic. Husserl, often regarded as "the fountainhead" of phenomenology in the twentieth century, rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable. He argued that people can be certain about how things appear in or present themselves to their consciousness. To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness (Fouche, 1993 as cited in Groenewald, 2004; Eagleton, 1983).

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the phenomena of parental engagement from the perspective of 10 African American single mothers who had at least one school age child between 4 and 11 years old with or without disabilities. The primary data source in this phenomenological study of parent engagement was an extensive interview of each of the 10 parents. Interviews generally lasted in excess of 1 hour. A phenomenological data analysis was used to make meaning of the transcript data. The data was transcribed in whole highlighting sentences and or quotes that embody an understanding of how participants experience the phenomena. Clusters of meaning were developed into themes from identified significant statements. Textual and structural descriptions provide context and illuminate participant's common experiences.

This allows the researcher the flexibility to describe variations within and across groups, obtaining culturally specific information that is inclusive of the gatekeepers' perspectives, as well as the social context of the target population. These in-depth interviews are effective for obtaining abstract factors such as social norms, socioeconomic status, and belief systems, in

addition to illuminating the complexity and, often, counterintuitive nature of the *human* side of an issue (Glesne, 2011; Creswell, 2009, 2007; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in this study

Cultural capital- The properties that are transferred from one individual to another through time, tradition and socialization. Socialization being the process by which usually family passes on the attitudes, values, and social norms considered appropriate or desirable within a particular culture. Cultural capital also identifies a resource capital that may be transmitted from one generation to the next that can take on three forms or states: 1) the embodied state or competence (incorporated in the mind and body), 2) the institutionalized state or credentialing (educational qualifications), and 3) the objectified state or cultural goods (personal artifacts or objects that can be used or consumed); (Bourdieu,1986)

Divergent family- Any family configuration that does not include two biological parents and a biological child/children; a diverse family (Moen & Forest, 2013, p634, p637).

Parental Engagement – Participation in any of the following levels of actions and or policies: 1) basic parenting obligations 2) school-parent communications 3) parental engagement in school volunteering 4) parental engagement in school decision making 5) parental engagement in home-based learning, and 6) parental engagement in school community collaborations (Epstein, 1992).

Generational poverty- A person or persons living in poverty for at least two generations and or persistently poor beginning in childhood carrying over into adulthood (Payne, 2005)

Human capital- The education or schooling that is obtained as an investment good. The acquisition of education is a personal investment made by the individual to facilitate higher productivity or earning potential, higher wages (Becker, 1964)

Intergenerational poverty-Individual or family that experiences chronic poverty (Payne, 2005)

Single mother headed household- A household headed by an unmarried female parent with no live in male/female companions, and at least one child of elementary school age.

Situational poverty- A lacks of resources due to a particular event (ie. divorce, death, chronic illness (Payne, 2005).

Social capital- The relationships formed inside and outside the family that facilitate access to the elements of mainstream culture. Social capital comes into being as a result of relationships with persons that facilitate action. Family relationships can be a vehicle for the creation of human and social capital, a resource to achieve goals and interests (Coleman, 1988)

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this dissertation will be organized into five chapters.

Chapter II presents a review of literature regarding current parental engagement standards framed against the history of women and civic engagement and the return to a middle and upper class educational agenda. The review will also explore structural inequalities, educational equity, and the disparity between mandates and current practice.

Chapter III provides a detailed description of the methods used for collecting and analyzing the data for this study.

Chapter IV presents a description of the context and a demographical sketch of the respondents.

Chapter V presents an analysis of the practices and beliefs of single urban African American mothers surrounding parental engagement in and out of school.

The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for current practice and future research in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of related literature is divided into five areas: (1) literature discussing the history of women in educational activism; (2) parent engagement as a resource for student success; (3) parent engagement as a reflection of educational equity and accountability; (4) impact of capital on parental engagement and student success among urban divergent families; and (5) parental engagement in the context of the new family.

A brief review of the rise of women's clubs to address issues of educational equity in the context of women's education and race will be reviewed as a means of examining the historical maternal role in family school collaborations. Parental engagement as a resource will be addressed as a means of illuminating current educational reform efforts intended to address shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement. Literature addressing equity and accountability will focus on structural inequalities that may impact parental engagement programs in addition to exploring materials associated with issues of culture and class that will consider barriers and obstacles that may influence the degree of parent participation in traditional forms of parental engagement activities.

The History of Women and Educational Activism in Black and White

The true aim of female education should be, not a development of one or two, but all the faculties of the human soul, because no perfect womanhood is developed by imperfect culture.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, 1859

The Antebellum Period in U.S. History is marked by the emergence of the "cult of true womanhood" which had a dramatic impact on women's education, shaping upper and middle class white women into "ideal women" for marriage and motherhood and transforming black women into agents of change. During the 1830's educated black women in the North formed educational, civic, and religious organizations to promulgate the black philosophy of "race uplift". Education in the black community was for the betterment of the entire race. Every educated black person was morally obligated to challenge the economical, educational, and social conditions of free as well as enslaved blacks (Perkins, 1983).

In 1895, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, editor for the Women's Era the first newspaper published by and for black women, issued a call for a national meeting of Colored Women to take place in Boston, Massachusetts. Following this initial meeting, Pierre, organizer of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, merged with the National League of Colored Women to form the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Inc. (NACWC), in July 1896. Activist and educator Mary Church Terrell became the organization's first president. This merger enabled the NACWC to function as a national umbrella group for local and regional Black women's organizations (Perkins, 1983; Woyshner, 2009; Retrieved October 19, 2010 from http://www.nacwc.org).

The NACWC adopted the motto of "Lifting as We Climb," promoting self-help among women and social responsibility. During the early years of the organization, the largely educated and middle-class constituency supported temperance, positive images of women through moral purity, and women's suffrage often incorporating the word ladies in their titles to dispel the stereotype of black women as immoral. The NACWC saw their organization in terms of gender and race; viewing their women's movement as a way to uplift the black family. For example, the

NACWC saw the struggle for suffrage as the right to vote not just for women, but also for black men still disenfranchised through the political maneuverings of mainstream society (Perkins, 1983; Woyshner, 2009; Retrieved October 19, 2010 from http://www.nacwc.org).

The late nineteenth century also brought major social and economical advances that would thrust married middle and upper class white women into the political spotlight. Technology had created leisure time for upper and middle class white mothers moving them from home and school into the community. The women's club movement believed in the power of women to change the moral, religious, and social welfare of women and children. The resulting maternalistic politics would eventually unite mothers of differing races around core democratic ideals such as the belief in public education, volunteerism, civic engagement, and the responsibility of parents to play a role in shaping schools and school curriculum.

In 1897, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, of the NACWC, addressed the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) to make a public appeal to unite all mothers in the quest for educational equity. Considered to be a non-threatening entity of a black faction Harper's speech was well received by her elite white contemporaries:

> I do not ask any special favor for the colored mother… But I do ask you to give what we cannot touch with our hands, the ideal things that cannot be measured with a line nor weighed in a balance… Trample, if you will, on our bodies, but do not crush out self-respect from our souls. If you want us to act as women, treat us as women.

The NCM's stance at that time was to be open to all mankind and to all womankind, regardless of race, color or condition. Yet, just one year earlier the U.S. Supreme Court had upheld the constitutionality of state laws requiring racial segregation under the doctrine of "separate but equal". This landmark decision in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* would prove to have

devastating consequences for what could have paved the way to true educational equity. By the 1920's, any local organization that was affiliated with a segregated school was denied membership by the white Parent- Teacher Association (PTA). The racist policies of local, state, and federal government were beginning to overshadow the racially inclusive policies of NCM-PTA., in many ways solidifying the contrasting educational ideologies among black and white women that existed at the beginning of the century and perhaps continue to pervade school reform policies even today (Woyshner, 2009; King, 2006; Perkins, 1983).

In general, women used educational activism to wield moral influence over their own and other people's children. However, black women, unlike their white counterparts, were also faced with the reality of needing to protect their children from institutional racism. Segregated PTA's with parallel school reforms became the norm until 1970 when the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT) disbanded after a long and bitter struggle to abolish the Jim Crow laws of the American South. Organizations like the NACWC and the NCCPT, which had been founded to address specific social issues that plagued the Black community sought to improve the socioeconomic condition of the race by pushing a middle class agenda. For over two hundred years mothers have believed that their own education as well as the education of their families is the gateway to a better life (Woyshner, 2009; King, 2006; Perkins, 1983).

Parent Engagement as a Resource for Student Success

Thus the accent of the family school relationship has been historically shaped by the perspectives of middle and upper class Americans both black and white. Accordingly, the educational policies of today have not moved away from their roots mandating one-size fit all parental engagement model(s), ignoring the fact that divorce and unwed mothers have become

very commonplace. Claims that parental engagement increases the likelihood of student success do not go unfounded, as vast research exists to legitimate these assertions.

O'Sullivan et al. (2014) explored the relationship between parents' methods of assistance and student's mathematical achievement. It was determined that even when parents of low-socioeconomic status could not provide direct or autonomy support for mathematical homework that parental provision of structure had a positive effect on students' grades. This finding has implications for improving parental efficacy for parents of low-SES, which has been positively linked with parents supporting homework practice. Hence parents with limited resources can have an impact on achievement through establishing high expectations

Fan (2001) investigated several hypotheses, one being the effects of parental engagement on the academic growth of high school students. The data revealed a positive correlation between parent's educational aspiration(s) for their children, and the rate of educational attainment during the four- year period regardless of ethnic or socioeconomic background. Perhaps one of the most compelling studies in this area is the work of Henderson and Berla (1994) in which they reviewed 66 studies of parental engagement concluding that "regardless of income, education level or cultural background, all families can –and do contribute to their children's success. Schools that have engaged parents benefit from increased support from families, fewer special education placements, higher graduation rates, improved teacher morale, and improved collaboration across the schools' communities (p.1, p.14).

Rapp & Duncan (2011) also identified parental engagement as a key factor in student success with cultural differences being mediated by the school principal's ability to create a parent-friendly environment. When families' opinions and beliefs were valued a viable community of practice positively influenced student outcomes. Recommendations were made to

employ paternal and maternal engagement strategies based on historical knowledge of parents' experiences and on-going feedback. This highlights cultural reciprocity as a key factor in developing a positive learning environment.

Pasek & Burchinal (2006) examined the effects of sensitive and responsive care-giving over time in relation to language and academic outcomes for children aged six months to six years. Findings showed that children who received parenting that was increasingly stimulating and responsive over time showed higher levels of expressive language and academic achievement (Nurmi & Aunola, 2005; Hart & Risley, 2002).

Hypothesizing that positive home environments can impact student success, Kyle (2011) conducted a follow-up study of families with low SES to determine if family engagement had had an impact on the academic development of children participating in a statewide reform. Families were originally tracked from 1996 to 2000. Feelings at the time were that parents possessed expert knowledge that would best inform educational practices. Feedback from the original family interviews was used to help develop strengths based instructional practices and to gain knowledge around ways to meaningfully engage parents. Findings from the follow-up interviews determined that 86% of the students had reached or surpassed the parents' goals of completing high school.

Steinburg et. al. (1992) studied 6,400 high school students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, establishing parent practices as a preeminent dynamic of student performance. In this study parental engagement was operationally defined as 1) helping with student's homework; 2) attending school programs; 3) watching the student's in extracurricular activities; 4) helping to select courses; and 5) remaining informed of student's academic progress. Improvements in student performance were measured by examining student's grade

point averages in four core subject areas (math, English, social studies, and science) over a period of four years in culmination with other propitious effects such as increased effort, concentration, and attention span.

Beauregard, Petrakos, & Dupont (2014) examined the parenting practices of families immigrating to Quebec, Canada (Latin-American, Maghrebi/Northwest African, and Central African) Constructs of parental engagement emerged that were consistent with findings in the United States that included parent-school communications, engagement in homework, participation in decision making and advocacy. While culture and parent experiences may have influenced the meanings behind parents' actions and practices, findings acknowledged parents' desire to influence student outcomes. Egbert (2013) believes that expectations for success can be traced to the mindset of a child. Parents that promote a growth mindset foster the tools necessary to respond to challenging situations

Irrespective of differences in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background, Mapp (2004) also found that parents expressed an innate desire to help their children succeed academically. Nieto (1999) maintains that high expectations can be a leading criteria for improving overall academic achievement, which may contribute to the likelihood of success in a climate of high-stakes reform. Coleman (1988) found that immigrant Asian mothers with limited education were able to increase their children's academic success by investing in quality study time with them.

Miano (2011) found similar effects when conducting an ethnographic study of Mexican immigrant mothers who utilized family literacy networks to support and shape student outcomes. Literacy and service exchanges were made in order to reinforce learning in school and at home even when mothers possessed varying levels of formal education. Mothers served as role models

and mentors to their children by attending bilingual courses to improve parent efficacy, in addition to demonstrative acts of advocacy, such as participation in community protests.

Accordingly, Coleman (1998) and Bourdieu (1998,1973) believe that family background is one of the strongest predictors for student success, as values and behaviors are both mediated and replicated by the choices made available to families within society's organization. Coleman and Bourdieu also believe that educational success is related to the quality of the relationships developed inside and outside of the home, recognizing the limitations associated with certain demographic characteristics. This line of thought brings into question the extent to which family socioeconomic status can mediate the impact of parent participation on student performance. Research in this area has focused on the influence of family processes and family interactions with schools in relationship to student achievement. In a study by Lee and Bowen (2006) students not living in poverty and students whose parents had more educational attainment also had increased academic achievement, and while parental engagement has been shown to be positively related to academic success it may also be attenuated by inequalities in the opportunities available to parents across demographic groups. The findings of Magnuson and McGroder (2002) who conducted the Welfare to Work study of welfare mothers with young children, in three cities, suggest a causal relationship between maternal education and employment, and school readiness.

William H. Jeynes (2005) conducted a meta-analysis on parental engagement and student achievement that drew from 77 studies, comprising of over 300,000 students from elementary and secondary schools. Two facets of parental engagement emerged in the findings as having the greatest impact on student achievement. One being activities such as reading and communicating with one's child which has been shown to promote language skills and the second being parental

style and expectations. Both require a large investment of time from the parent, but collectively had a greater impact than more demonstrative activities such as attending parent-teacher conferences..

Chubb and Moe (1990) examined the relationship between school performance and parents with limited education. Mothers with children in low performance schools on average had about a year and a half less education than mothers with children in high performance schools. Consequently mothers with children in top performing schools were two and a half times more likely to have a four-year degree. In both situations mothers are the main monitors of schoolwork. However, in high performing schools the mother's expectation for students to attend college is higher than mother's with students in low performing schools. Attending college is an educational goal or choice that is often passed on from generation to generation. Research suggests that families from low performing schools have fewer cumulative educational experiences making them less likely to directly encourage their children to learn and or to participate in traditional parental engagement activities. (Hart & Risley, 2002; Bourdieu, 1998).

Yet, most of the available research that supports the benefit of parental engagement implicitly assumes a typically middle class single model of family with two parents and a full time mother. This illustration of family has several problems that deserve careful consideration. For example, the current economic challenges being faced by many American families are often met through maternal employment, taking the mother out of the home and school environment which can reduce opportunities for providing parental supervision, academic support, and or volunteerism. Likewise, the one size family model pays little attention to family differences in social, cultural and economic capitals that may translate into advantage or disadvantage in school settings (Bourdieu, 1998). Current educational reform efforts view parental engagement as a

symbolic form of capital that is intended to serve as an extension of the curriculum. In doing so, the home becomes an open replica of the classroom, jeopardizing the ideology of cultural pluralism, and the simplicity of "quality" family time.

Are reformers advocating for shared or shifted accountability since certain expressions of parental engagement demand that the parent become the teacher. This line of thinking often gives absolution to underperforming schools and often overlooks the professional status of educators by presuming that parents can play the role of teacher at home, thus diverting the educational focus from the classroom to the home (deCarvalho, 2009). Public schooling in the context of a Democracy was intended to function as a formalized change agent for the development of vocational, academic, social and personal competencies. No parents required.

However, the reality of many comprehensive school reforms (CSR) is that the school must take on the responsibility of reeducating parents as a precondition of student success. Many parents, especially those of lower socioeconomic status (SES), do not participate in traditional forms of parental engagement that may include fulfilling basic obligations, (ie. helping with homework), volunteer opportunities, school community collaborations, school decision making, and school-parent communications (Epstein, 2009). Consequently, administrators and teachers may perceive parents as being less competent and or as being disinterested in their children's academic performance.

While many low-income and minority parents do feel that they lack educational competence, it does not diminish the desire for their child to be successful. With this in mind, many parents from diverse backgrounds prefer to allow school personnel to handle school-related issues and are reluctant to participate in activities that are directly aligned with the curriculum; parents who perceive themselves as being less capable or out of touch with school culture will

often opt for more informal parent-child learning experiences. In this way the "teaching and learning" is presented as a social activity that creates a non-threatening environment for the parent. The pressure to provide parents with educational experiences actually amplifies the scope of obligation of the school. In contrast, parents that are better positioned to advocate for their children often find themselves in disagreement with teachers and administrators by challenging the status quo. The parent's social class, sense of privilege, available resources, and conflictive educational standards may serve to mediate the concept of shared decision- making, collective power, and the responsibility for educational accountability (deCarvalho, 2009; Laureau, 2000).

Parent Engagement as a Reflection of Educational Equity and Accountability

> We seek… not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and a result,
>
> Lyndon B. Johnson, n.d.

Interestingly, America has seen the more conservative No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 replace the social assistance model of schooling that was associated with the Goals 2000 legislation. Renewing meritocratic ideals of schooling that support global competitiveness, school efficiency, and standardization. This current model of educational reform once again illuminates the responsibility of the parent to participate in demonstrative ways, but is all participation created equally as issues of culture and socioeconomic status continues to shape conversations surrounding the ability and or desire of all parents to actively participate in the business of schooling.

Assessing the actual impact of parent engagement on student success has presented a formidable challenge to the educational community. During the 1960"s two major reports were released that would dramatically influence the educational reform movement(s) for several decades to come. The Equality of Educational Opportunity Study also known as the "Coleman

Report" was commissioned by the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1966 to evaluate the availability of equal educational opportunities to children of different race, color, religion, and national origin. This iconoclastic study gathered data from more than 645,000 respondents including students and teachers in more than 4000 schools. Findings concluded that family and peers were likely to have a greater impact on a student's performance in school as opposed to class size, school facilities, and teacher salaries; signaling to legislators that increased funding for impoverished communities could not counteract the inherent moral deficiencies of certain types of families.

The Moynihan Report, published in 1965 indicated that higher rates of poverty experienced among Blacks were ultimately caused by an inferior family structure. The Negro family was branded as deficient based on the rising trend of single-parent homes. While the change in family structure was affecting America as a whole, the Moynihan Report succeeded in renewing the discriminatory practices of earlier decades. During the 1930's educational reformers recognized the importance of providing an "appropriate" education for "every child". Yet, the practice of providing Whites "good" educational opportunities while excluding at risk groups from receiving an equitable education was not uncommon. Tyack et al. (1995) notes that during the mid-twentieth century progress for all groups was made in relationship to public education, and while Americans believed that public education would raise the potential of the individual as well as society as a whole, inequalities in the system stemmed from race, income, gender, place of residence, family occupation, and from physical and mental handicaps.

The quantification of cultural differences effectively released reformers from their responsibility of providing equal schooling opportunities. In effect, these shaping reports concluded that inequities due to cultural differences could not be resolved through educational

reforms. Accordingly, the people who suffered the most were poor Blacks, working class immigrants, females, and the disabled at the hands of a closed educational system run by prominent White males (Gillborn, 2006; Grant, 2006; Kozol, 1991; 2005).

The backdrop for these seminal studies was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a controversial piece of legislation that attempted to move America toward an egalitarian society that would value the principles of equality and human rights; in theory, positioning all families to have the ability to affect change.

According to Nieto (1999) development and learning are mediated by culture and society. Educational reformers that take a naive approach to the impact of culture on learning may fail to recognize the individual, social, cultural, economic, and political context in which learning takes place. Consequently the crucial issue surrounding cultural diversity and student performance is the relationship between minority cultures and mainstream American culture, so discussions surrounding diverse communities and learning tend to encompass family structure, parent educational attainment, family finances, and the amount of time and effort devoted to parental engagement. In the current economic climate many parents are often preoccupied with providing basic family needs which may lead to a decrease in quality time for parents, usually mothers, to devote to working with their children in order to increase academic success (Milne & Plourde, 2006; Ram & Hou, 2003).

Research that has supported and or perpetuated a culture of pathology among divergent families has been used historically to justify educational inequalities. Policies that continue to enmesh student success with a one size family model may appeal to Conservatives, but fails to acknowledge today's "modern families. In, 2007, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) reported nearly 40% of all U.S. births were to unwed women, a trend that has been seen

in the birth patterns of industrialized countries throughout the world. As of 2013 the National Vital Statistic report estimates that 44.3 % of children are being born to unwed mothers. This continued change in family structure highlights a decrease in hegemonic families. If the key indicators for single parent families are changing, is it educational reform or reflection that is needed? Reform implies that our schools are faulty. Perhaps the relationship between democracy, schooling, and educational renewal should be examined. " While reform is rooted in a remote top-down authoritarian power structure, renewal is local, holistic, organic, and rooted in the communities it serves" (Noddings, as cited in Goodlad, 2004). Notably in this changing economic climate public attitude regarding social justice and personal happiness is waning in relationship to the purpose of schooling, but democratic values should shape the perceptions of people being serviced within a community.

A Framework for Social Reproduction: Impact of Capital on Parental Engagement and Student Success among Urban Divergent Families

Developed during the 1960's Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital added breadth to the knowledge base surrounding educational disparities among children from differing social classes. Bourdieu asserted that "cultural habits" and dispositions were strongly related to the characteristics of economic capital. In the United States economical capital is strongly linked with a formal education system. Cultural capital provides resources that are often monopolized by certain groups or classes, and under suitable circumstances there may be an intergenerational transmission of these resources that promote class privilege (Devine-Eller,2005; Laureau & Weininger, 2003). The theory posits that cultural capital exists in three forms: the embodied form, the objectified form and the institutionalized form. The embodied form, cultivated dispositions are acquired by the individual through socialization and are expressed through

competence and or skills. The objectified form may be actual objects that one possesses or cultural artifacts that may act as concrete manifestations of embodied capital. The institutionalized form makes reference to educational credentialing that validates an individual's competencies or skills.

Operating from a cultural deficit model subjugates capital that is acquired outside of the realm of formal learning. Likewise, forms of parenting that are different from the dominant classes are often presumed to be deficient as well. In fact, these symbolic forms of capital may be enacted in the educational community to the detriment of minority families. Students of parents from minority or low-socio economic backgrounds may lack the embodied capital to assimilate with the dominant culture. As a result these students are often seen as different or threatening, especially in the case of African American males (Hrabowski, III, et. al., 1998). Many researchers hypothesize that this is due in part to the clash between the institutionalized culture of school and the culture that students-at risk bring to the school setting. This lack of cultural capital results in limited access to academic opportunity, resources, and social supports. Resulting in marginalization of the families that are most in need of school support (Delpit, 2002; Laureau, 2000).

Objectified capital includes those goods that are concrete or abstract expressions of embodied capital, which in most instances are acquired either directly or indirectly through access to resources. Books like Murray & Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve"* (1994) purport "scientisms" that denote intractable genetic flaws that are passed on from one generation to the next developing ideals that support intergenerational themes of failure, and the notion that certain groups are somehow more worthy of opportunity. As a result of such controversial bodies of work and institutional practices related to schooling, persistent beliefs that undermine real

changes in educational policies and practices have not occurred. Parents that lack the language of school may be unable to facilitate the interpersonal social exchanges necessary in building trust between parents, children, and school communities (Payne, 2008; Lightfoot, 2003; Bryk & Schneider,2002; Laureau, 2002; Delpit, 2002).

Perhaps even more at the core of America's resistance to equitable funding is the ideology of individualism. Historically, meritocratic ideals have driven American life, supported market capitalism, and a burgeoning middle class. Individuals that find themselves outside of this hub are often silenced by their inability to participate in a democraticized system of education. Ostensibly to some, individual merit (innate abilities, hard work, optimism) alone determines the ability to be successful (McNamee & Miller, 2004).

