

REFRAMING SCHOOL READINESS: CASE STUDIES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
AND LATINA HEAD START PARENTS

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AND LATINA HEAD START PARENTS

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2017

ABSTRACT

The “school readiness gap” has been attributed to differences in family life, home-school connections, and social inequalities. The current school-parent partnership model fails to acknowledge the ways in which parent roles in education, and the home-school relations in which they are embedded, reflect broader social inequalities that affect students. This study utilized a narratological case study approach to examine the school readiness beliefs of African-American and Latina Head Start parents. The guiding research questions were: *How do parents conceptualize school readiness and transition practices?* Two sub-questions were asked: (1) What specific behaviors do parents use to promote their children’s school readiness? and (2) What other factors do parents believe help to promote their children’s transition to kindergarten?

Parents’ beliefs about school readiness were examined utilizing a theoretical framework informed by Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth, Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) critical race theory, and the concept of cultural capital. The participants in this study included three African-American parents and three Latina parents.

This study extends current research on parent beliefs about school readiness by examining data sources including in-depth interviews, readiness protocols, and surveys.

The research findings suggest the community cultural wealth model offers a framework to acknowledge multiple means of capital that parents access to support their children. The results recognize the diverse perspectives of kindergarten readiness held by parents, which suggests that schools work actively to gain insight into parental desires and interests, which may not be raised explicitly by parents themselves.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled “Reframing School Readiness: Case Studies of African-American and Latina Head Start Parents,” presented by Nicole C. King, candidate for the Doctorate of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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“Change requires more than words on a page—it takes perseverance,  
creative ingenuity and acts of love” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 574).

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## PREFACE

Working as a Head Start director has given me an insider’s perspective on the school readiness discussion. I have served as a member of a leadership team defining school readiness as a set of skills within children that support their developmental and educational progress (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). I have worked with teams to identify kindergarten benchmarks and develop systems of accountability that provided teachers and parents with checklists and developmental measures. I have looked at groups of five-year-old children and have been asked to quantify how many are “ready for kindergarten.” As I look back, I realize we failed to consider the child’s first teacher—their parent.

I came away from these experiences frustrated and unclear about what we were measuring. Was it Head Start curriculum, parenting, students, or the quality of Head Start programming? When parents and schools do not have a clear understanding of school readiness and lack access to community support networks, I believe the outcomes observed in the children are a reflection of a community disconnected from parents and their needs. I believe the community resources to support Head Start families do not have access to employment training, quality medical and dental providers, and mental health services. For example, Head Start has established Family Goals for School Readiness, which state, “families are able to identify and use community resources such as steady employment, access to transportation and affordable housing” (Aikens, Klein, Tarullo & West, 2013). If a mother lacks a high school diploma, has a criminal record, or suffers from mental illness, reaching the Family Goals will be difficult.

When external support systems are lacking, parents’ ability to prepare their child for kindergarten is given less attention because they are trying to meet the basic needs of their

family. The lack of quality preschool options in Communities of Color impacts parents' options for improving the school readiness of their child. Given the variation in rates of child development and home environments, equity needs to be considered when measuring school readiness, including wraparound services that support parents and children.

I believe community systems rather than individuals are responsible for school readiness. Receptive schools within responsive community networks of support produce kindergarten-ready children.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In early childhood education, intervention and readiness discourses are rampant (Souto-Manning, 2010). Often such discourse suggests that children from “disadvantaged backgrounds” (Children of Color) are not well prepared for school. A common belief theorizes Children of Color must be provided with early educational interventions (e.g., Head Start) as a way to compensate for inadequate home environments and insufficient literacy experiences—thereby framing Children of Color as culturally inferior (Goodwin, Cheruvu & Genishi, 2008). The assumption follows that People of Color “lack” the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. As a result, schools most often work from this assumption in structuring ways to help “disadvantaged” students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities, and cultural capital (Valenzuela, 1999). Deficit thinking is one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in United States schools (Valenzuela, 1999).

This model of thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education. These racialized assumptions about Communities of Color most often lead schools to default to the banking method of education critiqued by Paulo Freire (1970).

Souto-Manning (2010) notes, “Head Start classrooms educate children whose home cultural and linguistic experiences are misaligned with most Head Start teachers. This creates disconnect between the curriculum and children’s lives.” (p. 151). Most children qualify for Head Start classrooms based on deficit orientations such as single-parent homes

and low socioeconomic status. The Head Start mission, focused on “bringing them up to speed,” has positioned Children of Color as biologically and culturally inferior (Souto-Manning, 2010). This model fails to recognize parents as a vital component in supporting school readiness. Souto-Manning’s (2010) findings demonstrate that there is much variability in family practice and child outcomes. This study seeks to further challenge the myth that children from low-income backgrounds are not exposed to literacy-related activities, and that their parents have little time or inclination to provide them with learning experiences that contribute to school readiness.

In a child’s life, the transition to kindergarten is regarded as a pivotal marker, because patterns of achievement and behavior established in kindergarten can have a profound impact on children’s developmental trajectories (Puccioni, 2015). If the needs of our youngest learners are not addressed, children enter kindergarten with significant socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps (Lee & Burkam, 2002; Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2005) and these gaps continue to persist, if not widen, during elementary school (Reardon, 2011; Reardon & Galindo, 2009; Reardon & Robinson, 2008). For example, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) found that children ages 0-5 that were Children of Color or living below the poverty line, experienced disparities in their school readiness abilities compared to their peers. This gap widened as children grew older. By two years of age, Children of Color had fallen behind their white and Asian peers. By four years of age, the gap had widened even further (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). establishing a link between parents’ school readiness beliefs and transition practices may enhance conceptual models of home-based parent involvement, ultimately highlighting important targets for intervention (Puccioni, 2015).



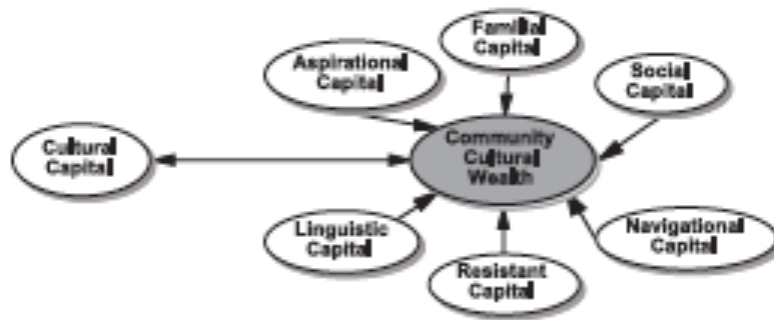
However, several studies have examined differences in parents' readiness beliefs by socio-demographic characteristics, and the findings were inconclusive (Barbarin et al., 2008; Diamond, Reagan & Bandyk, 2000; Graue, 1993). Because there is a shortage of empirical studies using a community cultural wealth model to investigate parents' conceptions of school readiness and their transitioning practices, this study focused on African-American and Latina parents' voices to reframe school readiness beliefs and transition practices.

In order to delve into the topic of intervention and school readiness, it is important to understand the intervention model of Head Start. Head Start is a federally funded program used to address school readiness gaps and transition practices. Established in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, Head Start's mission is to support education, health, and nutrition, and to provide other social services for low-socioeconomic status children and Children of Color. Without such intervention, many believe children may enter kindergarten already "behind." Belfield & Garcia (2014) pointed out preschool programs might serve either as a complement to, or substitute for, parental efforts toward school readiness. That is, parents might see Head Start as a way of enhancing their own school readiness efforts, or they may view it as a way of "outsourcing" school readiness so they can focus on other goals.

Within this Head Start framework, Parents of Color and their children are seen as having deficits to be addressed via early intervention programs (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). Spodek and Brown (1993) pointed out that the impetus to prepare Children of Color and/or low socioeconomic status to succeed in formal schooling by making up for inappropriate home environments has historically shaped the field of education, and it continues today. Yet, very little is known about either how Parents of Color prepare their children for school

or what they think such preparation should entail (Barbarin, 2002; Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000).

Utilizing a critical race theory lens, traditional interpretations of cultural capital theory were challenged, and forms of capital that go unrecognized or unacknowledged in schools and classrooms were examined utilizing Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth. Figure 1.1 highlights the six types of community cultural wealth children bring to the classroom, including aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, and linguistic capital. By examining assets that Parents of Color bring from their homes and communities into the school, community cultural wealth has the potential to transform the deficit model found in the school readiness literature.



*Figure 1.1.* A Model of Community Cultural Wealth. Adapted from Yosso (2005)

Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004) suggested that parents' attitudes, values, and beliefs about schooling influence their use of transition practices, which in turn, contribute to children's early outcomes during the transition to school. Puccioni (2015) defined parental transition practices as specific parent-child interactions intended to prepare children for school and have been operationalized by actions such as reading to the child, saying the

alphabet, and practicing counting (Barnett & Taylor, 2009; Taylor et al., 2004). It is commonly assumed that parents' views on school readiness are likely to influence their practices; however, research examining parents' school readiness beliefs and transition practices during the transition to elementary school has received less attention (Barbarin et al., 2008; Barnett & Taylor, 2009; Taylor et al., 2004).

As schools look for ways to increase parental involvement, more attention to parental beliefs and actions in connection to school readiness is needed. In this study, parents' school readiness beliefs are conceptualized as the importance parents place on children having certain skills and attributes prior to kindergarten (Diamond et al., 2000; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; West, Germino-Hausken, & Collins, 1993). Transition practices are conceptualized as targeted parent-child interactions intended to prepare children for school (Taylor et al., 2004).

This study aims to examine how parents conceptualize school readiness. Although school readiness includes cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, this study focused solely on understanding parents' readiness beliefs and the transition practices they use in readying their children for kindergarten. This study sought to recognize the contributions made by parents and to look for ways to improve home-school partnerships. Parents' voices illuminated the research questions and provided a framework for recognizing their cultural wealth.

The central research question guiding this narratological case study asks: How do Parents of Color conceptualize school readiness? The sub-questions focused on parenting behaviors:

- What specific behaviors do parents use to promote school readiness?

- What factors do parents believe help children transition to kindergarten?

This study describes parent's beliefs about school readiness and applies a critical race theory and community cultural wealth framework, whereby readiness depends on the family and cultural inputs used to produce it. There are many potential factors influencing school readiness, but this study focused on the inputs and beliefs of Head Start families.

This study uses terms Students of Color, People of Color, and Communities of Color to refer to African-American, Black, Native American, Chicano, Latino, and Asian American populations, who were described in many literature journals as racial "minorities" or underrepresented groups. This study also uses the terms Chicanx and Latinx. These terms are gender-neutral alternatives to Chicano, Chicana and Latino, Latina and even Latin@. Ramirez and Blay (2016) described the term Latinx to move beyond gender binaries and is inclusive of men and women from all backgrounds. The terms Chicanx and Latinx make room for people who are trans, queer, agender, non-binary, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid.

### **The Problem**

Ramey and Ramey (2004) noted, "school readiness and school achievement are at the forefront of our country's domestic social policy concerns." While starting kindergarten is universally recognized as a major transition in children and families' lives, school readiness has yet to be clearly defined (Kagan, 2008; Ramey & Ramey, 2004, Sameroff & McDonough, 1994). Parents play the ultimate role in determining school readiness; they do so not only by promoting their children's development but also in deciding when to send them to school and which school to send them to. Understanding parents' views of what

constitutes school readiness and early academic success is critical since parents typically influence early learning.

Despite this influence, parents' own perceptions, behaviors, and level of engagement supporting school readiness have seldom been the focus of research and are often overlooked. For schools and policymakers, parental beliefs and actions are critical to understanding school readiness. For example, Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) found these relationships to be extremely nuanced, and Chazan-Cohen et al. (2009) noted they vary across socioeconomic status. Barbarin (2002) pointed out that even though parents contribute significantly to children's early development, little is known about how parents construct beliefs about school readiness and whether these beliefs are linked to the skills children develop by the time they start school. Additionally, many families consider the transition to public school a major event for which they feel unprepared (Caldwell & Ginther, 1996; Kagan, 2008). The focus of this study is to examine and give voice to these nuanced variables among Parents of Color.

The literature on parental beliefs about school readiness is both limited and mixed in its findings. Diamond et al. (2000) explained that parental views of school readiness using elements such as parental education, race/ethnicity, gender, home learning, and educational television are limited. Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000) investigated parental views of school readiness in high-need communities of color and found similarities on basic concepts such as English language acquisition, but they found few differences across ethnic groups. Barbarin (2002) examined parental school readiness beliefs, socioeconomic status (SES), and ethnicity from interviews with 452 parents of four-year-olds in 2000. This study also found modest associations between parental beliefs and SES. Across different measures

of SES and different academic outcomes, a large body of research spanning decades makes it clear that family SES not only predicts children's academic skills at school entry but also their academic trajectories through high school (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2007; Connor, Son, Hindman, & Morrison, 2005; Entwisle & Alexander, 1988; Stipek & Ryan, 1997; Williams, 1996; Zill, Collins, West, & Hausken, 1995).

Historically, considerable attention has been given to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in academic achievement. For example, Jencks and Phillips (2011) found African-American and Latinx students repeatedly scored below White students on standardized tests of reading and mathematics skills. According to Ramey and Ramey (2004), for African-American and Latinx students in the United States, the educational experience is one of accumulated disadvantage. This accumulated disadvantage has been defined as "school failure" with respect to Students of Color (Boykin, 1983; Collins, 2009; Garcia, 2001; Siegel & Welsh, 2016); however, the causes of failures by schools to educate Children of Color are in need of further theoretical development. When researchers try to explain factors that impede or promote early academic achievement among Children of Color, there is a heavy emphasis on single parenthood, ethnicity, and peer interactions and less emphasis on parenting and home environments (McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005).

More studies are needed to provide a voice for parents raising children of African-American and Latinx descent within the majoritarian narrative in schools. Majoritarian storytelling is a method of recounting the experiences and perspectives of those with racial and social privilege (Yosso, 2005). Indeed, as Yosso suggested, "everyday majoritarian narratives have become embedded with racialized omissions, distortions, and stereotypes

that perpetuate myths that darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighborhoods and bad schools” (p. 12). Like White privilege, majoritarian stories seem invisible. Instead of stories, they appear to be “natural” parts of everyday life (Yosso, 2005). Researchers need to consider the majoritarian influence on education and look beyond this to highlight parents’ beliefs, specific behaviors, and concerns regarding their children’s academic success.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth description of school readiness beliefs and transition practices of African-American and Latinx parents. This study examined the influence and role of families in children’s preparation for kindergarten in an effort to explain school readiness and related practices. This study also explored various definitions of “school readiness” within the contexts of social class, race, and ethnicity. Using qualitative data, this study examined perceptions and identified processes and specific behaviors parents utilized to prepare their children for kindergarten.

One goal of this study was to put forth recommendations supported by examples of participants’ everyday experiences. By focusing on what Patton (2002) defined as the *unit of analysis*, this study focused on parental conceptions of school readiness across African-American and Latinx Head Start families. A case study design highlights the individual stories about defining school readiness among Parents of Color. Utilizing multiple case studies allowed for an embedded, deeper understanding into the factors that Head Start parents experience by exploring the “how and why” (Yin, 2013) of this phenomenon.

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to contribute a diverse and comprehensive view of parental perceptions of school readiness. Russell and Kelly (2002, p. 5) described good research

questions as springing from [a researcher's]...values, passions, and preoccupations.

Connected to school readiness, the preliminary research question guiding this case study asked: How do Parents of Color conceptualize school readiness? Sub-questions focused on specific transition beliefs included:

- What specific behaviors do parents use to promote school readiness?
- What factors do parents believe help children transition to kindergarten?

To explore this research question with Head Start parents required the integration of their narratives with school readiness research to transform this case study into an opportunity to inform public early educational policy, practice, and research.

The research questions focused the study and led to the development of the theoretical framework supporting the design of this study. I selected several areas of research that formed the study's theoretical framework, including the tenets of critical race theory, cultural capital, critical race counterstorytelling, intersectionality, and community cultural wealth. Figure 1.2 depicts community cultural wealth, and parental readiness beliefs and transitional practices.



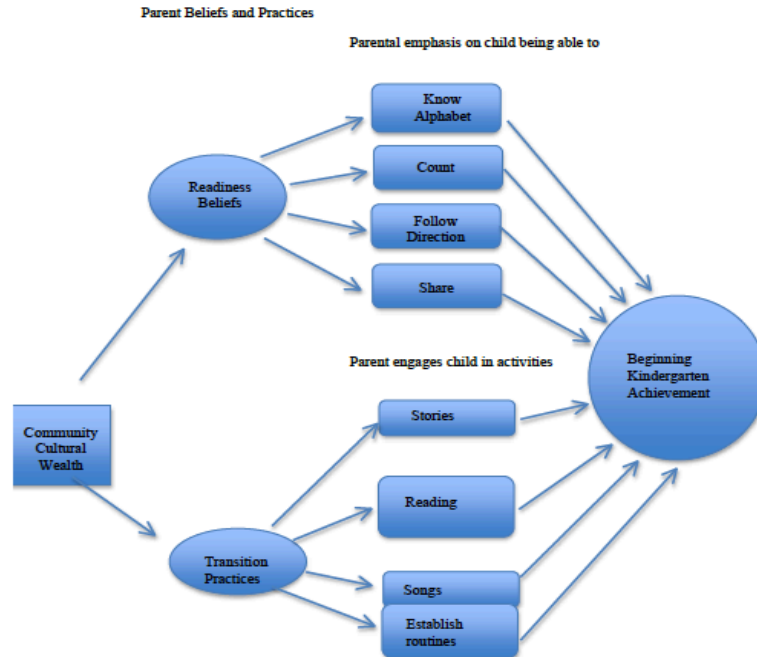


Figure 1.2. Parental Readiness Beliefs and Transition Model

### Theoretical Framework

Necesitamos teorías [we need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods. In our mestizaje theories, we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of existing ones. (Anzaldúa, 1990, pp. xxv-xxvi)

There are multiple definitions of school readiness, the parenting practices of African-American and Latina families are not valued by schools. Carlton and Winsler (1999) highlighted the need for a paradigm shift in order to better understand school readiness. The authors suggested, “assumptions upon which most of the current readiness practices are based are faulty and questionable” (p. 343). They contended current readiness paradigms can have negative consequences for young children. As Snow (2006) pointed out, “a comprehensive theory of school readiness is lacking in current literature” (p. 9).

This chapter provides a historical review of school readiness and an overview of the theoretical framework with parallels between critical race theory and community cultural wealth. This framework attempted to move beyond outlining models of risk and deficit to highlighting parental processes and actions that perpetuate and support school readiness.

A comprehensive discussion of each theory is beyond the scope of this study. The purpose of this chapter is to outline and highlight theoretical concepts that form the foundation of this theoretical framework.

This study explored a theoretical framework for preparing children for kindergarten based on parents as a child's first teacher and the process by which parents shape children's cognitive and emotional foundation. This study attempts to expand existing paradigms. The first conceptual strand of the theoretical framework addresses the historical definition of school readiness. The second conceptual strand examines race and racism in education. Third, critical race theory is incorporated to explore race and school readiness. Finally, cultural capital and community cultural wealth are presented to examine social class and the impact on school readiness.

### **School Readiness: Past, Present and Future**

Historically, participants in the field of early childhood development have been reluctant to define school readiness (Saluja, Scott-Little & Clifford, 2000). Recently this has changed considerably, and there are now over 150 definitions on this topic. During the past forty years, the definition of children's readiness for school has undergone major shifts. It has moved from a primarily maturational definition to a more socially constructed concept. Previous approaches stressed the maturity level of the child that would allow for quiet, focused work as the primary indicator of school preparedness (Gesell, Ilg, & Ames, 1943;

Pandis, 2001). More recent approaches have stressed the bi-directionality between the child and her or his environment (Moll & González, 1994). Current trends support the “goodness-of-fit” between the child and the environment that promotes optimal development (Graue, 1993; Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2004). School readiness, then, is the interaction between the child and the range of environmental and cultural experiences that maximize the developmental outcomes for children.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2015) stated, “Families and homes, providers and early childhood care and education programs, neighbors and neighborhoods, and educators and elementary schools are all social contexts and social relationships that are integral to children’s transitions from home into formal schooling.” (p. 11). Consequently, an ecological framework was put forth to theorize school readiness (Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Snow, 2006). The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCDL) Ecological Model was developed in an effort to understand the process of transitioning into kindergarten (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999). The model looks closely at the influence of many contexts—family, classroom, and community.

Similarly, the term “transition” may have several meanings, depending on the setting, the nature of the cultural and psychosocial adjustments involved, and the role of the actors in shaping their transition (Dunlop & Fabian, 2006). In this study’s discussion of school readiness, transition was defined as children moving into and adjusting to new learning environments, families learning to work with a sociocultural system (education), and schools making provisions for admitting new children into the system, representing individual and societal diversity (Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008).

In school readiness, the three dimensions are interlinked, building competencies and preparedness in children, schools and families. This study's definition of school readiness understands the child, family, and school are embedded within social, cultural and historic influences (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). School readiness needs to be discussed within a broader, more dynamic sociocultural context (Gardiner, 2004). By acknowledging the diversity in defining childhood as well as in child contexts, the role of culture is seen as a powerful influence on the school readiness paradigm (Nsamenang, 2008).

As Snow (2006) noted, "school readiness is best understood as an interaction between the developmental status of the child and the numerous elements of a child's environment" (p. 30). Further, Pianta et al. (1999) noted that the process of readiness is highly complex and involves multiple relationships and contexts in which young children are embedded and have experiences.

Thirteen studies noted relationships between such variables as race, class, gender and children's performances on assessments of school readiness (Dika & Singh, 2002). As a result, theories based on "risk" and "deficit" models were largely represented in school readiness literature.

This study examined ways in which Head Start teachers and schools could start to authentically incorporate home school readiness practices into their classrooms, challenging traditional roles of students as recipients of knowledge (Freire, 1970). This study moved away from questioning if Head Start early intervention works and if Children of Color are being brought "up to speed" in the process of White-ification (Kinloch, 2010). Instead, this study explored a theoretical framework for preparing children for kindergarten based on

parents as a child's first teacher and the process by which parents shape children's cognitive and emotional foundations.

### **Race and Racism in Education**

In order to explain how critical race theory is used in educational research, this study describes how race and racism are central concepts of CRT analysis. In connection with these concepts, I describe how I am beginning to understand race, racism, and CRT in education.

Carter and Goodwin (1994) discussed race as follows:

a topic that should not be subsumed under culture or diversity but needs to be confronted directly because, today and throughout the course of U.S. history, it is and has been a critical factor associated with who does and does not benefit from available social, economic, and educational commodities. (p. 293)

According to Huber (2008), while many definitions of race exist, most scholars agree that race is a socially constructed category (López, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Winant & Omi, 1994). Huber pointed out racial definitions are fluid and have changed throughout history to allocate and deny power to specific groups of people according to their place in a racial hierarchy. Despite the term's fluidity, the power of race and racism in mediating the lives of People of Color should not be underestimated (López, 2000). As Carter and Goodwin (1994) argued, "because the power of race mediates the lives of People of Color, it should be confronted directly" (p. 293). In order to challenge racism, scholars suggest a clear definition of race.

Banks (1995) defined race as "a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups, to create ideas about the 'Other,' to formulate their identities and to defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities

within society” (p. 22). Banks described race as a socially constructed category used to maintain and perpetuate racism through racial hierarchies that create social inequities (via institutional racism). Banks acknowledged how power is mediated through the construction of racial definitions to benefit whites, which validates white values, beliefs, and knowledge over that of others (Huber, 2008).