In contrast, Friere (2014) writes, "Money is the measure of all things, and profit the primary goal. For the oppressors, what is worthwhile is to have more—always more—even at the cost of the oppressed having less or having nothing. For them, to be is to have—For them, having more is an inalienable right." (p. 58). Although conceivably unintended, this scenario is played out in districts that service large numbers of high minority/ high poverty students across America. These are the students that traditionally lack access to objectified capital on the basis of their limited embodied capital. Thus, formal credentialing frequently becomes an obscure notion for parents as well as students that are not privy to these hidden rules of the middle and upper class.

When mandated parental engagement activities are in direct opposition to parents' previous cultural and or social experiences it may be difficult for certain parents to see the value of formalized participation. (Epstein, 1992; 2009). Parenting, a symbolic form of capital, often becomes synonymous with social class. This "how to" method of parenting is articulated through

the schooling practices and decisions that most affect student success which almost inherently ignores individual student ability and or potential (Laureau, 2000). Educational proponents often pose the question, "What is the business of schooling?", perhaps in today's age of modern families a more relevant question may be what is the role of families? If more schools need to provide physical, emotional, social, moral and academic direction to the children and families that are serviced it may be time to take a closer look at the division of family- school educational work.

Many existing family- school relationships lay the groundwork for blame by identifying a lack of parental engagement as a major cause of school failure. This rhetoric in turn blurs the boundaries of the roles and responsibilities of both educators and parents. Is it perhaps a discriminatory practice to mandate the use of capital that is limited or nonexistent in many families? This is not to say that schools should not be responsible for the less fortunate however could educational policies be more responsive to the social experiences of non-traditional families. Schools that fail to value the existing capital of divergent families may miss the opportunity to form the rich relationships that can truly affect student outcomes.

Parental Engagement in the Context of the "New" Family

The shifting dynamics that affect the interactions between teachers, schools, and parents must be explored through an inclusive approach that utilizes a strengths based model as opposed to a model of deficits. As society continues to redefine the constructs of "family" it is increasingly likely that the idea of parental engagement will need a comprehensive overhaul as well. Traditional parental engagement frameworks view *parenting* as a means of setting home conditions that support children as students. Schools often develop comprehensive parental engagement programs that take the position that this aspect of parenting must be taught as

opposed to accessing the household and community resources that strategically connect to instruction.

Moll et. al. (1992) found that the parenting practices of families from the border region of Mexico and the United States innately taught connections related to construction, economics, medicine, science, as well as other relevant occupations. Changing and often difficult social and economic circumstances were dealt with by using the families' funds of knowledge and social networks. Current Common Core State Standards (CCSS) call for educators to use this type of integrated learning, which transforms a trip to the grocery store into a critical thinking activity correlating planning, reading, estimation, and math computation into rigorous pedagogy. Still many educators negate the fact that this is a daily practice for many children living in non-traditional families.

Gardner & Toope (2011) used a social justice perspective to explore educators' perspectives and practices around a strengths-based approach (SB) approach. Four interconnecting sets of practice: recognizing students- in context, critically engaging in strengths and positivity, nurturing democratic relations, and enacting creative and flexible pedagogies were used to renegotiate the language around students deemed to be at risk of failure. Their findings concluded that SB social justice practices require educators to know their students holistically. Student's lives then become a continuum of the curriculum, positioning students and teachers as gatekeepers of knowledge.

In order to critically engage in strengths and positivity, educators thoughtfully developed egalitarian relationships with students. Negotiated power allowed students to become experts in their own lives and their own learning. Creating a positive school environment where students were involved in and responsible for making decisions around their education. Respecting rather

than making judgments about students allowed teachers to nurture democratic relations. The hierarchical power struggle was diminished through fostering student voice, self-efficacy, and relational trust. Central to reshaping deficit dialogues is the ongoing commitment from educational stakeholders to create options and opportunities for families experiencing educational barriers created by "one size fits all" educational models. Creative strategies and approaches to learning helped teachers to be responsive to students' needs. Yet, critical to the success of flexible pedagogies is the delicate balance between standardized accountability and the enacted curriculum. A SB social justice approach supports a rigorous curriculum that is dynamic and accessible within the constraints of normalized practices.

Volunteering, the recruitment and training of families to serve as "Help Labor" is another facet of parental engagement that lends itself to the social justice conversation. Programs that meet the needs of changing family structures understand that demonstrative parenting practices are mediated by the constraints of institutionalized schooling practices and the reality of parent's lived experiences. Christianakis (2011) examined teacher's perceptions of parental engagement through the narratives of 15 racially and linguistically diverse teachers who worked with mostly African-American, Latino, and Asian students at an inner-city school in Northern California. While local manifestations of parental engagement continue to evolve, the parent-teacher partnership model and the parent empowerment model dominate parent engagement definitions.

Volunteerism takes on a middle class perspective when viewed through the lens of a traditional partnership model often emphasizing asymmetrical power between parents and teachers. Empowerment models seek to position parents as educational stakeholders that are involved in the creation of schooling policies, practices, and pedagogy and are often more successful at creating democratic relationships between parents and teachers. However,

implications from this study are that in order for sustained change to take place parents and teachers must be advocates for change beyond the school level. The "new family" may be best served by developing a parent alliance model of parent engagement that employs a multidimensional understanding of volunteerism where parents and teachers lobby for systemic changes that meet the needs of divergent families.

Luckily researchers are beginning to take notice of what McLanahan (2010) calls "the fragile family". A term used since the 1990's to describe new family arrangements. Research that dispels misconceptions regarding single female-headed households is still limited in comparison to the numerous studies that espouse hegemonic families and traditional forms of parental engagement as the norm. Although debates continue around the effects of single-parent households, little by little research that supports strength based perspectives are emerging.

Temple-Journiette (2011) explored resilience in single African American mothers of children with disabilities. The findings from this qualitative study illuminate how resilience positively contributes to child rearing, school collaborations, and interactions with staff during Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. According to the data, once parents were able to embrace their child's diagnosis they immediately began to "shift gears". Altering their own lives if necessary to meet the challenges of finding the appropriate treatments for their child. Parents acknowledged original feelings of emptiness but concluded that education support groups, networking with other parents of children with disabilities, and informational resources helped them to regain self-efficacy. The ability to boldly rebound from life-changing events is a form of capital that supports parents in advocating for their child regardless of the parent's educational level.

McKenna and Millen (2013) interviewed eight mothers with three quarters defined as low income based on their children's participation in a free and reduced lunch program. Five mothers were African American and three mothers were Caucasian. Using grounded theory methods researchers ascertained that parents had strong insights into their children's academic and emotional needs. Data revealed that parents held high expectations for their children and the belief that educators should hold their children accountable for academic outcomes as well. Parent engagement was defined combining two models developed from the data, the Parent Voice Model and the Parent Presence Model. A comprehensive model that honors the nuances of parent engagement considering cultural norms, a factor that is usually overlooked in traditional models of parent engagement.

Preston (2008) sought to discover the ways in which ten single African American mothers were involved in their children's education. The case study revealed that all mothers saw the benefit of acquiring an education and recognized the relationship between student success and spending quality time with their children. Even those parents with negative schooling experiences wanted a home -school connection. Respondents contended that engagement would increase if they were able to participate in the decision making process coupled with varying engagement strategies. Relationships built on reciprocity help to solidify stakeholder commitment.

Conventional wisdom has always identified social contexts as a predictor of student behavior. Students that came from "good families" were considered to be better equipped to cope with classroom expectations. Brody,G., Dorsey, S., Forehand, R., and Armistead, L. (2002) examined the unique contributions of parenting processes and classroom processes to children's self-regulation and adjustment. A sample of 277 single African American mothers was selected

from viable African American communities in the South. Most of the mothers were of low socio-economic status and possessed varying levels of education ranging from less than a high school diploma to some college; 62% were employed. The study presented data to support the interconnectedness of the two social contexts, homes and classrooms. According to the data, environments that were organized, predictable, and affirming benefited African American children, ages 7 to 15 years old. Ideally these indicators should be available to students at home and school. However researchers found that one environment could act as a stabilizer for the other when either context was compromised.

Hall-Chambers (2005) interviewed eleven single –middle- class African American mothers to reveal perceptions surrounding their influence on their children's academic outcomes. Three protective factors, education/occupation, support from family and friends, and religion helped parents cope with perceived or actual life challenges. Mothers had an understanding of how working affected quality time with their children as well as their ability to have time to themselves. However, these feelings were balanced by their ability to provide certain privileges afforded to middle class families. Fictive kinships supported mothers with child care responsibilities and financial needs. Affiliation with the church created positive influences in their children's lives and laid a spiritual foundation that supported mothers through emotional times. Educational successes gave parents a sense of self –efficacy, which translated into high academic expectations for their children.

This work of Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein's (2008) focused on African American parents of children in grades 6th to 8th grade. Middle school parents formed two focus groups that were comprised of male and female parents with differing marital status and varying levels of education. Six parents were single, two were divorced, and one was married. Educational

backgrounds ranged from a bachelor's degree to a high school diploma. Five themes emerged from the data that supported the importance of parental engagement. However, several themes revealed that parents felt that the level of participation was mediated by family structure and socio-economic status, school personnel's expectations for African American children as well as the policies and practices of school personnel.

What influences African American parents to participate in their children's educational experiences? Cooper-Butler (2005) sought to identify past and present experiences that may hinder mothers' parental engagement. The researcher interviewed 10 African American non-professional mothers that were employed at an Ohio based specialty care facility. Eight of the 10 mothers had high school diplomas and four of the 10 had state tested credentialing for their positions. Each parent had an elementary age child attending Ohio public schools. Using a phenomenological approach the researcher used 30 minute interviews with each parent to discover the essence of the experiences and attitudes that influenced their parental engagement in school activities.

Parental engagement was defined as the engagement of parents in the educational process in or to promote academic and social success. Parents partner with school administrators and teachers through various at home and at school activities in order to create environments conducive to learning and succeeding (Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002, p 51 as cited in Cooper-Butler, 2005, p 9). Critical race theory (CRT) was used as a lens to interpret the data. Results indicated that mothers did not let past negative experiences hinder their ability to engage in parental engagement activities. Rather parents demonstrated resiliency and a willingness to behave in a manner that was both supportive and encouraging to support student success. Indicating that racism did not influence parents' decisions to provide academic support.

Summary

Woman have always played a major role in forming relationships inside and outside of the home that help to further the education of their children and raise the status of the family, especially in the case of African American women. Traditionally, African American women have been better positioned to proliferate the cultural habits" and dispositions of mainstream America through her matriarchal role in the home and community. African American women used educational activism as a vehicle for racial uplift. In doing so, women of all races were able to utilize their existing capitals in several ways. The acquired credentialing, embodied capital and shared experiences of womanhood transcended the political and racial aftermath of the Civil War.

As America entered the twentieth century the impact of parent's education and parental engagement continued to play a key role in the educational outcomes of children. Educational policy continued to be shaped by the views and opinions of the rising Middle and Upper class. Seminal studies focused on the benefits of parental engagement illuminating the impact of limited capital on families and student success. The academic gains made by children appeared to be directly correlated to the mother's education and cultural dispositions. The two-parent family with a stay at home mother became a symbol of the "one size fits all model of education"; linking divergent families with school failure. Tempered by racial rhetoric comprehensive school reforms (CSR) sought to prepare all students with an "appropriate education". The perceived inherent flaws within minority families gave credence to the deficit model of education.

Consequently, the complexities of cultural habits and dispositions became a focus of scholarly research. Bourdieu's social reproduction theory identified three forms of capital that

are believed to be vital to student success, which include the embodied form, the objectified form and the institutionalized form. The embodied form, cultivated dispositions acquired by the individual through socialization and expressed through competence and or skills. The objectified form, objects that one possesses or cultural artifacts that act as concrete manifestations of embodied capital. The institutionalized form makes reference to educational credentialing that validates an individual's competencies or skills. Families that are limited in these capitals or possess capital that has been acquired outside of formalized settings are often marginalized.

However, the family -school relationship is often dependent upon the families' ability, usually the mother, to conform to existing school norms. When there is a disconnect between the school culture and the culture that students bring to school the result is often detrimental to academic success. Mandated parental engagement activities are designed with the "one size fits all model" of education in mind, negating the fact that family structure has changed globally. A full time mother has become less common as families of all races struggle in a "failing" economy. Family stressors, work schedules, and limited financial resources are having an impact on the educational work of schools, as they seek to respond to the needs of the families they service.

Formalized parenting has been embedded within standards based reform(s) to further bridge the family-school partnership in raising student achievement. A humanistic approach to educational reform that is rooted in social justice has the responsibility of honoring the capital of divergent families. Schools that fail to value the capital of all families create an environment of exclusion and maintain an imbalance of power, the antithesis of parental engagement activities. One of the fastest growing groups among divergent family structures is the single female–headed African American household. If school districts' intentions are to involve all families in the

business of educating children, parents' perceptions around parental engagement must direct the conversation of how to engage with "modern" families.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

To better understand why some parents choose forms of parental engagement that are less visible to the school community, qualitative in-depth interviews with 10 single African American mothers (Gantt & Greif, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) were conducted. This phenomenological study is driven by four central research questions:

1. What are African American single urban mothers' practices surrounding their role in their children's education in and out of school?
2. What are African American single urban mothers' practices around interacting with schools?
3. What factors do African American single urban mothers' identify as the most significant obstacles mediating their parental engagement?
4. What are the resources or hidden strengths that are available to African American single urban mothers that may not be apparent to schools yet affect student outcomes?

The goal of the in-depth-interviews is to understand parents' perceptions around the phenomena of parental engagement.

Lester (1999) asserts that the essence of the phenomenological approach is to describe specific experiences and or personal perspectives of the individual. Likewise, this research is being conducted with the hope of understanding "why" single African American female parents respond to current parental engagement practices as they do. What are their perceptions surrounding parental engagement and how does this within group variation replicate or reject the current constructs of parental engagement. The study is guided by a conceptual framework that supports a strengths-based approach to working with youth and families; shifting the focus away

from deficit models that emphasize problems and pathology. Families are then free to be recognized for their unique set of skills, talents and life events in the context of academic development.

Participant Description

Informants were 1) unmarried females with no live in male/female companions 2) of African American ethnicity 3) a parent of at least one child of elementary school age attending Brightside Prep (pseudonym). Parents of children being raised in single female- headed households where the female parent is not biologically related will be excluded from the study.

Participant Setting-Subjectivity Statement

I am indigenous of this urban setting as I have lived in Detroit all of my life and attended schools within the same district as a child. My father was an educator and administrator within the same district and from childhood stories of the children that he had the opportunity to teach have been an integral part of our conversations. While I have grounded my research in the literature I acknowledge my participation in the community that I attempt to study and I understand that like all researchers my history is a part of the "self" that shapes my lens as a researcher.

Brightside Prep was selected for the study based on two factors: 1) access and 2) academic accountability. For five years, I have served as an Instructional Coach for Brightside Prep, which has allowed me to become familiar with the school culture and establish myself as an insider. Access to Brightside Prep has come in the form of participation in School Improvement planning, offering parent workshops, reading program facilitator as well as serving as the coordinator for the Child Study Team (RCT). Visibility and direct contact with members of the school community improves my ability to build relationships with parents.

As a participant-observer, I bring to this project over twenty years of working in an urban setting. I have dealt with many single mothers and on occasion a few have seemed more like close friends, having shared with them tears, hugs, laughter, and personal stories about my own children. As a classroom teacher, I became very familiar with the individual struggles related to being a single mother, as well as, the often harsh criticism that single mothers receive at the hands of the very people that have vowed to serve and value their children. As a married mother, I have stood in awe of the resiliency and courage that it takes to be a single mother, all the while being sometimes baffled by the choices and decisions that some single mothers seem to be forced to make around their children's schooling. Choices that traditionalist simply see as neglect manifest in the form of early pick-ups, late arrivals, chronic absenteeism, lack of personal grooming, and the perceived inability to complete and return homework on a consistent basis.

While Brightside Prep students seem to be "making the grade", the School Improvement Plan has continued to include action steps to address the lack of parent participation in traditional activities such as parent conferences, educational workshops, and volunteer opportunities. Brightside Prep's population is largely African American with a high percentage (99%) of children eligible for free and reduced lunch, where Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals are affected by absenteeism (Kozol, 2005). However, in recent years Brightside Prep has been considered high performing, scoring in at least the proficient category in academic areas of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) during the 2009-2011 academic school years and after a decline in standardized test scores for the 2011-2012 school year Brightside Prep rebounded showing signs of stable academic growth despite changes in MEAP cut scores and new achievement gap standards, pending the introduction of nationally recognized Common Core Standards. Brightside Prep's trend in academic accountability, despite the lack of

demonstrative parental engagement, supports the notion that parents may be participating in a broad spectrum of parental engagement practices; as academic success and parental engagement have been consistently linked in the literature. Hence, the research participants as well as the site have been chosen based on their perceived ability to purposefully inform an understanding of the central phenomena in the study.

Participant Selection

Study participants or co-researchers (Moustakes, 1994) were selected using a random purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 1990). The membership secretary for the school provided a list of all registered students in grades K-4, which included students from both the general education and special education population(s). Five candidates from each population were identified to represent families from the entire student body. Potential parents or co-researchers were contacted by telephone or by face to face contact to request an interview that would take place within the context of school, within the informants' home, and or a designated anonymity venue to address the parents' comfort level. A prepared script was used during the screening process to eliminate informants that did not fit the criteria and or to identify those individuals that were not interested in participating in the study. This process continued until 10 parents who met the criteria were identified. Participation in the study was voluntary. Informants were reimbursed for transportation and childcare costs if necessary for participating in the interview(s).

Two instruments were used with all co-researchers. A basic demographic questionnaire captured background information about each parent and in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview protocol of discussion questions that allowed parents the opportunity to illuminate their personal parenting experiences in detail. An in-depth interview was conducted

with each mother and lasted between 1.5-2.5 hours (Huang, 2007; Sleigh, 2005). The interview protocol focused on examining how single African American mothers make meaning of parental engagement based on their previous cultural and or social experiences (Epstein, 1992; 2009; National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and the Harvard Family Research Project, 2007, 2013). The crux of this phenomenological research was exhaustive contextual description of the phenomena of parental engagement. A form of cultural capital was revealed which is believed to contribute to students' overall schooling success. Parental engagement understandings were shaped by the intergenerational transmission of resources that can be perceived as valuable within the context of schooling, class, and privilege (Devine-Eller,2005; Laureau & Weininger, 2003; Moll, 1992). In-depth discussion questions focused on the following topics (See Appendix D):

- Parents' Feelings/Memories Around their Own Schooling Experiences
- Parents' Perceptions/Experiences Related to their Children's Schooling
- Parent Engagement Experiences
- Parent Child Interactions

Data Analysis

Creswell's (2007) abridged version of the Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method served as the framework for this study and consisted of the following six-steps or phases, which are:

1) Bracketing (epoche)
2) Delineating the units
3) Clustering the units of meaning to form themes
4) Writing a textural description (what was experienced by the participant)
5) Writing a structural description (how the experience happened)

6) Writing a composite description (unique themes from all interviews)

1. Bracketing- The researcher set aside her personal experiences with the phenomena (as much as is humanly possible) so that the focus became the lived experiences of the participants in the study.
2. Delineating the units – A list of statements were developed about how the individuals experienced parental engagement and engagement. Horizontalization of the data occurred as each statement was given equal worth and a list that is non-repetitive and non-overlapping was developed.
3. Clustering the units of meaning to form themes – The significant statements were taken and grouped into larger units of meaning or themes. The following verbatim excerpts represent a sampling of units that were grouped into a sub-theme of parent as encourager. Participants credited their parent, typically their mother for being their inspiration to meet life's challenges head on:

   " I wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to be a lawyer. And my Mom was like okay, still today she said you're only 30 years old you can go do that"

   I feel myself helping them with homework which she (my mother) was like "And my mom used to just look at me like, well if you can do that (help others with homework) then you can go do it for yourself."

   "Mom, what is this? I didn't apply for this school" And she's like. "Well I applied for you. And if you go one semester and you don't like it you could come home.

   "I am so proud of you"

   "I don't know how you do it. I get a lot of " You are a wonderful mom," from my mom.

"but, "OK, my baby got this".

4. Writing a textural description – A description of "what" the participants experienced in relation to the phenomena was written using verbatim examples.
5. Writing a structural description – A description of "how" the experience happened was written where the inquirer reflected upon the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced.
6. Writing a composite description - A description of the phenomenon was written incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. The essence of the experience was brought to life within this culminating passage.

The internal validity was maintained through pattern matching among meaning units and through addressing rival explanations. External validity or transferability was accomplished through generalizing the findings to theory surrounding an individual's habitus, and sense of efficacy *(*Bourdieu, 1998). Finally, reliability was maintained through using the framework of a case study protocol, purposeful random sampling, semi-structured interview questions, and substantiating findings through similar literature. As a final measure to insure validity and reliability, Polkinhhorne, (1989, p. 57 as cited in Creswell, 2007) identifies five questions that researchers must ask themselves to unearth issues of validity:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the participants' descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the participants' actual experience?
2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?
3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other that those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?

4. Is it possible to go from general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?
5. Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?

Analysis from the Field

Individual participant profiles were created using the information acquired from the demographic questionnaire. A table was created that displays the age of the mother, marital status (divorced, widowed, never married), educational attainment, employment status, gender of the child/disability where appropriate, and the age of the child (Table 3) is proceeded by a narrative discussing the similarities and differences between participants (Elliott, Fischer, Rennie, 1999).

From the in-depth interview data 52 horizons were lifted from 154 pages of verbatim transcript that were then clustered into 10 emergent themes. The interview data analyses occurred in four phases, including (1) transcribing the data for analysis; (2) listening to recordings and reading through all the data simultaneously; (3) coding all statements and then identifying statements relevant to the participants' experience of the phenomena and; 4) grouping significant statements into themes and then integrating results into a thick description (Glesne, 2011;Creswell, 2007; Lewins, Taylor & Gibbs, 2005; Moustkas, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A summary of the data analysis process is offered in Table 1.

Using a phenomenological approach, I was charged with setting aside my own experiences around parental engagement ranging from perspectives of childhood, mothering, and educational stakeholder. This was done in order to understand the phenomena through the lived experiences of the participant.

The verbatim transcript of each co-researcher was read and listened to simultaneously in its entirety before any coding took place. This initial data review took between one to two hours for each transcript depending on the length of the interview. During the second and or third reading significant statements that identified examples, context, causes, and settings related to the phenomena were labeled (Lewins, Taylor & Gibbs, 2005). At this stage each sentence, phrase, or word was given equal value. Verbatim statements were labeled with a formulated meaning or horizon. Table 2 includes examples of significant statements with their formulated meanings. For each hour of data, two to four hours was devoted to coding. Once preliminary coding was complete, a list of formulated meanings or horizons was lifted from the texts that represented significant moments of parental engagement for the participants. The horizons were then clustered into non-hierarchical themes eliminating irrelevant, repeated, and or overlapping topics. This process took approximately two hours. Using only relevant themes in addition to verbatim examples from the interview transcript, demographic profiles were written using participant data. In the final stage, in-depth theme descriptions were written using the experiences of the entire co-researcher group. Recordings or transcripts were reviewed as needed during the writing of descriptions.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To begin the process, a dissertation committee member experienced in phenomenological research reviewed the interview protocol. Feedback was given to assist in phrasing/rephrasing questions to draw out full descriptions of the phenomena (Curry, 2008; Sleigh, 2005; Patton, 1999). In order to illuminate potential opposing views, two critical friends (one male and one female) participated in a feedback loop. Both were educational professionals that had worked as

a teacher, curriculum specialist, and administrator before retiring after more than 30 years of service in an urban district.

The female critical friend also shared the characteristic of being a divorced single African American mother. Each read two transcripts, one transcript of a parent with a child with a disability and one transcript for a parent with a child without a disability. Their perspectives added credibility to the researcher's findings and interpretations around parents' experiences with the phenomena. Ultimately, the task of the critical friend was to raise questions and critique the conclusions drawn by the researcher as horizons emerged from the parents' interview transcripts. Initially, a phone conversation was held with the educational stakeholder to allow time to ask questions around the research and to clarify the context of the research. Subsequent conversations were held via phone, face to face, or email communications. Each critical friend was asked to provide feedback on the emerging interpretations of categories and themes by identifying what seems significant or "stands out to them" around each parent interview. The researcher took notes during debriefing sessions. If differing perspectives could not have been verified through discussion of the verbatim transcript, the researcher reserved the right to review information with parents as needed.

The researcher was also given on-going feedback on drafts by the dissertation committee chair. Questions were posed that elevated the researcher's thinking, offered differing perspectives, and or that confirmed conclusions. Advice on reorganization helped to highlight data improving the overall quality of the dissertation, as it was important to demonstrate that there was enough evidence to substantiate descriptions of the phenomena and to ground them in empirical data.

Table 1 Phenomenological Data Analysis Process

Data analysis process	Rationale
The researcher will simultaneously listen to the audio tape and read the transcribed individual interviews.	This allows the researcher to get a sense of the whole experience or provides a greater understanding of the mother's experience of the phenomena.
Broad themes identified.	Cluster similar themes emerging from the data.
Read transcripts to find most descriptive topics and examples of the phenomena until saturation takes place.	Enhance the distinction between exemplars that do and do not represent the phenomena.
Phrases and theme headings are read/reread to clarify the themes and exemplars.	Validate the appropriateness of the exemplars and parent experiences.
Phrases that represent the phenomena are highlighted using verbatim examples from narrative.	Integrate individual descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experience.

Table 2 Selected Examples of Significant Statements *of Single African American Mothers Perspectives of Parental Engagement and Related Formulated Meanings*

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
"I really think that I need some counseling, [laughs] 'cause I think that I have a lot of things that bothers me and it's not even about being a parent, it's just things that happened that I just need to get off and I don't know how to. Like a lot of stuff I haven't even told my mom - I haven't told her that I was molested."	Personal health challenges accompanied with a need for emotional support.
" I'm gonna hit you 'cause you're putting things in the socket. I'm gonna hit you 'cause you're running in the street. I'm gonna hit you 'cause you're slamming the door. I'm gonna hit you - not - you're gonna know why. And then you're going to go in your room and you're going to sit until you understand why".	Forms of discipline for managing behavior and setting behavior expectations.
"I find myself eating in my room, in my closet because I don't - like to take my frustration out on my children. And like I told my mom, I'll tell you the same thing. I know it might be very improper - I do, I understand how these parents can harm their children "-	Controlling emotions and coping with the stressors of parenting.
"Cause sometimes you just need a moment just for yourself. It's not a long time. Just a little time. And let them go, have fun	Desire for children to be self-sufficient. "Me time"

Table 2 (cont'd)

they come back and tell you that they had fun and you can tell them, "Well, yes. I did, too by just sitting down!"	
"Yes, I am happy (with their progress). It's that, they're gonna be slow. They're gonna learn slow because they were preemies and the doctor already let me know that that's the process of however you have babies born too early. So, I'm happy that they are focusing, they are sitting still, they are learning, they are reading. So, I'm happy with that progress –"	Accepting the challenges of disability while maintaining expectations for academic growth.
"Ok, homework. I like the fact that the packets are being sent home at the beginning of the week, the end of the week, but change it up. Like we're doing the same thing, same thing, same thing. So I just started to do it. I changed a whole lot of regimen around because my first grader he reads fourth grade level, so why is he still doing this pen and pad stuff that the rest of the first graders are doing, preparing him for the next level. I mean, because when I spoke to Ms. D. about being promoted or double promoted, it's not offered here but if they happen to have a group of kids that they can put in an accelerated program that's strictly for the kids that's eager to learn and are already in that concept where they just know, give them a time that they can go above and beyond on a daily basis."	Lessons of self-efficacy, advocacy, and the importance of education/college.

Table 2 (cont'd)

"Parents want to know, and this is what I'm going to, you have to have information for parents – It's really forwarded towards a parent is looking for. What do they need for their child? You need a good, almost want to say to gather a database of information. And I'm still finding out stuff. Trisha, she tells me some stuff that I didn't even know. But she knows stuff from working with inside. So she knows that she just constantly tells me. It's almost like, I don't know whether you know about Pinterest"	Managing educational challenges related to disability through problem solving/seeking treatment/networking.
"Yeah, something that he won't feel like it's not fun, and I'm trying to think of, I guess I need the school's help to give me some ideas on how to make learning fun because my old techniques that I did. I don't know what I did to my children, but they learned. I felt they learned."	Seeking knowledge to cope with challenges of being a single parent and feelings of inadequacy associated with supporting academic success.
"Number one, I look for responsiveness. That's the first thing I look for. If I walk into this office, somebody says hello. If I walk into a building, someone acknowledges me. If I don't get responsive, I don't like it. Because to me, if you can ignore me, you can ignore my child. And that's first thing I look for is responsiveness. Next I'll look for responsibility. If administrative staff, teachers, maintenance men, lawn people, if they can take responsibility for their actions when something goes wrong, or even when something is right, then I feel more comfortable."	High expectations for your child's school environment (ie. nurturing, safe)

Table 2 (cont'd)

"He forgives, so when I was in there, it is like she was uplifting me, as well, so she signed my little book, the book she gave me, and I knew it, that God was listening, I need to stop and just hear everything that God says, so that has been my new thing for my theory, and on my Facebook, a lot of times people will play around with Facebook, that is my thing, that is on my phone, that is my motto when you go on my page, it takes less to be stressed, because while I was in there, I just prayed to God."	Religion and relationships used as a coping mechanism for stressful situations

Informed Consent

To ensure that ethical research practices are followed, an informed consent was presented to participants prior to data collection. This document protects informants against human rights violations, lowering or alleviating any potential risk to vulnerable populations. The consent form contained the following elements: (Sarantakos, 2005 as cited in Creswell, 2009 p 89)

- Identification of the researcher
- Identification of the sponsoring institution
- Identification of the purpose of the research
- Identification of the level and type of participant engagement
- Identification of the risks and benefits of participating
- Guarantee of confidentiality to the participant
- Assurance that the participant can withdraw at any time

Each element was explained to the informant at the beginning of the interview. Informants that decided to not sign the consent were not be pressured to do so, and were immediately dropped from the study.

Data-Storing Methods

The informant was reminded that the interview would be recorded. Recorded interviews were saved on the computer as an Mp3 recording. It was important to record conversations to ensure accuracy of informant comments. Informants that did not wish to be recorded were advised not to participate in the study. All personal information and the recordings were confidential, and only the researcher(s) used the information for this study. Each interview was assigned a code, for example " Participant, 5-92012" denoting the order of interview, the month of interview, and the year of interview. Each recording was labeled with the corresponding

interview code. Directly after each interview, the recording was reviewed and notes were taken. Key words, phrases, and statements were transcribed to expose the voice of the interviewee. After reviewing the recordings the recording device was stored in a locking file. Within one year of the study's end, the recordings will be destroyed. The informants' privacy will be protected as much as the law allows. Field notes as secondary data sources were treated in the same manner as the primary sources described above.

> Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence. Abigail Adams, 1780

Delimitations

This study does not cover the perceptions of single mothers from other ethnic backgrounds with and without students with disabilities. Nor does it attempt to include the perceptions of other types of divergent families. Issues surrounding parenting experiences that may be a direct result of differences in class are not considered to be a focus of this study and any data that sheds light on these factors is unintentional. This study is also delimited in its use of phenomenological research as opposed to analyses of large scale quantitative or mixed methods data in order to shed light on the lived parental experiences of urban divergent families.

Limitations

Qualitative research uses an inductive approach. Inductive reasoning or induction is the result of collecting facts, identifying patterns, inferring generalizations about the relations between facts, and if necessary, confirming the inference through further observation. It is presumed that each of these stages is conducted meticulously and without bias on the part of the researcher. Thus, research quality can be jeopardized when the individual skills of the researcher are in question (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2003).

Rigor can be defined by the thoughtfulness of method and can only be maintained when the research methods have been carried out systematically. Unfortunately, in qualitative research it is believed that the ability to maintain, assess and demonstrate rigor is much more problematic. Taking a qualitative approach requires the researcher to become the data- gathering instrument, as such it may be difficult to limit subjectivity given that the volume of data generated is more difficult to analyze and interpret. Another limitation of qualitative research is that data is collected from a small sampling of participants limiting generalizability to larger segments of the population. Because of this issue qualitative research is often recommended for earlier phases of research projects or pilot studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Atypical of many elementary schools located within this Midwestern urban school district, the selected school was not identified as a high priority school during the 2013-2014 school year in that students were progressing academically at an adequate rate. Also many elective and or specialized programs (e.g. technology classes, sports, and art) that have been shown to contribute to academic success remain a part of the curriculum at this Pre K-4 elementary school.

As a final point, this study is a condensation of the respondents' beliefs and perspectives. However the researcher's lived experiences present an additional challenge to producing a bias free analysis. In Wolcott's, Writing Up Qualitative Research (2008), he asks his audience are you a reader or a writer? As the reader I am passively positioned to receive second hand information. However, as the writer I am free to actively engage in seeing, pondering, hearing, and reading only to aid in preparing to write. The dichotomy of the "self" as a researcher is increasingly pushed to the forefront of my mind as I begin to reflect on this seemingly simple question. At the onset of this project, I naively label myself as the researcher, which in my mind

fully signifies my objectivity and in and of the title itself separates me from the informant. In actuality I too am a gatekeeper of knowledge that must be in constant reflection reporting only the observed.

Summary

This phenomenological research was conducted with the hope of understanding "why" single African American female parents respond to current parental engagement practices as they do, their perceptions surrounding parental engagement, and how within group variation may replicate or reject current constructs of parental engagement. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 single African American mothers from a Mid-western urban district (Gantt & Greif, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Participants or co-researchers were selected using a random purposeful sampling strategy (Moustakes, 1994). The study focused on the central research question: How do single African American mothers of elementary school aged children make meaning of parental engagement? Data were collected using a demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions. Informed consent was acquired from all participants prior to being interviewed. Interviews were recorded and verbatim transcripts were developed for use during analysis.

Creswell's (2007) abridged version of the Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method was utilized in the data analysis process consisting of the following six-steps or phases: 1) bracketing (epoche); 2) delineating the units; 3) clustering the units of meaning to form themes; 4) writing a textural description (what was experienced by the participant); 5) writing a structural description (how the experience happened); and 6) writing a composite description (unique themes from all interviews). According to Schramm (1971) the central tendency of all types of case study is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions, why they were taken, how they were

implemented, and with what result, which is the overarching intent behind this study as the researcher attempts to study the phenomena of parental engagement through the lens of the co-researchers' lived experiences and perspectives.

CHAPTER 4

SITUATING THE SAMPLE

Mother Teresa said "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." In general, this describes mothers who are typically responsible for most to all day to day responsibilities. Yet, researchers rarely focus on identified strengths that have been associated with single mothers. Studies are more likely to link children from single parent homes with academic failure and incarceration. In spite of this, single parent homes have been found to have strong parent-child communication, networks of community support, and children with high levels of autonomy (Barajas, 2012).

According to Elliott, et. al. (1999) it is important to provide information that describes the participants and their life experiences in order for the reader to judge the range of persons and situations to which the findings might be relevant. For this reason, profiles were created from a demographic questionnaire to introduce the participants and to provide context for their lived experiences as well as illustrate how ten single African American mothers experience parental engagement and how they use available capital to impact their children. The sample consists of five single parents who have one or more children with disabilities and five single parents who have one or more children without disabilities (p. 221).

All ten mothers lived within the boundaries of Brightside Prep, a public elementary school that is located in the Mid-western region of the United States. Nine of the mothers were born and raised in urban settings and one mother was raised in a suburban setting.

The parents ranged in age from 29 to 57 years old. Two of the mothers were in their twenties, five of the mothers were in their thirties, one mother was in her forties, and two mothers were in their fifties. In terms of marital status, two mothers were divorced, five mothers

were never married, one mother was widowed, one mother was separated from her spouse, and one mother was single and engaged to be married.

Educational levels varied as well ranging from less than a high school diploma to a four-year degree. Two mothers had between a tenth and eleventh grade education. One mother had earned a General Education Degree (GED), one mother had earned a high school diploma. Two mothers had earned college credits towards an associate degree. Three mothers had attained their associate degree and one mother had earned a Bachelors' of Science (BS). At the time of the study, six mothers were employed full time, two mothers worked part time, one mother described herself as a student, and one mother was self-employed. All mothers held a head of household status and supported between one and six children under the age of sixteen. Four out of the five mothers of children with disabilities had more than one child with a disability. Reported disabilities included Asperger syndrome, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), cerebral palsy (CP), learning disability (LD), and speech and language (SL) (Table 3).

Mothers of Children with Disabilities

Claudia, 57, divorced mother of twin boys age 8, an adult daughter that helps her run the family business, and an adult son that currently lives in a clinical setting. The twin has been diagnosed with autism. Claudia had a suspicion that the boys may be experiencing some learning challenges. In the case of Ronald, she noticed that he was struggling with speech, and Donald was having *"blow ups"* at school. Discovering that the challenges she would face would be ones that would last a lifetime catapult Claudia into action.

> When she said that, my heart dropped. I'm like. This is what was going on. He wasn't talking. However, I got with –how did I find out about that? I think it was through _____ so I signed him. (Claudia, 2013, p. 1)

Here Claudia struggles to remember exactly how she connected with one of the first agencies to service the twins. Claudia began networking with friends, health care professionals, the school social worker, and any agencies that could support her in improving the twin's social and academic development. Claudia believes that she learned to be tenacious from watching her mother.

> I think it was my mom. I think it was my mom because my mom was just one of those types of people who she was always helping somebody do something. She – In other words, my mother was a type of person, she didn't back down off of things. She always spoke her mind. (Claudia, 2013, p. 11)

This transfer of cultural and social capital positions Claudia to be an advocate for her children. As in the case of Claudia hearing that Brightside Prep was a good fit for the boys. It was during a time when her local school district was not approving any internal transfers. Claudia merely explains their move from School B to Brightside Prep as *"so that's how that came about. But you know I talk a lot. I talk a lot"*. Contacting the appropriate school personnel to approve the internal transfer demonstrates Claudia's sense of self efficacy and her ability to evoke a sense of power and position as a parent in the school setting through creating spaces or fields of communication.

Paula works full-time and is raising an eight- year old twin boy and girl with special needs and/or characteristics. Her son has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and is classified as having a learning disability with ADHD characteristics. Her daughter has not been

identified for an IEP but is struggling at her current grade level and according to Paula is a "slow learner". Paula has an older son from a previous relationship and admits that her support system was much different when she was married to her oldest son's father. Paula is very proud of the fact that her oldest son graduated from a college preparatory high school and is currently working on a college degree. As a 39 year- old divorcee, Paula feels that she does not have the energy and patience that she once had for child rearing and that having a child with unlimited energy is both frustrating and tiring. Since her divorce one of Paula's greatest challenges has been to develop supportive relationships inside and outside of school. While her day care provider has been in the children's lives since they were infants, Paula describes their relationship as strictly monetary and although Paula is not completely happy with her childcare situation she believes that it is more important for the twin to be with someone they know. Paula's parenting situation seems filled with isolation much like her childhood. Here she describes her limited support system as she receives little help from the twin's father:

> My grandmother, so she's dead and I divorced his father (21 year old son). He's grown, now it's another man's children so it's totally different.

Paula's personal schooling experiences were filled with transiency that lasted throughout high school, finally, dropping out in the eleventh grade and electing to earn her General Education Development (GED) credential. According to Paula her parents weren't there and her grandmother was her only source of support. She depicted her grandmother as a caring but uneducated woman that was "up in age". Yet, Paula fondly remembers how her grandmother was able to spell words for her as she would work on her homework. Relationships with teachers were thwarted by the constant moving from school to school. As her schoolwork became

increasingly challenging, Paula strategized that completing her homework at school would allow her access to the necessary support.

School success for her children is very important to her as she has tried to establish herself as a visible and informed parent by attending school wide events, communicating with staff, and working with school professionals to ensure that her children can take advantage of any related services that will support their academic performance. However, after reaching out to staff she has come to feel that the school does not understand the needs of families with children that have special needs. She believes that the school setting focuses on the typical child and believes strongly that she can make the greatest impact at home by spending more time with the twin. Paula struggles with the dichotomy of school policies and practices that identify students for academic support but fail to respond to behavior challenges in the general education setting.

Benita is a 30-year-old never-married full-time mother of five. Her children range in age from 1yr to 10years old. She has three girls and 2 boys. Her oldest son (9yrs old) is classified as Otherwise Health Impaired (OHI) and also takes medication for ADHD characteristics. Benita believes that her oldest son has difficulty relating to authority so she has used school based parenting workshops to increase her understanding of her son's behavior. She believes that his acting out is directly related to his father's absence but Benita uses the relationships that she has developed with staff to help with behavior modification. In her eyes, the school is a parenting partner that is in touch with the needs of her family.

> And I just like, when I came here I just feel so much better. I'm just at ease. I know even though you all are not their parents, it's like I give permission. I know that you're not going to hurt him, I know everything's going to be all fine. So I'm like, ok. They can

go there, I'll sit at home, I'm at peace. Because I know everything's going to be ok. (Benita, 2013, p. 3).

Benita maintains her position within the school community by directly engaging with her children's teachers on a regular basis. She reports that teachers are very supportive of the fact that she is a single mother and that an effort is made to avoid suspension of her 9yr old even though he has a tendency to act impulsively.

While her formal education ended in eleventh grade, she maintains a sense of efficacy around helping her children with schoolwork. One of her fondest memories of spending time with her children's studies is the annual Science Fair Project. She admits that she loves science as she had aspirations of becoming a doctor. Benita maintains that she was an all "A" student and often played a matriarchal role in her family. Taking on the role of parent, she consistently helped her siblings with their studies. She describes herself as a bright student that *"started messing with this guy*" who was eventually incarcerated. However, Benita has shown resiliency as she uses her available resources to balance being a mother and a father. Her mother provides emotional support and strong discipline to the children. She sees her mother as playing the role of the father in that her mother "*picks up the slack".* When Benita feels overwhelmed she relies on her mother to make sure that care for the children continues.

Benita tries very hard to shield the children from life stressors as she admits that she does not discuss family finances with the children and is compelled to make excuses for the fathers' inconsistent presence in the children's life. She has also put her plans to return to school on hold seeing her role as mother as her first priority. She believes that her major role is to help her children bring their dream of college to fruition.

Patricia is a 46 -year old working class mother of ten who left high school after completing her tenth grade education. Three children remain at home ages 14, 12, and 9. She has never married but the father of the three children living at home is consistently involved in the children's lives. Her 9 year old daughter, Emily, attends Brightside Prep and has been retained twice in first grade and at the time of the interview Patricia was concerned that she was going to have to repeat the second grade. Patricia is no stranger to the IEP process as she reminisces about her 21- year old son that spent from 6th to 10th grade in special education before dropping out completely. She had noticed early on that her son's behavior differed from his siblings as well as his peers. She describes his behavior as *"wild".*

Patricia used reciprocal communications to create a relationship with her son's high school teachers and school professionals. She demonstrated a sense of parental efficacy in continuing to advocate for her son inside and outside of school, and while the family physician had been hesitant to prescribe medication, Patricia persisted using her relationship with school professionals as leverage. The same tenacity is evident as she speaks about Emily and her progress in school. Patricia advocates for Emily by writing a letter to request a psychological evaluation. Even if it means an all- day placement in a separate classroom she would prefer that Emily be in her correct grade with age appropriate peers.

Patricia follows the example of her mother in working with her children at home. She assists with homework and creates activities when the children do not receive practice lessons from the teacher. Emily has been avoiding her homework, but after a discussion with the teacher, Patricia, has begun to check the book bag daily to ensure that homework is completed in a timely manner. Through her conversations with Emily's reading teacher she has learned that she is improving but is still unable to complete grade level class work with ease. Patricia's focus

is reinforcing academic progress and encouraging Emily to graduate from college in order to be productive and self-sufficient.

Debra is a 30-year old mother of six. Three of her children have been identified for special education services. Her nine -year old son and ten year-old daughter have been identified for learning disabilities with ADHD characteristics and her six year old son has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Debra divulges that she has been living with bipolar disorder and some of the challenges that have accompanied her condition. At the age of 18 Debra suffered what she describes as a nervous breakdown after being told that she would be unable to have children. According to her, her recovery took approximately two years. After having children, as a single mother she has had to struggle to pay bills and care for her ailing mother. Debra also describes a dark period in which she was accused of not providing a proper home for her children and being in trouble with the law. She and the children have also had to endure homelessness. However, through these hardships Debra has learned to advocate for herself and her children. She says her strength comes from her religious convictions as she uses the church teachings to shape the children's value system.

Debra is currently a student at a medical trade school. She believes that earning a medical certification will help her to better care for her mother and provide an income for the family. To achieve her goals Debra has created many relationships within the school community. She works closely with the attendance agent to learn about her rights under the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act and Debra has also sought the assistance of the in-school Department of Human Services worker who supports her in maintaining an acceptable standard of living for her and the children. Debra has been able to maintain a stable home for three years with the support of these school professionals. Debra is consistently engaged in the school culture and

takes advantage of the resources available to parents like the Parent Center computers that she uses to do her homework, Family Math and Science Night, and Parenting workshops. She uses her social capital to find resources for her family. Wanting to give her two youngest children a head start on their education, Debra sought support from an in-home child development program that has evaluated the children's development and provides learning lessons. When asked what single parents really need Debra advises…

> We need shelter. We need a good area, as far as living, for a good community. We need just help, as far as in common, our status is that we don't need nobody to just always give something to us, but, even when they give it to us, we need, you know, like little programs or avenues that can help us, you know, find jobs or find other things... … still just, you know what I'm saying, stick with us, little programs, you, know, that help sometimes when we fall short on where to go to keep the kids up and, you know, just little activities. They took over all of the activities where our kids because there is really none left in the community centers and the schools. We lucky we got a few of y'all's schools left. (Debra, 2013, p.8, p. 9)

Debra recognizes the relationship between developing school and community partnerships and student success, and while it may be cliché to say *it takes the village to raise a child,* she understands that her children need resources that she alone is not positioned to provide.

Mothers of Children without Disabilities

At the time of the study **Lydia** was a 30 year old, never married single mother with a two- year old son and two daughters aged 7 and 3. Lydia held a Bachelors of Science Degree and described herself as an entrepreneur as she had just started a case management business. As a parent Lydia felt that it was important for her to support her toddlers in acquiring primary level skills such as learning numbers, colors, and the alphabet. She felt that her previous experience as a preschool teacher supported her efforts in preparing her children for school, but admitted that it was a challenge to be patient with her own children. *"I was a preschool teacher so I had the ability to do so, you know, but just not my own kids" "Like I didn't have any patience with her, any patience".* Once her oldest daughter got to kindergarten she was able to redefine her role, moving from teacher to facilitator.

Lydia was able to empower her child and to relinquish the feeling of needing full control over her daughter's learning. She explains her new role in this way, *"Kimea (daughter) this is your homework and my homework is to help you".* Being involved with her children's education has made her aware that some of the instructional strategies have changed. Lydia believes that schools should offer classes to help parents learn new ways to support their children's learning at home. She also reports that she uses an iPad (applications/websites) and books at home to further her children's education. Social skills and respect are other lessons that Lydia feels should be taught at home in order for her children to function in the real world. Lydia feels some relief that Kimea finally made it to school age because this takes some pressure off of her and frees her up to switch roles but she also employs after school tutoring,

As a mother it was important for her to support Kimea her 7 year-old who was struggling with reading. Lydia sought the assistance of an after school reading and math program

(KUMON) to help her child perform at grade level. This is perhaps a lesson that was learned from her mother as she describes her mother as a being an educational advocate who sent her sibling to a foreign language immersion school to learn Japanese, a "language of the future". Her mother has been her lifelong advocate for schooling as well as her emotional support. Lydia also shared a personal experience of promoting literacy through tutoring in the America Reads America Counts Program, in spite of the fact that she had initially rejected the idea of going to college.

Davita is working full time and raising David, a six-year old on her own. At the time of the study she described her marital status as separated. Davita's work schedule does not always allow her to attend school activities that are scheduled during the day but she makes an effort to attend Parent Conferences and regularly communicates with the teacher through hand written notes. Time also presents a challenge in creating space for quality interactions. When Davita is working, a latchkey worker cares for David. Davita describes her frustration in this way:

> Because by the time we're together, it may be almost 7. The daycare, not daycare, but childcare provider, she was feeding him, so that was a help. I didn't have to worry about feeding him. So by the time I got, and then I, let her know that I need her help with him getting started on the homework because he's getting behind. By the time we're together, he's sleepy. He can't stay awake. And then I'm getting irritated because I want him to finish as many pages of the homework but I think it's overwhelming (Davita, 2013, p. 1).