As much as the previous literature on race suggests, research must operate to expose racism and disrupt racist structures, practices, and discourses that maintain and perpetuate racial inequality. Critical race theory aims to achieve these goals and supports the framework of this study by revealing the school readiness beliefs of Parents of Color.

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

As many scholars of color indicate, the point of race-based epistemologies is not to “color” the scholarship, not to claim to be the truth, and not to dismiss European and Euro-American epistemologies. Utilizing a critical race theory framework in education, educational researchers aim to highlight the prominent role of race and racism in education systems and institutions that impact the educational trajectories of People of Color. A critical race analysis allows for and enables researchers to work towards the elimination of racism through understanding the multiple ways People of Color experience subordination, as defined by race, class, gender, and other forms of oppression (Huber, 2008).

Critical race theory in education turns a critical gaze on dominance to expose hierarchies based on race (Ladson-Billings, 2005). CRT emerged during the mid-1970s as a response among legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) in search of a critical interpretation of race and racism in the law and society. Later, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) introduced this concept into

the field of education. CRT provides an opportunity for “uncover[ing] how race and racism operate” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 7) to impact the lives of African Americans; while simultaneously taking into account intersections of socioeconomic status and gender.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contended the “voice” component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice. As we attempt to make linkages between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system. Delpit (2006) argued that one of the tragedies of education is the way in which the dialogue of people of color has been silenced. A growing number of education scholars of color are raising critical questions about the way research is being conducted in communities of color. Thus, without authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members), it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Bell (1992) noted that in listening to and recounting the stories of racially marginalized groups, critical race theorists “are attempting to sing a new scholarly song—even if to some listeners our style is strange, our lyrics unseemly” (p. 144). Bell added, “We do not expect praise for our legal scholarship that departs from the traditional. We simply seek understanding and that tolerance without which no new songs will ever be heard” (p. 144). CRT offers a tool to examine and more effectively challenge racism. Bell concluded, “we must understand so as better to oppose the dire forces that are literally destroying the many people who share our racial heritage” (p. 144).

Bell's (1992) explanation resonates with Freire (1970), whose legacy states, "as we challenge racialized oppression through our daily work, we transform our world" (p. 104). Delgado-Gaitan (1992a) added, "for educators a parallel goal of CRT is critical race praxis." Critical race praxis refers to our work toward the transformation of education inside and outside classrooms (Yosso, 2005). Cook (1990) described CRT as focusing directly on the effects of race and racism, while simultaneously addressing the hegemonic system of White supremacy on the "meritocratic" system.

Critical race theory offers a means for analyzing early educational experiences and the "school readiness gaps" between African-American, Latinx, and White children, going beyond deficit models to examine community cultural wealth within schools and communities. While the popular discourse in the United States continues to be limited to the Black/White comparison, CRT continues to expand the dialogue and recognizing ways that People of Color have been silenced (Ellison, 1990).

Within the educational field, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) discussed five tenets of CRT that can inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism; (2) the challenge of dominant ideology; (3) a commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches.

1. *The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination.* CRT's foundational premise begins with race and racism being central, endemic, permanent, and a fundamental part of defining how United States society functions (Bell, 1992). CRT also examines the "inextricable layers" of



subordination based on gender, class, immigration status, accent and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989).

2. *The challenge to dominant ideology.* CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claim that educational institutions are objective, colorblind, and race neutral and provide equal opportunity. CRT challenges deficit-informed research that silences, ignores, and distorts epistemologies of People of Color (Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Bell (1992) and Solórzano (1997) argue these claims of colorblindness and neutrality are a façade for the power and privilege of dominant groups.
3. *The commitment to social justice.* CRT is committed to social justice and works towards the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty as well as empowerment of People of Color (Freire, 1970; Solórzano, 1997).
4. *The centrality of experiential knowledge.* CRT recognizes the experiential knowledge of People of Color. CRT draws on the lived experiences of People of Color by including methods such as storytelling, family histories, parables, cuentos, testimonies, and narratives (Bell, 1992; Bernal, 1998, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).
5. *The transdisciplinary perspective.* CRT moves beyond the boundaries of disciplines and analyzes racism with historical and contemporary context, drawing on scholarship from ethnic studies, women's studies, history, and law (Delgado, 1989; Gotanda, 1991).

Utilizing the five tenets of CRT provides guidance that can inform research in Communities of Color. One of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in schools

is deficit thinking. Ladson-Billings (2005) traced back the opposition to Eurocentric epistemologies over one hundred years ago, with the work of W.E.B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this book, DuBois described how African Americans living in a post-emancipation era in the U.S. struggled with *double consciousness*, the conflict between the desire to become a part of mainstream white society and to reject it from a solely African-American perspective. Later, Anzaldúa (1990) added issues of ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality into these conversations, theorizing the contemporary experiences of Chicaxs (*la mestiza*) who are constantly “straddling” the conflicting perspectives of white, Mexicana/o, and indigenous cultures to make sense of our realities. Yosso (2005) stated, “the work of scholars such as DuBois and Anzaldúa articulate the struggles that arise as parents attempt to define and understand their experiences as People of Color, within the constructs of dominant Eurocentric, patriarchal paradigms” as they ready their children for kindergarten.

Yosso (2005) contended *deficit thinking* takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education. Educators argue that schools work and that students, parents, and communities need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system. To challenge deficit thinking in schools, race tends to be identified as “cultural difference.” In this study, culture refers to values and behaviors learned, shared, or exhibited by a group of people. Gómez-Quíñones (1977) defined culture as a set of characteristics that are neither fixed nor static.

## **Critical Race Counterstories**

Dixson and Rousseau (2005) described qualitative accounts as a means to giving voice to those that are traditionally marginalized. The voices of parents, particularly African-American and Latinx parents, are vital to a better understanding of preparing children for kindergarten. Qualitative methodology provides an opportunity for participants to describe their perceptions, experiences, and everyday lives using their own words. Within the framework of critical race theory, counterstories offer “a means to challenge the dominant story” about race and racism (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 11) by bringing to bear stories about race told by people of color (Duncan et al., 2006) in social science research. This study presented African-American and Latina voices in discussions of school readiness. Counterstorytelling is a widely used CRT method. In 2000, Solorzano and Yosso used counterstorytelling in their chapter, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Chicana and Chicano Education*. Then, Yosso (2006) published the first book of critical race counterstories in education titled, *Critical Race Counterstories along the Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline*. Bernal (2002) provided several basic tenets for critical race counterstories in education. They explain that counterstories can be used to:

- (1) build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice;
- (2) challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center;
- (3) open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and to show that they are not alone in their position; and

(4) teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. (p. 42)

Through critical race counter storytelling, we humanize the struggles faced by People of Color, calling attention to the racist structures, policies, and practices in education (Huber, 2008).

### **Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital is a theoretical concept first developed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) to explain the disparities in educational outcomes between students of varying social class. His theory of cultural capital asserted that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. Bourdieu (2011) argued that schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources of members of society. For example, schools utilize particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula; children from higher social locations enter schools already familiar with these social arrangements (Lareau, 1987). Bourdieu maintained that the cultural experiences in the home facilitate children's adjustments to school and academic achievement, thereby transforming cultural resources into what he called "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 2011).

The standards of schools are not neutral; requests for parental involvement are guided by the social and cultural experiences of middle-class whites (Lareau, 1987). It is important to consider class and class cultures in supporting or impeding children's (and parents') negotiation of the process of schooling (Baker & Stevenson, 1986). Thirteen studies reviewed showed a significant relationship across many school indicators (Dika & Singh, 2002). Dropout rates were positively related to nontraditional family structure and

number of siblings (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; Smith, Beaulieu & Israel, 1992) and negatively related to parental expectations and aspirations, parent monitoring, number of moves, church attendance, parent communication with school, and intergenerational closure (Carbonaro, 1998; Israel et al., 2001; Smith et al., 1992, Teachman, Paasch & Carver, 1996).

Following Bourdieu's framework (Bourdieu, 2011; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), Lareau (2011) suggested that the key issue was not the intrinsic nature of the parenting itself, but rather the uneven rewards dominant institutions bestowed on different types of strategies. Carter (2003) defined "dominant cultural capital" as powerful, high status cultural attributes, codes, and signals. "Cultural capital provides individuals with an ability to 'walk the walk' and 'talk the talk' of the cultural power brokers in our society" (p. 138). For example, Calarco (2014) discussed how middle-class parents provide direct and forceful coaching to their children, teaching them how to intervene in schools, whereas working-class parents remind their children not to pester the teacher or engage in any potentially annoying behavior. Streib (cited in Bourdieu & Passeron, 2011) showed how daycare teachers create dynamics that often privilege the verbal skills of middle-class children compared to their working-class counterparts.

Cultural capital offers a means to explore how these processes of social class begin from an early age to influence kindergarten preparation. Most of the empirical work on cultural capital has suggested that Children of Color may lack cultural capital or knowledge of how certain educational processes occur (Lareau, 2011). As Valencia (2010) pointed out, this "deficit thinking paradigm" overwhelmingly locates the basis of educational, social, and economic failure in students, their families, and their cultures instead of examining how schools are structured to prevent poor students and Students of Color from learning.

Valencia added, “of the several paradigms that scholars, educators, and policymakers use to explain school failure among low-SES Students of Color, the deficit model has held the longest currency—spanning well over a century” (p. 1). Deficit thinking permeates United States society, and both schools and those who work in schools mirror these beliefs (Yosso, 2005). Garcia and Guerra (2004) argued that this reality necessitates a challenge of personal and individual race, gender, and class prejudices expressed by educators as well as a critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from non-dominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Current theoretical and empirical scholarship on school readiness has not explicitly or thoughtfully addressed issues of power, social class, ideology, and racism (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). Most research examines student or parent interactions without paying attention to patterns in larger structures. The reality is that Students of Color are being educated in complex and dynamic educational contexts that also exert an influence on their educational opportunities. To this research, Valencia (2010) added a series of factors play a significant role in shaping and reproducing academic failure: school (and neighborhood) segregation; language and cultural exclusion, school financing, school policies, teacher/faculty-student interactions, teacher certification, curriculum differentiation, and restrictive immigration policies.

### **Cultural Capital as Resource**

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), DiMaggio (1982) and Carter (2003) focused on cultural capital advantages tied to higher socioeconomic status. Cultural capital, they asserted, is one mechanism through which the intergenerational transmission of class

advantage occurs and is indirectly translated into higher educational achievement. Bourdieu argued that individuals within society gain advantages through possession of cultural capital. Lareau and Horvat (1999) added, “cultural capital allows culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards” (p. 567). To understand disparities in academic achievement, the concept of cultural capital in this framework supports the concept that “schools are not neutral ecological settings” (Barone, 2006; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Instead, expectations and attitudes are well defined and imposed by the dominant class.

Cultural capital is “largely the property of the existing elite” (Kingston, 2001, p. 89). For example, Delgado-Gaitan (1992b) pointed out, in a study of six Mexican-American families, resources outside the home, such as parents asking co-workers how to manage a problem at their child’s school, are not presently recognized in the school as having educational value. Additionally, Villanueva (1996), in a study of three generations of Latinx families, stressed the “wisdom” of grandparents who are not formally educated yet provide important lessons to children and grandchildren. The work of Delgado-Gaitan (1992b) and Villanueva (1996) highlighted the important role schools play in selectively legitimizing cultural and social capital.

Educational disparities result when middle class cultural resources are more valued in educational settings than poor and working class cultural resources (Lareau, 2011). In other words, when children have access to or possess middle class cultural capital aligned with schools’ expectations, this becomes a resource for children entering kindergarten. This study listens to Head Start parents’ perceptions, expectations, and kindergarten transition practices to theorize the influence of cultural capital on school readiness.

Bhabha's (1994) hybridity theory noted children need a merging of personal and curricular spaces—the first space is the personal and cultural out-of-school ways of knowing (defined as student-centered) and the second space is the official curriculum (teacher-centered). When students have access to these resources, academic performance is enhanced. Moll, Véllez-Ibañez, and Greenberg (1990) described this first space as “funds of knowledge” which can serve to “transform classrooms into more advanced contexts for teaching and learning” (p. 344). They proposed engaging families as resources who “contribute substantively to the development of our lesson...[and] to the content and process of classroom learning” (p. 339).

The interconnection between the student- and teacher-centered spaces creates a third space that has permeable boundaries—allowing students to draw on specific ways of knowing within and across contexts. Often the merging does not occur naturally—it must be negotiated syncretically. Examining syncretic literacy practices offers a broader interpretation of what constitutes literacy and includes what families and communities contribute to children's cultural and linguistic worlds (Moll et al., 1990). Volk (2003) called permeable curriculum that incorporates the literacies from children's lives, “a collage of blending and clashing.” Syncretic learning can only be created when teachers and others who define what counts in school and recognize, value, and engage with the children in using their knowledge and skills in learning activities.

This view opens up the doors to valuing what each child already knows instead of conceptualizing certain children as if they need to be fixed. Children are already skilled and intentional. The challenge then is for teachers and schools to embrace this notion and acknowledge the skills and intentionality children bring with them to school. Helping



children negotiate such spaces would open up possibilities for learning to construct and embody multiple identities according to contexts, and ultimately develop deeper metacognitive strategies.

This approach focuses on examining “the inextricable link between culture and cognition through engagement in activities, tasks or events” (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004, p. 7). This study explores culture as a resource discussed in a community of cultural wealth as a framework to examine school readiness.

### **Community Cultural Wealth**

The theoretical model informing this work includes critical race theory, cultural capital, and counterstorytelling. To document and analyze perceptions of school readiness of Parents of Color, I integrated a theoretical model whose commitment to speaking truth to power continues to address social realities. “If we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi).

Community cultural wealth offers an alternative theory built on the CRT framework and syncretic literacy by focusing the research lens on the experiences of People of Color, revealing assets and resources in the lives of Parents of Color. Yosso (2005) suggests there are at least six forms of capital that comprise community cultural wealth and most often go unacknowledged or unrecognized. These forms of capital include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. For example, aspirational capital is the ability to hold onto hope in the face of inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality. Yet, aspirations are developed within social and familial contexts, often through storytelling and advice (*consejos*) that offer navigational goals to challenge oppressive conditions. This form of cultural wealth describes the work of Gándara and

Contreras (2009) who has shown that Chicana experience the lowest educational outcomes compared to every other group in the United States but maintain consistently high aspirations for their children's future (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992b; Solórzano, 1992). Gándara (1995) stated, "stories nurture a culture of possibility that breaks the links between parents' current occupational status and their children's future academic attainment" (p. 55).

### **Theoretical Synthesis**

Each of the concepts discussed above support this study's theoretical framework. The concept of community cultural wealth, as developed by Yosso (2005), was used to expand this study's explanation of how cultural capital impacts relationships and connections among multiple developmental contexts. The community cultural wealth model offers a means for examining kindergarten preparation because of the model's diverse, interrelated social contexts. Also, noticing the links between the different systems (family, school, community, and society) offers a more comprehensive account of African-American and Latinx children's early school experiences.

Class-based differences in school readiness examined cultural capital in the kindergarten transition process. However, the theory of cultural capital did not address racial disparities. To address this gap, a discussion of race and racism, as well as critical race theory were incorporated. Specifically, counterstory was discussed to describe how African Americans and Latinx often reject racial colorblind ideology that dominates how race is constructed in the United States. When syncretic literacy practices are considered, it is important to examine the tenet of intersectionality.

## **Intersectionality**

Social class and racial and gender disparities were interrelated within the studies examined in the literature review. Understanding how race, class, and gender intersect to impact individuals' experiences in society and educational settings was of value to this study. Intersectionality helped to address limitations found in the literature. Crenshaw (1989) suggested intersectionality refers to forms of intersecting oppressions. Race, class, and gender oppression do not work in isolation of each other; instead they "work together producing injustices" (Collins, 2009, p. 206). For example, being low-income, African American and male can simultaneously influence a child's transition to kindergarten. Intersectionality supported this theoretical framework and provided ways to examine adults who perceive social class, race, and gender while readying children for kindergarten.

## **Overview of the Methodology**

The purpose of this narratological case study was to understand the perspectives and experiences of Parents of Color regarding their beliefs about kindergarten. The goal of this study was to describe the stories of Head Start parents working to prepare their children for kindergarten. The rationale for using a case study approach was to establish themes and patterns for the meaning of school readiness from parents' perspective. The use of qualitative research was appropriate to generate representations of the phenomena independent of the researcher's beliefs (Mays & Pope, 1995). Creswell (2013) noted case study allows for the development of generalizations and interpretation. This study used six representative cases to offer different perspectives. It was important to explore the most effective ways to develop a survey that elicited answers not captured in traditional surveys. In order to ensure the survey was reliable and valid, the researcher examined the literature

and learned more about asking the right questions, asking sensitive questions, and controlling for social desirability bias.

### **Site and Participant Selection**

The participants were recruited at a Midwestern Head Start preschool program. Parents were informed about the project, and their written consent was obtained during meetings held at the Head Start center (see Appendix A). The preschool staff and parents were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation in the study was voluntary.

The Head Start preschool's instructional program used a version of Project Construct, forming the basis for a predominately play-oriented curriculum. Although parent involvement was an important part of the Head Start curriculum, none of the families in this sample participated in any home literacy or home visit interventions. There was a common daily routine for preschool classes: circle time and greetings; free choice/classroom learning centers; cleanup; outdoor free play; lunch and late afternoon snack; and outdoor free play until dismissal. The goal was to highlight parents' perceptions and activities as children transitioned from home to school. Therefore, this study gathered information from parents who have four-year-old children enrolled in a public Head Start program. The theoretical framework of critical race theory, cultural capital, and community cultural wealth further illuminated the participants' experiences.

The case study format provided an opportunity for holistic inquiry to gain insight and understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon (Stake, 2005). Rossman and Rallis (2003) explained that case study enhances understanding of a larger phenomenon by focusing on a specific case or cases. The authors note that case study is particularly useful for providing a thick, rich description of a phenomenon or issue. "The strength of case

studies is their detail, their complexity, and their use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives” (p. 105).

According to Yin (2013), a case study design should focus on the “why” and “how” questions of school readiness among Head Start parents. The use of case studies, viewed through the theoretical framework, provides a deeper understanding of how African-American and Latina parents experience this phenomenon in a Head Start center while giving a more holistic picture of both the participant and phenomenon in context. This lens narrows the focus to question how “power, privilege, and oppression influence the unit of analysis” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4).

Creswell (2013) found case study collects stories gathered through many different forms of data collection, including demographics, interviews, surveys and questionnaires. The data gathered included interviews, a Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School (CARES) survey, and home literacy practices to support the meanings of school readiness for parents. Critically analyzing the factors influencing school readiness assisted in informing this case study. The case study approach and the theoretical framework are further described in the methodology discussion in Chapter 3.

There was a need for a variety of sampling strategies to give the robust and thick description of the phenomena being explored. Morse and Richards (2007) found that [in qualitative research], “sampling schemes change dynamically with the development of the research” (p. 235). Purposive sampling was used to identify participants willing to provide thick, rich, detailed information on their perceptions of kindergarten readiness. This study focused on understanding the experiences of Latina and African-American mothers; in this case, ethnicity was a key factor in selecting participants.

## **Data Collection Methods**

Qualitative case study research involves describing contexts of the case (Creswell, 2013). Stake (2005) suggested that this description provides a sense of “being there.” To help create a sense of being there, documentary sources included demographics, surveys, and questionnaires as sources of information describing school readiness as a social issue. Stake (2005) noted, “data is collected on the nature, historical background, physical environment, and informant knowledge of the case” (p. 131) in order to detail ordinary activities and explore the particulars (and typifying characteristics) of parental beliefs of school readiness. Data collection included interviews administered to parents, a demographics family readiness report, and the Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School (CARES) survey to measure children’s school readiness. This study gathered data sources that could provide voice to parental perceptions of school readiness through “in-depth interviews and the collection of other documentary evidence” (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 9).

### **In-depth Interviewing**

A primary method of data collection included utilizing in-depth interviewing. The power of this data collection strategy is described as:

The foundation of interviewing lies in the mundane observations that individuals can report on what they feel, are, have, tell others about their lives, disclose what their hopes, fears are, offer their opinions, state what they believe in, say what they did last week, how much they spend on food, who they see regularly, and so on; in short, they can impart masses of information about themselves. (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1981, p. 102)

Using in-depth interviewing, rich, textured information was collected. It described how school readiness was perceived in African-American and Latina homes in a

Midwestern city. This method allowed the study to address each of the research questions. The interview was focused on the participants' responses in a flexible and open format. During the interview, participants were encouraged to tell "what they thought" about an issue. Interviewing was organized by topic in an open-ended format to stimulate discussion between interviewer and interviewee (Patton, 2002). These interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded. Important in the overall analytical process was the use of crystallization, whereby preliminary findings from each strand of data collection (qualitative interviews, school readiness protocols, and readiness surveys) were compared to enable a clearer and more robust interpretation of key issues and relationships.

Gathering data to document the case began upon receiving approval from the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board. The data collection was completed in two months. The participants were Head Start parents in the Midwest who had a four-year-old child preparing to enter kindergarten. Each parent participated in a 60-minute interview, completed a school readiness protocol about the experiences of preparing their child for school, and discussed the survey they had taken. The interview, protocol, and survey sessions took place during the 2017 term as scheduled with parents. The interview sessions were audiotaped for documenting purposes.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collection and data analysis are the most important components to consider when conducting qualitative research. As data were collected for the study, it was analyzed in order to discover emergent findings. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) defined "*analysis* as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification" (p. 10). However, Merriam (2002) expanded on the

definition, stating, “data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation...data analysis is the process used to *answer your research question(s)*” (p. 176).

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

After collecting the data, data were condensed into parts. In this study, coding was used to describe patterns and themes. Charmaz (2008) described coding as the “critical link” between data collection and their explanation of meaning. It “generates the bones of your analysis.” Coding helps confirm our description of people’s “5 R’s”: routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships. All coding is a judgment call, since we bring our subjectivities, our personalities, and our predispositions to the process (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004).

The themes and patterns were rearranged into categories of meaning. A final composite description will be described. Using within-case and cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to find assertions about the interpretation of the meaning of the issue or the essence of the issue (Creswell, 2013). Further description of the design of the study, including limitations, validity and reliability, are addressed in Chapter 3.

### **Significance of the Study**

School readiness is important to the associations that exist between early learning experiences and educational outcomes over a child’s lifetime. This study is significant for several key reasons. It examines: (a) kindergarten preparation across multiple developmental settings—home and Head Start center; (b) the mechanisms of race, class, and gender; and (c) kindergarten preparation using qualitative case study methodology.



There is a lack of consensus on what is required of children upon entering kindergarten because different groups of parents, educators, community members, researchers, practitioners, and legislators see the issue of readiness from different perspectives (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). This study seeks to develop a coherent and inclusive definition of school readiness in one community. It focused on Head Start parents' views of school readiness. To begin to understand the influence of race and social class on school readiness, special attention was given to African-American and Latina family life and parenting practices as they relate to children's preparation for kindergarten because of the emphasis placed on this developmental context in promoting school readiness advantages and disadvantages. Also, connections and disconnections between parent and Head Start educator views were explored. This is particularly significant to the field because continuity and discontinuity between these groups can contribute to a more defined school readiness construct.