Helping David at home with his homework has led Davita to believe that focusing is a challenge for him as well as maintaining concentration on work that he finds difficult.
She is strict regarding homework and works with David to build stamina. Davita moves learning out of the school setting by taking David on trips. Travel has been a part of Davita's life since

she was young and she travels with David as often as possible "*He's been to Hawaii. He went to Alaska, just came back from Alaska. So he enjoyed that. I didn't."*

Traditional methods of supporting instruction have included seeking outside tutoring programs, arranging support with the childcare worker, and reading books at home. Davita wishes her reading skills were stronger but she feels confident that practice will improve David's academic performance. Employment demands on her time have placed constraints on the ways in which she can utilize her social capital in the school setting. There have been few opportunities to cultivate relationships that go beyond corresponding with classroom teachers. Davita describes even the morning routine as being somewhat stressful. She would like to drop David off earlier to facilitate arriving at work on time but has found the drop off process to be a challenge. She initially spoke of the administrator as being unapproachable in the parking lot but after reflecting Davita surmised "*Then maybe the way I approached her. I sometimes blame myself for, I don't think I did it. Maybe appropriately to her either for her to address me."* Davita appears calm and personable and given fewer demands on her time would be positioned to have the conversations that mediate barriers.

Rhonda is a 29 year old mother of three, ages 11, 7 and 4. She identifies herself as unemployed but she is also taking business classes at a local trade school. Rhonda is a very familiar face at Brightside Prep as her children's teachers as well as administration know her by name. Rhonda's nurturing stance on parenting and dedication to her children is a direct reflection of her childhood. She admits that her mother struggled with alcoholism, but that she was always there.

> Well I liked the fact that when I was younger, my mother tried to be involved as much as she could be. Anytime I had any type of award ceremony, spelling bees, special

> recognition, my mother was always there. She fought tooth and nail to be there. So that's where I get my dedication from as far as being there for my kids. Whatever they need me there for, I'm there because even though my mother worked jobs and she was in school, she always made a way to be there. So that stayed with me because if she could do it, I can do it (Rhonda, 2013, p. 1).

Rhonda discloses that periodically health issues, transportation, and a nomadic lifestyle have inhibited her ability to participate in her children's life in demonstrative ways. Yet, she finds comfort in knowing that her oldest son has taken a position of empathy. He encourages his mother to rest so that she can "*get better"*. Rhonda sees her relationship with the children as being open. This allows her children as well as herself to express their feelings. Being a single parent has had its challenges. Although never married to the children's father, his being incarcerated has often led to strong and varied emotions for the entire family.

> I could say now like, with their father being in prison I feel like we're holding it together, being strong about it and supporting each other as far as attitudes. Just emotions. I allow my children to express themselves wholeheartedly whether it's anger or if they just want to cry, if they just want to talk. I allow it to come out at that time so they know that they don't have to keep stuff bottled up. So I like the fact that we have an open relationship that they still know I'm mother, but I like the fact that we can talk and they feel comfortable talking to me (Rhonda, 2013, p. 2).

Rhonda's sense of efficacy has grown with her willingness to continue learning. She has taken advantage of parenting workshops that have helped to shape her perspective on how to interact with her children and how to deal with stress. Strategies to calm down and additional resources that support the family have been the most helpful topics. She believes that these

experiences help her to be a better parent as she alludes to the fact that she does not want her children to experience an abusive home-life. Rhonda also involves her children in church activities to help establish values. She shares that her oldest son dedicated his life to the church at the age of six. Rhonda feels that this experience will help him to be on the right path for life. When asked specifically about parental engagement, Rhonda offers the advice of being very detailed in your observations of your children. Rhonda feels that creating opportunities to communicate with your children around schooling in addition to discussing the world around them supports their academic performance. Confidence is built through developing social skills and the ability to engage in conversations around current events. In addition, Rhonda reports that she uses the internet daily to facilitate her children's learning, and that she maintains a print rich environment by keeping books, magazines and newspapers available for her children to experience.

Sylvia is a 37 year old widow that works full time and is raising two boys ages 5 and 7. She recently earned an Associate degree and is hoping to return to school to become a social worker. Sylvia was raised in a two parent middle class home with a college educated father and a white -collar working mother. As a child her parents made it clear that education was not an option. Sylvia tries to instill this same message in her boys. Although the boys are young she is diligent regarding homework completion and in so far her parental engagement experiences have been very traditional. She attends parent conferences, dialogues with the teacher when necessary, and has chaperoned field trips. Sylvia utilizes cultural and social capital inside and outside of the school context. Before making her final decision to enroll her children in Brightside Prep she networked with surrounding neighbors, and took a tour of the school. Safety was a strong consideration as well as a courteous staff.

Sylvia acknowledges the importance of being a "*good reader"* and makes an effort to provide a print rich environment for her children. She also believes that it is important for the boys to learn how to use the computer. Most of Sylvia's schooling experiences have been aligned with the culture of school. She spoke with confidence as she mentioned a brief encounter with the principal, and is currently comfortable with her level of knowledge and skills in relation to helping her children be successful in school. However, she did admit that she has some concerns around the children not having a male role model in their lives. She believes that peer pressure could eventually cause the boys to stray away from the values that she is trying to establish.

Her major source of emotional support is her mother who is in-charge of the children during non-school hours while she is at work. Social learning experiences include dinner around the table, family movie night, and visits to the amusement park and/or go-cart racing. Sylvia embraces her role as a single parent and believes that educational stakeholders should understand "*that being a single parent doesn't mean that you can't show the same interest that you would if you had a mate".*

Nicole, age 30, is raising her eight-year old son, Steven. It is evident that she is tenacious and bold in her perceptions around parental engagement. After becoming a single mother, Nicole decided to move to Georgia for a new start. She felt that in a new setting she would be unable to rely on her parents for support forcing her to embrace motherhood head-on. Faced with the harsh reality of race relations in the South, Nicole was positioned to have conversations with Steven around discrimination from both blacks and whites. Skin tone, cultural norms and her *own* value system became a source of conflict. Nicole stated that she felt devalued as a single African American mother in this new community. " *It was like being from a whole*

another country almost in that way". According to Nicole, teaching her young son survival skills became a top priority. Naive to racism or what Nicole describes as more aggressive standards of play, Steven was required to adopt the social interaction rule of *"if they hit you, you hit them back".*

She doesn't hesitate to create spaces for conversation which is backed by a willingness to take action within the school setting which may take on the form of volunteerism, parent activism, or event planning, working to be an integral part of the community while also acting as a change agent to shape school culture. So often in urban settings teachers and administrators are likely to complain of apathy, however, Nicole has felt her unwavering desire to know her son's school community and all the key actors has been met with opposition and or indifference. Visible on a daily basis, she would routinely meet with Steven's teacher to build rapport and stay abreast of his progress. Her dogmatic style of communicating caused what Nicole frames as "bad communications", which continued until she and Ms. H. developed a level of mutual respect.

> We went through it. We never stopped. No matter how weird it got. No matter how tense it got (Nicole, 2013, p. 5).

Her willingness to challenge the status quo using traditional forms of social capital identified her as a *"challenging parent"* among some staff and administration. She believes that being a mother is a full time job, so she has elected to take employment positions that have fewer time demands to insure that she can spend quality time with Steven. It is evident that she dotes on him and their mother-son bond is very strong. Nicole believes that choosing to have a child before she reached some of her professional goals has created setbacks for Steven. She believes that by having additional resources she could ensure that her child could benefit from all that life

has to offer, outside tutoring if Steven is struggling in school, a private education, exposure to arts, language, and music. Nicole views limited capital as a detriment to Steven reaching his full potential and embracing his true identity.

Summary

This basic descriptive data helps the reader to understand the lens that each participant uses to conceptualize their role as a single parent and how they make meaning of parental engagement. Thus creating a context to support the coherence of parents' use of capital and a strengths based approach to understanding the parental engagement experiences of these 10 single African American mothers of children with and without disabilities

Table 3 Characteristics of Sample *of 5 Single African American Mothers of Children with Disabilities and 5 Single African American Mothers of Children without Disabilities*

Mother's characteristic	Number of characteristics	
	Parents of Children with disabilities	Parents of Children without disabilities
Mother's age		
20-29	1	1
30-39	2	3
40-49	N/A	1
50-59	2	N/A
Marital status		
Divorced	2	N/A
Never-Married	1	4
Widowed	N/A	1
Married-Separated	1	N/A
Engaged	1	N/A
Educational level		
<High School Diploma	1	1
G.E.D.	1	N/A
High School Diploma	1	N/A
<Associates	2	1
Associates	N/A	2
Bachelors	N/A	1
Employment status		
Full-time	3	2
Unemployed	N/A	2
Student	1	N/A
Other	1	1
Where born		
Urban area	5	4
Suburban area		1
Gender of child with disability		
Male	7	-
Female	2	-
Children's types of disability		
Asperger's Syndrome	1	-
Autism	1	-
ADHD	2	-
Cerebral Palsy	1	-
Learning Disability (LD)	3	-
Speech and Language	1	-

Table 3 (cont'd)

Gender of child without disability		
Male		10
Female		9

**Note: 2 Male children without disabilities were retained.*

Age of children under 16 in home		
1yr-4yrs	4	3
5yrs-8yrs	8	5
9yrs-12yrs	3	4
13yrs-15yrs	N/A	1
Frequency of internet usage in relation to child's education		
Often	3	4
Sometimes	2	N/A
Never		1
Reading materials regularly in home		
Yes	5	5
No	N/A	N/A
Highest level of education participants' parents completed		
<High School Diploma	N/A	2
High School Diploma	5	3
<Associates	1	N/A
Associates	N/A	2
Bachelors	2	2
Graduate	N/A	1
Not Applicable	2	N/A

Note: Characteristic N= 5 Parents of children with disabilities. N= 5 Parents of children without disabilities.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings from the in-depth interviews focusing on ten single African American parents' practices surrounding parental engagement and how they view their role in improving academic outcomes for their children. This chapter will also highlight the experience of the co-researchers and discuss emerging themes from the analysis of the data using a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994, p 131). Textural descriptions will elucidate the ways in which single African American mothers of children with (n=5) and without (n=5) disabilities experience parental engagement.

From the verbatim transcripts 52 formulated meanings or horizons were lifted from the text that represent moments of parental engagement for the participants (See Appendix). These horizons were analyzed for irrelevant, repeated or overlapping topics, and then clustered into 10 themes. Each emergent theme will be discussed along with the sub-themes that give meaning to the parents' lived experiences.

Emergent Themes of Parental Engagement

Navigating Adverse Conditions

- Dealing with personal health challenges
- Lack of transportation
- Limited financial resources
- Managing child/children's challenging behaviors
- Dealing with diagnosis of targeted disability

Navigating adverse conditions requires parents to take actions in order to mediate circumstances that negatively position the family and are directly related to social and or cultural capital. This emergent theme illuminates the way in which these parents resourcefully use their social, cultural, and or embodied capital to make a difference in their families' overall well-

being. For the purpose of this study a distinction is being made between mediating tangible conditions or situations and what some may believe are examples of resiliency. We focus here on demonstrative actions that are taken to diffuse or mediate situations that often undermine the stability of the family. In the following transcript Patricia shares her concern regarding her oldest son's lack of motivation and lack of progress in school.

> And on his papers they told me he would write just, "I don't know" down the line, down the line. Then so I took him to the doctor. They put him on Ritalin to slow him down and he couldn't go to school without that Ritalin … (Patricia, 2013, p. 1).

Patricia navigates this adverse condition by activating her social capital in seeking assistance from the family pediatrician as well as ongoing communications with her son's school in order to resolve her sons' challenges. Additionally, Patricia draws from these initial experiences with the special education system to inform her decisions and to build her sense of confidence around actions she later takes to advocate for special education services for her elementary age daughter (Brown, S., 2014).

. In another example, Rhonda who suffers from scoliosis and seizures questions her ability to adequately provide for the family. Her health challenges and her reliance on public transportation often position the family for ridicule from the school community as her children are often tardy to school. This causes Rhonda emotional stress and negatively impacts her identity as the head of household as her comments draw attention to challenges associated with limited resources (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008):

> A lot of the times I wasn't able to do the transportation or I was sick from having my seizures or whatever type of. I have muscle spasms too due to my scoliosis, so if I can't

> get up and go, it makes me feel bad. I felt like I let him down. But he don't see it like that. He (son) sees it as well mom, get better (Rhonda, 2013, p.1).

She navigates this situation through communication and the relationship that she has developed with her children. Here her oldest son seems to have assumed a patriarchal role encouraging his mother to take care of her personal needs. Through her parenting practices, Rhonda has taken time to cultivate both compassion for others and a sense of responsibility that allows the family to adjust during stressful times:

> I allow it to come out at that time so they know that they don't have to keep stuff bottled up. So I like the fact that we have an open relationship that they still know I'm mother, but I like the fact that we can talk and they feel comfortable talking to me (Rhonda, 2013, p. 1).

Talk seems to bring solace to the family and helps Rhonda to resolve her feelings of inadequacy around her ability to parent. A sense of family wellness is nurtured through these reciprocal conversations that heal and empower these families to resolve feelings of loneliness, frustration and disappointment as well as the uncertainty of being able to provide for the family that is often associated with being a single parent.

Nine of the ten parents experienced adverse conditions as outlined by the sub-themes of the emergent topic navigating adverse conditions and while Sylvia reported no current challenges she had concerns around future behaviors and growing peer pressures as her sons grow older without a male role model in their life. From the shared experiences healing and the ability to adapt came in three major actions, a) conversation; b) interpersonal relationships; and c) developing competence. All nine parents utilized conversation within the home to help their children understand any challenges that the family may be faced with. Rhonda, Paula, and Debra

all faced long-term health challenges. Rhonda, a scoliosis patient, Paula, who had developed heart issues, and Debra a mother with bipolar disorder used conversation with their children to develop a strong sense of family and devotion to one another. Conversation has long been recognized as a cultural strength in the African American community. The art of talk and story-telling has been readily used as a teaching tool through the communal based lifestyle of many African Americans. Narratives that speak of strength bring healing and help to form bonds between the individuals that share stories (Smith, 2006).

In the case of interpersonal relationships, parents began to network with other individuals to aid in problem solving. In the following transcript, Claudia who was initially devastated with her twin boys' diagnosis of autism begins to network with other families to locate the best services available to her sons. She has been frustrated by the inability of some agencies to give her specific diagnosis information as well as strategies that she can employ at home to help her son with his oppositional behaviors:

> Right. Ok. Back up. Went through (local agency) because I have a girlfriend who has a son who's like 34 years old now. She's the one that told me about ------- because back in the day, all through the years he was adolescent, that's who she went to. So that's how I went through -------- And -------started having a scheduling problem. I can't do this. So I ended up going to ---------- No, no, no. We changed, because I will change in a minute. And there's not that, I do it on purpose but because of the struggles and stuff that Ronald has. I need a place where it was going to work for him and that was a must. Absolutely must. (Claudia, 2013, p. 2).

Claudia's tenacity in finding local agencies to aid in diagnosing her twin's disabilities was relentless. In the above quote, she shared how she used an agency that was recommended by a close friend with a child with similar disabilities. However, when scheduling and the agency's ability to properly service her twin came into question, Claudia immediately pursued another agency. She formed relationships with the school social worker, a neurologist, and several local child development agencies that offered occupational therapy, language development, as well as behavior modification therapy. She continued this networking process until she was satisfied with their diagnosis as well as the prescribed medications. Her account is symbolic of the strategies that other participants employed to rise above moments of challenge (Brown, S. 2014).

Nicole mediates adverse conditions through developing interpersonal relationships. Here she reflects on how she feels delaying parenthood may have improved her financial situation and that having limited resources has been a setback for her son:

> But I think at 27, I would have had the money to keep him on point. You see what I'm saying? I would have had the money to put him in the right schools. I would have had the money to pay for outside tutoring. I would have had the money to put him in an extracurricular activity, such as like a language (Nicole, 2013, p. 12).

The desire for her son to have enrichment opportunities motivates Nicole to use her social and cultural capital to build interpersonal relationships with stakeholders that are positioned to provide access to any opportunities that she feels will help her son to grow as an individual and as a student. While she cannot afford the "best schools", she makes every effort to insure that her son is being challenged in his current educational setting by developing a relationship with his teachers and administration.

Another subtheme that emerged around navigating adverse conditions was managing children's challenging behaviors. Parents were successful in mediating these situations through developing additional competence in their ability to cope with their children's negative behaviors. This was accomplished through partnering with local agencies and or attending parenting workshops offered by the school. The following transcript illustrates how Benita, a parent with a child with disabilities and Rhonda, a parent with children without disabilities both felt empowered to make change after attending parenting workshops (McKenna & McMillen, 2013; Willam & Sanchez, 2012).

> They had a workshop for, it was actually for children's behavioral problems. It actually targeted little boys. It was more so, it really encouraged me, the man that was there giving the speech, cuz there were certain things about my son that, even though he is my son, I wasn't able to, you know, say ok, target and say this is the problem, or this is what's going on" "But it enlightened me….." (Benita, 2013, p.1).
>
> Yes, the workshops. We get a lot of information in the workshops pertaining to how to handle situations. I grew up in an abusive setting. My mother could have dealt with things better than what she could, so I feel like when I'm in situations, I deal with it totally different. I don't want physical to be the first thing. And by being in the workshops, they give us points when we're pressured. Things to do to calm down. Ways to talk to our children. How to approach them because they have feelings too. So I gained a lot from listening to other people's stories and how they handle situations and resources that they used and people, they've come across that they can refer us to in the event that we felt overwhelmed. So the workshops, they really helped (Rhonda, 2013, p. 6).

While parents of children with and without disabilities employed similar strategies to mediate adverse conditions, a sense of urgency was attached to the actions taken by parents of children with disabilities in reference to managing negative behaviors and or seeking resources to cope with the specific challenges of having a child with disabilities. For parents' of children with disabilities their greatest concerns were their child's ability to make academic gains and their child's ability to interact with their peers. Supporting the idea that emotional wellness was a primary concern for these families. Parents of children without disabilities focused on resources that would provide additional choices and or opportunities for the family to build a sense of overall wellness (Temple-Journiette, 2011; Krausz & Meszaros, 2005).

Mediating Community

- Influencing school culture and climate through participation
- Willingness to volunteer at school
- Requesting information from the teacher around student progress
- Voicing concerns around student progress/retention/treatment

Parents mediate community as they work to shape formal spaces through activism and or presence in their school community as it relates to school culture and climate. The theme of mediating community was reoccurring throughout all the participants' experiences of parental engagement. Each participant made reference to being a part of the school culture in varying ways that represented a continuum ranging from face to face contact to technology-based conversations. Some parents work directly to shape school culture and climate. Nicole describes how she rallied parent support to stop her son and others from being bullied to and from school:

> He had started getting bullied. I took the issue to the school and when I say they were on top of it, they pulled those kids out of class, they called those parents. We had parent meetings. We started to have more like those parent meetings that you guys have talking about bullying (Nicole, 2013, p. 7).

Increased communications and visibility of parents in the school community identifies them as "involved parents" thereby increasing their social and cultural capital. A parent's willingness to extend their time is viewed favorably by members of the school setting as it aligns to more traditional forms of parental engagement (Topar, Keane, Shelton, Calkins, 2010):

> But we would stand at the top of the corner and wait till about maybe about 15, 20 kids got there and then we would all walk to school together. Now I know that the kids probably told their parents. Most of the parents from my neighborhood did not participate in the way of helping that way. The parents that actually walked up and down the street – some of the parents didn't even live in our neighborhood, but they just participated (Nicole, 2013, p. 8).

Parents that consistently participate in the business of schooling have an understanding of how school level policies and practices directly impact their children. Nicole was able to increase safety measures by utilizing her social and cultural capital within the community. Her ability to mediate community benefits not only her child but, the overall culture and climate of the school. Parents also mediate community by making their expectations for positive academic outcomes known to stakeholders. Patricia describes her experience of negotiating her child's position and identity as a student with the current teacher (McKenna & Millen, 2013).

> When I'd call him, he'd call me back or sometimes he call me and tell me about something that's going on at the school and then we'd talk about it and see if she can participate in it and stuff like that. He was a good teacher. He just say, she now when she come home, she say I did my homework at school. So she don't never want to do her homework. I go through her backpack and I see a lot of homework that she won't do and I don't know why she don't want to do it. And then, when she in school, Mr. M. say she

> doing her work but it's up under grade level when she's testing. So I'm like, maybe it's some kids that can't test good, but they can maybe do their work good. So when the tests come out, low testing, then the child is automatically going to be on the flunking list. And I said, well I don't think that's fair if she's doing alright in the classroom but the testing scores is low, lower than the grade is supposed to be. Maybe some kids just don't test well (Patricia, 2013, p. 4).

From this account, Patricia feels that she has made an effort to participate in reciprocal conversations, yet she feels somewhat frustrated by school policies around testing and accountability. So much so that she made a trip to the school to talk with the reading teacher around her daughter's progress. Patricia's goal in visiting the school is to determine what interventions are available to her child. Parents that demand information around student progress are activating their capitals to make change and or lessen the impact of school practices that may negatively position the family (Kyle, 2011).

Several parents use on-going presence to implant themselves into the school setting. Daily visits to the Parent Center provide opportunities for them to spontaneously volunteer for school projects like room parent, field trip chaperone, and or lunch monitor. Volunteerism is a common platform for mediating the school setting. Many parents have a desire to stay connected to their children's experiences through active participation in school activities (Christianakis, 2011; Topar, et al., 2010). Rhonda is a student that makes use of the parent computer room several times a week. This makes her a regular presence in the school community. The following transcript expresses how Rhonda believes the school should do more to solicit the help of parents that frequent the building on a regular basis:

> I feel like it would be good to me like, you see us every day, put us to work if you need us. We can be the ones running paperwork back and forth to different classes or even if the office is full and the phones are ringing and you need, let me come in and help. So whatever is safe, whatever is convenient, staff may be sick or anything, utilize us (Rhonda, 2013, p. 5).

By simply being a regular presence in the school community this helps parents to shape this formal space. It frames the school's culture and climate as a safe haven for families and reminds stakeholders to be accountable for their actions (Williams & Sanchez, 2012).

In the following excerpt, Paula advocates for her son who has been consistently suspended after being moved from a self-contained special education placement to general education. Here she shares her conversation with the principal where she questions her son's suspension status and voices her concerns around fair treatment practices.

> Yes. I talked to her because the information that I got from the teacher was some totally different. So then she said, "Oh, no. He's not kicked out of school." I'm like, "Okay, thank you." Because of the information, they was saying that he was going to stay home and I don't like when my kids stay home (Paula, 2013, p. 9).

The principal has noted the discrepancies in the teacher's account of the situation and has made a decision not to suspend her son. Paula's presence in the school community as a concerned parent has made her known to members of the Child Study Team as well as administration. This improves Paula's ability to navigate this formal space using both cultural and social capital to affect change (Barton, A. C., Drake, C., Perez, J. G., St. Louis, K., & George, M., 2004).

All 10 single mothers used presence and or activism to mediate community in varying ways ranging from physical contact to phone communications. Parents of students with disabilities were more likely to have to use their capitals to request information regarding student progress and or voice concerns regarding progress, treatment, or retention related issues. The differences in methods that parents employed to mediate community seemed to be attributed to time, employment obligations, and transportation. The three parents that consistently used presence were not employed full time and were regularly on campus. Six of the parents indicated that they were employed full time and therefore were more likely to use their social and cultural capitals to resolve issues once becoming aware and one parent lacked transportation making it difficult to readily be on campus. However, parents constantly made efforts to influence their children's schooling experiences.

Intergenerational Foot-Printing

- Experiences of parent as activist
- Experiences of parent as teacher
- Experiences of parent as encourager

Intergenerational Foot-printing **is** feelings and memories from childhood that shape the participants' current parenting practices and or behaviors.

> Like I had ten kids. Five boys and five girls, so I did like the same methods my mom would do with me or either like summer, if they didn't have summer school, my oldest kids, they're grown now, I used to make up work for them to do. You know, on their grade level like that (Patricia, 2013, p. 1).

> So it was really exciting for him to open that world up and for me to be able to open up my experiences that I've had with my mother, with me being in youth council or me going to the conferences or just sitting in meetings or anything like that. It was an

> experience of complete education and learning and enlightenment the whole entire, from beginning to end. It was talking about Mama and talking about what the NAACP does and wow, this is what she does and she's trying to help black people (Nicole, 2013, p. 10).