Studies tend to concentrate on single parenthood, race/ethnicity, parenting styles, or peer interactions as single factors affecting school readiness (Caldwell & Ginther, 1996; Molfese, Modglin, & Molfese, 2003). Even when there is some recognition of the influence parenting and home environments have on school readiness, factors such as single parenthood, low wages, or social policies are given minimal attention and are not examined closely as factors of a complex set of child development characteristics.

Segments of incoming kindergarteners do not fare as well as the general population of children in the American educational system. Race, class, and gender are often examined as variables within studies of "school readiness gaps." This study offers a specific examination of how race and class impact everyday experiences and perceptions of

preparing children for school. It provides a critical analysis of these systems pertaining to the understanding of Head Start parents' perceptions and meanings of school readiness experiences.

For example, In *Learning While Black: Creating Educational Excellence for African-American Children*, Hale (2001) argued many times that the models offered by educational reformers to improve the educational outcomes for low-income children depend heavily on increased parental participation in the educational process, measured by the additional amounts of time, energy, and financial resources that low-income parents are willing to expend towards their children's education. Hale (2004) noted these types of educational reforms place an excessive burden on single mothers, many of whom are the sole breadwinners for their families. The responsibility for children's academic success or failure is shifted away from the classroom teachers and principals and onto the already overburdened parents. McAllister et al. (2005) said additional pressures may include housing problems, relocations, violence in local communities, and lack of access to public transportation. These factors need to be given additional consideration in relation to school readiness.

Research examining African-American and Latina parents' views and responses to current policies and goals pertaining to early childhood education has been limited. This study addressed this limitation by examining the ways in which educational policies play out from the perspectives of parents. Listening to stories of parents readying their children for school presented further evidence of the study's significance and provides Head Start practitioners and policymakers with concrete methods to continuously focus on areas related to the meanings of school readiness for parents. This study did not analyze the effects of

Head Start on school-readiness; instead, it focused on themes common to Families of Color and areas of concern as they prepare their children for kindergarten.

### **Organization of Remaining Chapters**

Chapter 1 includes a description of the problem and the purpose of the study, the research questions, the theoretical framework, and a brief overview of the methodology. Chapter 2 presents the review of literature and includes a detailed analysis of the research and theory related to the conceptual strands that support the theoretical framework. Chapter 3, methodology, provides a description of the research design, the rationale for qualitative research, setting, participants, sampling techniques, data collection sources, the data analysis plan, and limitations including validity, reliability, and ethical considerations for this study. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and describes what school readiness means to parents from their own perspectives. Chapter 5 offers conclusions and recommendations and discusses implications of parental conceptions of school readiness. It provides recommendations for future research related to parental conceptions of school readiness. The instruments used in this study are included in the Appendices of this dissertation (see Appendices B, C, and D).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

If the norm for Students of Color is underachievement in K-12 schools and underrepresentation in four-year colleges, then Parents of Color with high educational aspirations for their children may need to take deliberate steps to ensure access and counter the tendencies of schools to reproduce inequality (Delgado-Gaitan & Segura, 1989). Parents' perceptions of school readiness support the steps taken by parents to guide their child's educational aspirations.

This review of literature explores factors related to school readiness among school leaders and African-American and Latina Head Start parents seeking to counter tendencies of inequality. The purpose of this literature review is to explore current and past trends of parents' school readiness beliefs. This literature review begins with an historical overview of Head Start. Next, leadership styles within early childhood settings are discussed. Leadership in Head Start settings takes a different perspective compared to leadership in an elementary school. Next, a review of existing literature and empirical studies relevant to parents' school readiness beliefs are discussed. Finally, the literature review concludes with a discussion of the achievement gap among Children of Color.

#### **Historical Perspective of Head Start**

Based on theories that it was immoral for a nation as affluent as the United States to accept poverty, economists asserted that poverty was an economic problem and it could be controlled through economic policy by federal action (Kuntz, 1998). As part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, Head Start was developed as a component of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty initiative.

President Johnson announced the creation of Head Start in a special message to Congress on January 12, 1965, in which he focused on the expansion of “preschool program[s] in order to reach disadvantaged children early” (Osborn, 1991, p. 415).

When the planners met to design Head Start, they had little research to guide them. One project that interested Sargent Shriver, the director of the Peace Corps and Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), was the Early Training Project (Gray & Klaus, 1970). The program focused on preschoolers who were at risk for “progressive retardation” in their school performance. This term captured the common observation that poor children often begin school behind in language and social skills so they are unable to keep up with the curricula and fall further behind as they progress through school (Zigler & Styfco, 2010).

The scientific significance of the Early Training Project was that it was the earliest to demonstrate, in a random assignment design (now considered the gold standard for research) that early enrichment and parental involvement can boost the intellectual performance of children at risk for school failure (Zigler & Styfco, 2010). From the beginning, the history of Head Start was complex. Initially, it was not created as a program only for children. The main focus was to provide an opportunity for low-income parents—especially low-income mothers—to participate in institutional change at the local level. From its earliest stages, Head Start aimed at improving whole communities by giving parents and community members active roles in the nurturing and education of their children and improving communities as a whole.

As a Community Action Program (CAP), the program was envisioned as a vehicle to give families with low incomes a voice, and for doing things with them rather than to them (Osborn, 1991). By suggesting that the poor could be involved in institutional reform, the

political forces began a critique of service agencies—from welfare to public hospitals to public schools—where the poor did not have a voice (Kuntz, 1998).

Head Start may have become one of the most significant community efforts at institutional reform had it not retreated from community action to child-centered services to survive political forces at the federal level (Kuntz, 1998). Instead, Head Start turned its focus towards comprehensive health, nutrition, and education services for young children, including early identification of physical and mental health problems such as enhancing social competence (now termed *social and emotional competence*), which included “the child’s everyday effectiveness in dealing with his environment and later responsibilities in school and life” (Osborn, 1991, p. 454).

During the early years of Head Start, conflicting ideas about the origins of poverty began to surface. Community activists were encouraged by the idea of institutional transformation, but the media and the nation’s political leadership believed the poor were deficient and culturally deprived and that these deficits were passed from generation to generation “in the social genes of the slums,” resulting in a cycle of poverty (Osborn, 1991). The cultural deprivation theory suggested that the poor needed to be educated, to have opportunities to learn the values embraced by middle class America, and if these ideas—such as the importance of a work ethic—were introduced, the “poor would straighten up and act like real Americans.”

Although the Head Start legislation authorized CAPs to assist local communities in establishing and administering their own anti-poverty efforts, in early 1965, southern states opposed the placement of administrative control and resources in the hands of poor people and refused to apply for program grants. Sargent Shriver needed to develop Head Start

programming in regions of the country where community action was not welcome. Shriver realized the potential to develop the Head Start program by focusing support and education on children instead of on community action.

This focus helped Head Start avoid what non-poor Americans felt about supporting welfare programs. Limited authority allowed the government to maintain control of programming while addressing the needs of children in poverty. Wealthy Americans did not want the working poor having total authority over funding.

Initially, Head Start was viewed as a positive social program until Lady Bird Johnson made remarks implying that poor parents were incapable of raising children properly. She suggested Head Start could work miracles with these children in a few weeks, undoing the terrible damage caused by children's parents and the squalid conditions of poverty. Unrealistic expectations about the ability of Head Start to change the lives of children surrounded the program for years, as well as a paternalistic view of poor parents as incapable of doing what was best for their children.

In 1967, another important influence arose in the form of public school superintendents who wanted the structure and authority of Head Start modified to stop Head Start agencies from playing a role in the hiring of school personnel and program planning. School superintendents did not want community agency staff (without educational credentials) to have influence over local school systems. This structure placed limits on the role parents would play within Head Start programming.

In addition, gender played a crucial role in the historical foundation of Head Start. Early Head Start publications used terms such as "parent" and "mother" interchangeably. The photos in Head Start publications depicted women and children. Teachers were referred

to as “she.” Head Start booklets depicted the role of the psychologist at Head Start centers and included a photo of a man meeting with other adults. In 1970, women’s roles were quite traditional and members of the Senate’s Labor and Public Welfare Committee testified that taking care of children “is not a very masculine activity in our society and I think it would be degrading for a lower income/middle income person that their major responsibility is a baby caretaker” (p. 17). Several speakers referred to the fact that women earned less money than men, but no one pointed to the systemic issues behind this inequality such as Head Start’s publications—women were the teachers and men were the psychologists. Through the Head Start Supplementary Training Program (HSST), Head Start provided programs for adults by offering new employment opportunities. HSST negotiated with community colleges to drop entrance requirements, to give credit for work experiences, and to assist with transportation. These early programs addressed the poverty of female-headed households by facilitating career development.

Head Start’s policy of encouraging mothers to participate in the classrooms established ideas about the culture of poverty and Patrick Moynihan’s “pathology” of female-dominated black families, which discounted their influence and activism. Both frameworks, the culture of poverty and female-dominated black families, supported the idea that without intervention, poor children would become the impoverished parents of the next generation. Head Start rejected these frameworks by attempting to hire mothers to serve within Head Start centers. Head Start mothers’ lack of political credibility did not qualify them as community activists. This helped shape Head Start’s transition from community action program to preschool education program, dismissing the actions of Head Start mothers as misguided.



The Nixon administration further altered the mission of Head Start by categorizing it as a program for children rather than as a program for whole communities. A renewed focus on a deficit model continued to support a culture of poverty, where children “lacked good male role models,” and boys “drifted into gangs where they learned the extraordinarily violent style of lower-class life” (p. 49). In 1971, Head Start training manuals encouraged child care workers to provide “mothering” to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The authors warned that without intervention, poor children would “begin to hate school and teachers, the law and police.” By 1972, Head Start officials were convinced outside intervention was the only way to save poor children from crime and poverty exemplified by their mothers.

### **Leadership in Early Childhood**

Strong leadership is a vital component of any thriving organization, and early care and education programs are no exception. An emerging body of research confirms the pivotal leadership role early childhood administrators play in their centers’ quality equation (Dennis & O’Connor, 2013).

As noted in the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) volume on leadership (Kagan, 2008), there are at least five possible varieties of leadership common to early childhood education—community leadership, pedagogical leadership, administrative leadership, advocacy leadership and conceptual leadership.

First, community leadership in early childhood aims to consider the needs of particular communities. They must have a vision of quality early childcare and an understanding of the local community realities, needs, and resources. Strategies to assist leaders of early care programs include emphasizing outcomes for children who have access

to quality early care and education and cooperatively working with community to develop an action plan to garner support. Second, pedagogical leaders function as a bridge between research and practice, acting as interpreters of research and theory. Pedagogical leaders also shape agendas. They reflect upon, redefine, and reinterpret the realities and problems they see in early care and educational practice. They help focus attention on the gaps of knowledge that need to be filled in order to provide the absolute best for young children (Kagan & Hallmark, 2001). Third, administrative leadership goes beyond the details of running an early childhood program. Administrative leaders provide vision, structure, and direction. All management duties—budgets, hiring, staff development, and family outreach—are carried out with the larger mission of creating a quality early care system in mind.

Next, advocacy leadership is based on a vision, long-term planning, and forward thinking about where to take the field of early childhood through business policy, public policy, and legislative initiatives. Advocacy leadership requires the ability to see how all stakeholders—local organizations, the community, media, government, and the private sector—fit into the process of bringing about lasting change through policy initiatives.

Finally, conceptual leadership requires a vision of early childhood education that transcends any single organization, program, funding stream, or policy. A conceptual leader considers early childhood leadership and reform from within broader social change and links it to other reform and social movements and fields. Conceptual leaders push what it is to what might be (Kagan & Hallmark, 2001).

As described above, early childhood administrators' roles are as varied as the field itself. Director, site manager, and principal are a few of the titles administrators use to

identify themselves. Early childhood administration includes both leadership and management functions (NAEYC, 2015; Talan, Bloom, & Kelton, 2011). Leadership functions are defined as helping an organization clarify and affirm values, set goals, articulate a vision, and chart a course to achieve that vision. Management functions relate to orchestrating tasks and developing systems to carry out the organizational mission. Attending to these leadership demands now requires three understandings in relation to early childhood leadership—first, new theories of organizational leadership and followership are being created within the field of early childhood. Second, these new theories and varieties of leadership are needed if the field is to flourish. Third, varieties of leadership must be supported equitably.

Traditional leadership theory makes critical assumptions that do not correspond with the reality of early childhood care and leadership today. First, most traditional leadership theory assumes leadership by a sole figure, usually a male, such as a CEO or president of the organization. This conceptualization ignores joint or shared leadership emerging and present in many early child care and educational settings that are led by women and are expressed in programs ranging from parent cooperatives to Head Start (Kanter, 1983; Lawler, Mohrman & Ledford, 1992). Next, systems theory moves away from the idea of leadership being embodied in an individual. Instead, the theory states that unless all parts of the system are working together, the whole is dysfunctional. Peter Senge's book, *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), provides a good example, noting that current structures call for new leaders who are designers, stewards, and teachers.

Similarly, Robert Kelly's book, *The Power of Followership* (1992), suggests that followers contribute 80% of the work in an organization, where leaders provide 20%. Even

if we are in leadership positions, Kelly argues, we spend more time reporting to others as followers than leading others, and the real trick is knowing when to be each. The realization that following can also be a way to lead is one of the cornerstones of effective leadership and is applicable to early childhood care and education. By successfully tapping into every resource within the organizational structure—specifically the followership base (Kelly, 1992), early childhood care leaders can take the lead in analyzing this power base. In their book, *The Global Fourth Way: The Quest for Educational Excellence*, Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) noted, “to be high achieving, educators in school systems need the right kind of purpose that inspires them, a strengthened professionalism that propels them forward, and a cultural and structural coherence that holds them together” (p. 259).

### **Parental Beliefs about School Readiness**

One of main priorities of the National Educational Goals 2000 was to promote parents as children’s first teachers. Goal 1 stated, “Every parent in the United States will be a child’s first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent’s preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need” (n.p.).

Therefore, it is critical to examine how parents perceive school readiness. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) noted the following model: parents help young children acquire new skills and knowledge in an expert-novice relationship by serving as supportive, knowledgeable others. This model of children learning from a knowledgeable parent in an everyday social context and gradually advancing to independent performance is termed *apprenticeship*. While teachers perceive school readiness as children’s ability to not disrupt the class, parents emphasize school-like skills such as knowing English, knowing the letters of the alphabet, and counting.

Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Piérola (1995) noted limits related to understanding readiness beliefs in high-need communities, where school failure is a critical issue. Existing studies have aggregated data across socioeconomically diverse communities, but lack information regarding the readiness beliefs of parents and teachers within low socio-economic communities. Studies have not systematically examined ethnic variations in parents' views of children's readiness (Farver, Xu, Eppe, & Lonigan, 2006; Heaviside & Farris, 1993). Few studies have systematically examined beliefs regarding the multiple dimensions of children's school readiness, relying instead on lists of readiness characteristics.

Finally, McAllister, Wilson, Green, and Baldwin (2005) implemented the qualitative methods of interviews and indicated parents view social and emotional factors equally important as academic and cognitive factors and in some cases as more important. Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000) administered the *Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School* (CARES) instrument to Latinx and African-American parents of children who attended urban schools and who were eligible for reduced-price lunch. Their results indicated that health, peer relations, effective communication skills in language, emotional security, self-care, interest and engagement, and motor skills were important to a child's early academic success.

According to Wesley and Buysse (2003), parents valued school readiness experiences such as play and pretending, social interactions, hands-on experiences, and a balance of adult instruction with opportunities to choose their own activities as well as a focus on conversations, looking at books, reading, listening skills, and predictable daily routines.

Furthermore, Parents of Color believed that children should be exposed to books, go on field trips, learn songs, do art activities, and participate in cooking projects; these parents stressed that these activities should occur in a structured manner (Holloway et al., 1995). However, Holloway et al. (1995) noted that Parents of Color do not use terminology that professionals have developed to describe good educational practices and that they are more likely to view school-related learning behaviors as the sole responsibility of the teacher.

According to Edwards, Sheridan, and Knoche (2008), evidence exists for the valuable experiences parents provide for their young child's general learning both at home and outside the home in many direct and indirect ways called the "curriculum of the home." The richness of the home literacy environment strongly predicts children's language and academic outcomes (Espinosa, 2002; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006).

When trying to organize parents' readiness beliefs, transition practices and student achievement, it is important to also look at children's opportunity to learn in preschool and Head Start programs. One study noted behavioral expectation differences (Foulks & Morrow, 1989), while another study found that preschool teachers had greater expectations, both academic and behavioral (Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989). No studies have compared the beliefs of parents and preschool teachers, but Harradine and Clifford (1996) did compare preschool teachers, parents of preschoolers, and kindergarten teachers. Phelps (2011) found very few researchers had examined the impact of parental behavior on children's academic performance (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2007).

According to Brooks-Gunn, Rouse, and McLanahan (2007), parenting behaviors fall into the seven categories: nurturance, discipline, teaching, language, monitoring, management, and materials. Many of these behaviors have been correlated with academic school readiness (Farver et al., 2006). Hess, Holloway, Dickson, and Price (1984) found parenting factors such as strategies for controlling behavior, communication technique, and being effective in the dyadic relationship predicted at significant levels both school readiness and academic performance. Similarly, Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, and Howes (2002) found that parent factors such as parenting practices and attitudes were the best predictors of academic achievement.

Farver et al. (2006) noted that parent involvement with literacy activities as well as effective quality of the home environment was associated positively with school readiness skills. Similarly, findings from McGroder (2002) suggest that mothers' parenting patterns of being cognitively stimulating or patient and nurturing contributed to greater school readiness skills in their children. McGroder (2002) also looked at the processes leading to the cognitively stimulating parenting and found that risk factors such as low educational attainment contributed to less cognitively stimulating parenting and thus lower school readiness skills in children. If parents feel stress due to other environmental factors, that stress may spill over into the environmental level of parenting. With more demands from other environments, parents will have fewer resources to utilize in their parent environment, and thus their parenting skills may decrease and their children may have lower readiness skills. McGroder (2002) found support for the ecological assumption that environmental levels can overlap and factors in one environment can affect individuals in other

environments. The empirical studies discussed above provide evidence of many parental factors that can be associated with school readiness.

By focusing on qualities in parenting behavior that led to better school readiness, McGroder (2002) and Hess et al. (1984) focused on resilience. Often, the parenting behaviors valued by certain populations are not examined as readily, and it is important to look at each population of parents as having qualities that give their children the opportunity to be resilient. Therefore, consideration for cultural factors that may play a role in parenting behaviors or parental beliefs need further review as factors that may affect children's readiness.

Brooks-Gunn et al. (2007) argued that some early childhood interventions can alter parenting behaviors and therefore improve school readiness. Brooks-Gunn et al. (2007) stated: "if disparities in parenting styles were reduced, racial school readiness gaps would decrease by 25-60%" (p. 293). They noted parenting styles can predict the variance in school readiness gaps among racially diverse students.

Parenting behaviors are described in several categories. The parental behaviors of language and teaching were considered to be highly correlated with academic readiness. The category of language includes parents talking to their children as well as reading to them. Teaching is defined as any didactic strategy parents use to provide skills or information to their children (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005). Within the category of teaching, the quality of assistance is often examined. Research has shown that Latinx parents read less to their children and interact less in literacy activities (Espinosa, 2002). If language and teaching are two crucial parenting behaviors that are linked to school readiness, then the research stating that Latinxs fail to emphasize these two parenting behaviors may explain



some of the gaps in school readiness. Yet, examining the specific teaching behaviors of Latinx parents and continuing to examine the language behaviors of Parents of Color would be useful.

However, these findings strongly contrast with McAllister, Wilson, Green, and Baldwin (2005), who found that parents emphasized social emotional health as an area that is equally important for school readiness. With parents having such varied beliefs, it becomes important for early childhood professionals and educators to create a more consistent definition of school readiness that is culturally sensitive, so all parents will be more knowledgeable about what skills their children may need to be ready for school.

Other studies have examined the specific relationship between parents' beliefs and children's school readiness using diverse samples (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Galper, Wigfield, & Seefeldt, 1997; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993). In one study, Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) studied parental beliefs about child rearing, what teachers should teach, and characteristics of an intelligent child to see if correlations existed with children's school performance. Using a diverse subsample of cultural groups including Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans, the authors found that parents of different ethnic groups placed different emphases on factors that are characteristic of child intelligence.

For example, Latinx parents believed that non-cognitive behaviors such as motivation, social skills, and practical school skills were just as important as cognitive behaviors such as problem-solving skills, verbal ability and creative ability. White parents, on the other hand, believed that cognitive skills were more important than non-cognitive skills.

It is possible that this difference is due to cultural factors such as the Latinx concept of “familia.” When looking at differences in child-rearing beliefs, Parents of Color placed more emphasis on conforming to external standards when compared to white parents. Conformity in this study was defined as being able to follow directions, being obedient, doing work according to external standards, and being truthful (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993).

Similarly, Galper et al. (1997) explored parents’ beliefs about their children’s abilities and parents’ expectations on school performance. Findings showed that parents in general were quite optimistic about their children’s capabilities and that parents’ beliefs were positively related to children’s attitudes toward school and school performance. Specifically, parental beliefs about specific school-related tasks, such as the alphabet and numbers, were positively related to children’s performance in the areas of reading and math. Additional findings suggested very few differences across ethnic groups. However, parents of Latinx children were found to be less confident than White and African-American parents that their children would get a good education.

Looking at the beliefs of Latinx parents, Delgado and Ford (1998) examined within-group differences among Mexican parents. Delgado and Ford interviewed and observed eight Mexican-American families in order to explore parental perceptions of child development. After interviews and observations, three themes emerged, including family views and values related to parenting, developmental changes that are important for children, and experiences faced by immigrant parents with children growing up in the United States.

In sharp contrast to the Anglo-American culture, Latinx value interdependence, cooperation, collaboration, respect, and moral development (Espinosa, 2002). The Latinx

concept of “familia” promotes a strong connection between family members both in the immediate and extended family (Espinosa, 2007). This concept includes ideas that the family will offer support as well as loyalty and that the family will be the primary socializing influence for children (Espinosa, 2007). Even though Julian, McKenry and McKelvey (1994) found that culture only accounted for 4% of the variance in parenting attitudes, parenting behaviors, and parenting involvement, it is possible that culture may account for more of the variance if beliefs are measured within one particular ethnic group. Furthermore, if these different beliefs result in finding strengths of Latinx children’s readiness skills, they are important to examine and build upon.

### **Achievement Gaps among Children of Color**

Looking more closely at what accounts for low educational attainment among African-American and Latinx students, many explanations begin to emerge (Perez & McDonough, 2008). One paradigm of school failure exists in the “structural inequality” or “systemic inequality” model. Examining the poor academic achievement of Students of Color in the widest cultural, economic, and political contexts, factors such as the national economy, political influence over school policy and the top-down, authoritarian nature of schooling all seem to contribute to school failure (Pearl, 2002).

In discussing systemic inequalities, Pearl (2002) pointed out the vital role history plays in understanding school failure for Students of Color. Moreno and López (1999) argued,

history establishes in various, often subtle or disguised forms, the means by which people are included or excluded from positions of power and influence. Unless we fully understand the consequences of a particular history, we fail to appreciate how African American and Latinx students’ school failure are the logical consequences of people paying a continuous price of exclusion from positions of authority and

influence. History establishes the basis for inclusion and exclusion in various societal institutions, most powerfully, infused throughout education. (p. 336)

While Pearl's (2002) paradigm for school failure connects to social reproduction and resistance theory, DeJesus (2005) argued, "the role of schools is to sort individuals and groups according to the hierarchical division of labor in society" (p. 7). For example, clear ethnic and racial disparities in social class for students in the United States educational system has reinforced this paradigm.

While 10.1% and 11.1% of the White and Asian children are living in poverty, 27.1%, 34.1%, and 32.7% of Latinx, Black, and American Indian children are living in poverty (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2010). Approximately 5% of White children and 10.5% of Asian American children are living with a mother or father who did not graduate from high school compared to 12% of Black and 40% of Latinx children who are in the same circumstance. The proportion of children who are eligible for free or reduced lunches is 29% and 34% for White and Asian children, respectively and range between 68% and 77% for Children of Color.

The most commonly cited research evidence on the development of achievement gaps in elementary school includes the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten cohort of 2010-2011 (ECLS-K), which includes kindergarten through grade eight data on a nationally representative sample of children who were enrolled in kindergarten in the fall of 2010. Analysis of ECLS-K data shows that on average, gaps between African-American and White children in reading and mathematics assessments are evident upon kindergarten entry, about one-half of a standard deviation (Reardon & Robinson, 2008). Analysis of the ECLS-K data, comparing a sample of 40,000 Latinx and White students, indicates the differences

between Latinx and White children's reading and mathematics achievement is very similar to the observed differences between African-American and White children's achievement. However, the gap between Latinx and White children in reading and mathematics decreases during elementary school years, while the gap between African-American and White children widens during the same period (Fryer & Levitt, 2004).

Latinx and African-American children have the most barriers accessing quality preschool education, and Latinx and African-American children have the most barriers (NCES, 2009). These barriers account for some of this early gap, but it cannot explain all of it. The evidence shows that poverty is the culprit. Young Latinx and African-American children are more than twice as likely to be poor as white children and are even more likely to be among the poorest of the poor. At least one-third of Latinx families lack health insurance; many Latinx children rarely see a doctor, dentist, or optometrist, and so they often go to school with toothaches, uncorrected vision problems, and untreated chronic health problems (Berliner, 2009). Many also go to school hungry. These all constitute serious impediments to learning that schools are often poorly equipped to address.

Latinx students are many more times as likely as students from other ethnic groups to come from homes where parents do not speak English well—or at all—and where parental education is low. More than 40% of Latina mothers lack even a high school diploma, compared with only 6% of white mothers; and only about 10% of Latina mothers have a college degree or higher, compared with almost one-third of white mothers. Although Latinx students may come from loving homes, limited education and resources do affect their education outcomes. There is no better predictor of how well children will fare in school than parents' education attainment (Murnane, Maynard, & Ohls, 1981).

Studying individual differences in the roles and needs among families of color, Chase-Lansdale (2012) stated, “considering how to break the cycle of poverty, one should know under what circumstances impoverished families have strong parenting practices and what subgroups may be less likely to withstand the strains of the associated hardships” (p. 374). Understanding the circumstances under which at-risk families exhibit particularly effective parenting can advance the scholarly study of parenting in low-income and families of color and may provide insights for designing family support systems within urban schools to support school readiness. Furthermore, Raver and Knitzer (2002) suggested the parenting practices that support the emotional, social, and behavioral competence of young children predicts academic performance in first grade over and above cognitive skills and family backgrounds.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented a review of the literature. School readiness as policy, pedagogy, and construct remains a work in progress. Findings that emphasize class, racial, and gender disparities are concerning but need to be interpreted with caution. Current research suggests school readiness disparities among African-American and Latinx children go beyond general developmental differences. In short, according to the American Psychological Association report on *Ethnic and Racial Disparities in Education* (2012), there are two “achievement gaps” that must be confronted simultaneously: the one between those racial groups faring well and those who are underperforming in the United States educational system, and the gap between all U.S. students and students in other parts of the world.

In this chapter, the review explored the context of school readiness. In working to understand parents' knowledge and views of educational policy, this chapter examined the activities African-American and Latinx families engaged in with their children. A competing explanation for school readiness and achievement disparities suggests that there is cultural mismatch across home and school settings (LiGrining, Votruba-Drzal, Maldonado-Carreno, & Haas, 2010).

Learning is considered intricately connected to an individual's lived experiences (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1970). When the content of the lessons mirror home experiences of one culture in important ways, children are given opportunities to enact what they have already learned at home in classrooms (Delpit, 2006). There is a lack of empirical research in this area. This study attempts to address this limitation.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Today, the most urgent challenges for the American educational system have African-American and Latinx faces (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). According to Skinner, Bryant, Coffman, and Campbell (1998), schools create

“at risk-ness” or a lack of “readiness” by the expectations they hold for families that enable children to learn: At-risk children are not lacking personal capabilities or caring families; rather, they do not conform to the speech patterns, styles of interaction, family structure, rules and routines, and other cultural knowledge characteristic of the white middle class, the culture that is validated and accepted as natural and desirable in most U.S. schools. (p. 298)

Coupled with school expectations, Parents of Color play a critical role in determining school readiness; they do so not only by promoting their children’s development but also in deciding when to send them to school and which school to send them to. Consequently, parental beliefs and actions are critical to understanding school readiness. Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) found these relationships to be extremely nuanced, and Chazan-Cohen et al. (2009) noted they vary across socioeconomic status. Within this context, parental decisions about school readiness may or may not be fully understood. Consequently, the necessity of further research into parents’ beliefs about school readiness is needed.

The purpose of this narratological case study is to provide an in-depth description of school readiness beliefs held by Head Start parents. According to Pease-Alvarez and Vasques (1994), as kindergarten classrooms change, the inequities in the social structures causing poor achievement among ethnically diverse children increases disconnect between school and home cultures. First, understanding the factors that influence a parent’s ability to prepare their child as they transition to kindergarten is essential to creating home-school



partnerships. Second, parents' specific home routines and transition and readiness behaviors will be examined. The research was qualitative and guided by in-depth descriptions of parents' views of school readiness. The interview questions provided a semi-structured format.

### **Research Questions**

At its essence, qualitative research aims to study the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative researchers "seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them...[by gaining] access to the multiple perspectives of the participants" (Glesne, 2006, p. 254). The study was a narratological case study, integrating the theoretical tradition of critical race theory to examine the beliefs of six Head Start parents as they readied their children for kindergarten.

The overarching research question was: How do parents' conceptualize school readiness? Sub-questions looking at parenting behaviors and transition practices included:

- What specific behaviors do parents use to promote their children's school readiness?
- What other factors do parents believe promote school readiness?

This chapter presents an overview and rationale for qualitative research, parameters of this narrotological case study, and a description of the methodology.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Research that is conducted using qualitative methods acknowledges the existence and study of the interplay of multiple views and voices. It also allows the construction of reality and knowledge to be mapped out. Yet, this knowledge cannot be understood without

understanding the meaning that individuals attribute to that knowledge – their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and actions (Illingworth, 2006).

Qualitative research recognizes the importance of value, context, setting, and the participants' frames of reference. Further, the way in which the researcher and participant enter and communicate in the research field is a vital and influential element of the research process and its outcomes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) asserted that the researcher is able to focus on “naturally occurring ordinary events in its natural setting” (p. 10). Being situated in the natural setting allows the researcher to be actively engaged and to get a clear perception of the lived truths and realities of the phenomenon.

Qualitative research designs have three distinct features that contrast quantitative research designs. First, qualitative research utilizes an inductive reasoning process. The researcher seeks to understand the human subjects' experiences and to make meaning of those everyday experiences. The researcher also formulates ideas and makes meaning from the patterns that emerge from the data. Quantitative research engages deductive logic that relies on theoretical knowledge to drive the prediction and conceptions of the human subjects. Next, qualitative research is emergent and flexible. The research design is a draft of unfolding processes that are subject to change as the study develops. Quantitative research designs are very specific and somewhat rigid and change is not typical or desirable. Finally, qualitative research designs are non-linear and non-sequential. For example, data collection and data analysis can happen at the same time rather than independently. As the research unfolds, the research questions may need to be revisited, tweaked, and refined (Devers & Frankel, 2000).

## Case Study

Qualitative case study design, integrating the theoretical tradition of critical race theory, contributes a comprehensive and inclusive view of the perceptions and practices that shape children's preparation for kindergarten. Informed by Parents of Color, this study attempts to provide recommendations and strategies for quality school readiness and kindergarten transition practices for all children.

Purposeful and criterion sampling were used to identify participants. Each participant constituted a case study. For a period of two months, parents' beliefs about school readiness and transitions to kindergarten were captured. This study used in-depth interviews, readiness surveys, and family reporting protocols to explore Head Start parents' beliefs about school readiness and transitioning their children to kindergarten. Kelly (2010) noted, "qualitative methodology is concerned with exploring the meanings of taken-for-granted meanings in people's everyday lives" (p. 307)..

The qualitative case study research approach drew from Stake's (2005) *The Art of Case Study Research* and Creswell's (2013) *Qualitative Inquiry and Designs: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Qualitative case study begins and ends with an issue (Stake, 2005). In the previous chapter, school readiness was discussed as a national concern. According to Yin (2013), in the field of education, qualitative research can be useful as researchers seek to understand group and individual experiences. It provides an opportunity to situate school readiness in relation to parents within a community and aligns with this study's general purpose and research questions. Rossman and Rallis (2003) explained that case studies enhance understanding of a larger phenomenon by focusing on a specific case or cases. The authors note that case studies are particularly useful for providing thick, rich descriptions of

a phenomenon or issue. “The strength of case studies is their detail, their complexity, and their use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives” (p. 105). Moreover, a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 2013, p. 23).

In order to prevent the case study from being too broad, Creswell (2013) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) recommended ways to place boundaries on case studies: by defining time and place, time and activity, and by definition and context. Critically analyzing the factors influencing school readiness informs this case study. The goal was to provide a rich description and decide if the study findings could be applied to other parents’ school readiness practices. (Yin, 2013). Ragin and Becker (1992) emphasized a case-oriented approach, which considers the case as a whole entity—first, looking at configurations, causes, and effects within a case and then turning to a comparative analysis of a limited number of cases.

The research methods were bound by data that included multiple sources such as interviews of participants using semi-structured format, school readiness protocols, and parent surveys. Yin (2013) spoke of the logic of replication in multiple case studies to ensure that the procedures for each case can be duplicated. The data analysis process from the case study led the researcher to detail the lessons learned from each case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Cross-case comparisons were used as a narrative analysis; specifically how these stories reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences (Patton, 2002). Cross-case analysis provided the opportunity to be immersed in the data with

a single case, looking for patterns that emerged. The data led to interpreted themes, which provided holistic understanding of the case (Creswell, 2013).

In order to understand individual parents' perspectives and practices related to kindergarten readiness that parents felt were important, this study closely investigated parents' sense-making and social contexts in which their perspectives were constructed and subsequently enacted. This sense-making served as the foundation for this qualitative study of parents' reflections, definitions, and actions towards their children as they readied them for kindergarten.

The perspectives and practices of six parents were examined through the use of qualitative methods aligned with multiple case study methodology. Parent-child interactions and parent experiences with Head Start were explored.

The study was bound by one Head Start center, the spring semester for data collection, a focus on school readiness, and transition practices through in-depth interviews, surveys, and a readiness protocol. The units of analyses, determined by the research questions, were the school readiness beliefs of African-American and Latina Head Start parents. School readiness was defined as what children bring with them from other life experiences to their early elementary years that either enhances or inhibits their capacity to learn (Love, 2003).

### **Narratology**

Although narrative inquiry has a long intellectual history both within and outside of education, it is increasingly used in studies of educational experience. One theory in educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Because lives are understood as and shaped by narratives,

narrative approaches to inquiry parallel the ways individuals experience the research process and reclaim these narratives as occasions for storytelling (Denzin, 1989). Narrative is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience. The term *narratology* includes literary theory, linguistics, education, drama, art, and film. Because of its focus on experience and the qualities of life and education, narratology aligns well with researchers working with critical theory, psychology, and curriculum studies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). A premium is placed on *perspectivalism*, the belief that a person or group's position or standpoint influences how they see truth and reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This narrative process allows stories to be captured and enhance further discussion by parents regarding their experiences and perspectives of school-readiness. The imposition of a narrative order on life illuminates the differences among a life-as-lived (what actually happened), a life-as-experienced (the images, feelings, thoughts) and a life-as-told (a narrative) (Bruner, 1986).

By entering into dialogue with others, the use of narrative is an essential device to generate a dialogue that allows parents to reflect on their feelings, frustrations, and anxieties related to getting their child ready to enter kindergarten. Through analyzing parents' narratives, this study "actively found the voice of the participant in a particular time, place or setting," (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 1). In order to recognize the voices of Parents of Color, the complete transcripts of each interview in this study have been included (see Appendix E).

### **The Role of the Researcher**

Patton (2002) suggested, in qualitative research, the "researcher is the instrument." In this study, the researcher was responsible for all data collection, interpretation, and

analysis. My role was a non-participant observer (Creswell, 2013). In relation to researcher as instrument, the researcher's perspective is a paradoxical one; on one hand to be acutely tuned in to the experiences and meanings of others and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may influence what one is trying to understand (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I describe this information as a signal to the reader that care was taken to acknowledge the distance between the lived experiences of the researcher and those of the participants. This impacted decisions made at each stage of the research, such as selecting samples, structuring interview questions, conducting observations, "seeing" themes in the data, and making meaning. In case study research, answering the research questions based on emerging and existing themes and theories by being aware of my experiences was essential.

As I considered the study of parents' perspectives related to school readiness, I listened carefully to parents as they defined what "good teaching" means. Kumashiro (2000) argued in *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice*, that unspoken assumptions about "good" teaching—often regarded as "common sense"—actually reinforce oppressive practices in United States schools.

Kumashiro (2000) asserted,

approaches to teaching reinforce certain ways of thinking, of identifying, and of relating to others, including complying with different forms of oppression (including racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, colonialism, and other 'isms.' While common sense ideas about good teaching permeate national education discourse, research suggests that there are *official* perspectives of what and how schools should teach and these perspectives typically reflect the beliefs and values of dominant views in society, particularly those in privileged positions or with political power. (p. 28)

This research study is important because, while there are many studies about school readiness focused on cognitive skills, there are few studies describing Parents of Color and their beliefs of school readiness. Additionally, rarely were Parents of Color included in the research (Kurdick & Sinclair, 2000; Ricciuti, 1999). Head Start policy leaders and site administrators could reframe school readiness supports for parents according to the data in this study. The study could also support an understanding of parents' beliefs and support a dialogue to begin building partnerships with parents. District and Head Start training could also be reviewed by noting parents' perceptions of school readiness and alignment of home-school partnerships.

The use of qualitative research for this study was justified by the goal of finding meaning in a narrative sense. This study helped me as a school leader to explore challenges in defining, supporting, and creating school readiness opportunities for schools and parents. This study may help Head Start leaders to understand parent perceptions of school readiness through data translation that provides a rich interpretation of the meaning and transition practices utilized by Parents of Color.

### **The Design of the Study**

Although comprehensive measures of readiness activities are available and very useful (Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Salinas, 1993; Garcia & Guerra 2004), the purpose of this descriptive case study was to gain a deeper understanding of kindergarten readiness by looking closely at the beliefs of Head Start African-American and Latinx parents. Current research exploring the readiness beliefs and transition practices for Parents of Color has been limited.



Case study methodology utilized the data collection methods of interviews, documents, and surveys. With the intent of the case study being to understand a specific issue within a larger Head Start organization, the type of case study described in this study is an instrumental case. The qualitative research sample involved six mothers whose children would be attending kindergarten in the fall. The setting was an urban Head Start childhood center located in the Midwest.

By asking Head Start teachers to identify parents who currently have four-year old children in Head Start programs, the process began with information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Next, criterion sampling was applied in identifying African-American and Latina mothers. The point of criterion sampling was to locate information-rich cases that revealed targets of opportunity for Head Start program improvement.

I begin with a discussion of the design of the study, including setting, participants, and sampling. Next, I provide an overview of the types of data, and collection and management procedures for the data. Then, I define the data production and analysis methods. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

### **Data Sources**

A variety of data collection methods were used to investigate each parent's perspectives and practices related to kindergarten readiness. In order to understand each parent's perspective holistically, this study followed a three-step procedure once consent forms were returned. First, each parent was given a home practices protocol to capture home setting readiness practices and the Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School (CARES) survey. Second, each parent was interviewed to gather information about his or

her perceptions as they readied their children for kindergarten (see transcripts in Appendix E).

Case study research uses multiple data sources, a strategy that also reinforces credibility (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). Each data source represents one piece of the puzzle that ultimately contributes to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon (Merriam, 2008; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2002). The process of connecting data and looking at the data from different perspectives can be described as crystallization. Crystallization provides an important way of ensuring the validity of cases study research.

### **Participant Recruitment**

First, parents of four-year-old Head Start children were informed about the study by oral recruitment at the Head Start center. Parents were provided written information about the study focused on learning about parents' beliefs on school readiness. Latinx and African-American parents were considered eligible to participate. All six parents who responded were contacted via a phone call within two weeks and asked to set up an appointment for the interview at a place of their choice.

During the one-on-one interview session with each parent, first the reason for the study was explained. Then, each parent was asked to give their honest opinion to a series of questions and were assured that everything they said would be completely confidential. The interview was in the form of a questionnaire and was administered by the researcher. Interviews were administered orally by the researcher to facilitate all parents being able to read and understand each question. Parents had a copy of interview questions and followed along reading the questionnaire as it was administered. The interviews were conducted in English and recorded to capture parent's exact responses to each question.

## **Data Sources**

This study utilized three sources of data to capture parents' perceptions of school readiness.

**Interviews.** Kvale (2008) defined qualitative research interviews as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.” As Patton (2002) stated, “It is the opportunity for a short period of time to enter another person's world”(p. 45).

DeMarrais (2004) and Merriam (1988) viewed an interview as a conversation between two people that is focused on the research topic. The strength of the conversational interview method resides in the opportunities it offers for flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness to individual differences and situational changes (Patton, 2002). Interviews provide a way to capture the unseen, explaining how respondents think or feel about something (Glesne, 2006).

Interviews captured the oral narratives and stories of each parent. This study employed interviewing in which the researcher listened, observed with sensitivity, and encouraged the participants to elaborate on their experiences (Charmaz, 2006). Interviews took place at the parent's convenience and at a location selected by the parent—home, library, or school setting. Prior to the scheduled interviews, a letter was given to each participant outlining the purpose of the study, risks, benefits, and information to be collected and how the data would be used. It explained that their participation was voluntary and that confidentiality would be secured.

The interview was conducted so that general questions and rapport could be established. Far too often, the researcher enters a site wanting to learn about the participants, yet there is no disclosure about the life of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I shared my background with parents, situating myself within the research. During the interviews, I utilized what Hatch (2002) called a “flexible structure.” I led the interview with a few guiding questions yet remained open to following the leads of my participants, probing areas that arose during our discussions.

The interview process was a semi-structured, open-ended interview method. An interview guide was created to ensure that the same information was collected from each interviewee. During these interviews, the interview guide served as a starting place for specific topics to be discussed; however, the interviews developed during the process and a variety of additional follow-up questions were posed to the participants related to their responses. An interview guide ensures that the interviewer carefully decides how best to use the limited time available in an interview situation (Patton, 2002). The interview questions were utilized as a means to answer the study’s proposed research questions and to keep the interview focused (see Appendix C, Interview Questions).

It was important to conduct the interviews in a location that was comfortable for the parent. I audiotaped, transcribed and coded the interviews. Important in the overall analytical process was the use of crystallization, whereby preliminary findings from each strand of data collection (qualitative interviews, protocols, and parent surveys) were compared to enable a clearer and more robust interpretation of key issues and relationships.

In order to find out what features of school readiness are most important for the parent, interview questions were open-ended, such as “What do you think is important for

your child to know?” An effort was made to let the conversations flow naturally, with questions interjected when necessary to keep the conversation moving and to address topics that may not have come up naturally.

**Family Readiness Protocol.** In order to describe family readiness, parents were asked to identify ways they prepare their children for kindergarten at home. This questionnaire (see Appendix B) asked parents to describe ways that they support school readiness and where they find information about school readiness. Families have a perspective on their children’s skills from experiences at home that may differ from how teachers see children in a classroom setting (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004).

**Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School Survey.** Parents were asked to complete the Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School survey (see Appendix D). The CARES survey was designed to assess beliefs about the importance of readiness resources such as health, basic self-care, socio-emotional maturity and self-regulation, interaction with peers, interest and engagement in the world, motor skills, cognitive knowledge, communication, and adjustment to the classroom setting (e.g., following teacher directions and classroom routines) (Piotrkowski et al., 2000).

According to Piotrkowski et al. (2000), these readiness resources were based on five dimensions of school readiness that were identified by the National Education Goals Technical Planning Group for Goal 1, a review of the literature, and the conceptualization of school readiness as resources. The survey was created to be appropriate for both parents and teachers who have low educational attainment (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). In the CARES survey, parents were asked to rate the various school readiness resources, including parents’ beliefs that pertain to children’s everyday lives (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). The CARES

survey was first created in English and then translated to Spanish by Piotrkowski et al. (2000). Upon assessment of the equivalence of the English and Spanish CARES survey, Piotrkowski et al. (2000) found that language was significantly related to response style.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

The goal of qualitative research is to identify a few central themes explaining why and how a particular phenomenon operates in a particular context (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Charmaz (2006) described coding as the “critical link” between data collection and their explanation of meaning. It “generates the bones of your analysis” (p. 6). Coding helps confirm our description of people’s “5R’s”: routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships. However, all coding is a judgment call, since we bring our subjectivities, our personalities, and our predispositions to the process (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004).

A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy that also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2013). Using parents’ voices was critical to establishing the meaning of school readiness and describing their perceptions of school readiness. The analysis of the parent interviews and surveys included descriptive, interpretive, and thematic coding. Unique in comparison to other qualitative approaches, within-case study analysis allowed this study to collect and integrate quantitative survey data, which facilitates reaching a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Christensen and James (2000) pointed out that the social and cultural context of a study are important to consider in the research design in relation to power relations and social inequalities of daily life.

After interviews, protocols, and surveys were collected, I analyzed the data for descriptive codes and interpretive codes and developed a code book with defined themes

based on the theoretical framework and research questions. Thematic coding provided a process for sorting and synthesizing large amounts of descriptive data. Thematic coding allowed this study to make decisions about what descriptive codes may be consolidated to form broader conceptual categories. I used comparative methods to refine the relationships in the data, “continually question[ing] gaps in the data—omissions and inconsistencies, and incomplete understandings” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 5). Experts in qualitative research recommend waiting until all fieldwork has been completed to engage in rigorous and specific coding (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Before thematic coding could be conducted, I transcribed all interviews, which were recorded digitally. I reviewed the interviews twice for accuracy. The responses of the participants were compiled. Next, I identified common themes from the interview questions, surveys, and school readiness protocols and then condensed the number of themes based on similarities. All survey entries were typed into a single document and analyzed for common themes. I sent a copy to parents to review for clarity and accuracy.

Categorical aggregation was used to establish patterns and generalizations (Creswell, 2013). Tables and figures were used to show visual representations of patterns. The data collection included interviews, surveys, and family school readiness protocols. Collecting data included the documentation of the unit of analysis of school readiness and surveys taken by parents.