Participants consistently shared stories of intergenerational influences on their parenting strategies. Sub-topics that emerged made reference to being an activist, teacher and or encourager in their child's/children's life based on their lived experiences. To their credit even the mothers that told childhood stories of isolation, alcoholism, and molestation all had a positive experience that impacted their current parenting practices. In almost each instance it was the participants' mother that had left a footprint on their lives. Through socialization these mothers have learned to adapt and reflect on their own parenting practices embracing lessons of strength from the past that currently help them to thrive (Cooper-Butler, A., 2005).

In this excerpt, Lydia feels encouraged by the praise that she receives from her mother. Her mother has been a driving force in her life, offering words of healing and strength when Lydia often wanted to surrender to the pressures of life.

> Well, she tells me, "I don't know how you do it!" [laughs] But she always says, "I don't know how you do it." I get a lot of "You are a wonderful mom," from my mom, so that is very, very helpful and actually, I get that from a lot of people (Lydia, 2013, p. 12).

This supports Lydia's identity as a change agent and positive role model for her children. Parents that receive accolades for their engagement usually feel validated in their role as a caregiver. Lydia is following in her mother's footsteps as she describes her mother as a disciplinarian, an educational advocate, and her strongest supporter when it comes to starting new endeavors (Cousins, L. & Mickelson, R., 2011).

Sylvia learns the importance of education from her parents based on high expectations.

> Yea, not particularly, but, I was raised to believe that education was very important and that I wasn't going to just up and just drop out of school one day, that that was not going to be acceptable, that that would be grounds to have a place to live, basically, so I was on. I didn't go to college right away, or whatever, but I did graduate from high school (Sylvia, 2013, p. 1).

Sylvia was a stay at home mother until the death of her husband but plans to return to school to become a social worker. She hopes to start school in the fall and tries to promote the same values around schooling by working with her children at home to promote school readiness.

Here Benita shares how much of an impact her mother has had on her to excel in school:

> I always remember my mama telling me that school is very beneficial and if you ever wanna be anything in life or if you ever wanna be, like she kept saying, she sees president all the time. If you ever want to be president or if you ever wanna be lawyer or a doctor you have to know how to read, you have to know how to write, you have to I know how count and you don't know how to do these things, now if you can do that, this was drilled into my head every day, every day. I wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to be a lawyer. And my mom was like okay, still today she said, you're only 30 years old, you can go do that. I been looking to still do it, but that was basically everything she used to say which was very beneficial to me and she just kept saying, look at your history, how many people fought for you, to be at this point. And I just thought about that everyday up until the little tragedy happen in 11th grade and it just is like, ok school isn't, not for me at the moment, but when it came to everybody else's school, like my little cousins at high

school and they are in middle school, they come over my house and I help them with homework, so I felt like, and my mom used to just look at me like, well if you can do that then you can go do it for yourself (Benita, 2013, p. 8, p. 9).

At the time of the study, Benita had enrolled in a local career training institute with hopes of graduating in the spring. Finally, bringing to fruition her goal of acquiring the credentialing necessary to change her family's financial status.

Davita turned to the techniques that her mother had taught her in terms of providing a structured environment for homework:

Probably my mother. Yeah, to have a quiet area. Sit at the dining room table or you got a little desk, and that's what I'm looking for. You have to sit in a quiet area, turn the TV's off and no phone (Davita, 2013, p. 2, p. 3).

Brody, et al. (2002) found that by providing structure parents were able to influence their children's academic performance. These excerpts illustrate a sense of reverence that is held in reference to their mothers and how their parents' words and actions continue to influence their decisions around how to interact with their own children. Demonstrating the interdependence that often exists within the African American family (Lyles & Carter, 1982). The mother of each participant played a paramount role in shaping their current parenting practices independent of having children with or without disabilities.

Taking Action to Affect Children's Academic Outcomes

- Looking for mentorship opportunities or outside resources
- Choosing a safe and caring school environment to meet the needs of your child
- Dealing with disciplinary actions of the school
- Tracking student progress
- Attending parent conferences

Parents advocate for their child by negotiating resources and or mediating formal spaces to support their child's academic outcomes**.** Sylvia is concerned about the school environment as there are several charter schools in the surrounding neighborhood. She uses her social and cultural capital to elicit information regarding the local public school before going to visit in person:

> Well, I had spoke with different people that live on my block and they said that it had been a good school for their children, so I decided to try it out for myself…..Well, because it seemed orderly, all the classes with all of the private, how the teachers and the staff are polite and they seem concerned about the students, was it just like some wild school where anything can happen, it seemed very orderly, the truancy, the violence, you know, there was really some supervision at the school (Sylvia, 2013, p. 3).

The use of networking helps Sylvia to make an informed decision regarding school selection. It is important to her for her children to be in an environment that supports learning with few distractions. Several mothers spoke of using networking to secure outside resources in hopes of improving academic outcomes (Williams & Sanchez, 2012; Hall-Chambers, 2005). In the following transcript, Claudia shares that while Ronald is receiving related services at school that outside services will be beneficial to his overall progress:

> Right, I told her about _____(local agency)_ They are, I took Ronald to _ (local agency)_ Now he had speech and and OT __[but I also put him in speech and OT at _

(local agency)_ So he's been double dosed and that's what his teacher said. She said no, just because he had speech and OT here, put him in whatever outside environment. And I did that. They worked miracles (Claudia, 2013, p. 1).

Claudia feels that exposing the twin to speech and occupational therapy from internal and external partners that their overall prognosis will be improved. Lydia has similar thoughts about helping her oldest daughter become a stronger reader:

She's kinda, well right now, I think she's really lagging behind. I'nervous but at the same time I know what I need to do. She'll be in "K" (tutoring). for the summer. Actually I already signed her (Lydia, 2013, p. 13).

Lydia believes that it is very important for her "*to do my part at home*". She does not feel that the entire burden for academic success falls completely on the teacher. Claudia and Lydia's sense of responsibility to their children and their desire for them to excel in school causes them to use their social, cultural, and objectified capital to access resources to promote student success.

Traditional parental engagement frameworks tout the importance of parent participation in the business of schooling. Typically the actions are demonstrative and are often orchestrated in formal spaces. Limited parent visibility and or nontraditional participation are often associated with parental apathy around schooling and or bring to bear issues of class and an imbalance of power. All of the participants were very concerned about student outcomes and the overall treatment of their children by the adults within the school community (Kyle, 2011;Topar, 2011). The following transcript represents how four of the mothers took action to affect change in their children's academic success which range from investigating the school environment to parent

conferences. All of the excerpts portray actions that are normally associated with traditional forms of parental engagement.

> Number one, I look for responsiveness. That's the first thing I look for. If I walk into this office, somebody says hello. If I walk into a building, someone acknowledges me. If I don't get responsive, I don't like it. Because to me, if you can ignore me, you can ignore my child. And that's first thing I look for is responsiveness. Next I'll look for responsibility. If administrative staff, teachers, maintenance men, lawn people, if they can take responsibility for their actions when something goes wrong, or even when something is right, then I feel more comfortable (Nicole, 2013, p. 6).

> And I just like, when I came here I just feel so much better. I'm just at ease. I know even though you all are not their parents, it's like I give permission. I know that you're not going to hurt him, I know everything's going to be all fine. So I'm like, ok. They can go there, I'll sit at home, I'm at peace. Because I know everything's going to be ok (Benita, 2013, p. 3).

> Yes, go through her backpack more until I found out when it was too late that she was – Mr. M. told me he give them homework every day. She's still doing it now. I did my homework at school. And now her daddy going through her backpack. So if he don't go through it, I have to go through it. Some of the homework be old, and some of it be new, but one time I took all of it out and I made her sit here right at this table and do all of it. She said, well that's new. I said I don't believe you (Patricia, 2013, p. 5, p. 6).

> We tried to communicate. We sat down and talked. I did get to meet with her and come to a couple of the parent teacher conferences. But I always felt it was real fast -talking and like, maybe I'm missing it. I'm not getting it. She's telling me what he's being

> shown and told and he knows and this and that. He was always forgetting his homework. I don't know, that's probably his fault. So we get home and I'm like where's your homework? Oh I left it. Left your journal. You left your, your homework packet. Now we're behind. School's closed. Whatever (Davita, 2013, p.4).

The actions of these single mothers emulate those of hegemonic families that are often regarded as the ideal parenting situation. A common theme among the participants was the desire for the school to address cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Nicole and Benita effectively express the need to have the school act in ways that mimic the role of the parent. Benita goes as far as saying, "I'm at peace" when my children are at Brightside Prep. Relational trust is being cultivated as parents take actions to support student success. Although varying degrees of education are represented in the study, Patricia who completed a tenth grade education is clearly frustrated with her daughter's defiance around completing her homework. Yet, she is diligent in working with school personnel to resolve her daughters' struggle with learning. Likewise, the other parents took similar actions in order to support academic success and all see education as a way of improving the quality of life for their children. All ten parents attempted to navigate formal spaces in order to support positive academic outcomes. This supports the notion that parents from all socioeconomic levels have a desire for their children to be successful (Jeynes, 2011, Mapp, 2004).

Resiliency

- Being there physically and emotionally for your children
- Controlling emotions
- Dealing with feelings of isolation and or absent father
- Impact of thoughts around one's own identity as a parent
- Accepting diagnosis of disability
- Validation of ability to parent child without a spouse

Resiliency is the ability to cope with negative feelings or situations associated with being a single parent that may be affected by limited resources including social and cultural capitals. Single parents often have to deal with feelings of isolation and or negative feelings associated with an absent father. In this excerpt, Rhonda admits it is a challenge to hold the family together without the children's father in their life. While she never married the children's father she feels that if he were present it would bring a sense of peace to the family.

> I could say now like, with their father being in prison I feel like we're holding it together, being strong about it and supporting each other as far as attitudes. Just emotions. I allow my children to express themselves wholeheartedly whether it's anger or if they just want to cry (Rhonda, 2013, p. 2).

Rhonda copes with the emotional highs and lows of the children by accepting that she has no control over their feelings and believes that their behavior is a normal part of their current circumstances, Religion plays a strong role in her ability to comfort herself and her children, relieving her anxieties and creating a mental calmness.

Resiliency can also be seen in the way participants describe their identity as a single parent. Lydia's sense of resiliency is evident as she reflects on her current life without a spouse. In this example she acknowledges the challenge of being a single parent while admitting that this role has helped to shape her identity:

-Like I really wish that I did marry before I had children, but of course I thought that's where it was going, but you know- I wouldn't - I absolutely would not trade - even though I am a single mom and it is absolutely the most hardest thing in the world. Being a parent is hard with two people so - but one person is definitely harder. But I wouldn't trade it because I think that it has built my character. It has a great part - it makes a great part of what I am today. So - I don't know [laughs](Lydia, 2013, p. 20*).*

Lydia recognizes that having to provide for her family has positioned her to be resourceful and tenacious. She is hopeful regarding the future of her family as she believes that having a great support network will allow her to accomplish anything.

Resilience as defined by Webster's Dictionary is the ability to become strong, healthy or successful after something bad happens. Within this theme there is a psychological focus on the mental strength of each parent to transcend and adapt to the pressures of being a single parent. The stigma that is often attached to being a single parent has positioned many mothers to feel that they must shelter their children from the reality of their fathers' absence. During the interview Benita is obviously moved by the thought that her son is being deprived of his father's attention something that she is increasingly aware is out of her grasp as a female. As a mother she aches to fill her child's void and is hurt by her son's rejection of her attempts to provide comfort as he searches for his identity as a "man" without the consistent guidance of a male role model (Choi, J. & Jackson, A., 2010).

I find myself making excuses for their father and I shouldn't, but then when I look at my son and he sees all the little boys tossing the balls and stuff and I be like, daddy at work right now, he coming later or, I be making up excuses, just to keep him from looking like, uh you know, and my son acts out a lot cuz of his father (Benita, 2013, p. 5).

Parent identity may also be questioned from the standpoint of being a "good provider". Nicole seems to lament the choice to have a child before she was able to accomplish some personal goals that she believes would have afforded her the ability to ensure that her son reaches his full potential. Resiliency is demonstrated through her revelation that the quality time she has sacrificed to give her son is clearly relevant to his development. Not having the resources to provide what she perceives as important enrichments causes Nicole to take on those challenges herself.

> He has a guitar and because I'm not in a financial position, I didn't allow myself to be in a financial position, I did not afford him the best parts of education, which is really that one on one interaction. If you can get that, it just makes a total difference in everything that you learn and that's why I have taken these sacrifices because I know I did, I could not afford him that sooner. ON the back end, I had to do a lot of it myself and that was my, that's how I balanced it out (Nicole, 2013, p. 12).

Nicole replaces formalized activities with quality mother-son interactions to help her son mold a positive identity, inevitably reprioritizing her personal goals. However, instead of accepting a deficit perspective of single motherhood, Nicole arranged her work schedule to be able to provide afterschool supervision and guidance in order to keep her son on a path to success.

Lydia speaks on controlling her emotions as she works to increase her level of patience while working with her children at home. Experiencing a "tough teacher" as a third grader has made her appreciate the need to maintain her child's self-esteem while cultivating perseverance in completing schoolwork. Again we see how Lydia uses resiliency to bring a sense of calm to a situation that she finds very troubling.

> Just, I don't want her to feel uncomfortable because I feel like when you make a child feel uncomfortable, they - they're embarrassed if they're getting - if they get it wrong. You have to have some type of way to encourage. So, I - instead of getting madder or getting frustrated or letting her see - 'cause I still get frustrated but I don't let her see it (Lydia, 2013, p. 4).

Lydia's personal experiences around schooling and the support that she received from her mother have made her extremely sensitive to the emotions attached to being a successful student. She understands that she must take the role of encourager to see her daughter through her educational struggles which means being mentally tough so that she does not communicate failure and frustration in her actions. In the excerpt below, Lydia further demonstrates her mental toughness as she finds strength in her role of single parent as you sense her struggle with life experiences:

> But I told - I said the next time that I go to the doctor I was going to tell my doctor that I think that I need some kind of - 'cause - even though that I think that everything is good - like I have those really down moments and I never, ever think about killing myself or anything like that - 'cause I don't want nobody to have my kids [laughs]…..
>
> - so they keep me going. If it wasn't for them, I don't know where the heck I would be - but I do think that I need some of it 'cause I find myself being - I'll cry (Lydia, 2013, p. 30).

In another example, Paula speaks about accepting her twin's learning challenges and her feelings of contentment as she gets word that they are improving.

> It's that, they're gonna be slow. They're gonna learn slow because they were premies and the doctor already let me know that that's the process of however you have babies born

too early. So, I'm happy that they are focusing, they are sitting still, they are learning, they are reading. So, I'm happy with that progress (Paula, 2013, p. 11).

Paula wants her twin to experience the same academic success that was afforded to her oldest son but she is realistic about their progress. Although she knows that they are experiencing some learning challenges she still maintains high expectations for her children and feels a sense of pride when they make strides in their education.

When Claudia received the information that her twin boys were autistic she was devastated but relieved. She immediately began connecting with local agencies that could provide behavior modification, occupational therapy (OT) and speech and language services.

> When she said that, my heart dropped. I'm like, this is what was going on. He wasn't talking. However, I got with – how did I find out about that? I think it was through (agency) so I signed him. First part when he got tested, tests came back __positive signed him up with (agency). Some kind of way (agency) connected me to (secondary agency). The resources are not in Wayne County as much as it should be. You got to go out there in Birmingham (Claudia, 2013, p. 1, p 16).

The theme of resiliency illuminates the ability of each mother to view their situation from a different vantage point and use their embodied cultural capital to nurture their own emotional health and that of their children. Resiliency is seen across both subgroups in which mental or psychological health is maintained through religious affiliations, verbal praise or encouragement from members of a support systems, and or life lessons that seemed to nurture a sense of inner strength (Temple-Journiette, 2011).

Personal Efficacy

- Being a role model for your children
- Stakeholder partnerships
- Developing child's identity as an individual/ student
- Managing pressures
- Attending parenting workshops
- Continuing education to raise SES of family

Personal efficacy builds one's social, cultural and or institutionalized capital through negotiations with individuals or formal spaces. The theme of personal efficacy encompasses the mother's quest to acquire new knowledge and skills that increase the social capital of the family. The experience of being a leader taking on the critical role of raising children is encompassed in the constructs associated with authentic leadership. "Authentic leaders use their natural abilities, but they also recognize their shortcomings, and work hard to overcome them. They lead with purpose, meaning, and values. They build enduring relationships with people. Others follow them because they know where they stand. They are consistent and self-disciplined. When their principles are tested, they refuse to compromise. Authentic leaders are dedicated to developing themselves because they know that becoming a leader takes a lifetime of personal growth." (George, 2003 p.12 as cited in Gardner, 2011). True to these tenets the mothers in the study embody courage, community, and care. While there is certainly a continuum in regards to the challenges faced by each family, courage is a salient theme across all of the participants.

Here Lydia describes what it was like to return to school after having three children. She also makes the connection between having formal education and networking opportunities. Further identifying with a traditional perspective of the importance of education and the benefits that society bestows on families that uphold middle class values. During the course of the study three parents actually earned their associate degrees. Being in school positioned these parents to create quality time with their children that revolved around education. Thus becoming a role

model and further developing their child's identity as an active participant in the process of learning. In this transcript, Lydia discusses her plans to gain more formal credentialing. She has just begun a case management business and has a desire to open a non-profit organization. Thus she sees returning to school as an opportunity to further her studies as well as increase her networking opportunities that she links with the health of her business endeavors:

> Then in 2010, I went back to school to do my prerequisites for nursing, but that - I was adamant - I was ready to do it, but I didn't have the - I had three kids. So it was very hard. I didn't have the help. I had help, but it wasn't enough, though to study for biology and chemistry and you know. So, I just went back. So now, in September I'm going to start a family studies program and - I wanted - I really don't need another degree to do what I want to do, but I just figured if I do that, then I'll be more knowledgeable. I'll be able to meet new people that possibly have the same thing in mind, or they could give me something that I can use for my organization that I'm trying to open, so (Lydia, 2013, p. 9).

Attending school establishes her as a lifelong learner. Becoming a successful entrepreneur demonstrates the connection between education and empowerment.

Authentic leaders create community to foster a sense of belonging. Parents exercising personal efficacy reach out to stakeholders that share the common mission of nurturing "the family". Fictive kinships and informal social networks have been staples in the African American community often serving as the "glue" for divergent families. All parents attempted to affect their child's academic outcomes through actively pursuing relationships with educational stakeholders (Taylor, 2013). Debra expresses what it was like to have a reciprocal relationship with a teacher that was willing to work with her child's disabilities. Often feeling ostracized by

family members because of her own bouts with mental health. Debra created safe places and strong bonds with school personnel that added to her family support system and increased her ability to act as head of the household. In other families relationships helped parents to secure much needed academic and or emotional support which builds a parent's sense of personal efficacy (McKenna, M. & Millen, J., 2013).

> I love Mr. M. he was so nice and he just kept going, all you had was to remind him about Mr. M. that is who kept him motivated. I mention Mr. M. said to do it this way, he just said to do it this way, J. don't say anything, J. was like,… (Debra, 2013, p. 7).
>
> "Miss G. gave me some candy. She was getting on me. She told me she was going to kick me if I do that again." I said, "good." So, they always bring a few teachers that are like that, I learned that, like, there are only a few good, it's a lot of teachers and a lot of people here but there are only a few teachers in your mind, when you get older, you can remember (Debra, 2013, p. 7).

Debra's ability to maintain these stakeholder partnerships supported her ability to develop her child's identity as a male and as a student. Debra had expressed that she felt uncomfortable about teaching her male child how to conduct himself. Mr. M. set behavior standards that were respected that Debra could in turn support within the home. Other teachers that Debra described as good teachers also exhibited strong disciplinarian traits that she felt were integral to student success. Davita also sought partnerships that would support academic enrichment.

Caring for oneself or "me time" is crucial to physical and emotional health. Mothers often feel guilty about taking time out to nurture themselves. Also, they often feel that no one else will be able to perform tasks as efficiently as "mom". However, one must be at their best to

perform at the highest level. Paula briefly amused by her own comment shares that what she really needs is a vacation from being a mother. She quickly recants her statement and goes on to talk about the joys of motherhood as if she feared being judged for her fleeting fantasy. Perhaps not realizing that this is a positive characteristic of leaders. Many mothers because of their strong dedication to family and on-going responsibilities do not feel positioned to care for their personal needs. However, she is open to the idea of schools offering mothers a day of rejuvenation giving them "Just a little time"

> Well, the day of refreshing, you mean you would just take the kids for an outing and that'd give them a moment for them. 'Cause sometimes you just need a moment just for yourself. It's not a long time. Just a little time. And let them go, have fun and they come back and tell you that they had fun and you can tell them, "Well, yes. I did, too by just sitting down! (Paula, 2013, p. 18).

Part of being placed in a role of leadership is being able to manage the pressures that accompany the position. This often means being resourceful by using one's capital to create a space for rejuvenation. Personal efficacy as a whole enables parents to grow as individuals in knowledge and skills that allow them to function in their capacity as the head of household. Parents of students with and without disabilities served as role models for their children. This was exhibited when parents took the position of student in both formal and informal spaces. Here Paula shares how she had hoped to learn new strategies to help her work with her children and her disappointment that only students without disabilities were addressed, Suggesting that subgroups should be considered during the planning of family activities (Williams & Sanchez, 2012; Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

> No, I went to the workshops. They was just being - that was just more educational, saying be aware of certain things that's going on with the kids in school. And I'm like, "Okay, this should already be alarming everybody's mind…….Certain people, they don't always have normal children. So, if sometimes they just go over - if you have a child that has this special need or that special need, to give you clues or information for you to be alarmed so to always of aware of different things that you already know. Right, because it was with normal, a normal situation with children. That's normal. Not a situation with children that has a disability or a learning slow area range (Paula, 2013, p. 1).

Continuing the pursuit of formal credentialing would eventually serve to raise the socioeconomic status of two families participating in the study. Parents also used stakeholder partnerships to navigate situations in which they may have felt less equipped to handle. However, to make the decision to solicit the expertise of another individual demonstrates a sense of self-advocacy.

Cultivating School Readiness

- Developing language skills
- Introducing technology for learning
- Making study materials
- Completing daily homework
- Completing school related projects

Cultivating school readiness is when parents assume the role of teacher interacting directly with perceived or actual curriculum that is believed to have an impact on student outcomes (Beauregard, Petrakos, & Dupont 2014; Brody, 2002). In the following transcript Lydia and Sylvia share how they expose their children to primary curriculum benchmarks, in addition to expressing their desire to give their children a jumpstart on learning.

It is their hope that prior learning experiences will ensure that their children have some basic skills before entering a formal schooling situation:

> So it - I do things like that - and like I said, I'm going to start working 'cause I wanna - when he goes to Head Start I want him to know his colors. I want him to know - how - like, at least be able to say his name starts with a "M." I want him to do that. I try to teach him his birthday. It's July 27th, he tells me it's July 4th, told him he was two, he tells me he's 14 (Lydia, 2013, p .20).

> Well, when they were first born, I had flash cards already made up. I started teaching them how print their name and all that that was before they even went to school. I would help them with their homework when they needed it (Sylvia, 2013, p. 1).

Cultivating school readiness highlights the parents' sense of responsibility for being their child's first teacher. Parents support their children by facilitating homework completion, seeking additional information or expertise related to the current curriculum, as well as providing hands-on educational experiences that support schooling. In this excerpt, Nicole, speaks about making quality experiences out of the time she and her son spend together during their daily routines. She indicates that she frequently uses informal instructional techniques like oral quizzing to challenge her son to go beyond the curriculum:

> Let me see. I test Steven a lot. Not to say like test him, oh sit down and take a test. But I'll look at the lesson plan for the teacher or I'll look at like towards this time of the year, usually during the middle of the year, I'll look at what they need for the next year and I'll start testing him on my own, just random kind of questions like oh well do you know what this is? Then if he says no, I check that on my head. Most of the stuff I keep it just mental. I don't actually write it down because I write so much other stuff down. But

with Steven, I don't have to write it down because I know what I want to do with him (Nicole, 2013, p. 11).