After gathering this data, I created a case record. After condensing the raw data, I wrote the final study description. The separate data were analyzed for patterns and themes (Creswell, 2013). Within-case and cross-case analysis was used to find the essence of the meaning of school readiness. A synthesis of findings informed and answered the research

questions. The data analysis plan reflects the narrative tradition because the interviews, school readiness protocols, and surveys included open-ended questions that asked the participants about their experiences in terms of preparing their children for school and about factors that influenced or affected the participants' experiences of preparing their child for school through the lens of critical race theory.

### **Limitations including Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative researchers look to authenticity and legitimacy in their findings (Miles et al., 2014). The findings of this study should be interpreted with the following limitations. First, the use of self-reporting questionnaires by parents to assess home environment and school readiness are subject to bias. Parents may have trouble estimating the frequency of their own behavior and that of their children. For example, parents know they are supposed to read to their children, so mothers may have over-reported the frequency of their literacy behaviors. An optimal study would have included an opportunity to cross-validate parents' reports with home observations. However, choosing to use surveys with parents in this study was considered to be a valid choice in place of home observations, as can be verified within the literature.

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) found survey reports significantly correlated with observational and diary assessments and with parents' knowledge of children's books (Sénéchal, LeFevre, Hudson, & Lawson 1996). Additionally, reliability of survey estimates has been demonstrated to be moderate. Leseman and de Jong (1998) reported a mean intercorrelation of .69 for survey reports of the home literacy environment obtained on three separate occasions over a two-year period. Lonigan and Shanahan (2009) concluded the various critiques of self-reports and surveys to assess the home literacy environment resulted



in an underestimation (rather than an overestimation) of the relation to developmental outcomes by parents.

Second, there was significant variability in the family environments making up my sample. Reasons for these differences are complex and varied and may be related, in part, to basic limitations in resources. Other limitations include a small sample set, multiple definitions of “school readiness,” a deficit approach found in much of the literature, and a lack of recruitment of Head Start fathers.

Consideration was also given to self-reporting protocols used to assess home environments by parents (bias), significant variability in family environments across the participants, small sample set (six participants), accuracy of the data collected, multiple definitions of school readiness (external validity), a deficit approach to school readiness found in much of the research literature, and interpretation of the data through my lens as a school leader and my experience with coding (bias). In future studies, demographic aspects and diverse perspectives should be taken into account. The results should be interpreted with caution.

### **Crystallization**

In order to avoid possible threats and to test the validity of my conclusions, I employed the following strategies suggested by Maxwell (2013): crystallization, feedback, and the use of “rich data.” Case study research design principles offer numerous strategies that promote data credibility or “truth value.” Crystallization of data sources is a primary strategy that supports the rationale in case study research that the phenomena can be viewed and explored from multiple perspectives. The collection and comparison of data through this process enhances data quality based on the principles of idea convergence and the

confirmation of findings (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989). I drew on multiple sources of information and data collection to document the case.

Crystallization was applied using multiple data sources including protocols, interviews, and surveys during a four-month period. During this time, I analyzed and identified the patterns and themes of the data, respecting participants' voices and acknowledging that participants occupy standpoints that intersect with power and oppression. It is through this crystallization process that I described parents' perspectives of school readiness and kindergarten transition practices articulated by the patterns and themes that emerged.

Stake (2005) suggested validating observations by trying out understandings of the case on its members. Member checks supported truthfully representing participants' voices and lived experiences. A draft of each interview transcript was provided to participants for feedback and to verify their responses to interview questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations in this study utilized informed consent, conducting ethical fieldwork, and reporting findings in a fair and honest manner (Miles et al., 2014). Patton (2002) recommended an ethical issues checklist that includes the purpose of the methods to be used, reciprocity for participation, and a risk assessment for the participants. Consent forms ensured that research was not used in an adverse way. Prior to conducting the study, approval from the University of Missouri-Kansas City's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix F) was obtained.

Written consent was collected from each parent as a voluntary participant. The consent described willingness to participate in the study and awareness of the research

purpose, procedures, goals, and possible benefits. Each was reviewed and collected. I shared the purpose of the study at parent meetings and left information with the front office of the Head Start location for interested volunteers as a way to not pressure participants into signing consent forms. During data collection, I built trust by honoring the time commitment and strict adherence to parents' schedules and location preferences. In the reporting data phase, I assigned pseudonyms to participants to maintain their anonymity. Finally, when the study was published, copies were to be made available to participants.

The Belmont Report states that research involving human subjects will be conducted following three guiding ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. In research, respect for persons demands that participants enter into a research program voluntarily and with good information about the research goals (Shore, 2006). Next, beneficence has to do with doing good to the individual. In the Belmont Report, beneficence is understood as an obligation to do no harm and to “maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms” to the individual research participant. Justice, in the Belmont Report, refers to the benefits and harms to individual subjects of research (Shore, 2006). Through informed consent, risk and dutiful selection of subjects were met in the research with human subjects. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality, as well as developing relationships with each family allowed the researcher to build a trusting relationship. All documents, interview notes, and surveys were stored in a locked file cabinet to ensure data security and confidentiality.

Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study, followed by a discussion of the study in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4  
RESEARCH FINDINGS

**Overview of the Study**

This multiple case study incorporated narratology and critical race theory to describe parents' beliefs about school readiness. This research study noted limited literature regarding definitions by Parents of Color of school readiness. Traditionally, the research literature has focused on deficit model thinking to describe the achievement gap between students. Yet, the cross-case analysis of this study described a new paradigm of how school readiness may be defined.

The problem I addressed is the varied definitions used by parents as they readied their children for kindergarten. This phenomenon was presented through the perspectives of African-American and Latina parents. My purpose was to describe parents' beliefs and to provide a presence in the narrative about school readiness for Parents of Color. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) described qualitative accounts as a means to giving voice to those who are traditionally marginalized. The voices of parents, particularly African-American and Latinx parents, are vital to understanding the preparation of children for kindergarten. Qualitative research provided an opportunity for parents to describe their perceptions, experiences, and everyday lives using their own words to describe their school readiness practices.

“Qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm or world view, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their inquiries” (Creswell, 2013, p. 74). Initially, a model of cultural capital based on income and wealth was the only form of capital considered valuable (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995). The qualitative approach of this study was informed by Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth as both a

philosophical framework and a methodology. A CRT lens can “see” that Communities of Color nurture cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Auerbach, 2007; Bernal, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Yosso’s social phenomenology of community cultural wealth (2005) is a descriptive and interpretive theory of social justice that focuses on emphasizing “a multifaceted approach recognized as an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 10) (see Figure 4.1).

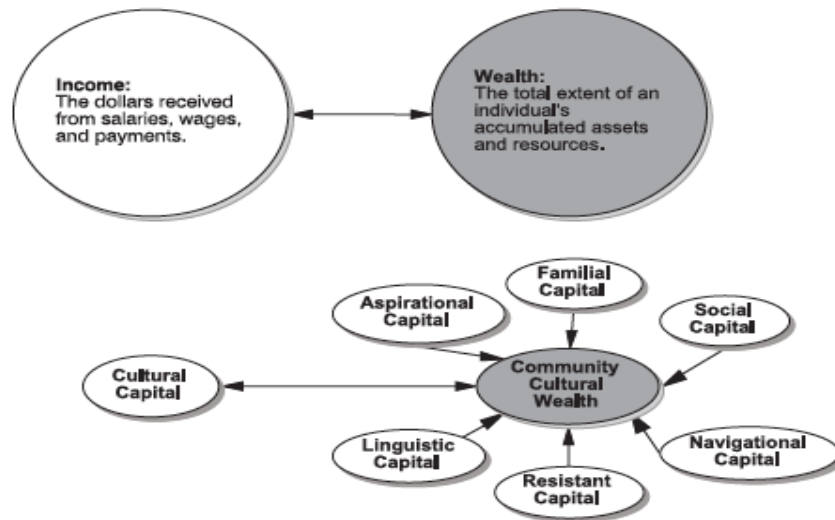


Figure 4.1. Yosso's Framework of Community Cultural Wealth

The research question was: How do Parents of Color conceptualize school readiness? and the sub-questions focused on the following:

- What specific behaviors do parents use to promote school readiness?
- What factors do parents believe help children transition to kindergarten?

Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2013). Using a qualitative approach, the investigator explores a case through multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013). Based on the size of the bounded case and the intent of the case analysis (Creswell, 2013), a multiple-case study approach was selected. The case study is described as multiple case study (p. 99). Multiple cases allow different perspectives to highlight the issue (Stake, 2005).

As the main theoretical tradition, this case study utilized in-depth interviews, readiness protocols, and surveys as data collection methods. I employed narratology to understand the experiences of parents as they ready their children for kindergarten. Narratology was used to peer into the lives of each participant, with the central task of grasping that people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

This chapter is divided into sections to describe and organize the information. First, a description of the setting and participants are described. Next, the findings and discussion from each case are presented beginning with a profile of each participant and in-case analysis and a cross-case analysis of each data source. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented. All data were collected and kept in a confidential manner. Pseudonyms protected the identity of each participant.

### **Description of the Setting and Participants**

Demographic characteristics of each parent are displayed in Table 4.1. This case study consisted of six single parents with a racial/ethnic composition of 50% African

American and 50% Latina. I purposefully selected Parents of Color, using criterion sampling, who met the criteria of having a child preparing to enter kindergarten in August and expressed a willingness to participate in the study. Parents were compensated for participation in this study, receiving a \$30 gift card for completing the interview, readiness protocol and CARES survey. The participants were selected from an early childhood Head Start center situated within an urban setting with culturally diverse student body. Table 4.2 displays an overview of demographics of the six participants across the six case studies.

Table 4.1

*Summary of Participant Demographics*

	Parents (n=6)
<b>Education</b>	
Graduate degree	0
College degree	1 (16%)
High School degree	5 (83%)
Other	0
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
African American	3 (50%)
Caucasian	0
Latinx	3 (50%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	6 (100%)
Male	0
<b>Employment Status</b>	
Full-time	2 (33%)
Part-time	1 (16%)
Unemployed	3 (50%)

Table 4.2

*Ethnicity, Marital, and Educational Demographics of Participant Sampling*

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Degree Status
Ana	Latina	Single	Associate's
Kelly	African American	Single	High School
Deborah	African American	Single	Associate's
Brenda	Latina	Single	High School
Izette	Latina	Single	High School
Tiffany	African American	Single	Associate's

This study followed a multi-case study approach. The units of analyses were the school readiness beliefs of African American and Latina Head Start parents. This study provided qualitative research on the school readiness beliefs of Head Start parents to better reveal their perceptions and meanings.

In order to explore the phenomenon of Head Start parental conceptions of school readiness, the sample was recruited at a primarily Latinx Head Start preschool program which served an inner-city neighborhood. Parents were informed about the project, and their written consent was obtained during meetings held at the Head Start center. The preschool staff and parents were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation in the study was voluntary.

The goal was to highlight parents' perceptions and activities as children transition from home to school. Therefore, this study gathered information from six parents who have four-year-olds enrolled in a public Head Start program. Each data set for the individual



parents constituted a single case. Within-case analysis consisted of coding all data types for each case, identifying themes, patterns, and categories for each case (Merriam, 2002). Cross-case analysis identified common themes in the parent interviews, readiness protocol, and the CARES survey.

Multiple data sources crystallized the data to support validity and provide rich, thick descriptions. The multiple data sources included in-depth interviews, readiness protocols, and readiness surveys. The process for coding the data involved descriptive coding, interpretive coding, and themes (see Table 4.3). Each case was a Head Start parent, with a total of six case studies.

### **Within-case Analysis of Case Studies**

Several types of data were collected for each parent, leading to six case studies. These data included in-depth interviews, a family readiness protocol, and survey analysis. To discuss findings, I incorporated spoken narrative through in-depth interviews and readiness protocols to support my conclusions and integrated a within-case analysis approach to describe the outcomes of my research. Through my research, I have attempted to describe perspectives of the phenomena regarding parents readying their children for kindergarten. Three themes emerged in the data collected from the interviews, readiness protocol, and CARES survey analysis. These themes were: aspirational capital, familial capital, and social capital.

The findings related to the within-case analysis were delineated by participant and provided a narrative description for the reader as it related to each theme. Within-case analysis consisted of coding all data types for each case, extracting themes, patterns, and significant threads running through each case (Merriam, 2002). Within-case analysis

Table 4.3

*Within-case Themes in Qualitative Data Sets*

Interview and Protocol	Tiffany	Izette	Deborah	Brenda	Kelly	Ana
Theme: Aspirational Capital						
Interpretive Codes						
Barriers	S	-	-	-	-	M
Parent Beliefs	-	-	-	-	-	M
First Teacher	-	-	M	-	M	-
Theme: Linguistic Capital						
Interpretive Codes						
Expectations	-	-	M	-	-	-
Numeracy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Prep	-	-	-	-	-	-
Motor Skills	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lang	M	M	M	-	-	-
Dual Lang	-	M	-	M	-	-
Work Habits	-	-	M	-	-	-
Spanish	-	M	-	M	-	M
Music	-	-	-	-	-	-
Theme: Familial Capital						
Interpretive Codes						
Beliefs	S	-	-	-	-	-
Values	-	-	S	-	-	M
Interactions	M	M	-	-	-	-
Image	M	-	M	-	M	M
Structure	M	-	M	M	-	M
Theme: Social Capital						
Outreach	-	-	-	-	-	-
Barriers	M	-	-	-	-	-
Bridges	M	-	M	-	-	M
Program	-	-	M	-	-	-
Inst. Model	-	-	-	-	-	M

*Note.* S=Strong Presence (10 or more occurrences)

M=Moderate Presence (at least 3 but no more than 10 occurrences)

provides opportunities for readers to listen to the experiences of parents and develop a better understanding of parents' beliefs about school readiness.

The profiles of the six participants are described in the introduction of each case, followed by the themes within each case. Data from the CARES survey was also used to understand parents' attitudes toward school readiness. Finally, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) believed that the purpose of cross-case analysis is "to enhance generalizability" and to deepen understanding and explanation. Cross-case analysis compared themes from the readiness protocol to answer the research question. All three themes were found in the six cases in varying degrees. Some themes presented richer descriptions based on the number of descriptive codes. The themes were grounded in the literature supporting critical race theory. In some cases, the themes repeat, but the interpretive codes are different. Table 4.3 describes the varied presence of the interpretive codes leading to the themes identified in the six cases. The interpretive codes required at least three occurrences, but no more than ten to be considered a moderate presence in the interviews and protocols. Interpretive codes with more than ten occurrences were considered a strong presence in the interviews and protocols.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Case Study One: Tiffany**

**Profile:** Tiffany is an African-American woman who is single and has two sons. She is pursuing an associate's degree in early childhood education.

**Tiffany's themes.** The first theme that emerged through the interview, readiness protocol, and CARES survey analysis was **aspirational capital**, defined by Gandara (1995), as the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams and allow parents and their children to dream

of possibilities beyond their present circumstances” (p. 55). During her interview, it was clear that Tiffany had clear aspirations for both of her sons.

She explained:

I want him to succeed academically. I try to help him as much as I can when I have the time. I am starting to see progress from the first year into preschool. But now I am concerned because time is coming to move to kindergarten.

Similar factors were noted during the interview leading to the interpretive code of *barriers*. The interpretive code *barriers* led to theme of **aspirational capital** with a strong occurrence as noted in the interview and readiness protocol. *Barriers* were defined as *beliefs about a child that may limit development and learning*. Of the two parents who identified social skills as relevant, both had African-American sons.

Data emerged from the CARES survey describing parents of African-American boys, as they discussed self-regulation skills and competencies for school readiness.

In Tiffany’s interview, she knew boys were more likely to be identified by the teachers as having social concerns and that would be a reflection on her parenting. She expressed concerns that her child’s ability to self-regulate would adversely affect his transition into kindergarten. During her interview, Tiffany was concerned that her preschooler’s behavior might be challenging for school staff. Tiffany stated:

He’s a little on the rough side. I do not want to call him bad but he so mischievous. My main concern is behavior. I really hope he does mature more than what he is doing now. I can tell you, I get a call every day about his behavior.

Within the interpretive code of *barriers*, Tiffany’s interview revealed her concerns about her son’s readiness for kindergarten and served as a competing force against the aspirational theme. Tiffany stated,

My kid, he's a little on the rough side. I do not want to call him bad but he so mischievous. I do the age thing. I think—he's five and he should know certain things... I need to know where he stands in a kindergarten class with those going to kindergarten. I do not want him to be left behind.

However, Webster-Stratton's (1990) review showed that various stressors can disrupt parenting practices by causing some parents to become more irritable, critical, and punitive, which in turn increases the frequency of conduct disorders in children and initiates a cycle of negative parent-child interactions, producing further parental stress. Parenting stress has also been associated with mothers' impaired sense of competence and a negative perception of their children in general (Stone, Bendell, & Field, 1988). Tiffany's awareness of her stress was clearly expressed:

It is hard to balance everything. I have another child—he is already taken off and now I have this other child, that I feel like is already behind. It is like where do I balance the two? I want him to succeed academically. I try to help him as much as I can when I have the time. My routine messes them up too.

Tiffany stated:

I go to class from 5-6:30 p.m., then I'm going back to work to finish a shift or I am going home. With two children, they are at two different schools right now. I have Head Start and elementary. My routine messes them up too because I'm not there. I can't get no one else to step up. If everyone in my life was on the same level, it would help my goals I am trying to accomplish with them. I'm trying to carrying everything by myself.

Tiffany added:

Another routine that affects my kids, is one has homework and my Head Start son does not. So if I am coming home at 8 p.m., I can't force my childcare to do his homework with him.

Additionally, the extent to which parents provide a language- and literacy-rich home environment may have direct implications for promoting the development of children's social functioning. Children's socio-emotional skills are thought to originate in the home

environment. As Howes, Matheson, and Hamilton (1994), Birch and Ladd (1997) and Pianta (1999) have argued, cooperation and compliance, effective communication, appropriate help-seeking, following directions, and knowledge and awareness of emotions develop in the context of relationships children form with adults in their homes, which are transferred and extended during interactions with teachers and peers.

Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000) found that parents ranked basic knowledge (rote counting) as “absolutely necessary” for kindergarten more (76%) than kindergarten (25%) and preschool teachers (48%). Similarly, in the same study, parents rated basic knowledge more highly than interest and engagement in learning as important for kindergarten readiness. In another study of parents’ beliefs about school readiness, Latinx parents emphasized interest in learning, communication, and emotional maturity more often than African-American parents.

A similar pattern was identified among the Latinx parents in Graue’s (1993) case study of three different school communities. She noted how communities guided parents’ interpretations of school readiness and early education. Within each community, subtle messages were sent and interpreted by parents regarding what school readiness required and this simultaneously influenced their perceptions and practices toward preparing children for kindergarten.

School leaders play a critical role in guiding parents’ readiness decisions, since parents place great emphasis on children’s academic abilities when making decisions to delay kindergarten entry (Diamond et al., 2000). Tiffany’s concerns about her son’s behavior and delayed progress was woven throughout the interview:

But now I am concerned because time is coming to move to kindergarten and I don't want him left behind. In kindergarten the teacher will have so many more children to work with, she might can't focus on you and I don't want you to just go into first grade and you don't even know what you are supposed to have in kindergarten.

A report from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care (2002) found that mothers' sensitivity and children's positive engagement with their mothers, assessed by observations of mother-child interaction in their homes, was a powerful predictor of both academic and social functioning when children entered school and later on in first grade. The second theme that was evident during Tiffany's interview was **familial capital**. In connection with parent definitions of school readiness, participants described family factors or what Bernal (2002) described as *pedagogies of the home* that Students of Color bring with them to the classroom setting.

Based on sub-question 2, I wanted to know what values parents believed were relevant to their child's school readiness. According to the readiness protocols and interviews, parents described readiness characteristics as "shares, respect, self-confidence, self-control, independence, curiosity and interest in the world around them." Specifically among African-American and Latina parents, listening to the teacher was identified as absolutely necessary. The interpretive codes leading to the development of this theme were *beliefs* and *image*.

Within the theme of **familial capital**, the interpretive code of *beliefs* developed and had a moderate occurrence. The descriptors for this interpretive code included parent's beliefs about their child's present academic and social functioning as well as future growth. During the interview, Tiffany stated,

I'm trying to pull him back, and stress learning is imperative. He looked at me the other day and said, "What is that word?" I told him, "Education is the key." I tell him

that every morning.” She added, “I don’t want you to just go into first grade and you don’t even know what you are supposed to have in kindergarten.”

### **Case Study Two: Izette**

**Profile:** Izette is a Latina woman who is single and has three children, two girls and a boy. She has a high school diploma. She has recently moved to Midwest from El Salvador.

**Izette’s themes.** The first theme that emerged through the interview, readiness protocol, and CARES survey analysis was **linguistic capital**, defined as the idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills. Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido (2003) examined bilingual children who are often called upon to translate for their parents or other adults and find that these youth gain multiple social tools of “vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness, ‘real-world’ literacy skills, math skills, metalinguistic awareness, teaching and tutoring skills, civic and familial responsibility, [and] social maturity” (p. 6).

When parents were asked to describe what languages they use to prepare their child/children for school, African-American and Latina parents reported using English to teach shapes, colors, and letters, while Latina parents reported using Spanish songs and bilingual books to enhance their child’s literacy. Six interpretive codes led to the development of this theme: First, *expectations* as defined by the beliefs parents set for their children. Second, *dual language* is defined as speaking two languages, Spanish and English. Third, *preparation* was defined as *preparing for kindergarten*. Then, *music* is defined as using songs in English or Spanish to teach language and concepts like shapes, colors, ABCs. Next, the interpretive code *Spanish* is defined as using Spanish to teach readiness skills



through songs and stories. Finally, *numeracy* is defined as counting and recognizing numbers. These are the interpretive codes that informed this theme.

As evidenced in her interview, Izette discussed how she supports linguistic capital in her home:

What we do at home is sing songs in English—the ABCs. My daughter has learned so much English slowly. When she comes home she teaches me English. When my daughter talks with other children from El Salvador, she only talks English. My daughter will say “my language now is English.”

The next theme was **familial capital**, defined as pedagogies of the home that Students of Color bring with them to the classroom setting (Bernal, 2002). The first interpretive code that informed this theme is that of *beliefs*, defined as a parent’s perspective on a child’s development. The second interpretive code was *values*, defined as culture interwoven across all areas of readiness. The third interpretive code is *interactions*, defined as using mealtime to teach literacy and social skills. Next, the interpretive code of *image*, defined as beliefs about the child. Finally, the last interpretive code is *structure*, defined as a schedule of events in a child’s day.

Throughout the interview, Izette had clear *values* for her daughter that demonstrated a moderate occurrence:

I tell my girl (the oldest one) education is very important. In El Salvador we have a saying, Pon tus baterías en (Get your batteries on) to learn the language, learn English, skills that will help you get a better job and won’t have to depend on nobody.

Izette’s readiness protocol reported *interactions* that she involved her child in making meals in the home and that their family sat down for dinner one to two days per week. Izette welcomed the chance to reinforce social values and extend learning at home:

Head Start has helped because they teach my child how to hold a pencil, how to cut, but also the talks the teacher has—the values that they give to the kids such as bullying or hurting someone else’s feelings, pulling hair. These situations may not happen at home, they don’t see those at home or the parents may not talk with them about those topics. Being at Head Start gives parent a chance to extend what is learned at school, to have a conversation.