In addition to providing opportunities for rehearsal study practice, Nicole continues to express the need to make education a first priority. Rhonda takes a similar stance to reinforcing educational practices by encouraging her son to become an avid reader and then checking for understanding:

> He sat and read a chapter book and he finished it. He finished the whole book and I asked him to tell me about it. Sometimes I have to be careful what I ask for because once he starts, it's hard for him to stop. So he basically verbalizes the whole book and his summary back to us, and I said whoa. Ok. You got it. Yep, you're right. Ok, so how do I turn the button off because you're still talking? (Rhonda, 2013, p. 7).

Rhonda used her knowledge of the reading curriculum to determine if her son's reading practice was beneficial by using a common strategy of having her son to summarize the text. Survey data reported the use of technology such as Leapfrog tablets and IPads to infuse technology into their children's at home learning experiences. In the following transcript Benita shares how much she enjoys helping her children with science projects:

> -----yes I love to help them with they science projects. Cuz I like to be real creative, my kids won't, they all are so intelligent. They just sit there, but they want me to do everything (Benita, 2013, p. 5).

Benita admits that she is so overzealous about the project that she finds herself wanting to complete it on her own. In contrast, Davita tries to work with her grandchild who is unresponsive to her attempts to help him successfully complete his homework. While she seems somewhat frustrated she has tried to create routines and structure to completing homework:

> It's like he's somewhere else. His focus is not there. We go over the a, e, i, o, u. I say, what sounds do these make? It's like he's forgetting or he'll look at some lettering and have no clue what those letters should sound like to me. So I don't know what that is (Davita, 2013, p. 5).s

In each instance parents utilize their cultural and social capital to impart knowledge and skills that will make a difference in their child's academic performance. A resounding message from participants was that of empowering their children with knowledge regardless of the mother's educational level.

Participants drew from their lived experiences in order to effect change in their child's schooling experiences As participants shared their interactions it was evident that each mother felt that this was an integral part of motherhood., a rights of passage. In some instances it was evident that the mother planned to live vicariously through her child/children. Long -range goals included college and or a specific trade that would allow their children to be self- sufficient thus moving away from the frequently assumed pathology of divergent families around education (Cooper-Butler, 2005, Kyle, 2011, Fan, 2001).

Establishing High Expectations

- Reinforce religious principles and or values
- Promoting a positive work ethic
- Teaching your children to take responsibility for themselves and others
- Promoting college attendance
- Communicating desire for children to be self –sufficient
- Discussing behavior expectations

Establishing high expectations means that parents establish norms around behavior inside and outside the school setting in addition to conveying beliefs around academic and or life goals. Frameworks of dysfunction may theorize that existing systems within a single-parent household are deficient and therefore unable to support the development of high expectations (Payne,

1996). In contrast, participants narrate instances in which they incorporate religion into life lessons that help to establish values as a foundation for decision- making. Rhonda believes that a biblically based value system will help her children *"stay on the right path",* clearly communicating that only certain behaviors are acceptable and that decisions made in youth have lasting implications for the future (Petts, 2012).

My son got the Holy Ghost when he was 8,9,6. It was 6?

Well I remember we were making shirts for the curator at church. I had words that they can pick to put on their shirts, and they all picked their words and the words that they picked, the order that they picked them in was joy, belief, faith, and love. That was my oldest son's shirt. And I really liked that he picked those words. I feel like those words he's going to live by when he gets older (Rhonda, 2013, p. 2).

Religion is a staple in Rhonda's parenting practices that has set the standard for the way she interacts with her children with scriptures at the core of the behavior norms she has established for the entire family. Diligence and excellence are the messages that Rhonda hopes to instill in her children. Echoing her sentiments is Patricia who makes it clear that she feels education will improve the quality of life for her children. She has made the connection between skills, knowledge and leading an independent lifestyle. Two of her older daughters became mothers at an early age and periodically are dependent on their mother to provide basic needs. Patricia thinks of the future as she shares her commitment to ensuring that her three youngest children become self-sufficient:

I want to make sure that they get a good education and they go to college and be able to take care of themselves and get a good job because I'm getting older now and I want them to be independent where they don't have to be saying – Like sometimes my oldest

kids, mama, I got into it with my girlfriend or my boyfriend. I got to come back home and, no I want them to be solid and on their feet (Patricia, 2013, p. 7).

In touch with her mortality, Patricia sees the need for her children to be able to care for themselves and perhaps be in a position to help her in the event that she is unable to care for herself. Continuous improvement was the message from each participant. For a majority of the parents in the study this will mean that they expect their child/children to attend college either to follow in their footsteps or for the parent to live vicariously through the success of their children. In the following transcript, Benita balances her own idea of success and her daughters desire to follow her aunt into the field of cosmetology:

I told her, the hair it, I don't really like, it's okay to be a hair stylist, but I want, to her okay push your dreams up just a little bit more baby because you, you so smart, you can be a hair stylist and you could be doing something else too (2013, p. 6).

Benita recognizes that she does not have complete control over the decisions that her children will make. However, she wants her children to reach their full potential and dream big which to Benita means being college bound. Nicole shares her quest and makes it clear that her son is her passion, "The first thing I do when I wake up is think about Steven". Her day is consumed with being a parent as she has reduced her work schedule to spend more time with her son. Nicole can be found daily on the school's campus in the Parent Computer Center. She explains how she works to instill a positive work ethic around schooling practices:

At school we talk about everything that happen in the day, and before we go to school, we practice timetables or we do spelling words or just to let him know that you're getting ready for something and then when you leave, this is what you learn. I need you to go

over those things. I need you to constantly be thinking about what you need to do in your priorities, because my priority is to keep you educated (Nicole, 2013, p.9).

Nicole is adamant about her son being well rounded. Since Steven is an only child teaching her son to be a compassionate person is something that Nicole admits is sometimes hard to do, but as she appears to be a person that seeks out teachable moments she seized an opportunity to teach her son a sense of sharing and responsibility during a visit from a younger house guest, but was pleasantly surprised by her son's revelation:

> And Steven took Carl outside and some boys tried to be mean to Carl and Steven told the boys I don't think is ok. I don't want you to be mean to him. And you should never be mean to a kid. He pulled Carl, they walked back to the house. He came in the house and he told me what happened. When we walked back outside, he walked with Carl to the kids and I talked to the kids. He said, mom, wait a second. And he turned, I turned back around and I said what? He said, I want to say something to them before we leave. And I said, go ahead. And he says, I've always wanted to be you guys' friends, but I will never let a friend be mean to me. That, I was, that's a small thing, but in a way it's so big. It's so big. It means that he realized his self who he was in the scenario. It means that he heard what I said. It means he put value on himself as well as those friends, because like he said, I will always want to be your friend. I will always want to play with you. But I will not let you hurt me, because that's not a friend (Nicole, 2013, p.11, p. 12).

Nicole realizes that her son has learned the true meaning of friendship and that he recognizes his self-worth by showing an unwillingness to associate with children that were differently principled.

Parents work to establish high expectations through promoting the benefits of education, setting standards of appropriate behavior, and encouraging self-sufficiency. These expectations may be impacted by religion, lived experiences, and or the parent's ability to set an example through modeling. All of the parents' actions directly or indirectly set high educational standards. Behavior standards seemed to be influenced by the presence or absence of disability. Claudia and Paula worked directly with behavior intervention strategies based on their children's Individualized Education Plans. For other parents, religion was a common theme regarding behavior expectations and although some parents did not speak directly about behavior standards it may be considered implicit of their expectations for academic success (O'Sullivan et.al 2014; Petts, 2012).

Relationships with Family, Friends, and Stakeholders

- Cultivating relationships with your children
- Encouragement from family members
- Emotional support from family
- Financial support from families
- Spending quality time with your children
- Family support system (emotional/financial)

Social interactions cultivate support systems that mediate the acquisition of tangible and or intangible resources. A relationship founded on relational trust is based on social respect that is supported through positive discourse that takes place within the community (Bryk & Schneider,.2003). These resulting connections provide support to a divergent family in the absence of a patriarchal social system. Within the emerging sub-themes there is an interconnectedness that underscores the value of discourse as capital. In the case of Benita she describes how her mother took on the role of being disciplinarian much like some fathers would in a two- parent home. This allows her to take on a submissive role that she sees as taking a break from the constant responsibilities of being a single parent:

> We do it every day. She don't never leave my home. She comes back and forth, there's nothing she won't do. She goes over and beyond the call of duty. When it comes to like, if I'm not feeling well, or if, um, how can I put it, or if I'm just at that moment in my mind, ok I can't deal with this right now mama. She will pick up the slack on everything. Kids will, it's like little soldiers when she's around and she's ok, you go there and you do this, you gonna clean up this, you gonna do, and I just sit there with my feet up and like, oh thank you mama. This is great. She has been my self-supportive for a long time (Benita, 2013, p. 2).

In addition, this line of thinking also serves to illuminate the often dichotomous role of being a single parent. The saying "It takes a village to raise a child" has almost become cliché however nontraditional African American families that move away from their communal roots can potentially limit their available social and cultural capital that can potentially translate into tangible and or intangible resources for the family.

Discourse between stakeholders is a viable form of capital when it serves to enhance the families' quality of life. Lydia was urged by her parent to go to college and while she was apprehensive the emotional support that she received provided a springboard to employment opportunities. In this quote, Lydia describes her rocky freshman year in college and how her mother's "you can do it" message helped her make it through to graduation:

> I never came home. And so, I was so happy that she pushed me,that it took that 1.1 and was like, this is not you. So, I got it together, but coming from a 1.1 - it - That's hard to bring up when you gotta start strong to kinda end somewhere in the middle. And I didn't, so I always regret that when I look back at it, but I ended up graduating with a 2.6 (Lydia, 2013, p. 8).

Formal instances of discourse or networking beyond the boundaries of ones 'social circle may serve to elevate the socioeconomic status or social standing of the family. Finishing college has positioned Lydia to be able to provide for her family. However, it was the relationship that she shared with her mother that made this possible. The emotional support she received made her college degree a reality.

Discourse within the school setting allows parents access to the culture and increases the likelihood of parents being able to participate in schooling at the decision making level. Being able to affect change at the local level gives voice to families that may otherwise be forced into peripheral participation. In the following narrative, Paula shares how she reached out to school personnel to gain special education services for her children (Miano, 2011; Topar et al, 2010).

> No, me and her, we talked. And before they entered into the classroom, I let her know it was a problem for both of them. And then, I let her know it was a different problem, though. It wasn't the same problem. So as she watched and she monitored and she observed, they was about to drive her crazy. So I said, "Okay, I go through this every day as well." So I told her, "Well, if it's any help that's out there, I would be willing to be able to participate." So she said, "Okay, we're going to sign you up. Sign your name." And I signed my name and then that's when they referred me to - it was Mr. O. And Mr. O. was a social worker (Paula, 2013, p. 13).

Paula used discourse to gain a better understanding of the specific challenges that her children were facing as well as to garner support from the school community in making a positive impact on their educational experiences.

Discourse as a tool shapes ones' cultural identity or feeling of belonging. Parents that used talk as a method of teaching were able to strengthen the relational bonds between parent

and child. In this example, Rhonda shares how "talk" improves her relationship with her children and how discourse engages her children during their quality time:

> Talk. Read. Ask them questions. Allow them to be verbal so that they can understand how to communicate with other people when they encounter someone else. I don't like to see kids when you speak to them, you say hello, how you doing? I'm fine and it's just short. Say I'm okay, how are you? Give them that chance to learn what feedback is and don't keep them away from stuff that could happen. Like I sit and watch certain shows, we watch the news together. We talk about the news, how would you feel if someone did that to you or how do you feel about this story? My son, he's touched by a lot of things. He's like, so he relates to a lot of stuff and we'll look at each other and I'll say, you saw that, and he's like, I was thinking the same thing. And just to have that bond is very important to me. Very important and that gives them structure. That builds their character, gives them confidence in knowing that some stuff is ok to talk about. (Rhonda, 2013, p.3)

Rhonda improves the children's conversational skills, critical thinking, and world knowledge through these informal relationship building activities. The benefits to "talk at the family level may be its ability to improve language development which is associated with increased student performance (Miano, 2011; Hart & Risley, 1995).

In this final example we see how emotional and financial family support systems help Rhonda through a period of homelessness:

> Yes. When we were evicted out of our home, this is when Jean, she wants in school yet but the boys were. They offered to keep her while I kept them going to school and everything. It was a really big help because I was in transition where we're living here,

> living there and my mother is like your daughter doesn't need to see all of that. Just let me keep her. When you get it together, she can come back home. So that was a really big help for me. (Rhonda, 2013, p. 8)

Rhonda appreciates the support she received from her mother during this stressful time. She also maintains a relationship with the children's uncles and considers their homes to be another place that she and the children can seek refuge if necessary. Parents used embodied cultural capital and social capital to cultivate relationships that supported family needs in times of crisis and or stress.

Providing Basic Needs

- Housing
- Child development

Basic needs are resources that support feelings of security and or promote routine as well as nurture the physical and emotional development of one's children. Although basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter did not emerge outright as a salient topic in the participants' interviews it is implied in many of the aspects of the parent's behaviors in a more organic fashion (Epstein, 2002). Debra may be the exception because she and her family had experienced a brief period of homelessness approximately three years prior, so to have a stable home was an accomplishment. It restored her identity as the matriarch and head of the household. In the narrative below, her four year old daughter has a very mature conversation about the current status of the family:

> How old are you? She looks up at me, and then she is all, "I don't want to struggle because, Ma, you had a lot of babies." This morning she said that to me. "Ma, you not pregnant no more, are you?" I said, "No, I don't, I'm not having no more kids." She say,

> "How you know?" I said, "well, because, like, who are you, little person?" She's killing … I say, "Where you get that from?" She say, "I'm just…" She say, "How you know?" I say, "Well, what make you say that?" She say, "God?" I just looked at her and kept going, like, "God ain't told me to have no more yet, but okay." I just watch her and she just a little old lady, that's my baby, my sickle cell trait baby (Debra, 2013, p. 10).

Wise beyond her years, Debra's four year old daughter has made the connection between having more mouths to feed and limited family resources. This conversation confirmed Debra's understanding of the importance in maintaining a home through the lens of her preschooler and the sense of pride that her children felt from having their own home. Each parent understood that not having structure could have a profound impact on the family's well-being. However, across all accounts parents seemed the most concerned about their child's/children's future endeavors and their overall psychological health. . Debra's four year old is already demonstrating a strong sense of autonomy, which is a strength often seen in children of single parents (Barajas, 2012). Nicole vehemently captures this self-determination ideology in the following excerpt…

> But at the end of the day when my son speaks a sentence that people around him are like stunned by, those small moments are like what make me feel like okay, what I'm doing is worth it. These instances, you coming to me like you know what, I see you all the time, so you're probably really surprised by some of the things that I say, like wow she's probably smart and that kind of stuff. But that kind of thing, that motivates me to continue. You got to get your priorities in order. You have to say that his education or their education is important to me. Their stability is important to me. How they see the life is important to me because a lot of times if you're the type of parent who does the

> minimum, you make sure they get clothes, make sure they get school, and that's pretty much it. Then that's what your child will give life is the minimum. My son sees me give nothing but a 1000 percent on everything that I do, so even if right now he still wants to be lazy sometimes, I know that when he becomes an adult that he's going to say no, I can't do it this way. I feel uncomfortable (Nicole, 2013, p. 9).

Nicole believes that by being consistent and committed she can influence the direction of her child's life. Communicating that education is a first priority and essential to her sons' overall development she hopes to overcome any obstacles that may be the result of limited resources.

Parenting practices included providing both structure and nurture. Each mother believes that there will be a return on the investment of social, cultural, and or objectified capital. Mediating external barriers and or being fully present in their children's lives will develop high morals and values that will enable their children to make choices that will have a positive impact on their life. And while all mothers are not currently engaged in a formal learning setting, it is believed that increased institutionalized capital will increase opportunities and social economic status. These emergent themes and subthemes are worthy of comparison to traditional frameworks. In that, narratives of single African American mothers' ideals around parental engagement are often met with feelings of dysfunction and or stories of apathy which is representative of the participants' lived experiences (McKenna & Millen, 2013; Preston, 2008; Cooper-Butler, 2005).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

BLACK MOMMA BLUES

When did it become my job, and my job alone
to wash diapers, clothes, a_ _ and nose, while
you sit upon your thrown contemplating your
sense of self-worth,
while I eat compulsively acquiring girth.
Quality time spent,
while I work to help pay the rent

All the while emotionally bankrupt by your frequent withdrawals
No Deposit, No Return policies
It took some time, but now I've learned
I was the one at fault.
I was the one who allowed you to empty my vault.
NOT!
NO MORE!
NEVER AGAIN!
I must become my own best friend…
Captain of my ship,
Queen of my hill,
Buddhist of my temple,
Worshipping my mind, my body, and my soul
Pat myself upon the back
Then, sit and let others pick up the slack
Find time to crawl inside me
Carve out my own space in history
I'll redefine time and transcend race
Letting no one tell me my place

I am the original *OMNI-KARE,*
Nurturer, wife, lover
You ask me who I am
I am a Black Mother.

Discussion Overview

This chapter will begin with the researchers reflections on the research process, followed by a discussion of the findings aligned with the research questions; implications for policy and practice, future research, and conclusion.

Researcher's Reflections

I began this research in hopes of developing a better understanding of the urban families that I have had the opportunity to service in my twenty plus year career in education. For in that time, I have had to stop and question my own belief system in order to keep from making judgments about families that I truly had no integral knowledge of. Being from a middle class family with a college educated father and a mother that worked in corporate America, although African American myself, clearly maintained the status quo around the "ideal" family structure. As I worked on this project I began to realize that what I was actually trying to maintain around perfect family structures was my own childhood. In my late teens my parents divorced and I got a bird's eye view of what it was like for an African American woman to start over again as a single mother. My mother was forced to reexamine her life, her choices and her identity. I believe that by interviewing single African American mothers I am in many ways connecting to my mother's lived experience and the ways in which being the daughter of a single mother touched my own life.

I was initially apprehensive about beginning the process of identifying parents to interview for this project. I began with parents that I would regularly greet in the hallways during arrival and dismissal. After completing a few interviews, I became more confident in finding participants using a phone script. I found that most of the parents were willing to share intimate details of their lives, as I often had to stop the recorder for them to compose themselves.

The interviews almost seemed to function as a therapy session and I found their stories to be both fascinating and uplifting. A sacred space was created for sharing that gave these mother's the opportunity to disclose their stories without fear or judgment.

Discussion of Findings

Across America the definition of the "modern family" is changing as art continues to imitate life. Still, in many school settings little has changed for African American families that are often confronted with narratives of dysfunction and incompetence (Harry, Kilnger, & Hart, 2005). However, these findings extend the conversation on bodies of work that utilize a strengths based approach to discuss the divergent African American family. This data serves to counteract stories of parental apathy and demonstrates the power of cultural capitals that are at work in creating families that offer hope and security to their children through mediating formal and informal spaces. The parallels to traditional forms of parental engagement are revealed through examining the participant's lived experiences.

***Research Question* 1**-What are African American single urban mothers' practices surrounding their role in their children's education in and out of school?

The perceptions of the mothers in this study align with the findings of Jeynes (2005, 2011) in which parents regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background had a strong desire for their children to succeed. The quest for academic success presented itself in a number of parent practices that were both demonstrative and undemonstrative. Parents' behavior indicated that their overarching role was one of service or help. Help in the form of activism brought services to the family that would potentially support academic outcomes or increased capital. The sample group as a whole did not participate in school governance but did seek the support of school personnel and outside local agencies to

support their children's individual development and identity as a student. This was especially true for families of students with disabilities whose main reason for networking was to secure resources to support their child's social and or academic development. Discourse and modeling also served to lay a foundation for improved academic performance.

Parents provided significant feedback to their children through conversations, through participating in the school culture as a concerned parent or through being an actual student working to increase their own knowledge and skills. In theory, these behaviors have been historically linked to increased academic performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985). All participants worked to give their children a head start with learning at home which in most instances was tied to the parents' lived experiences, thus supporting the transfer of cultural capital or a funds of knowledge framework for improving the social and economic position of the family (Jeynes,2005; Moll, 1992).

Research Question 2-What are African American single urban mothers' practices around interacting with schools?

The single mothers in this study interacted with school at varying levels but through traditional forms of participation regardless of their educational attainment and contrary to literature that supports the attenuated participation of working class parents (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein 2008; Cooper-Butler, 2005; Magnuson and McGroder, 2002). All mothers attended parent conferences in addition to developing a rapport with their child's/children's teachers. Approximately half of the participants had had contact with the administrator to express academic concerns and or resolve issues around their child's school conduct. However, the strongest relational bonds were created with school personnel that were directly positioned to aid the family in acquiring services such as the attendance agent or social worker. Parents of

students with and without disabilities were involved in school activities, (ie. fieldtrips, Lemonade Day activities, parent surveys) and or took advantage of informal learning opportunities like parent workshops. Overall participants felt comfortable in the school environment and barriers to participation were associated with work related time constraints or perceived philosophical differences around the purpose of school rather than an inability of the parent to negotiate power (Christianakis, 2011).

Research Question-3 What factors do African American single urban mothers' identify as the most significant obstacles mediating their parental engagement?

Existing barriers could be classified into two categories 1) limited resources or 2) emotional and physical well-being of the family. Approximately a third of the participants identified personal health challenges as a limiting factor related to demonstrative participation. In this instance participation is identified as taking children to and from school, prompt arrival at school, and or self -imposed travel restrictions preventing physical presence in the school environment. Managing behavior was a salient topic among parents of students with and without disabilities. Behavior concerns and acceptance of the diagnosis of a targeted disability were mediated through established relationships with teachers, local child development agencies, and school related professionals. Parents of students with disabilities seeking formal interventions used their cultural capital to navigate the school level bureaucracy often associated with securing Individualized Education Plans (IEP). In this context, school level psychologists positioned themselves as "experts" in an attempt to withhold or delay services by disqualifying and or excluding parents' views and opinions from the discourse.

Two parents identified transportation as an obstacle to parental engagement. Not having a vehicle placed a burden on the entire family. Parents had to rely on networking and or public

transportation. When bus passes were not available it placed a monetary strain on family resources. In relation to limited resources, employment related time constraints and an inability to provide shelter were related to the families' then state of socioeconomic status. Parents were able to mediate the effects of limited capital by relying on relationships that were developed within and outside the school setting. These obstacles were most likely perceived as significant because of their direct relationship to the parent's identity as head of the household. However, relational trust and a sense of resiliency played a significant role in the parents' ability to navigate each situation.

Research Question-4 What are the resources or hidden strengths that are available to African American single urban mothers that may not be apparent to schools yet affect student outcomes?

Intergenerational footprints or lessons passed on from parent to child played a significant role in the parent's identity as teacher. The origin of parents' desire to work at home with their children on school related materials through one on one learning is often associated with direct participation in formal spaces as opposed to a strength that exists within the family unit. Deficit perspectives assume that nontraditional families need to be taught these skills (Payne, 2008). While some parents expressed a desire to learn new educational best practices, their sense of efficacy kept them from shying away from supporting their child's/children's academic performance. High expectations for learning and informal learning opportunities are often a daily practice in divergent families (Gardner & Toope, 2011; Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008)). The single mothers in the study also used discourse as a teaching tool to establish morals and values. In some instances, religious perspectives that parents believed would guide their children to better life choices shaped their values.

The parent's sense of resiliency is a strength that school communities tend to overlook because this embodied capital is acquired through socialization rather than through formal learning. Cultural deficit models promote the subjugation of capital that is formed outside of dominant class ideals. Therefore, school communities are more likely to recognize educational credentialing that follows the middle class narrative of competence (Delpit, 2002; Laureau, 2000).

Summary of Discussion of Findings

Interestingly, the findings of the research are analogous to Epsteins's (2001, 2009, 2011) framework for parental engagement but demonstrate an existing cultural framework for parental engagement that may need to be nurtured as opposed to established. This nuance of difference gives credence to the participant's sense of self –efficacy, their ability to negotiate power, and the resiliency required to provide a nurturing environment for their children.

Epstein's framework for six types of engagement include 1) parenting 2) communicating 3) volunteering 4) learning at home 5) decision making 6) collaborating with the school community. In the case of **parenting**, the mothers seemed aware of their children's needs in terms of their development and the type of home conditions that would help their child/children to grow as individuals and students. All participants used discourse to bond with their children and to stay abreast of their emotional and academic development. Parents were able to share concerns and behaviors that they felt were detrimental to their children's overall well-being with members of the school community. Effective school to home and home to **school communications** were not at issue for participants as a whole, but seemed to increase when parents perceived stakeholders as approachable. In one instance when a parent had received conflicting information around her child's academic progress, the mother's continued

interactions with school personnel positioned her to effect change for her child. The parent advised that when two or more teachers are working with a student there should be collaboration between school personnel to ensure that progress within each educational setting is combined to develop a comprehensive profile of the student's overall progress.

Parents' ability to participate or not participate in school programs was affected by either demand on time related to employment and or the ineffectual nature of the program being offered. Parents that took advantage of parenting workshops selected activities based on the additional knowledge and skills that would be brought to their families. Parents not restricted by time, were willing to volunteer in the school community and often used the on-site Parent Center as a means of being visible in the school setting. This positioned them to be a part of school activities on an impromptu basis that helped to build social capital for the family.

All parents were directly involved in **home based learning**. The decision to work directly with their children to promote academic success seemed to be based on their existing cultural capital that emerged from the data as an intergenerational theme. Parents created learning materials, enrichment activities, and promoted conversations that tend to support vocabulary development. The **decisions** that parents made around their children's schooling experiences in most instances were directly related to their own family as opposed to the entire school. However, parents that needed the support of related school personnel used their social capital to form relationships to meet the needs of their children. Likewise participants sought out local agencies and networked with the appropriate school personnel to **coordinate resources** that were perceived as beneficial to the families' physical and or emotional health. Therefore, the needs of the family dictated the types of relationships that were developed. Parents mediated formal and informal spaces to empower themselves and their children.

Expanding the Framework: Moving Away from "Doing To" to "Doing With"

While the participants' behaviors were analogous to Epstein's framework for parental engagement, the emphasis on cultural capital requires us to expand our thinking around each type of engagement. Ferlazzo (2011) states "We need to relate to families not as clients, but as partners in school and community improvement." Although Epstein's model of parental engagement is widely used throughout the United States and to many may be considered the "gold standard" of frameworks, expansion of the model may prove beneficial when working with divergent families. The current approach positions parents as clients with most of the agenda or strategies to increase parental engagement being set by educational stakeholders, with little to no parent input. Parents without strong school ties may not be positioned to benefit from the most relevant information as it pertains to schools, limiting their power and creating instances of inequity.

For this reason, let us revisit the six areas and explore how the use of embodied capital may better benefit divergent families in navigating formal and informal spaces as they relate to schools. The results of this study revealed that parent knowledges were acquired through socialization as opposed to a reliance on formal education. With this in mind, the first area **parenting** required parents to support students at home. Each parent felt that this was inherent of being a parent and employed either the strategies that they learned from their mother or strategies suggested by the teacher. Additionally, the school frequently hosted "how to" parent workshops that provided strategies on how parents' should work with their children at home. The result was often low parent attendance which was taken as apathy or indifference by school level personnel. Research shows that parents are more invested in programs and practices which are shaped by family needs (Beauregard, 2014; Dryfoos, 2005, Brody, 2002). Especially for families

of students with disabilities who are often seeking strategies specific to helping their child achieve academic and personal well-being. Home to school and school to home connections would be expanded by allowing parents to identify their needs, if any, that they may have in a particular area. In this way schools make the positive presupposition that parents are more likely to be working with their children than not and by allowing parents to guide this conversation the work becomes a collaboration that honors the gifts and talents that parents already possess (Moll, 1992).

When schools speak of **communication**, area 2, they most likely, suggest, tell, provide, give or help parents understand. This practice of limiting parents' voice is either ignored or unrecognized by school level personnel. If parents and schools work to dialogue, devise, and create meaning together this would support mutual understanding of school policies and programs. Removing some of the challenges noted by Epstein such as reviewing media for readability, clarity, form, and frequency. Reciprocal conversations can also reveal the most relevant options for distributing communications, ie..print, non-print and or technology based communications. Parents of students with and without disabilities desire to have school professionals readily exchange relevant information as it pertains to their families (Squires et al., 2007; Howland et al., 2006).

Volunteering, area 3, according to Epstein (2009, 2011) means recruiting and organizing parent help and support. When schools recruit and organize individuals to help and support, the ideas and energies are usually manifestations of the school's mission and or vision. What is really being requested from parents is an investment of time that many parents are not positioned to spare, for activities that may be inconsequential to school families. It is acknowledged that volunteering must include activities that take place beyond the school day. However, for parents

to feel invested in the activities and show a willingness to participate, each activity must work to elevate the families' well-being as defined by the families and community being served (Barton et. al., 2004). Partnerships evoke parents' embodied capital to create social networks that allow all divergent families to participate at varying levels. An expanded meaning of volunteering would include cultivating a relationship with parents that supports teachers in gaining new knowledge. This knowledge would help teachers understand parents' barriers to participating in traditional forms of volunteering. Teachers that are in tune with families' constraints are less likely to make unrealistic requests. Parents that are positively positioned in the pursuit to raise student achievement build their capacity through sharing their time and talents. For example, a face time presentation delivered to a classroom on a parent's lunch break, checking papers at home, or networking with other parents outside of school to resolve problems can all be seen as volunteering. Using parents' available capital increases self-efficacy and moves away from the deficit identity that working parents often embrace (Cousins, 2011, Shiffman, 2005).

The **learning at home** concept, area 4, is almost an oxymoron from the standpoint that the learning is designed to be an extension of the school day. Schools typically fail to acknowledge that students really do learn many academic concepts at home. Instead of providing information to parents, use social context to inform teachers about the learning that takes place at home. Exchange funds of knowledge so that parents and teachers become actively involved in producing critical thinkers (Moll, 1982). Keeping in mind that research shows that high expectations for academic achievement, reading at home, talking about college, as well as other less demonstrative actions are more likely to improve academic outcomes (Robinson & Harris, 2014).

The study reveals that the last two areas, **decision making** and **collaborating** are directly linked to the needs of the family. Relational trust is the key to schools engaging parents in these areas. Parents used their embodied cultural capital to make decisions around schooling and collaborate with stakeholders that had an investment in their families' well-being. Schools must be able to respond to the question" How will this support my family?" Polices, programs, and practices must be based on the comprehensive needs of the community. It is imperative that parent presence and parent voice be a driving force in designing strategies that remove barriers for divergent families. Informal communications that connect families with programs and resources increase parents' overall commitment to the "whole school" (Shiffman, 2005, Barton, 2004).

Engaging Parents of Students with Disability

Although the study began with the belief that parents of students with and without disabilities would behave in the same manner, one notable difference was the intentionality parents' of students with disabilities used to strategically build relationships. Stakeholders who were positioned to help the families secure resources for their children were actively recruited for the cause. This included the social worker, the attendance agent, the Department of Health and Human Services worker, and the counselor, all of which had relational networks that connected parents to much needed support services.

Engaging parents of students with disabilities is not only required by law but a practical decision for schools to make. Parents of students with disabilities typically need more support around flexible discipline policies, support for frequent absences, child development programs, and or mental and physical health care. Administrators in a community driven school must nurture a culture where all stakeholders see themselves as a liaison to the community (Howland,

et. al., 2006, Harry et. al., 2005)). A responsive school culture actively seeks these wrap around services through collaboration and forming strong community ties.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

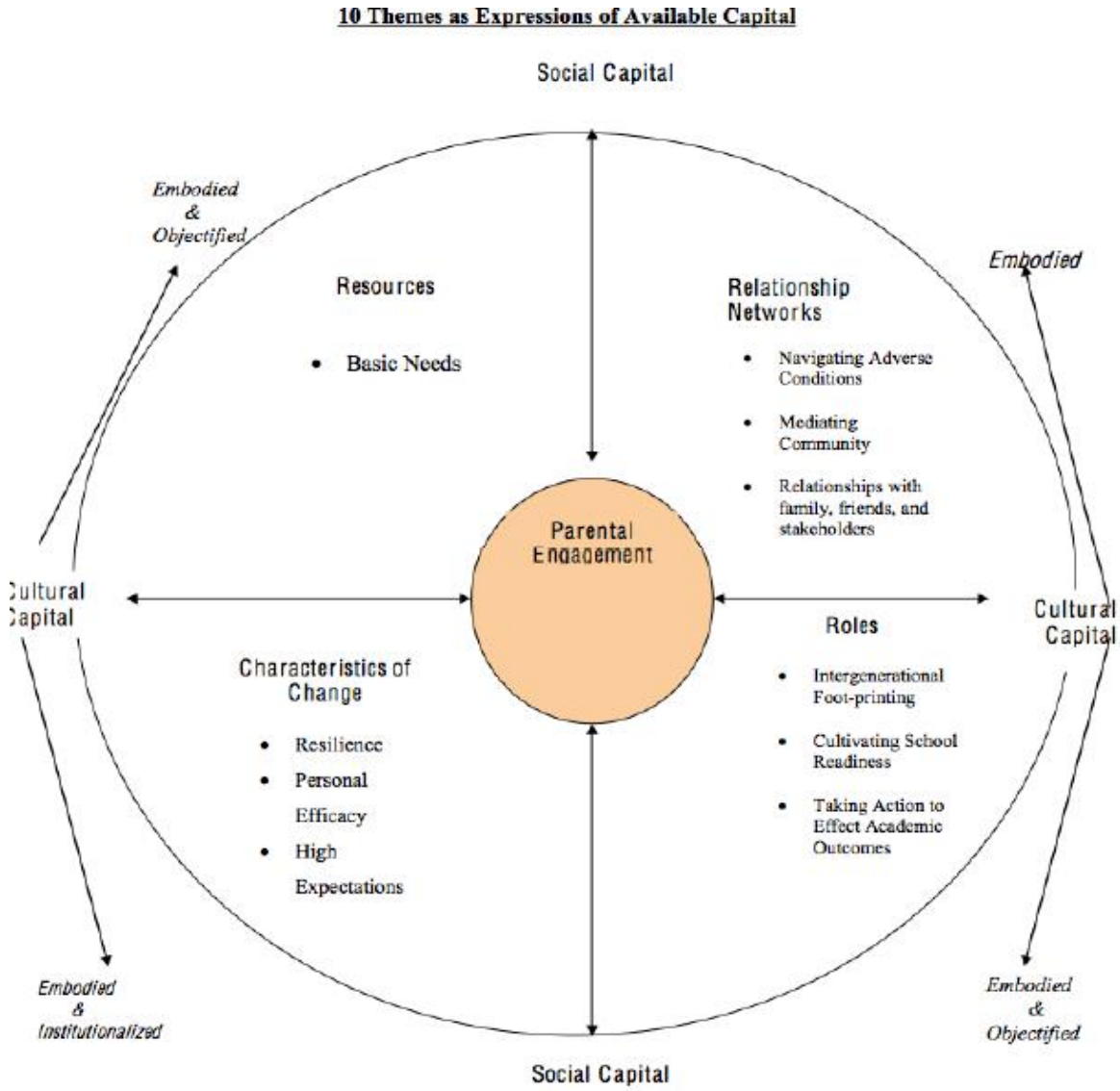
As strengths based research continues to show that in spite of differences in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background parents have an innate desire to help their children succeed academically (Kyle, 2011; Topar, et al. 2010; Mapp, 2004), it is reasonable for schools to apply positive presupposition of existing parental engagement frameworks for divergent families that are comparable to those of the dominant class. Hence, new frameworks must come from a perspective that recognizes all capital as valuable (Gardner & Toope, 2011). To honor the complexities of divergent families is to develop a framework for parental engagement that mimics other multi-tiered systems that address the needs of students and families simultaneously.

Let us take time to further explore this concept by thinking about our identified themes in the context of available capitals. Parents that are perceived to be the most successful in effecting their children's education are believed to be high in social, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital. By connecting key elements within the 10 themes four expressions of available capital are illuminated that include: Relationship Networks, Actionable Roles, Resources, and Characteristics of Change. These expressions of available capital also flow between social capital and cultural capital. However, upon close inspection these expressions of capital are more heavily reliant upon embodied cultural capital (Table 1). Hence the question becomes how do we as educators begin to translate these expressions of capital into effective parental engagement policies and practices?

Implications for Policy

Imagine a world where schools become the "hub" of the community. Cultural competence would be regarded as a norm in developing parental engagement practices and policies. The National Education Association (NEA) defines cultural competence as having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a tapestry. Policy frameworks around parental engagement that tend to shape local education agencies (LEA) should embrace frameworks that are inclusive of all types of families and move away from traditional frameworks that use a one size fits all model. New models should be guided by funds of knowledge frameworks that build on families' existing cultural identity and cultural capitals.

Figure 1 Ten Themes as Expressions of Available Capital



In doing so, modern families will be distanced from narratives of deficit and dysfunction. Federal, state and local policy makers would work together to design systemic approaches that provide wrap-around services that focus concurrently on adults and children, coordinating available programs and resources. With flexible funding policies, schools that receive subsidy designated for specific student populations would be able to provide interventions at varying levels for families. Research has shown that students' educational outcomes have been linked to parent competence (Conger,Conger, Martin, 2010). Children and or parents who live with mental health challenges would receive school-based family therapy. Community driven schools would also be positioned to offer workforce training programs and or tutoring to parents in concert with educating students during the school day and or through after school programs (King, Coffey, Smith, 2014). Student transportation laws could be expanded to families that have lost mobility due to hardship or illness making community resources accessible to all families.

Implications for Practice

At the local level, a greater effort to understand the knowledge and skills that families bring to the school community would forge collaborative relationships and move school personnel away from traditional practices that may not support the families that they service. Flexibility in the ways that schools define parental engagement would promote the valuing of parents' resiliency, self-efficacy, and the methods that are used to negotiate power. This would bring to the fore the ways in which all parents navigate formal and informal spaces.

Proactive practices nurture parents' ability to work with and be supported by members of the school community. Districts should be responsible for developing comprehensive parental engagement programs that incorporate all stakeholders, engaging families, teachers, and community agencies to broaden available resources. Single parents' social capital is often framed

by time restrictions, limited networking opportunities, and or limited knowledge regarding school policies, which impacts parents' ability to manage the business of schooling.

Accordingly, flexible scheduling would become the norm in planning school events/activities, driven by school based comprehensive needs assessments as opposed to the traditional nine to five work day. Community connections position parents and children for mentoring opportunities that promote family well-being through knowledge transmission, psychological support, and interpersonal communications. School level policies and practices that refrain from using suspension or expulsion would be mandated as opposed to recommended by government guidelines, as studies show that divergent families and or families with children with special needs are disproportionately affected by zero tolerance policies that address minor infractions ranging from attendance to noncompliance. Punitive school policies that contribute to unfair practices do little to create a positive culture and climate. Building a strong sense of community and increasing relational trust is key to fostering family school partnerships (Fabelo, T., Thompson, M.D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M.P. III, Booth E.A. (2011).

Recommendations for Building New Parental Engagement Frameworks

The following recommendations support the concept of a community driven school while also seeking to integrate competing themes surrounding parental engagement (Dryfoos, 1995, 2005). The framework for such a model would take a three pronged approach to creating a collaborative system that is both fluid and organic in nature, taking its shape from the culture in which it exists. Paramount to creating a community driven environment is stakeholder education at the administrative level. Educational stakeholders including superintendents, principals, and teachers set the tone for an atmosphere that makes parents feel comfortable and welcomed into the school setting (Rapp & Duncan, 2011). However, this can only be accomplished by

providing professional learning opportunities that educate administrative and school level personnel on how to support divergent families and or families dealing with their child's disability. Educational stakeholders must be committed to continued professional growth surrounding issues of diversity (Obiakor, et. al., 2002). At the heart of this work must be the development of cultural competencies. New understandings will better position educational stakeholders in identifying and responding to the needs of the community. Leveraging the schools ability to cultivate the relational trust that is required to fully engage parents.

Second is the task of developing relationships. This concept must be nurtured through building a sense of reciprocity. Focus groups can be conducted to identify parents' skill sets creating opportunities for parents to connect both personally and professionally with school personnel. Schools can promote parent presence by ensuring that there are spaces within the school environment that are specifically designated for parents. Use all available mediums to provide a forum for parents to dialogue around issues that directly affect their family including but not limited to school programs, discipline practices, curriculum, and school culture and climate. Schools must be flexible in arranging school events, choosing, for example, locations and times that are sensitive to obstacles that may mediate parental engagement.

Discovering parent's personal needs and working to develop resource networks can improve the family's overall well-being (Miano, 2011). Like the Community School Model (CSM), a model for full service public schools that allows communities to construct solutions through bringing together people and resources (Dryfoos, 1995), a community driven school would also focus on strategies not programs to address parent concerns. Social networks would provide parents with services such as mental and physical health care, access to social workers, and or child development programs for students with special needs (Dryfoos, 1995, 2005).

Stronger relationships are created with stakeholders that are positioned to elevate the family (Cooper-Butler, 2005).

Finally, building parents' capacity de-emphasizes power relationships and serves to uplift the entire family. Many families become disenfranchised to no fault of their own but are seeking a "*leg up*" as opposed to a "*hand-out"*. Liaison with community partners to develop in-school programs that teach resume writing and or interviewing skills. Connect with adult education programs to provide on-sight courses. Position parents to participate in local job-fairs as well as provide college and career planning activities. Partner with professionals in the school community that can provide vocational training or educate parents on topics like homeownership. Most importantly, parents must be the framers of this conversation. Give parents a voice to express their personal needs and or challenges so that all strategies are consistent with parents' interests; promoting a "doing with" as opposed to a "doing to" mentality (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

Implications for Research

Further studies should address other types of divergent families and the ways that they use their capitals to navigate formal and informal spaces. New research should also seek to include families from other racial minority groups and or those groups that have been historically silenced by traditional frameworks of parental engagement. It would also be relevant to determine how capitals may be utilized across educational levels, as the focus of this study was single African American mothers of elementary school age children. Most important to new research is the point set forth by Anzaldua (1990) that states that theory is a set of knowledges that can either serve to empower or to disempower marginalized people. By using different lenses to view the four expressions of capital, Relationship Networks, Actionable Roles,

Resources, and Characteristics of Change stakeholders can begin to shift their thinking around the value of embodied cultural capital.

While there are other frameworks that support the divergent family, three lenses that may allow for a more critical examination of capital are Bratlinger's conceptual framework for "Othering", Luis Moll's Funds of Knowledge and Tara Yosso's conceptualization of community cultural wealth using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. Othering acknowledges the creation of social hierarchies in which outsiders are labeled and stigmatized by identifying names. In turn, groups that meet the norm or standard become the insiders or dominant group. *"Centering one group marginalizes Other groups."* (Brantlinger, 2001). A lens that uses Othering as a conceptual framework can illuminate how poverty, class and disability intersect to frame conversations around the valuing of cultural capital and pathologies associated with the proliferation of "irreversible dissymmetry" between families of different socioeconomic status. Making a case to deconstruct negative narratives that subjugate the capital of divergent families (Brantlinger, 2001).

Moll's (1982) Funds of Knowledge framework would be very helpful in continuing the conversation around intergenerational themes of educating students, and the complexity surrounding the undemonstrative parental engagement practices that emerged from the data. This lens would support the valuing of the emerging expressions of capital. Collective knowledges may aid school level stakeholders in making the shift from "doing to" to "doing with". Highlighting existing cultural and cognitive resources positions school stakeholders to develop cultural competencies that can increase relational trust. Relational trust is key to building strong social networks that have been shown to support divergent families (Robinson &.Harris, 2014; Shiffman, 2005;Turnbull, 1984).

Yosso (2005) identifies 6 forms of cultural capital that form a model of community cultural wealth , ***aspirational***, the ability to maintain hope; ***linguistic***, intellectual and social skills attained through communication; ***familial***, cultural knowledges nurtured among family; ***social,*** networks of people and community resources; ***navigational,*** skills of maneuvering through social institutions, and ***resistant,*** knowledges and skills acquired through challenging inequality. All of which parallel the 10 themes outlined in this study that also support a strengths based perspective. This framework moves beyond re-educating educational stakeholders and further asserts the need to deconstruct social institutions that are aligned with socially constructed hierarchies that sanctify social divisions (Yosso, 2005, Bourdieu, 1996). Reframing what counts as valuable capital addresses issues of inequality that are obfuscated by issues of race.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of single African American mothers' practices around parental engagement and their role in educating their children. It was revealed that their lived experiences are aligned with funds of knowledge frameworks that support the parents' use of cultural, social, and objectified capital to reinforce academic success. While their methods of navigating formal and informal spaces may deviate from traditional practices their desires are comparable to current ideals around parental engagement. If efforts are made to re-socialize the educational community, divergent families will be seen as more competent and less dysfunctional in their efforts to parent their children. Cultural competence can lay a foundation for relational trust and begin a strengths based narrative for setting policy and practice that honors resiliency and self-efficacy as much as formal credentialing, moving away from the one-size fits all model of parental engagement. This

will place the onus for change on state and local agencies as opposed to families. Hopefully, grassroots campaigns will inspire change at the national level as the country works to redefine the family.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Phone Script

Project Title: Rethinking Parental Engagement: Perceptions of Single African American Mothers
Protocol Title: Phone Script
Application No: i038167
Principal Investigator: Troy Mariage

Hello, My name is Tracey Jones. I am an Instructional Coach at Brightside Prep and a doctoral student at Michigan State University. I am conducting research about parental engagement. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that you do not have to participate in this study unless you want to.

Would you be willing to answer some questions to help me determine if you are eligible for this study? (If yes, proceed; if no, thank them for their time and end the call).

Are you a single parent?
Have you been a single parent for at least 2 yrs.?
Do you identify your ethnicity or yourself as African American?
Do you have a live in companion?
Did your child/children attend Brightside Prep last year?
Are you biologically related to your child or children?
Are you between the ages of 25 and 60?
If you agree to be interviewed, would you object to your interview being recorded?

The purpose of this research study is to understand how single parents are involved in their children's education and how they make educational decisions. Ten parents will participant in this study. To find out about these things, I am asking to conduct an interview with you that will last about an hour. We can meet at your home for the interview, or at your child's school classroom after school, or another place of your choice. There is a small chance that some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. You don't have to answer those questions if you don't want to. In fact you don't have to answer any question that you choose not to answer. And that is fine. We will just skip that question and go on to the next one. You may also discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. Your participation is completely voluntary.

All the information I receive from you by phone, including your name and any other identifying information {if applicable}, will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and key. I will not identify you or use any information that would make it possible for anyone to identify you in any presentation or written reports about this study. If it is okay with you, I might want to use direct quotes from you, but these would only be quoted as coming from "a person" or a person of a certain label or title, like "one woman said." When I finish with all the interviews from everyone who has agreed to participate, I will group all the answers together in a report or presentation. There will be no way to identify individual participants.

The only risk to you might be if your identity were ever revealed. But I will not even record your name with your responses, so this cannot occur. There are no other expected risks to you for helping me with this study. There are also no expected benefits for you either. However, your

participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of the ways single parents are involved in their children's educational experiences.

This study is not being funded and no one is being paid to participate including the researchers. You will be reimbursed for transportation and childcare costs if necessary for participating in the interview.

Do you have any questions?

You can also call Troy Mariage (Principal Investigator) at 517-432-1981 with questions about the research study. A committee that works to protect your rights and welfare reviews all research on human volunteers. If you have questions or concerns about your role or rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at Phone: (517) 355-2180, Fax (517) 432-4503 or email at irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824

Do you agree to be in this study? Do I have permission to set up an appointment with you?

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Title of Study: Rethinking Parental Engagement: Perceptions of Single Urban African American Mothers

Dear Participant:

The goal of this project is to create a parental engagement profile based on the lived experiences of single African American mothers and to understand the kinds of things that influence a mother's decisions regarding their children's education. To find out about these things, I am asking to conduct an interview with you that will last about an hour. We can meet at your home for interviews, or at your child's school classroom after school, or another place of your choice. You will be reimbursed for transportation and childcare costs if necessary for participating in the interview. You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of the ways single parents are involved in their children's educational experiences.

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. Most of the interview questions just ask for information. Some parts of the interviews may ask for your opinion or feelings. If the interview asks for something that is uncomfortable for you, I assure you that sharing is your choice and you may choose not to answer a question at any time. Participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all or you may refuse to answer certain questions or you may discontinue your participation at any time without consequence.