### **Case Study Three: Deborah**

**Profile:** Deborah is an African-American woman who has two children, a girl and boy. She has an associate’s degree and works as an after-school teacher.

**Deborah’s themes.** The first theme that emerged through the interview, readiness protocol, and CARES survey analysis was **familial capital**, defined as pedagogies of the home (Bernal, 2002). The first interpretive code that informed this theme is that of *beliefs*, defined as a parent’s perspective on a child’s development. The second interpretive code was *values*, defined as culture interwoven across all areas of readiness. The third interpretive code is *interactions*, defined as using mealtime to teach literacy and social skills. Next, the interpretive code of *image*, defined as beliefs about the child. Finally, the last interpretive code is *structure*, defined as a schedule of events in a child’s day. Deborah’s **familial capital** is interwoven across all aspects of development of school readiness with her children, as evidenced by a strong occurrence within the interpretive code of *values*.

Deborah pointed out,

I constantly told her important it is for us to get our education. Because I never know what our future/her future is gonna look like if she does not have it.

Deborah added,

I believe in education. I want a solid foundation. I believe in teaching character and compassion, no cracks in the foundation. I want my daughter to be given everything that she can possibly have.

Deborah’s readiness protocol indicated foundational *values*:

My child is energetic, loving, and also thoughtful. I just want the best for her and the future she withholds. Being kind is a way that is respectful to you and others.

A moderate occurrence within the interpretive code of *structure* was evident during Deborah's interview and CARES survey as "absolutely necessary." Deborah asserted:

I try to keep them on balance—keep them on track. I really try to get them on track and get them their rest. I used to work really crazy hours, but the kids know the routine. Every since they have been going to school, they have a routine. We don't like to be thrown out of our routine. If I get up late, my day is going to be a late start. Rushed. I like to take my time. Especially when you have a little one.

Hess, Holloway, Dickson, and Price (1984) found parenting factors such as strategies for controlling behavior, communication technique, and being effective in the dyadic relationship predicted at significant levels for both school readiness and academic performance. Likewise, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, and Howes (2002) found that parent factors such as parenting practices and attitudes were the best predictors of academic achievement.

The next theme was **aspirational capital**, defined as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams and allow parents and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances (Gandara, 1995). The first interpretive code that informed this theme was *barriers*, defined as limitations. The second interpretive code, *parent beliefs*, was defined as strengths. *First teacher* describes the final interpretive code, defined as parents as a child's first teacher. During the interview, Deborah shared an example connected to the interpretive code *parent beliefs*:

I ask my children every so often what they want to be when they grow up. And every so often, they change their profession. He said he wanted to be a construction worker. I said, Ohh, baby, what is it going to be like for you as a black man to own your own construction company. He was getting so excited. We were putting ideas

on paper. I said, this could be your life. I am planting that little seed, I am expanding his exploration of his future.

The interpretive code *parents as child's first teacher* emerged with a moderate occurrence from the data collected in the interview and readiness protocol. Sheridan, Marvin, Knoche, and Edwards (2008) defined parental behavior as, “an almost infinite variety of specific actions unfolding over time as the child develops.” Evidence supports these valuable experiences parents provide for their young child’s general learning, both at home and outside the home, in many direct and indirect ways called the *curriculum of the home* (Edwards et al., 2008). The richness of the home literacy environment strongly predicts children’s language and academic outcomes (Espinosa, 2002; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Weigel et al., 2006).

During the interview, Deborah explained:

I even enrolled myself in Parents As Teachers to get more resources. I just felt like I needed a little bit more, so I can be successful in my parenting. We are their first everything. First teachers, first learners. I have to be at work. But what I can do when I get home, we can recap, we can talk about it, we can plan together. They help me plan meals.

#### **Case Study Four: Brenda**

**Profile:** Brenda is a Latina woman who is married and has three children, two girls and a boy. She has a high school diploma and is unemployed.

**Brenda’s themes.** The theme of **familial capital** had a moderate occurrence during Brenda’s interview and readiness protocol. The interpretive code evolving from the theme of **familial capital** was *structure*. Parents’ beliefs have been described as “a combination of recollections of their own school experiences and their attitudes, values, and beliefs about school [and this] influence[s] parenting behaviors with children making the transition to

school” (Taylor et al., 2004, p. 164). Based on the school readiness protocol, three parents reported reading books, practicing the alphabet, and singing songs in English and Spanish. Five participants discussed family routines that were structured and supported school readiness. When Brenda was asked to describe family routines that supported school readiness, she explained,

They need a rhythm. They understand what they need to do before they get to this place. That will give them success. If there is order in the home, they will have order at school. In the morning as soon as they wake up they have to go to the bathroom, brush their teeth, then they go and change, get dressed, get ready for school, eat breakfast, then they come to school and then after school, they take off their uniform, hang up their backpack and show me the papers from school.

The second theme that developed from the interview and CARES survey was **linguistic capital**. Phelps (2011) referenced Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews’ (2000) administration of the CARES instrument to Latinx and African-American parents of children who attended urban schools and who were eligible for reduced-price lunch. Parents indicated that health, peer relations, effective communication skills in language, emotional security, self-care, interest and engagement, and motor skills were important to a child’s early academic success.

The first interpretive code supporting the theme of **linguistic capital** in Brenda’s interview with a moderate occurrence was *dual language*. The concept of speaking two languages, English and Spanish, describes this interpretive code. Brenda said,

We read books in English and Spanish. Sometimes the books are bilingual books. Or sometimes I just invent stories and include what is going on around them or at school

Landry and colleagues (2014) tells of the idea’s origin: Rodríguez-Brown (2009) found that having a school culture focused on bilingual and bicultural literacy may create conditions

conducive to the positive, two-way home-school communication that is envisioned in a social justice orientation towards education.

According to Wesley et al. (2003), parents who were part of a focus group believed that play and pretending, social interaction, imitation, hands-on experiences with materials, active exploration of environment, repetition, a balance of adult instruction, opportunities to choose their own activities, conversation, looking at books, reading, and listening skills, and predictable daily routines supported school readiness. Furthermore, Parents of Color reported that children should be exposed to books, go on field trips, learn songs, do art activities, and participate in cooking projects; these parents stressed that these activities should occur in a structured manner (Holloway et al., 1995).

The second interpretive code supporting the theme of **linguistic capital** in Brenda's interview with a moderate occurrence was *Spanish*. Latinx concept of "familia" (family) promotes a strong connection between family members both in the immediate and extended family (Espinosa, 2007). Brenda's interview and CARES survey reported using English and Spanish to teach colors, shapes and letters, as well as songs to teach basic skills. Of the seven parenting categories, language and teaching are highly correlated with academic readiness. The category of language includes parents talking to their children as well as reading to them (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2007). Espinosa and Lesar (1994) recommend all communications with Latinx parents, written and oral, must be provided in Spanish and English.

#### **Case Study Five: Kelly**

**Profile:** Kelly is an African-American woman who has four children—two sons and two daughters. She has a high school diploma and is unemployed.

**Kelly's themes.** The theme of **aspirational capital** had a moderate occurrence during Kelly's interview and readiness protocol. The first interpretive code supporting the theme of **aspirational capital** in Kelly's interview with a moderate occurrence was *parent as child's first teacher*. Kelly stated:

As a parent I am preparing my 5-year-old for higher learning challenges, daily life challenges and just like educational life. I would like for my son to be more involved in education than I was, cause I could of... I kind of just stopped and did not go any further.

As Kelly's interview describes, learning is considered intimately connected to an individual's lived experiences (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1970). When the content of the lessons mirror home experiences of one culture in important ways, children are given opportunities to enact what they have already learned at home in classrooms (Delpit, 2006). It is possible that parents' beliefs about their children's abilities on school-related tasks can be attributed to their behavior and enhancement of the home learning environment. Therefore, the relation between parents' beliefs and children's school readiness or performance may be mediated by the home learning environment, which includes parenting behaviors of school readiness. This could be an important relationship to look at, as it may serve to support interventions such as home visitation programs that attempt to increase children's school readiness through an enhanced home environment (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998).

Kelly said:

I believe the majority of it is my responsibility because he is at home more than he is at school. School, school is just like a 8-hour job, he's just temporarily there but basically, I am a 24-hour mom so around the clock, I feel like I'm the one that is mainly responsible for how he gets some of the stuff done he needs to be able to be effective in school.

CRT draws explicitly on the lived experiences of People of Color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles and narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This consciousness can be fostered within and between families, as well as through sports, school, religious gatherings, and other social community settings. Isolation is minimized as families “become connected with others around common issues” and realize they are “not alone in dealing with their problems.”

Kelly stated:

I just think education is important for him so he can learn to be and get out there and live. The fact I’m a single parent mother and basically a lot of the responsibility is on me. S loves male bonding, and he does not necessarily have that in his life at this time, so I plan to reach out to some mentor programs or something to try to see if he can actually to try to get him involved in sports n stuff, to just try and let him be able to have his guy thing, a boy thing, male thing or whatever and some positive role models.

The second interpretive code supporting the theme of **familial capital** in Kelly’s interview with a moderate occurrence was *image*, defined as beliefs about the child.

Kelly remarked:

I am going to have to do a lot different with him because of the fact that he struggles with his language barrier and communication because he is really just now being able to just start talking and so I would just like to probably work more with him with talkin and maybe vocabulary and grammar and stuff like that so he can learn how to like you know be able to formulate his words.

### **Case Study Six: Ana**

**Profile:** Ana is a Latina who is single and has an associate’s degree. She is a paraprofessional for a school district. She has one son.

**Ana’s themes.** The theme of **aspirational capital** had a moderate occurrence during Ana’s interview. The first interpretive code supporting the theme of **aspirational capital** in



Ana's interview with a moderate occurrence was *parent beliefs*. The descriptors for this interpretive code included parent's beliefs about their child's present academic and social functioning as well as future growth. During the interview, Ana stated:

I do have a lot of books. When he in his room has like a big bookshelf and where all the books are where he can reach. The books that I have are picture books but are especially for his age where they are predictable books like he know what is going to happen kind of Brown Bear Brown Bear What Do You See, so he know what is coming and or the just the fact uh...like activity books where he looks through and there is an activity and the fact that the books are in Spanish too.

Sénéchal and Cornell (1993) demonstrated that children's shared storybook reading with adults was associated with increases in their expressive and receptive vocabulary. This evidence suggests that shared storybook reading provides opportunities for conversations with adults that extend beyond the story content which helps children learn and practice new vocabulary that they may not encounter during daily conversations in their homes (Dickinson & Snow, 1987).

The second theme that transpired through the data was **familial capital**, defined as *values* and *structure*. The interpretive codes of *values*, defined as *culture*, and *structure*, defined as *routine*, supported this theme.

During the interview Ana's comments on *structure* included:

There is a strict *routine* in the house like my child has to go to bed at 8, you know. He has to eat on the table—there is no eating watching TV, there are rules.”

Ana stressed the value of extended family in supporting school readiness:

just to be able to go out with a friend, have coffee and know my kid is taken care of, so now she (mom) helps with the house cleaning and also, she has a really big bond with A. She reads to him, she teaches him the colors and stuff like that.

The interpretive code, *values*, was of moderate occurrence and linked to the theme of familial capital. Ana pointed out:

I am getting him ready for more than kindergarten with that, he will have an advantage over the other kids just for the fact that he is bilingual.

### **Cross-case Analysis**

I used the theoretical tradition of critical race theory in this multiple case study to describe the voices of parents preparing their children for kindergarten. The stories of Tiffany, Izette, Brenda, Deborah, Kelly, and Ana were integrated through in-depth interviews, readiness protocols, and CARES surveys. The research question that guided cross-case analysis was How do Parents of Color conceptualize school readiness?

Sub-questions examining parenting behaviors included the following: (1) What specific behaviors do parents use to promote school readiness? (2) What factors do parents believe help children transition to kindergarten? Within the cross-case analysis, I compared the results of each case with the results of the whole in order to discuss how they related to each other.

However, Silverstein (1988) maintained that cross-case analysis must reconcile the preservation of the uniqueness of the case while attempting to analyze the case across other cases. The dominant themes in the cross-case analysis were **family, readiness, and skills**. Tables 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 display the data from the within-case analysis with the integration of the readiness protocol and CARES survey.

Table 4.4

*Cross-Case Themes in Interview Qualitative Data Sets*

Interpretive Codes	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
<b>Theme: Aspirational Capital</b>						
Barriers			-	-	-	X
Parent Beliefs	X	X	-	-	-	X
First Teacher	X	X	X	-	X	-
<b>Theme: Linguistic Capital</b>						
Expectations	X	-	X	-	-	-
Numeracy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Preparation	-	-	-	-	-	-
Motor Skills	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lang	X	X	X	-	-	-
Dual Language	-	X	-	X	-	-
Work Habits	-	-	X	-	-	-
Spanish	-	X	-	X	-	X
Music	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Theme: Familial Capital</b>						
Beliefs	X	-	-	-	-	-
Values	-	-	X	-	-	X
Interactions	X	X	-	-	-	-
Image	X	-	X	-	X	X
Structure	X	-	X	X	-	X
<b>Theme: Social Capital</b>						
Outreach			-	-	-	-
Barriers	X	-	-	-	-	-
Bridges	X	-	X	-	-	X
Program	-	-	X	-	-	-
Instructional Model	-	-	-	-	-	X

Table 4.5

*Cross-case Themes in Readiness Protocol Qualitative Data Sets*

Interpretive Codes	Readiness Protocol					
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
<b>Theme: Program</b>						
Age	X	X			X	X
Language	X	X	X			
Head Start	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Theme: Resource</b>						
Teach	X	X	X	X	X	X
TV					X	
Family	X	X	X	X	X	X
Outside	X	X		X	X	
YMCA	X					
<b>Theme: Family</b>						
Meals	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sit			X	X	X	
New Food	X	X		X	X	X
Concern	X	X			X	
Books		X	X	X	X	
Library						
Converse	X	X			X	X
Songs	X	X	X	X	X	X
ABC	X	X			X	X

Table 4.6

*Cross-case Themes in CARES Survey Qualitative Data Sets*

Interpretive Codes	CARES Survey					
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
<b>Theme: Motor</b>						
Well Rest/Health	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cuts			X	X	X	X
Holds pencil	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blocks						
Self-care						
<b>Theme: Socio-Emotional</b>						
Turns						
Independence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Curious						
Eager to Learn						
Work Habits						
Shares	X	X	X	X	X	
Directions	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Theme: Readiness</b>						
Cleans		X	X	X	X	X
Equipment		X	X	X	X	X
Lineup	X	X		X	X	X
Listen Teacher	X	X	X	X	X	X
Language		X	X	X	X	X
<b>Theme: Literacy</b>						
Write	X	X	X	X		
Rhymes	X	X	X	X		X
Books	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Theme: Skills</b>						
ABCs	X	X	X	X	X	X
Colors		X	X	X	X	X
Counts	X	X	X			X
Days of Week		X				X

**Readiness** emerged as an overarching theme in the cross-case analysis. Readiness was defined by participants' discussions of language and early literacy, social competence, self-regulation of behavior, independence, and motor skills and good physical health, as factors that are important for children prior to their kindergarten transitions. Interpretive codes included *cleans up, equipment, line up, listen to teacher, and language*. The interpretive code *listening to the teacher* developed with a strong occurrence. Listening to the teacher included following directions, pays attention, completes task.

**Family** developed as a dominant theme from the cross-case analysis. Interpretive codes included *meals, concerns, books, conversations, songs, ABCs, and sitting for meals together*. Family was defined by participants' discussion of daily routines, extended family, language, regulation of behavior, and kindergarten transition. Parents structured routines and mealtimes. Children engaged in unstructured time with family and peers watching television, singing songs, and playing games.

**Skills** were the final dominant theme identified from the cross-case analysis. The interpretive codes of *ABCs and counts* highlighted this theme.

### **Summary of the Study**

The first task of this study was to describe parents' readiness beliefs and transition practices. Chapter 4 presented the findings from the data collection and analysis for this multiple case study to understand parents' beliefs about school readiness. The results described one overarching theme, **readiness**, and two supporting themes, **family** and **skills**. Parents of Color supported their children to be academically and emotionally prepared for the transition to kindergarten. Parents valued being their children's first teacher and having access to quality Head Start options. Parents discussed the importance of routines and

values. There was a strong occurrence of involvement in their child's education. Parents recognized this factor as critical for academic success. Parents of Color reported involving children in similar readiness and transition practices. These current findings challenge deficit theories that suggest Parent of Color do not value education. This study found many similarities in readiness beliefs among Parents of Color. Many factors contributed to parents' conceptions of school readiness, such as their own schooling and parents' experiences.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

In Chapter 5, this multiple case research study first reviews the purpose of the study including methodology. Next, a summary of the findings is discussed under each research question. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for Head Start leaders, teachers, and policy makers.

The existing literature offered varied perspectives of parents' readiness beliefs grounded in deficit theories to place the blame for achievement gaps on the child or their parents. The purpose of the study was to describe the readiness beliefs and transition practices of Parents of Color. I examined parents' perspectives on school readiness and transition practices using Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth and critical race theory as frameworks.

To develop an understanding of school readiness from the perspective of Parents of Color, qualitative methodology was chosen, specifically multiple case study. Six mothers who lived in a Midwestern city participated in this study. Data sources included interviews, readiness protocols, and surveys. Results show that parents defined school readiness as literacy, numeracy, and social skills. Parents described the critical role they play as their child's first teacher.

Empirical research by Epstein (1992, 2001) discussed six types of parental involvement between schools and parents. Connected to this study, I discussed three of the following:

1. *Parenting*. Schools must help parents with the creation of positive home conditions to promote the development of children



2. *Communicating*. Schools must inform parents about programs and the progress of their children. Schools must present this information in a manner that is comprehensible to all parents
3. *Learning at home*. Activities aimed at the support, help and monitoring of learning of early learners at home.

Parents believed consistent family routines supported school readiness. These participants understood the protective factor of being involved in their child's education. Based on the analysis of interviews and readiness protocols, parents discussed helping with homework and sharing meals with their children weekly. The findings also supported parents placing value on children having certain school readiness skills such as knowing how to write their name, knowing the alphabet, and being able to listen to the teacher.

However, many parents struggled with supporting their children, being involved with the school, and providing for their families. The school-parent partnership model fails to acknowledge the ways in which parent roles in education and the home-school relations in which they are embedded are a reflection of broader social inequalities that affect students. The unequal distribution of economic, human, cultural, and social capital—in addition to schools' devaluing of the resources of lower SES families—constrain parents' involvement options, inclinations, and relations with schools (Auerbach, 2007; Lareau, 1989, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Parents of Color and schools often are separated by cultural divides as well as by legacies of racism, deficit thinking, and mutual distrust (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992b; Fine, 2004; Fordham, 1996). African-American and Latinx parents are more likely than those of the dominant culture to have a skeptical, ambivalent, and potentially adversarial stance toward

school programs that have historically failed their communities (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Olivos, 2004; Tillman, 2004). If the norm for Students of Color is underachievement in K-12 schools and underrepresentation in four-year colleges, then Parents of Color with high educational aspirations for their children may need to take deliberate steps to ensure access and counter the tendencies of schools to reproduce inequality (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Auerbach, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan & Segura, 1989).

It is beyond the scope of this study to measure the direct effects of parent involvement on school readiness, but parental involvement has a strong cultural component (Epstein, 2001). This cultural component was highlighted by two parents in their interviews.

Tiffany stated:

That is something I have talked with my family advocate about. I have always told her I wanted to do something like volunteering. I'm from this area and I can honestly say I do not see or hear about anything going on to get the children involved. I don't see it. There is nothing. If there was more to do. Are we dropping the ball? Being from this area, I feel like I can say I am engaged as much as I can. Even at the Head Start site there is not much engagement. I'm not sure if it is because it is too diverse? My main advice for the Head Start center, they do put out papers and things where they try to provide the resources but it is singled out to the Hispanics or Somalians. I have never attended a parent meeting simply because what are you going to tell me to help my child. I speak English. I see it as kind of a barrier.

Deborah added:

When I went with a teacher on a Home Visit, the parent (African American) really wasn't prepared for us coming. It was a shock to her when we were at her door. She did open up her home. Maybe she did it because I was there. She did let us in. Offered us breakfast. We proceeded on. I heard other cases where the parents were home and did not open the door at all.

According to Vincent and Martin (2002), for parents, schools can become places they do not feel welcome and a place where they feel they do not belong. Parent-school partnerships require mutual respect, shared interests, and open communication between

parents, teachers, and the school. Schools must take a genuine interest in the cultural and social diversity of child-rearing and educational perspectives demonstrated across parents. Attention must be given to support parents in the design and improvement of their child-rearing practices (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005).

Schools must work more actively to gain insight into parental desires and interests, which may not be raised explicitly by parents themselves. Once the diversity of these desires and interests among parents is recognized, a dialogue on school readiness and parenting transition practices can begin. The extent to which schools' efforts are successful with parents depends squarely on parents being treated as serious educational partners. (Driessen et al., 2005) call this moving from a *request situation*—in which parents occasionally are called upon to help at the school and schools occasionally help parents at home—to an *interaction situation*—in which teachers, parents, and schools exchange ideas as equals with regard to the education and development of children.

### **Research Questions**

There was one central question and two sub-questions in this study. I address the two sub-questions and then the central question.

The first sub-question was: What specific behaviors do parents use to promote school readiness? The theme of **aspirational capital** was widely described in interviews by parents. The interpretive code of *values* was a strong indicator among the data sources for the theme of **aspirational capital**. Yosso (2005) defined aspirational capital as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. From the case analysis of the interviews, one participant emphasized:

The parents. We are their first everything. First teachers, first learners. First motivators-everything.

The interpretive code *parents as child's first teacher* emerged with a moderate occurrence from the data collected in the interview and readiness protocol. Sheridan et al. (2008) defined parental behavior as “an almost infinite variety of specific actions unfolding over time as the child develops” (p. 3). Evidence supports these valuable experiences parents provide for their young child’s general learning both at home and outside the home in many direct and indirect ways called the *curriculum of the home* (Edwards et al., 2008). The richness of the home literacy environment strongly predicts children’s language and academic outcomes (Espinosa, 2002; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Weigel et al., 2006).

The second sub-question: What factors do parents believe help children transition to kindergarten? As the data from interviews and CARES surveys were analyzed, the results from this study revealed support for previous literature suggesting parents’ conceptions of school readiness are positively associated with children’s academic achievement (Barbarin et al., 2008).

The central question, “How do Parents of Color conceptualize school readiness?” addressed parents’ conceptions of school readiness and transition practices as a means to better understand achievement gaps and consider possible interventions to support home visits and parental involvement.

This study contributes ideas about the roles of parents in supporting school readiness by drawing on critical race tenets. The findings of this study can be used to understand the experiences of Parents of Color. The cross-case analysis of this study served as a method to illuminate the findings in relation to the research questions.

## **Implications for Practice and Theory Development**

This study's findings have implications for early childhood education practice and policy. African-American and Latinx children make abrupt transitions from home learning environments to strict, structured school environments as they transition to kindergarten. The additional set of skills needed to be successful in kindergarten adds to African-American and Latinx children learning barriers. Kindergarten readiness has been socially constructed to privilege White, middle-class norms and the expectations of educators (Auerbach, 2007; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002; Lareau, 1989). López (2000) noted, "parents readying their children for school and being involved at the school has become a privileged domain signified by certain legitimate acts" (p. 417), such as helping with homework, attending Back to School Night, and chaperoning field trips. Because teachers place a high premium on school-based involvement and lower SES African-American and Latinx parents are less likely to come to the school than middle-class White parents (Gandara, 1995; Moles & D'Angelo, 1993), teachers often assume that African-American and Latinx parents do not care about their children's schooling. Such assumptions, rooted in deficit thinking and the discourse on "at risk"-ness, perpetuate the myth of uninvolved minority parents (Valdés, 1996; Valencia & Black, 2002).