I will record your interview and save the recordings on CDs. It is important that I record our conversations so I can keep them and check exactly what you said. Please do not agree to be in this study if you do not wish to be recorded. All your personal information and the recordings are confidential, and only this study's researchers and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) will have access to your information. The CDs will be stored in a locking file in the Principal Investigator's office located on MSU's campus. They are labeled with a code, not your name. A copy of the data will be kept for at least three years after the project closes with the Principal Investigator. Your confidentiality or privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

Your name or family members' names will not appear in any published works using this data. In some rare cases, readers might feel they can identify you. This could happen if you told a unique story or if you have told that story in many places. I cannot promise that you will be anonymous in cases like that. However, your confidentiality or privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

If some background regarding your child is necessary in order to better understand your educational decisions. I am asking for your permission to review information from existing school records regarding your child's educational programming, academic achievement and experiences. I will follow the same procedures to protect anonymity that I described for the recordings of your interviews. Your participation or non-participation in this study will not affect your child's educational experiences in any way. There are no penalties for refusing to participate or loss of any benefits that you are entitled to.

Thank you very much for your help. You may ask to withdraw your consent at any time. You may also decide to stop taking part in this study. I will do as you ask quickly and completely. There is no penalty for withdrawing. I will destroy any information you shared at once. Participation is voluntary.

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial or otherwise) please contact the researcher:

Dr. Troy Mariage, Principal Investigator 339 Erickson Hall Michigan State University East Lansing, MI 48824-1034
Phone: (517) 432-1981
Email: mariaget@msu.edu

Tracey L. Jones, Secondary Investigator 19299 Berg Rd.
Detroit, MI 48219
Phone: (313) 538-3097
Email: jonestr9@msu.edu

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at Phone: (517) 355-2180, Fax (517) 432-4503 or email at irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824

Thank you,

Tracey Jones
Doctoral Student in Special Education at MSU
Phone: (313) 538-3097

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.
Name: (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Demographic Questionnaire

The following information is being collected to help me, the researcher, better understand the parents or co-researchers that are participating in this study. Remember that all the information is confidential. Please answer the questions as openly and honestly as possible.
What is your current age?
What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
Where were you born?
What is your current marital status? o Divorced o Never-Married o Widowed
What is your current household annual income?
My current employment status is o Full time, o Part time, o Unemployed, o Laid- off o Retired
How many children under age 16 live in your home?
How many male or boy children do you have? What are their ages?
How many female or girl children do you have? What are their ages?
Do/Does your child/children have any special learning needs? *If yes, according to their IEP, how has their learning disability been classified?*
What is the highest level of education that your parents completed?
During non school hours who is in charge of your child?
How often do you access the web in relation to your child's education? o Often o Sometimes o Seldom o Never
What type of reading materials, if any, are regularly in your home? books, magazines, newspapers, sales papers etc.

APPENDIX D

Discussion Questions

Parents' Feelings/Memories Around their Own Schooling Experiences

- Let's go back to your childhood, how were you raised to think about schools or education? Does any story or memory standout for you?

- When you were young how did your parents or anyone else in your family help you with school? If not, how did you decide what you would do differently with your children?

- What challenges have you faced around schooling as an African American single female parent?

Parents' Perceptions/Experiences Related to their Children's Schooling

- What skills do you think help your child to be successful in today's school setting/environment?

- How happy are you with your child's progress in school?

- What roles and or responsibilities do you feel parents have in helping their child be successful at school?

- What things did you consider when you decided to send your child to Brightside Prep?

- What do you see, if any, as the biggest barriers to supporting your child in their school work.

- What advice would you give other single mothers/ parents about helping their child be successful in school?

- Looking back on your child's learning experiences, what would you have done differently?

Parent Engagement Experiences

- If you could speak with the principal about how to make life better for single parents in Brightside Prep, what would you tell them?

- If you have a question, concern or problem regarding your child's schooling experiences or education (ie. homework assignment, field trip, bullying, sports etc), how do you go about resolving it? Or what steps do you take to clear up the matter?

- Thinking first about the activities that you found to be most helpful or interesting. How was your family supported by this activity?

- Now that your child has been in school for _____ years, how has your engagement with their education changed?

- Other than yourself, who provides academic, emotional, or financial support to your child?

Parent Child Interactions

- What dreams do you have for your child's/children's future?
- If I were to spend the day with you and your child what would I see and hear? Or What is a typical day like for your family?
- I want you to think back to one of the fondest memories that you have of spending time with your child. Describe the activity and what made it special for you?
- What are some of the ways you keep track of what your child is learning in school?
- If you had to name a special gift or talent that you've noticed in your child, what would that be?

APPENDIX E

Initial Formulated Meanings

1. Family support system (emotional/financial)
2. Acquiring new skills and knowledge
3. Supporting school readiness
4. Establishing behavior expectations
5. Managing peer pressures
6. Attending parent conferences
7. Completing school related projects
8. Tracking student progress
9. Finding the "right" school to meet the needs of your child
10. Overcoming homelessness
11. Spending quality time with your children
12. Validation of ability to parent child without a spouse
13. Requesting information from the teacher
14. Completing daily homework
15. Emotional support from family
16. Encouragement from family members
17. Developing child's identity as an individual/ student
18. Making study materials
19. Intergenerational lessons around self –efficacy
20. Accepting diagnosis of disability
21. Doctor prescribing medication for your child
22. Dealing with disciplinary actions of the school
23. Managing challenging behavior
24. Stakeholder partnerships
25. Advocating for your child
26. Desire for children to be self –sufficient
27. Choosing a safe and caring school environment
28. Concerns around student retention
29. Interpreting school test data
30. Concerns regarding underachievement/Slow academic progress
31. Feelings of inadequacy as a parent
32. Limited financial resources
33. Lack of transportation
34. Expectation of attending college
35. Establishing relationships with teachers
36. Reciprocal communications/being informed by teachers
37. Being there physically and emotionally for your children
38. Providing basic needs
39. Dealing with adverse conditions
40. Dealing with feelings of isolation and or absent father
41. Controlling emotions
42. Cultivating relationships with your children
43. Establishing religious principles
44. Being a role model for your children
45. Willingness to volunteer at school
46. Looking for mentorship opportunities

47. Influencing school culture and climate
48. Promoting a positive work ethic
49. Teaching your children to take responsibility for themselves and others
50. Introducing technology for learning
51. Developing language skills
52. Dealing with personal health challenges

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdul-Adil, J. K., & Farmer, Jr,, A. D. (2006). Inner-City African American parental involvement in elementary schools: Getting beyond urban legends of apathy, School Psychology Quarterly, 21(1) 1-12.

Amato, P. R. (April, 2008). Recent changes in family structure: Implications for children, adults and society. *National Healthy Marriage Resource Center.,* Retrieved from: http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/May08changefamstructure.pdf

Anzaldua, G. (1990**).** Making Face**,** Making Soul/Haciendo Caras**:** Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color. In G. Anzaldua (Ed.) San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.

Archer-Banks, D. A., & Behar-Horenstein, L.S. (2008). African American Parental Engagement in Their Children's Middle School Experiences. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 77(2), 143-156.

Asher, N. (2007). Made in the multicultural U.S.A.: Unpacking tensions of race, culture, gender, and sexuality in education. *Educational Researcher*, 36(2), 65-73.

Battle, J., & Pastrana Jr., A. (2007). The relative importance of race and socioeconomic status among Hispanic and white students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences,* 29(1), 35-49.

Barajas, M. S. (2012). Academic Achievement of Children in Single Parent Homes: A Critical Review, *The Hilltop Review*, 5(1), 4. Retrieved from: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/hilltopreview/vol5/iss1/4

Becker, G.S. (1964). Human capital: a theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education. *The National Bureau of Economic Research*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1973). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction, In R. Brown Ed. *Knowledge, education and cultural change: Papers in the sociology of education*, (pp. 71 – 112). London: Tavistock.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital in: J.G. Richardson (ed.): *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education,* (pp. 46-58).

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital, in: J.G. Richardson (ed.): *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Educations,* (pp. 241-258).

Bourdieu, P. (1998). The new capital in *practical reason: On the theory of action* (pp. 19-34.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.C. (1977 [1970]). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*, Richard Nice (Tr.). Sage Publications, London.

Bradley, R. H., & Corwyn, R. F. (2002). Socioeconomic status and child development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 371-400.

Brantlinger, E. (2001) Poverty, class, and disability: A historical, social, and political perspective, *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 33(7), 1-19.

Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Eds). *Developmental Psychology,* 28(5), 759-75.

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2004). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 40-45.

Calabrese Barton, A., Drake, C., Perez, J. G., & St. Louis, K. (2004). Ecologies of parent engagement in urban education. *Educational Researcher*, *33*(4), 3-12.

Christianakis, M. (2011) Parents as help labor: Inner-city teachers' narratives of parental involvement, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 38(4), 157-178.

Chubb, J. E., & Moe, T. M. (1990). *Politics markets and America's schools.* Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institution.

Clark, J. E. P. (2011). Culturally and linguistically diverse family perspectives on home-school connections and family engagement: A case of four middle class Latin American families, (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/etd

Coleman, J. S. (1988, 1998). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94*(S), 95-120.

Cremin, L. A. (1957). *The republic and the school: Horace Mann on the education of free men*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (3rd ed.). Los Angles: Sage.

Crozier, G., & Davies, J. (2007). Hard to reach parents? or hard to reach schools? A discussion of home-school relations, with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents, *British Educational Research Journal,* 33(3), 295-313.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*, New York: Plenum.

de Carvalho, M. E. (2001). *Rethinking family school relations: A critique of parental engagement in schooling*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (2001). Extrinsic rewards and intrinsic motivation in education: Reconsidered once again. *Review of Educational Research*, 71 (1), 1-27.

Deci, E. L., Ryan, R. M., & Koestner, R. (2001). The pervasive negative effects of rewards on intrinsic motivation: Response to Cameron. *Review of Educational Research*, 71, (1), 43-51.

Delpit, L. (2002). *The skin we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom*. Joanne Kilgour Dowdy (Co-Ed.). New York, NY: New Press.

Devine-Eller, A. (2005). *Rethinking Bourdieu on race: A critical review of cultural capital and habitus in the sociology of education qualitative literature*. Retrieved from: http://www.eden.rutgers.edu/~auderey/Rethinking%20Bourdieu,%20A%20Critical%20Review%20of%20Cultural%20Capital.pdf.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy in Education*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Doherty, W., & Craft, S. (2013). Single mothers raising children without fathers: Implications for rearing children with male positive attitudes, Columbia University Press, 322-327

Dryfoos J. (1995). *Full service schools: Schools and community-based organizations finally get together to address the crisis in disadvantaged communities*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED385899)

Dryfoos J. (2005). Full-service community schools: a strategy—not a program, *New Directions for Youth Development*, 107(Fall), 7–14.

Earley, C. P. (1997) *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An analysis of organizational behavior across cultures.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Edmonson-Bell, E .L. J., Nkomo, S. M., & Hammond, J. (1994) *Glass ceiling commission: Barriers to work place advancement experienced by African Americans.* Cornell University Federal Publications.

Epstein, J. L. (1992). School and family partnerships, *Encyclopedia of educational research* (6th ed., pp. 1139-115)1 New York: MacMillan.

Epstein, J., & Associates (2009). *School Family and Community Partnerships: Your handbook for action.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M. P. III, & Booth E. A. (2011). *Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement*. New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center; Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University. Retrieved from http://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/breaking-schools-rules-report.

Fan, X. (2001). Parental engagement and students' academic achievement: A growth modeling analysis. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, (70), (1), 27-61.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2004). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. In; C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium, and D. Silverman, (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, (pp. 420-434).

Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*, Donoldo Macedo, Dale Koike, and Alexandre Oliveira, (Trs.) , Westview Press, Boulder, CO.

Gadsden, V. L. (1995). The absence of father: Effects on children's development and family functioning. *National Center on Fathers and Families*, University of Pennsylvania.

Gardner, M., & Toope, D. (2011). A social justice perspective on strengths-based approaches: Exploring educators' perspectives and practices, *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34(3) 86-102.

Gillborn, D. (2006). Public interest and the interests of white people are not the same: Assessment, education policy, and racism. In G. Ladson-Billings & W. Tate (Eds.) *Education research in the public interest: Social justice and action policy* (pp173-195). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Gonzalez, A. R. (2002). Parental engagement: Its contribution to high school students' motivation. *The Clearing House*, 75(3), 132-134.

Gonzalez, N., Moll, L.,& Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Gonzalez-DeHass, A. R., Williams, P. P., & Holbein, M. F. D. (2005). Examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation, *Educational Psychology Review*, 17(2), 99-123.

Goodlad, J. I., Mantle-Bromley, C., & Goodlad, S. J. (2004). *Education for everyone: Agenda for education in a democracy.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gosa, T. L. & Alexander, K. L. (2007). Family disadvantage and the educational propects of better off African American youth: How race still matters. *Teachers College Press*, 109(2), 285-321.

Grant, C. (2006). Multiculturalism, race, and the public interest: Hanging on to great—great grandaddy's legacy. In G. Ladson-Billings & W. Tate (Eds.) *Education research in the public interest: Social justice and action policy* (pp158-172). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 3(1), 4. Retrieved from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf

Grossman, S., Osterman, K., & Schmelkin, L. P. (1999). The relationship between beliefs and practices. Montreal, Quebec. *American Educational Research Association.*

Hargreaves, M. B. (1991). Learning under stress: Children of single parents and the schools. Metuchen, N.J: *Women's Action Alliance and The Scarecrow Press Incorporated*.

Harry, B. (2008) Collaboration with culturally and linguistically diverse families: Ideal versus reality, *Exceptional Children,* 74(3), 372-388.

Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Henderson, A. T., & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement.* Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hernstein, R. J., Murray, C. A. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Hixaon, J. (1990). Restructuring schools: Exploring school based management and empowerment issues, a national perspective. *Policy Briefs* (12).

Hoepfl, M. C. (1997). Choosing qualitative research: A primer for technology education researchers. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9(1), 47-63. Retrieved from http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JTE/v9n1/pdf/hoepfl.pdf

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M. T., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C. L., Wilkins, A. S., et al. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *Elementary School Journal, 106*(2), 105-130.

Horn, C. (2003). High-stakes testing and students stopping or perpetuating a cycle of failure? *Theory into Practice,* 42(1), 30-41.

Howland, A., Anderson, J. A., Smiley, A. D., & Abbott, D. J. (2006). School liaisons: Bridging the gap between home and school, *The School Community Journal*, 16(2), 47-68.

Inglehart, R. F. and Welzel., C. (2005). *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jeynes, W. (2005).The Effects of Parental Involvement on the Academic Achievement of African American Youth, *Journal of Negro Education,* 74(3), 260-274.

Jeynes, William. (2005). A meta-analysis: Parental involvement and secondary student educational outcomes, *Evaluation Exchange of the Harvard Family Research Project,* 10(4), 6.

Jeynes, William. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement**,** *Urban Education*, 40(3), 237-269.

Jones, M. G., Jones, B. D., Hardin, B., Chapman, L., Yarbrough, T., & Davis, M. (1999) The impact of highstakes testing on teachers and students in North Carolina. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(3), 199-203.

King, J. (2006). Gender equity in higher education, *American Council on Education,* Washington, DC.

Klingner, J. K., Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E., Harry, B., Zion, S., Tate, W., Durán, G. Z., & Riley, D. (2005). Addressing the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education through culturally responsive educational systems. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13(38). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n38/

Knight, M. G., & Oesterreich, H. A. (2002). (In)(Di)Visible identities of youth. In W. G. Tierney & L. S. Hagedorn (Eds.), *Increasing access to college: Extending possibilities for al*l *students,* (pp. 123-143). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kozol, J. (2005) *The Shame of a nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York. NY: Three Rivers Press.

Kozol, Jonathan (1991). *Savage Inequalities*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers.

Krupnick, C. G. (1994). *High School II Film Study Guide*. Cambridge, MA: Zipporah Films .

Lareau, A. (2000). Home Advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education. Boston Way Lanham, Maryland: Rowland & Littlefield Publishers.

Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 72, 37-53.

Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2003). Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment. *Theory and Society*, 32, 567-606.

Lee, J. S., & Bowen, N. K. (2006). Parental engagement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 193-218.

Lezotte, L. W. (1992). *Creating the Total Quality Effective Schools*. Okemos, MI: Effective School Products Limited.

Lightfoot, S. L. (2000). *Respect an exploration*. Cabbridge, MA: Perseus Books.

Lightfoot, S. L. (2003). *The essential conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other.* New York, NY: Ballantine Books

Luthans, F, Youssef, C., & Avolio, B. (2007). *Psychological capital: Developing the human competitive edge*. New York, NY: Oxford Press

McCabe, K. & Barnett, D. (2000). First comes work, then comes marriage: Future orientation among African American young adolescents, *Family Relations,* 49(1) 63-70.

McLanahan, S. (1988). Family structure and dependency: Early transitions to female household headship, *Demography*, 25(1), 1-16.

McLanahan, S. & Percheski, C. (2008). Family structure and the reproduction of inequalities, *Annual Review of Sociology* 34, 257-76.

McLanahan, S., & Beck, A. N. (2010). Parental relationships in fragile families, The Future of Children, 20(2), 17-37.

McNamee, Stephen J. and Robert K. Miller, Jr. (2004). *The Meritocracy Myth.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

MacPhee, D. & Miller-Heyl, J. (2003). Parent self-efficacy mediates the impact of family intervention, *American Psychological Association Conference*, Toronto, Ontario.

Magnuson, K. & McGroder, S. M. (2002). The effects of increasing welfare mother's education on their young children's academic problems and school readiness. *Joint Center for Poverty Research. National Institute for Child Health and Human Development,* Bethesda, MD.

Mapp, K. (2004). Family engagement. In F. P. Schargel & J. Smink (Eds), *Helping students graduate: A strategic approach to dropout prevention* (pp. 99-113). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Meier, D. (1995, 2002). *The Power of Their Ideas*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Meier, D. (2004). Smallness, autonomy, and choice: Scaling up. *Educational Horizons, 82*(4), 290-299.

Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis (*2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milne, A., Plourde, L. A. (2006). Factors of a low-SES household: What aids academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 33(3), 183-93.

Munn J., M., & Gavin E. K. (2008). Urban parents of children with special needs: Advocating for their children through social networks. *Urban Education, 43*(3), 378-393.

Noddings, N. (1999). Renewing democracy in schools, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(8), 580.

Neuman, W. L. (2000). Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2008). *Affirming diversity, The Sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon

Nurmi, J. E. & Aunola, K. R. K. (2005). Parent's causal attribution concerning their children's school achievement: A longitudinal study. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly,* 51(4), 494-522.

Obiakor, F. E. *(*2007). *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42; 148 DOI: 10.1177/10534512070420030301

Ogbu, J. U. (1992). Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher*, 21 (8), 5-14.

Okpala, C. O., Okapala, A., & Smith F. E. (2002). Parental engagement, instructional expenditures, family socioeconomic attributes, and student achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(2), 110-115.

Ortner, S. (2002). Subjects and capital: A fragment of a documentary ethnography, *Ethnos* 67(1), 9-32.

Ortner, S. (2003). *New Jersey dreaming: Capital culture and the class of 58*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Pasek, K., & Burchinal, M. (2006). Mother and caregiver sensitivity over time: Predicting language and academic outcomes with variable- and person- centered approaches. *Merrill Palmer Quarterly*, 52(3), 449-85.

Payne, R. (2005). *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Highlands TX: Aha Process Incorporated.

Payne, R. K., & Shenk, D. (2008). *Under-resourced learners 8 strategies to boost student achievement*. Highland, TX: Aha Process Incorporated.

Peacock, T. (2002). *Nurturing resilience and school success in American Indian and Alaska native students*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED459989)

Perkins, L. M. (1983). The impact of the cult of true womanhood on the education of black women. *Journal of Social Issues*, 39(3), 17-28.

Petrie, J. T., & Holloway, S. D. (2006).Mothers' representations of the role of parents and preschools in promoting children's development, *Early Childhood Research and Practice, 8*(2), Retrieved from http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v8n2/petrie.html.

Prins, E, & Toso, B.W.(2008). Defining and measuring parenting for educational success: A critical discourse analysis of the parent education profile. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), 555-596.

Ram, B., & Hou, F. (2003). Changes in family structure and child outcomes: Roles of economic and familial resources. *Policy Studies Journal*, 31(3), 309-330.

Rapp, N., & Duncan, H. (2012). Multi-dimensional parental involvement in schools: A principal's guide. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 7(1), 1-15.

Rayle, A. D., Arredondo, P., & Kurpius, S. E. R. (2005). Educational self-efficacy of college women: Implications for theory, research, and practice. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 83(3), 361-366.

Ream, R. K. (2003) Counterfeit social capital and Mexican American underachievement. *Educational and Policy Analysis*, 25(3), 237-262.

Ream, R. K., Palardy, G. (2008). Reexaming social class differences in the availability and the educational utility of parental social capital. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(2), 238-273.

Robinson, K., & Harris, A. (2014) *The broken compass: Parental involvement with children's education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

St. John, E.P., Williamson, G.M., Chung, C. & Michael, R.S. (2005). Rationales for educational reforms. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(3), 480-519.

Shen, Y. & Peterson, G. (2000). *Effects of Chinese parental practices on their adolescent children's school performance: Moderated by student's conformity to parents, self-esteem, and self- efficacy*. (Unpublished manuscript). Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ.

Shepard, L. A. & Smith, M. L. (1989). *Escalating kindergarten curriculum.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED308989).

Sizer, T. (1996). *Horace's hope: What works for the American high school.* Boston, MA Houghton Mifflin.

Skerrett, A., & Hargreaves, A. (2008). Student diversity and secondary school change in a context of increasingly standardized reform. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(4), 913-945.

Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. (2006). *Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class, and gender* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Sloan, V. J., Jason, L. A., & Addlesperger, E. (1996). Social networks among inner-city minority women. *Education*, 117(Winter), 194-199.

Snowman, J., & Biehler, R. (2000). *Psychology Applied to Teaching* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Snyder, C.R., & Lopez, S.J. (2007*). Positive psychology: the scientific and practical explorations of human strengths.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Spencer, N. F., Grimmett, M. A., & Kambui, H. A. (2015). A phenomenological study examining African American parent involvement towards student academic achievement: Implications for school counselors, *Vistas 2015. American Counseling Association*

Stanton-Salazar, R., & Dornbush, S. (1995). Social capital and the reproduction of inequality: Information networks among Mexican-origin high school students. *Sociology of Education*, 68(4), 116-135.

Steinberg, M., & Planta, R. (1992). Teacher-child relationships and the process of adjusting to school, *New Directions for Child Development*, 57(Fall), 61-80.

Stewart, E. B., Stewart, E. A., & Simons, R.L. (2007). The effects of neighborhood context on the college aspirations of African American adolescents. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), 896-919.

Sturges, K. M., Cramer, E. D., Harry, B., & Klingner, J. K.(2005). Reconceptualizing Childhood Studies, *International Journal of Educational Policy, Research, and Practice*, 6(Spring), 79-104.

Towns, D. P. (1996). *The impact of structural hypocrisy on the school performance of young African American males*. Retrieved from ERIC data base. (ED414348)

Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering with utopia: A century of public school reform* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Turnbull, A. P., & Winton, P. J. (1984). Parent involvement policy and practice: Current research and implications for families of young severely handicapped children. In J. Blacher (Ed.), *Severely handicapped children and their families: Research in Review* (pp. 377-397). New York: Academic Press.

Urdang, E. (2002). *Human behavior in the social environment: Interweaving the inner and outer worlds*. New York: Haworth Press.

United States Census Bureau, (2000).

United States Census Bureau, (2002).

Waites, C. (2008). *Social work practices with African American families: An intergenerational perspective.* New York: Routledge.

Werner-Snyder, C.R. & Lopez, S.J. (2007). *Positive psychology: the scientific and practical explorations of human strengths*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Wilson, W. J. (1996). *When work disappears: The world of the new urban Poor*. New York: Knopf.

Winters, W.G. (1993). African American mothers and urban schools: The power of participation. New York, NY: Lexington Books.

Wolcott, H. (2008) *Writing up qualitative research*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Woyshner, C. (2009). The national PTA, race, and civic engagement. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth, Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 8(1) 69-91. doi: 10.1080/1361332052000341006

Zellman, G. & Waterman, J. (1998). Understanding the impact of parent school engagement on children's educational outcomes, *The Journal of Educational Research*, 91(6), 370-380.

Zhan, M. & Sherraden, M. (2002) Effects of mother's assets on expectations and children's educational achievement in female-headed households (Working Paper 02-9). Retrieved from Center for Social Development: csd.wustl.edu/Publications/Documents/wp02-9.pdf