Current research is working to expose this myth by documenting the many ways in which low SES and Parents of Color value education, push their children to do well, hold high expectations, and respond to teachers' requests (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; López, 2001; Meyers, Dowdy, & Paterson, 2000; Solórzano, 1992). Educators may be unaware of the invisible strategies that Parents of Color use to support their children's education, such as making sacrifices so children can attend better schools or limiting children's chores to allow

for study time (Mehan, 1996). Yosso (2005) believed such transmission of sociocultural values be recognized as legitimate parent involvement and that schools build on these transmissions.

Schools consciously could implement pedagogy that supports cultural and experiential differences to support Children of Color. Research has shown that children who have access to the middle class ideology (Kessler, 1991) retain high status in society, while Children of Color struggle as soon as they enter the school. Flexibility, awareness, and willingness to broaden the definition of school readiness is required within early childhood classrooms. Glick and White (2000) pointed out,

despite the advantages of working-class and poor family life, including respectful children, greater autonomy for children when they engaged in leisure activities, and closer extended family life, the childrearing strategies of working-class and poor families generally do not comply with the expectations of educators. (p. 760)

Valuing children's cultural wealth and family and community resources are realistic implications of this research for practice. Head Start guidelines require home-school partnerships, and family partnerships can be strengthened by developing readiness goal contracts with parents. Agreements would outline home and school practices and parenting strategies that support children. Schools would work actively to gain insight into parental desires and interests, which may not be raised explicitly by parents themselves. Once community cultural wealth is recognized within each family and valued, a dialogue with parents can begin to build on these strengths. The extent to which schools' efforts are successful with parents depends squarely on parents being treated as serious educational partners.

Driessen, Smit and Slegers (2005) call this moving from a *request situation*—in which parents occasionally are called upon to help at the school and schools occasionally help parents at home—to an *interaction situation*—in which teachers, parents, and schools exchange ideas as equals with regard to the education and development of children.

### **Future Research Possibilities**

This qualitative study provided the detailed beliefs of Head Start parents readying their child for kindergarten. Parents shared activities from their daily lives that support school readiness. While the findings were from a small sample, rich, detailed narratives can uncover hidden meanings through case studies. Future research should continue to examine Parents of Color, teachers, and schools to gain deeper understanding of school readiness and kindergarten transitional practices. Building on the experience of Parents of Color, some researchers have proposed alternatives to mainstream conceptions of parents readying their children for kindergarten. For example, Delgado-Gaitan (1994) offered an empowerment model of family-school relations in which power is shared, influence is shared between home and school, and parties are mutually accommodating, in contrast to the conventional one-way model dominated by the school's needs and expectations. López, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) suggested that families need more home involvement focused on “readiness” teaching by educators that addresses basic family needs and builds trusting relationships rather than more school involvement by parents.

### **A Novice Researcher's Final Thoughts**

Similar to students, parents come to schools with unequal resources for pursuing educational goals for their children. Each parent comes with complex raced/classed/gendered identities, cultural scripts, and family histories or dynamics that

shape their relations with institutions. Just as schools need to affirm and accommodate students, so too, do schools need to transform their understandings of and interactions with Parents of Color (Gay, 2010). This discussion illustrates only six Parents of Color as they ready their children for kindergarten. This discussion is not comprehensive but rather suggests an alternative framework for understanding parent roles beyond mainstream models of school readiness.

This narratological case study examined the perceptions of parents of color of school readiness. School readiness outcomes and student achievement data were not examined. This study was limited by time and setting. In-depth observations of children/parent activities would have contributed a more detailed account of how community cultural capital is supported within families of color. Qualitative future research would involve multi-step research looking at a full year of kindergarten, following parents and students along the transition process at every step—before school starts, during, and at the end of the first year of kindergarten.



## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Reframing School Readiness: Case Studies of  
African-American and Latina Head Start Parents

Nicole King

B.S. Avila University, 1991  
Ed. S. University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2000

#### **Request to Participate**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This study is being conducted at your Head Start center.

The researcher in charge of this study is Nicole King.

The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you are a Head Start parent with a four-year-old child entering kindergarten next year. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. The researcher will go over this consent form with you. Ask her to explain anything that you do not understand. Think about it and talk it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to this study.

#### **Background**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have a four-year-old child entering kindergarten next year. As a subject in this study, you will be asked to take part in this research study because of the experiences you have had preparing your child for kindergarten.

You will be one of about six (6) subjects in the study at the Head Start center.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth description of school readiness efforts and practices of African-American and Latina parents in order to provide recommendations for Head Start programming and parent partnerships. This study will examine the influence and role of families, in children's preparation for kindergarten. This study will examine perceptions, identify processes and specific behaviors parents utilize to prepare their

children related to school readiness and kindergarten preparation that have the potential to inform parent educational programming.

### **Procedures**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a school readiness questionnaire, a demographic questionnaire, and consent to one in-person interview. This study will last from approximately January 2017-February 2017. While you will be considered a participant during this time, your actual involvement is outlined below.

1. The **Family Readiness and CARES survey** will ask you to describe your experiences preparing your child for kindergarten. These surveys will be collected during the one to one interview.

2. **An interview** will take place after completing the family readiness and CARES survey. Each participant will have one interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes in length. The interview will be conducted in-person, at a convenient location for you, such as the Head Start center. All questions should be considered optional; you have the option at any time to not answer or skip any question.

After the interview has taken place, your time as a participant in the study will be finished.

If you are willing, the interview will be recorded: the interview can still take place even if you do not want them recorded. After the interview, the researcher will transcribe the recording and email them to you so that you can review the interview and make sure you said things the way you meant them. Recordings will be used solely to make accurate transcripts and will be kept on the researcher's password protected MacBook that only she has access to; after the transcript has been created and you have verified the accuracy, all recording will be deleted.

Participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in certain activities or answer certain questions. If at any point you wish to withdraw for the study, you may do so by contacting the researcher, Nicole King.

### **Risks and Inconveniences**

There are no known physical, social, or economic risks associated with this study; there is also no risk or criminal or civil liability. You may, however, feel uncomfortable describing the experiences you have had in preparing your child for kindergarten and your educational experiences. In order to minimize these risks, all participation, including conversations, are voluntary and may be discontinued at any time for any reason. This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks of taking part in this research study are not expected to be more than risks in your daily life. There are no other known risks to you if you choose to take part in this study.

### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. Indirectly, however, talking about your experiences may lead to a better understanding of school readiness and strategies parents use to support their children for kindergarten. Other people may benefit in the future from the information about school readiness that comes from this study.

### **Fees and Expenses**

There are no fees or expenses linked to participating in this study.

### **Compensation**

You will receive a \$30 gift card for completing the interview and survey questionnaires. If you leave the study early, compensation will be prorated to cover the time you participated.

### **Alternatives to Study Participation**

The alternative is not to take part in the study.

### **Confidentiality**

While we will do our best to keep the information you share with us confidential, it cannot be completely guaranteed. Persons from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study to make sure we are doing proper, safe research and protecting human subjects. The results of this research may be published or presented to others. You will not be named in any reports of the results, nor will the school or school district be identified. Although audio recordings will be used for precise interviews, no audio will be used in publications or presentations. If you decide to leave the study early, which you may do at any time, all data collected will be destroyed at that point.

During the research, the data collected will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. All digital data will be stored on a password-protected laptop until it is transcribed; all digital copies will be destroyed at that time. After the study is complete, all files will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office for 7 years.

### **Contacts for Questions about the Study**

You should contact the Office of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call the researcher, Nicole King, if you have any questions about this study.

**Voluntary Participation**

Taking part in this research study is your choice. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. The researcher or sponsors may stop the study or take you out of the study at any time if they decide that it is in your best interest to do so. They may do this for medical or administrative reasons or if you no longer meet the study criteria. You will be told of any important findings developed during the course of this research.

You have read this Consent Form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Dr. Loyce Caruthers.

By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. The researcher will give you a copy of this consent form.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Nicole King

Dianne Smith, Ph.D.

**By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. Study staff will give you a copy of this consent form.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (Volunteer Subject)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name (Volunteer Subject)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Nicole King

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

## APPENDIX B

### FAMILY READINESS PROTOCOL

Please check all that apply.

1. How many children do you have between the ages of 0-5?  
 1 child  
 2 children  
 3 children  
 4 children  
 5 or more children
  
2. How old are your children?  
 under 1 year old  
 1 year old  
 2 years old  
 3 years old  
 4 years old  
 5 years old
  
3. Are you currently enrolled in a Head Start program?  
 Yes  
 No  
 I don't know
  
4. What language do you speak with your child/children? Check all that apply.  
 English  
 Spanish  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What language do you use to prepare your child/children for school? For example, teaching shapes, colors, letters, etc.  
 English  
 Spanish  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents and teachers often have different views on what their child/children need to know when entering kindergarten.

6. Do you feel like you are aware of the basic school requirements for a child entering kindergarten?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

7. Do you look for tips on how to prepare your child/children for school?

- Yes
- No

**\*If answer is no, skip to question 10**

8. Where do you look for tips on how to prepare your child/ children for school? Check all that apply.

- Online
- Pamphlets. Brochures
- Magazines
- Books
- Television
- Parenting groups
- Head Start or other community organizations
- Friends and family

9. In the past 30 days, has your child/children been to:

- Activities hosted by Head Start
- Activities hosted by your local library
- Activities at other community organizations
- Supervised playtime with other children

10. What do you do to make sure your child gets plenty of physical activity?

- Schedule playtime
- Take your child to the park
- Have them play outside
- Enroll your child in sports programs
- My child gets enough physical activity on their own
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

We recognize that parents have very busy schedules. With this in mind, think about the last week, how many times did you or someone in your household: (for questions 11-15)

11. Read a book to your child/children

- 0 days
- 1-2 days
- 3-4 days
- 5+ days

12. Practice the alphabet with your child/children?

- 0 days
- 1-2 days
- 3-4 days
- 5+ days

13. Tell a story to your child/children?

- 0 days
- 1-2 days
- 3-4 days
- 5+ days

14. Have a conversation with your child/children about the events of their day?

- 0 days
- 1-2 days
- 3-4 days
- 5+ days

15. Do you sing songs to your child/children?

- Yes
- No

16. What types of songs do you sing to your child/children? Check all that apply.

- Songs we hear on the radio
- Children's songs
- Songs in your native language
- Songs that help children learn basic skills (counting, colors, etc.)

17. In the past 30 days, have you and your child visited the library?

- Yes
- No

18. Have you ever involved your child in making meals at your home?

- Yes
- No

19. In the last week, how many times did your family sit down for dinner together?

- 0 days
- 1-2 days
- 3-4 days
- 5+ days

20. How likely are you to introduce your child/children to new foods?

21. Do you have any concerns about your child's development?

Yes

No

22. Many people show affection in different ways. How can you tell your child knows you love them?

Write your answer below.



## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SCHOOL READINESS

1. How do you define early academic success for your child? What does it look like?
2. What factors do you believe promote academic success? What factors do you believe prevent academic success?
3. Do you believe that your family routines are important to your child's academic success? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?
4. What family factors do you believe promote or prevent academic success?
5. Before your child enters kindergarten, what are some of your concerns?
6. Please describe to the best your ability your experiences as a student in grade school.
7. How would you describe your other children's experiences in school?
8. What neighborhood/community factors do you believe promote or prevent academic success?
9. How do you believe your child's Head Start center has helped you/not to prepare your child for school?
10. What have you learned about school readiness through your child's Head Start center?
11. Do you believe your child is ready for kindergarten? If yes, please explain. . If no, why not?
12. What do you think about your child's Head Start center? What do you like about the Head Start center? What would like to change about the Head Start center?
13. Do you think your child's Head Start center acknowledges or celebrates his or her cultural heritage? Does the classroom include information about your child's culture in lessons? Why do you say yes? Why do you say no? Could you provide examples?

## APPENDIX D

### COMMUNITY ATTITUDES ON READINESS FOR ENTERING

#### SCHOOL (CARES) SURVEY-ENGLISH

*This survey asks your opinion about what children need to know and be able to do in order to become ready for kindergarten. There are no wrong or right answers.*

#### I. Your Opinions about the Readiness for Kindergarten

A. Think about your child who will BEGIN Kindergarten in the Fall.

For each item below, enter one number to indicate how IMPORTANT or NECESSARY it is for a child STARTING Kindergarten.

Write "1" if you think it is not too important.

Write "2" if you think it is somewhat important.

Write "3" if you think that it is very important but not essential.

Write "4" if you think that it is absolutely necessary.

#### 1. Physical and Motor Development

Is well rested and well-nourished. Health care needs are met.

Can write on the line. Can color inside the lines.

Throw the ball, skips, runs, hops, walks up/down stairs.

Stacks 5-6 blocks by him/herself.

Can hold a pencil.

Can use scissors.

Cuts simple shapes with scissors.

Hold pencil properly.

#### 2. Self-Care

Buttons own clothes.

Feeds self with fork.

Find own belongings.

Zips own jacket.

#### 3. Social and Emotional development

Plays well with other children. Shares.

Is self-confident. Proud of his/her work.

Does not hit/bite. Has self-control.

Has sense of right or wrong.

Shows independence.

Takes turn.

#### 4. Approach to Learning

- Is curious.
- Asks lots of questions about how and why.
- Is interested in world around him/her.
- Likes to solve puzzles.
- Is eager to learn.

#### 5. School Routines and Work Habits

- Cleans up work-space and spills.
- Uses classroom equipment correctly.
- Lines up and stays in line. Waits quietly.
- Pays attention to the teacher.
- Moves from one activity to the next with no problems.
- Listens during group discussions or stories.
- Completes tasks on time.
- Follows the teacher's direction.

#### 6. Language and Reading

- Can express feelings/needs in primary language.
- Writes first name, even if some letters are backwards.
- Can express feelings/needs in English.
- Recognizes rhyming words that rhyme like "cat, hat"
- Is interested in books and stories.
- Knows ABC's.
- Can read a few simple words.
- Can read simple stories.

#### 7. General Knowledge

- Knows the basic colors like "red, blue, yellow."
- Can count to 10 or 15.
- Can count to 50 or more.
- Understands big/small.
- Sorts by colors or size.
- Knows names of body parts (eyes/nose/legs).
- Understands yesterday/today/tomorrow.
- Knows the days of the week in correct order.
- Knows own address/telephone number.

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES ON READINESS FOR ENTERING  
SCHOOL (CARES) SURVEY-SPANISH

*This survey asks your opinions about what children need to know and be able to do in order to become ready for Kindergarten. There are no wrong or right answers.*

I. Sus Opiniones sobre el Preparamiento para Kindergarten

A. Piense sobre un niño que EMPEZARÁ el Kindergarten este Otoño. Para cada artículo debajo, escribe el número que indica lo IMPORTANTE o NECESARIO que es para un niño que va EMPEZAR el Kindergarten.

Escriba "1" si usted piensa que no es *DEMASIADO IMPORTANTE*.

Escriba "2" si usted piensa que es *ALGO IMPORTANTE*.

Escriba "3" si usted piensa que es *MUY IMPORTANTE, PERO NO ESENCIAL*.

Escriba "4" si usted piensa que es *COMPLETAMENTE NECESARIO*.

1. Desarrollo Físico y Motora

- Descansa y bien alimentado.
- Puede escribir en la línea.
- Puede dibujar entre las líneas.
- Tira la pelota, salta, corre, brinca, sube y baja por los escalones.
- Alinea hacia arriba 5 o 6 cubos sin ayuda.
- Puede aguantar un lapiz.
- Puede usar unas tijeras.
- Corta las figuras basicas.
- Sostiene el lapiz correctamente.

2. Maneras de cuidarse

- Abotona sus propias ropas.
- Come con un tenedor.
- Encuentra sus propias pertenencias.
- Se cierra el cierre de la chamarra.

3. Desarrollo Social y Emocional

- Juega bien con otros niños.
- Comparte.
- Es seguro(a) de si mismo.
- Orgulloso(a) de su trabajo.
- No golpea/muerde.
- Tiene control propio.
- Tiene sentido de lo malo y lo correcto.
- Demuestra independendencia.
- Toma turnos.

#### 4. Se enfoca para aprender

- Es curioso(a).
- Hace muchas preguntas sobre como y por que.
- Esta interesado(a) en mundo alrededor del o de ella.
- Se gusta hacer o resolver rompecabezas.
- Esta entusiasta para aprender.

#### 5. Rutinas Escolares y Habitos de Trabajo

- Limpia el espacio de trabajo y los derramamientos.
- Utiliza el equipo del salón de clase correctamente.
- Se alinea y se queda en linea.
- Espera calladamente.
- Le pone atención al maestro(a).
- Se mueve de una actividad a la próxima sin problemas.
- Escucha durante discusiones de grupo o cuentos.
- Completa las tareas a la hora.
- Sigue las direcciones del maestro(a).

#### 6. Lenguaje y Literatura

- Puede expresar sentimientos/necesidades en idioma primario.
- Escribe su primer nombre, aun cuando algunas letras quedan al revés.
- Puede expresar sentimientos/necesidades en ingles.
- Reconoce palabras que riman como “gato, plato.”
- Esta interesado(a) en libros y historias.
- Sabe el abecedario.
- Puede leer algunas palabras fáciles.
- Puede leer cuentos fáciles.

#### 7. Conocimiento General

- Conoce los colores básicos como “rojo, azul, amarillo.”
- Puede contar hasta 10 o 15.
- Puede contar hasta 50 o mas.
- Entiende grande/pequeño.
- Clasifica por color o tamaño.
- Sabe los nombres de partes del cuerpo (ojos/nariz/piernas).
- Entiende ayer/hoy/mañana.
- Sabe los dias de semana en orden correcta.
- Sabe su propia dirección y número de teléfono.

(Adapted from Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000).

APPENDIX E  
PARENT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**Interview: A-Ana**

I We are meeting today on 3-1-15. I am meeting with AF and we are going to get started on the interview, ok? So A, um, first of all I am going to ask you to talk to me a little bit about how you would describe yourself, single mom, age, that kind of stuff.

A I am a single mom, yeah, I am 38 years old, I am originally from Mexico, I was born in Mexico City and I moved here to the United States um seven years ago. My son is 4 years old. So, yeah I, I work and I am a full time mom.

I How would you describe your ethnicity?

A I would say Hispanic, 100%. My son, my son's dad is um American, so he's half Hispanic, I would say. He's Caucasian.

I Today, um. First of all thank you being willing to come in and talk to me about your child um, really the focus of our interview today is for me to understand your perspective and your experiences on raising your child and getting them ready for kindergarten and ready for school and kind of what that has been like for you.

I Ok, um so my first question to you is, "How do you um, let me find my first question, What does kindergarten readiness mean to you?"

A Oh, well, first of all, I find out they are ready for kindergarten when they turn...uh...six. Because I start kindergarten in Mexico City when I was younger, it was mandatory in Mexico City to start uh, we enroll in preschool when you are three at least, so when kids turn three they start going to school and it's mandatory and here in the United States um you start going in kindergarten when you're six, so I find that really trouble because I was thinking my son at this age was already to start kindergarten.

I College almost.

A Yeah, yeah so it's different and um...I value education a lot so for me it is very important that he is ready because of the cut in age, I know he will be the oldest in his class, so by the time he goes into the kindergarten, I hope he already acquire all the necessary skills to go to kindergarten.

I Ok. Alright, um, so tell me about your experiences, like How have you prepared A for school?

A Well, um I have done my part and um, mainly my mom is the one who has done a lot of the part she reads to him every night. It is mainly books in Spanish because for me

it is very important that that he is going to be bilingual, this is the time, he is starting to learn the colors, we uh, he watches a little bit of TV but I make sure that um the programs he watches are educational you know and um...and so actually he reads and he is learning numbers, colors. I have bought books for him especial the ones you can touch the page so he starts reading his line, then how to write his name and all that

I So you have really leaned on your mom, so tell me more about that (A: Yes) how's that

A Well my mom moved to the United States in March of last year um...she moved here, she is not currently working, she has a work permit, well, but we applied for her um green card, her residence, here.

I So having her here has really helped you as a working parent?

A Yes, a lot, a lot, just to be able to be able to go out with a friend, have coffee and know my kid is taken care of and um...so now she helps with the house cleaning and also, she has a really big bond with A. So she reads to him, she teaches him the colors and stuff like that.

I Um...Can you talk to talk to about...you kind of alluded to it just now, So if I walked into your house, so what would I see happening when I arrived, with your child, what would I see you doing, I know you said your mom does a lot but how have you kind of taken on that role, if I came in your house.

A If you were to look, I would probably be studying, my mom would probably be cleaning the kitchen, right now and A would be playing with his train. I, I, I let him play a lot, I I think, creativity at this age is very important for him to discover things by himself, it is very important and so he plays a lot by himself.

I So more indirect instruction versus do you ever sit down with him and do direct instruction like... this is how we do... like your colors in Spanish?

A Yes. Yes but not only that, there is a strict routine in the house like he has to bed at 8, you know. He has to eat on the table there is no eating watching TV, there is um...there are rules he knows he has to follow when it's time to take a shower and um...when to cut his nails or, or do stuff like that, you have to go get your, he's starting to get dressed by himself, put his jammy on and um...and oh that like he will be playing, so look right now he will be sitting with a book, or he plays by himself, so he's the only kid so he plays a lot.

I Ok, so not only the educational part but you are also teaching him like the social part, the hygiene part, the um socialization part.

A Exactly. Exactly.

- I Creative play. So you are trying all the perspectives.
- A And it's important, especially with him, in the fact that he has no brothers, no siblings that is not around obviously, so uh...he plays by himself so because he doesn't have a lot of contact, but the contact that he has with the kids at school for me it is very important he gets the socializing, knowing there are rules, wait your turn or like um like if your gonna eat candy or something you have to ask mom can I get a cookie, I don't want him just to go get it by himself so
- I So you put him strict rules
- A Yeah .
- I I'm double checking my questions because you have answered quite a few of these... What do you see are the most important experiences that you provide to your son in getting him ready for school? What do you as the most important things you have done to get ready, you know he's going, he's got another year (A: I know) so what are some things that you think are real important, you said the reading, you said.
- A Yes the reading, well the fact that he's becoming bilingual, I think that is just a big one, a big, big one. Uh for him to be able to speak two languages and at this age that is the most important than I mean he's, I am getting him ready for more than kindergarten with that, he will have an advantage over the other kids just for the fact that he is bilingual. And uh...just I do have a lot of books he in his room has like a big bookshelf and where all the books are where he can reach. The books that I have are picture books but are especially for his age where they are predictable books like he know what is going to happen kind of Brown Bear Brown Bear What Do You See, so he know what is coming and or the just the fact uh...like activity books where he looks through and there is an activity and the fact that the books are in Spanish too. I mean he has Spanish yeah.
- I You're building a love of reading it sounds like?
- A Yeah.
- I Love of books, how to take care of books.
- A Yeah, right now I am doing the books is the most important, the reading out loud, let him read to me even though what he says is not like the book. We're reading a book about Maisy the little mouse and If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, that is the one he likes a lot and um it is a very predictable book too and um yeah I am putting a lot of stress on reading yeah...
- I Ok.



I Um...let me see what else I have to ask...(5 sec pause) Uh...So talk to me about...you are in a Head Start program, what is it like being a parent, a Head Start parent? I know recently your income has changed but when you were really struggling as a single mom and you did not know what to do and what has it been like for you to have a Head Start facility to be able to assist you?

A It has been a big, big advantage knowing that he is just not being babysitting you know like, he is really learning there, I know there is a lot of things I like about having him in a facility, the field trips, uh...hanging out with other friends from different backgrounds and he is able to share and to see and you know there is a structure and routine in the classroom which is basic but at this age, there's um...the curriculum that they work um...what is hard for me I must say is that A's age when I was working in Mexico the kids that I had were my students were between 3 and 5 and most of those kids were already writing their names I mean I remember there was a teacher demanding from us that when these kids turn to the next school, the next year they need to know how to write their names and they need to know how to read, and I really remember pulling kids and they were able to write, here ...sometimes I ask A, "write your name" and he tries hard and he doesn't know all the letters here that is, that freaks me out because, I know all my kids knew how to write and my own kid at this age doesn't know how to write his name and

I Are you worried about that as you send him on. He's got another year, but are you worried about that sending him into a kindergarten program that he won't be up to the...

A Yeah.

I So is that something you will practice with him at home?

A Yeah. Yeah, I have to catch up, he needs to catch up and I absolutely believe that is my responsibility to teach him at home some of the gaps that are not covered at school because there are um...the curriculum at school or just lack of time or lack of...planning or in the lesson plan, I don't know. There is a lot of I think the curriculum focuses on discovering, and this structured teaching like in Mexico we covered the objectives, where here it is more what the kid is interested in.

I More constructive.

A Exactly, more exploring, let's have these centers, where he's gonna learn and and you have your art area, you have your math area, your science area, and um...we didn't that was completely new to me. We don't do that ours was structured we decide what you are going to learn no matter what these are the objectives and this is what we are going to cover—so less time for play—less time for choice time, because we have to cover those objectives.

I To get them ready.

A No matter what, yeah.

I Which do you think is better?

A Honestly, the other one, I know that sounds weird but it is more like Japan and other countries and Germany, they follow those curriculums, it is not always Creative Curriculum. I know it has to do with the creativity of the kid and everything but uh...the structure and the discipline that we need to achieve the objectives or the goals leave everyone at the same place. Like we know how to evaluate them.

I You really work with you son, so what about the other kids in his classroom that are getting ready that are also children living in pretty severe poverty, do you see that being detrimental to them as they move forward? Won't they be even further behind?

A Yeah. I know. Exactly. I think that is one of the disadvantages that if we don't work and structure and discipline and at the end we have to reach the goals. I mean when you have an objective and you have an activity you have to follow and achieve that objective, for the kid to know the five colors, you are going to evaluate it, the kid is going to tell you five colors and then it is as simple as it—he know it or not. So I am responsible me myself I am liable for him to learn them and here it is not like that, it is more like whatever he wants to explore to define it. I guess he will learn in kindergarten right?

I I don't know that is the question I worry about.

A Yes.

I Um...I am going to talk to you a little bit, I'm going to switch gears a little bit, cause we are going to wrap up in just a minute.

I Stressors in your life past or now, that affect your child and then how do you get support, and you said your mom is with you so who do you lean on to help you with stresses that come as single mom what do you see that affect him?

A Well there are things that I must say that yes stresses, but I have my priorities very straight. I know what is more important and I know when it comes to manage that stress I know how to handle it. Um...I have strong beliefs and strong convictions, and that has helped me when there is a lot of stress, at the end I know how important for this to happen. I am going to do whatever I can to make it work. I am going to do my best and at the end if it's up to me what is going to happen.

I You had said you struggled with, you know, housing, you struggled with no job, you struggled (A: Yeah) how did you keep all that from affecting your son?

I You kept it away from him? How did /who did you lean on to help you?

A No. I had nobody to help me, lean on just myself. I knew I had to be very strong. I knew I had to be very healthy because he only depended on me. But I knew, that I was very, very sure that I was not gonna go out and work and pay and take care of other kids for somebody to take care of my kid and still not be able to make it. I was going to have to rely on the system so I could stand on my feet again. Um...for the reason that eh. That um...kids go to kindergarten unprepared, if there is no way to send them to school. Childcare is expensive and as a single mom obviously you have to pay for childcare and you have to pay for utilities, your car, your insurance, and everything and I knew were...um regarding my expenses I knew that my priorities were first, we were going to have water, we were going to have electricity, we were going to have the basics were really important. I was relying on heavily on credit cards that were obviously adding up, up and up but I knew that, I mean, that was going to stop sooner or later, you know?

I Did you know where to go in the city to get assistance? Did anyone come to you and say, Hey we can help you with programs er...What was your...How did you do it, ...my goodness.

A No no...no really...I was not aware of programs. When I got divorced and started going to counseling, I remember the therapist said, You have been living in this country for seven years and you have never been able to, you have never paid a utility bill. I mean this is your responsibility. Get to know your rights. Get to know where to go for assistance. Get to know your responsibilities who you put on someone else that at the end failed and now you find yourself in this position where you have nowhere to go, you are obviously don't have savings, you don't have anything, but uh...so I didn't know where to go, for health care I went R clinic, for when I went, I got food stamps for food, and I was able to take it and the utilities were being paid on uh...the credit cards. I was also receiving my child support so the child support was not being spending on clothes or anything, it was just going towards whatever needed the most at that time. But I was definitely not being able to afford child care that was for sure and I was not willing, because it is my only kid and I know he is my priority so I was not gonna be willing to just use this daycare I don't even know and me have to go to work for minimum wage somewhere you know and and not be able to afford either one. Let somebody else to take care of my kid while I take care of somebody else's kid.

I That is the dilemma a lot of single women face. I mean how do work if you do not have a place like a Head Start program to, there is no way for you to be successful.

A No no, it was very stressful.

I You are constantly diggin yourself out.

A Also knowing that there is a huge long waiting list of kids trying to get into Head Start and eh...eh it is almost like winning the lottery, just for you being able to get your kid in, I mean and then qualify for him to be there, it was just hard.

- I It was meant for you to be there.
- A (Sigh)...I guess.
- I Um...What do you think your son needs to be successful in kindergarten?
- A Um...He, he needs to, he needs to know how to follow directions, I think that is very important, uh...he needs to um...um...not being afraid of asking questions, you know, knowing that teachers is there to support you and to answer questions, just um...having structure is very very important, just this, structure of habit, the structure of doing something over and over, until like, I am sorry, you get up, you get dressed, eat breakfast, you go to school and that is what we do for a long time, so you better get used to it, because it is gonna be like that (laughing) and yeah, habits mainly, and you sit down, you do some homework, you learn and you um the foundation, the basic math you know grouping, sorting out, basic math skills that are the foundation for future you know, learning. Like activities as simple as sitting down with him and sorting buttons by size or like color, you know that starts creating his brain, you know connecting all those nerve cells that know ok, this is how it works, math. Math works this way. So
- I So exposing him opportunities
- A Yes, counting, very important. Um, how do you say it, all this is, space and his body you know—up, down, right, left, all that is very important, so he knows we write from left to right, top to bottom, you know, for him to have space with his body first and then with his paper. All things are the foundation for future learning.
- I Do you think parents that are in Head Start think about school readiness? Do you think that is on their radar? Like I need to prepare my child?
- A No, no I think not. No. No.
- I What do you mean? Can you say more about that?
- A Yes, I think that some people, we assume that the school is responsible to get them ready. I do not think that is something we sometimes think starts at home. I do believe, some parents think that way. I know I am responsible because whatever he does not learn, I will be the only one who will be affected by that. So I am perfectly aware that um he needs to learn those things and he depends on me and it is up to me to provide him to make sure he has those things.
- I Why don't parents do more with them? What do you think? Why don't Head Start parents take that on as a responsibility? What do you think stops them from doing it?
- A There are many things. The one I just mentioned that, we work 8 hours we go home, and we are tired and and just sitting another hour, another lesson teaching an activity is tiring. And we also know for them it is like, they are tired they come from school

and we assume that well, it is the responsibility of the teacher to teach these things to get him “ready.” It shouldn’t be like that. If that part is missing, it is going to be a lot of trouble in kindergarten and in the future.

I Last question, What should I have asked you about that I didn’t ask you. Is there anything I missed about kindergarten... about school readiness? Or something you wanted to add?

A Umm, yeah like what kind of connections could the school provide, what kind of resources school should provide to parents for them to work on that part. Resources.

I You think we could do more?

A Yeah. Yeah. Like resources.

I Home visits? Do you think that could help? I am just throwing that out there. Could that be strengthened, could that help?

A Yeah.

I Resources. Things for them to take home?

A Yeah. I think so, yeah. Books, like you can do this activity, exactly, you could um take him to this place or yeah stuff like that materials, resources, and pamphlets. Stuff like that.

I Anything.

A Yeah that they will provide me and I will say that. They need to provide resources for us to know where to go to know exactly.

I Thank you Ms. A. This ends our interview. Thank you.

### **Interview: K-Kelly**

I We are ready to get started. First, can you tell me a little about yourself?

K Uhhh...I am 38 years old so and I have four children...10, 6, 4 and 2. Basically, I take pride in taking care of my kids and education.

I How would you describe yourself ethnically?

K Umm...A single, African-American female...ummm basically with a few struggles being a single parent basically that is it.

I What does kindergarten readiness mean to you?

- K As a parent I am preparing my 5 year for higher learning challenges, daily life challenges and um...just like educational life, I would like for my son to be more involved in education than I was, cause I could of...I kind of just stopped and did not go any further. I just think education is important for him so he can learn to be and get out there and live
- I Ok, you mentioned your experiences and said you had it hard, lot of struggles and in preparing him what are some of the things you have had to overcome?
- K As far as me or with him?
- I Let's start with S.
- K Language barriers umm. Communication factors...um just basically trying to get him to understand certain words and tasks.
- I Ok.
- I In thinking about getting him ready for school, he started early, he's now going half-day-early childhood and...
- K He goes to school from 8-12 and then he goes to another school from 1-4 p.m.
- I Ok. Is he in a kindergarten space or is he in a pre-k?
- K Not yet, no, not yet, he wont be able to (noise, excuse me) he won't be able to start kindergarten until next year. So basically for the meanwhile he is just getting like speech/language and development through school and then his other school is helping with some of his therapies too, so he's just uh...basically receiving therapeutic services right now....
- I Ok. What type of experiences do you think are important for him to have going into kindergarten?
- K Uh...Learning how to socialize in a positive manner...um...his listening skills umm...his temperament 'cause he needs not to like, get so frustrated when it comes to being asked what to do...his communication level of understanding that it is important that when he is asked to do something he needs to do it because it is only going to help him understand what the teacher is trying to communicate to him....
- I Ok. Is there anything else you think he needs to have as far as a connection, you know now after raising two other girls that have gone through kindergarten, anything you did different with him than you did with the girls?
- K I am going to have to do a lot different with him because of the fact that he struggles with his language barrier and communication because umm... he is really just now being able to just start talk and so umm... I would just like to probably work more

with him with talkin and maybe vocabulary and grammar and stuff like that so he can learn how to...like you know be...be able to formulate his words to where we can understand what he is saying and cause it is kind of foggy a lil bit and um...get rid of some of that jibber jabber and um...basically him being able to express himself effectively to where we can be able to get done what it is he needs to get done to make sure, you know, he's getting what he needs to ...to learn.

I Whose responsibility do you think that is?

K Believe the majority of it is my responsibility because he is at home more than he is at school. School, school is just like a 8-hour job, he's just temporarily there but basically, I am a 24-hour mom so around the clock, I feel like I'm the one that is mainly responsible for how he gets some of the stuff done he needs to be able to be effective in school.

I What's it like being a Head Start parent?

K: Umm... it's kind of different because um...with my two girls they were more independent and he is a little more co-dependent because of his speech issues and um...

I Head Start by having the Head Start experience maybe I need to phrase the question differently, is having the Head Start experience in what ways has that helped?

K Oh yes, it has been a tremendous help because like I said, he was mute kind of at first and he wasn't really talking and at his age, it kind of left him far behind, so him being able to ummm...him being able to um...get a head start, I believe is giving him an advance, and even him going to R, since he is not going to start kindergarten till next year, it also gives him an advance as far as the school setting so once he get to kindergarten he will already be sort of kinda prepared to learn how to be in a classroom setting with peers and everything because he's already getting like a head start on that, so I think the Head Start program is really good as far as getting kids adjusted start towards where they are going.

I Talk to me a little bit, you said he is not starting till next year, now is that your decision? How old is S?

K S is four and because of his birthday uh...being in November, it throws off the school enrollment so it's instead of him being able to being able to be a kindergartner this fall coming, he has to wait a whole additional year, which I don't too much like because I feel like it is kinda holdin him back but at the same time, I was told it would give him more time to ready for the kindergarten. That is what a teacher said to me—"Don't look at it as he's being held back, look at it as he'll be moving forward with more advancement, more skills.

I So he doesn't turn five...

K Until the 22 of November, he'll be turning 5, this year, he'll be turning five. (phone rings)...

I What stresses in your life affect (interrupted by S... "momma"...).

K What stresses in life affect my children? The fact I'm a single parent mother and basically a lot of the responsibility is on me and the fact that um...(S comes in again, K redirects him) S loves male bonding, and he does not necessarily have that in his life at this time, so I plan to reach out to some mentor programs or something to try to see if he can actually, to try to get him involved in sports 'n stuff, to just try and let him be able to have his...uh...guy thing, a boy thing, male thing or whatever and basically uh...(S comes in again turns on radio) is going on for him and some positive role models, I think that would be good for him because he likes to engage in social groups kinda and umm...basically that is all I can think of.

I Thank you Ms. K, thank you for your time.

### **Interview: BR-Brenda**

I How do you define academic success for your child? What does that look like?

BR That they will be invested in the community. When my child is older she will have a career. She will be a good citizen.

I What things promote academic success?

BR Help from the teachers, especially encourage them, how to motivate them. Make resources available to children.

I What do you think prevents academic success?

BR Lack of support from the parents. Sometimes from the teachers. There are some situations or needs that the children have that teachers or parents may not know. There are different factors that hinder their education.

I Do you believe that your family routines are important to your child's success? If so, what is an example of a family routine that you use at your house?

BR Yes, they need a rhythm. They understand what they need to do before they get to this place. That will give them success. If there is order in the home, they will have order at school. In the morning as soon as they wake up they have to go to the bathroom, brush their teeth then they go and changed, get dressed, get ready for school, eat breakfast, then they come to school and then after school, they take off their uniform, hang up their backpack and show me the papers from school. They change out of their uniforms. I ask them, "How was school?" and they are eating a snack. Then they go play outside, then they shower, then they go to church. After they go to church, they come back home, eat dinner. After dinner, they change or if



they have homework, they get it out if they don't, they go put their jammies on. Then we sing or read books—children's stories. Then they brush their teeth and they go to bed. We read books in English and Spanish. Sometimes the books are bilingual books. Or sometimes I just invent stories and include what is going on around them or at school.

I Before your child enters kindergarten, what are your concerns?

BR First, here she has an amazing teacher that likes her and does amazing teaching with her. My daughter is always happy after her school day. Going to kindergarten, my worry is will the new teacher like my child and will my daughter like the teacher. How will she be treated? How will the new environment be and how will she do in that class? I also worry, will my child understand the English and do well. I know it will be hard for her in the transition. Moving to kindergarten will be more responsibility than just playing all day in preschool. Sometimes my child does not want to work, only play.

I At this Head Start center, do you see your culture acknowledged or celebrated? In what ways if you do see it celebrated, lessons, or stories.

BR No. I do not see anything the times I have been here at school. I have seen the different types of flags hanging in the hallways. We do not talk about the different cultures that are here.

I Would you like to see your culture recognized in the classroom?

BR No. It is not important right now. First, I am not sure if it would be ok talking with the kids about differences. Not sure if they would understand because they are little. I would like to see our culture discussed and shared with the children.

I In your community, what factors do you think help or hinder your child doing well in school?

BR I think all the letters on the signs give me opportunities to explain to my kids what does that say. I have not noticed any problems in the community. I have heard about houses that may be drug dealers, but I have not seen it. Either they are really quiet about it or they may do it when the kids are not around.

I How has Head Start helped your child prepare for kindergarten?

BR Yes. Head Start has helped because they teach my child how to hold a pencil, how to cut, but also the talks the teacher has—the values that they give to the kids such as bullying or hurting someone else's feelings, pulling hair. These situations may not happen at home, they don't see those at home or the parents may not talk with them about those topics. Being at Head Start, gives parent a chance to extend what is learned at school. To have a conversation. This Head Start has helped a lot.

I How has Head Start helped you as a parent? Are trainings or home visits have those been helpful?

BR I have enjoyed parent conferences. I also have liked the different topics they teach us about as parents like a class on discipline vs. punishment. Would like to have more classes offered during the day instead of at night. I also want the kids to have more field trips. I understand the school may not have the money, but as parents maybe we could pay so they could go on field trips. I also would like more activities within the school for the kids.

**Interview: DJ-Deborah**

I Can you talk with me about how you define school success for your child—what does it look like?

DJ What I define academic success for my daughter is she has seen me going to school and I graduated last year with my A.A.S degree in Criminal Justice and I constantly told her how important it is for us to get our education. Because I never know what our future/her future is gonna look like if she does not have it. Umm ...when she was very young, I did it one-on-one with her and her brother showing her new things—the building blocks we did the counting, the ABCs, even enrolled myself in Parents As Teachers to get more resources. I just felt like I needed a little bit more, so I can be successful in my parenting to get her ready not just for big people school (that is what she calls it) because I want her to have that ability to be able to give that opportunity to her brother,

I When did you place her in school?

DJ I put her in school that was in July or August of 2013 when she was 7 months old. Then she stopped going to school I say back in 2014 between April and May 2014. That is when she started going to school from that point on she was about two. When she had the opportunity to be around teachers as a baby growing up and to be around other peers her age.

I The socialization.

DJ Yes.

I The stimulation.

DJ Her mind was just growing, just blooming because everywhere we would go blue and pink, she wasn't familiarized just yet she was only a kid but her numbers but now seeing that she is in pre-K going to pre-K since last year, the last full year, every other word she is sound out pronouncing it she correct me. She gets on me because she knows that a lot of important people in her life these are important for you to hear (her hearing aids). So every morning, "Momma, I got to get my hearing aids because these are important. I need to hear, momma.

- I She reminds you.
- DJ She reminds me. Sometimes my mornings, somewhat in a rush. I have to pace myself. If I'm like that my daughter will be like that. My son will be like that. So I have to tell him, we have to slow down. Calm down because the night before we will talk about everything, things we are going to do the next day.
- I So you really set the stage for that—prepare them.
- DJ Try to.
- I You let them see what is coming up the next day.
- DJ Yes.
- I You touched on this earlier. You talked about what promotes academic success. What do you think prevents academic success?
- DJ The parents. We are their first everything. First teachers, first learners. First motivators—everything. If the parents are not strong enough or willing enough I have so 'n so and so 'n so to look after, to make sure that they are getting the best education that their need because we are too lazy to get up in the morning we are too lazy to pay attention to join parent meetings being on a committee showing the kids you really care for them. Proving that one-on-one time. When you have multiple kids, you need to set days. I set days to where I keep my child out of school to have one-on-one time with her. We will go have mommie and daughter time. Then I will do that with her brother the next week. We will have mommie and son time. We can talk, we can laugh. I can get to know my kids. When parents know their kids, they really don't. That is why it is very important that we have that. Time to set aside our personal life, set aside our business to really focus in, zoom in on that little one, that got two eyes looking at you, cause everything we do impact their life.
- I Really learning about them, our world gets so fast. They become like an object. Little human beings and their growing and they have all eyes on you all the time.
- DJ When I speak, I do not try to pretend I am someone I am not. This is me all day every day. I tell my kids that they know that. Things I see that I do not like. We as people have got to get better, not just by color about raising our little ones. Because we took the time to have them now that they are here in the life and breathing we need to do more.
- DJ I have been here as an employee for three years connected with parents on so many levels we can talk we can cry we can be mad together.
- I What outside factors have you had to overcome? How have you dealt with outside factors of employment, relationships, social impact on you as a parent?

- DJ I try to keep my relationship with other parents on a professional level. I try not to get too personal with families may not want to open up. I tell my own story. My testimony. I let them know that if I can overcome it (I'm not saying if I did it you can do it too) I'm here to help you and we are here to help each other. That is what a community is about. Building healthy relationships with our families. Building healthy relationships with the outside families to let them know and bring in new families we are opening our hearts not just our doors but we have to open our hearts. We have room for everyone.
- I Leaving judgment at the door.
- DJ Exactly.
- I Do you feel like parents take advantage of resources that are provided here?
- DJ A lot of parents don't know, unless they hear it from word of mouth and trust it.
- DJ The school is predominately a certain race or certain culture you have to be aware of how you may come across to them because you really don't know if they know so much of the English language.
- I Is this Head Start site predominately Latino population?
- DJ Hispanic, yes.
- I Just from the parent meeting I noticed Vietnamese interpreters, Somali interpreters, and Spanish interpreters.
- DJ There are a lot of Spanish-speaking parents and families here. Predominately that culture here. The way I reach out to our parents of all cultures is to have one-on-one time with them, talk with them and give them my support for whatever. I know that I am not the main teacher or advocate or anything, just a paraprofessional. But the way I come across is easy to approach. I tell parents to reach out to their family advocates—talk to them, express your thoughts, feelings, and concerns.
- I How did you learn those tools? How did you learn to advocate? Some parents won't share or reach out. How did you learn to advocate? They may not know what to even ask their advocates.
- DJ I learned through the school district, family advocates. While I was meeting with advocates setting family goals, I was really observing them too. Because in my heart, I love kids and this is what I really wanted to do. I have always wanted to be a lawyer or an advocate or social worker. That has been my goal to help until I am blue in the face, I am going to find some other resources to meet this dream I have.
- I Do you believe your family routines are important?

DJ Yes, very important.

I You talked earlier about that describing the night before school.

DJ Yes, we always talk about what we are going to do for the next day. I try to have them in bed by 8:30. But that does not normally work. My daughter likes to talk. Her brother will go to sleep. But my daughter wants to talk. She wants to recap her day. I remind her we've recapped the day now we will focus on what will happen tomorrow. She wants to tell me about the WHOLE day. I try to keep them on balance—keep them on track. I really try to get them on track and get them their rest. I used to work really crazy hours, but the kids know the routine. Every since they have been going to school, they have a routine. We don't like to be thrown out of our routine. If I get up late, my day is going to be a late start. Rushed. I like to take my time. Especially when you have a little one. You have to do hair, dress them, teeth. Bath that takes time. She really don't want me to do hair—she wants to do it her way. That is how I was when I was her age. She takes it out when she gets to school.

DJ My daughter has gone beyond her hearing impairment.

I Do you have any concerns for her as she enters kindergarten?

DJ No. No major concerns. Just one, she thinks she's everybody's momma. She wants to be dominant in every aspect, not just her little childhood life, but of everyone's life. She will try to take over the teacher and the class. They have to draw her back in. I remind her of her age.

DJ I ask my children every so often what they want to be when they grow up. And every so often, they change their profession. I teach them good cop bad cop, good doctor, bad doctor. So they have a different feel when they go to Children's Mercy, they are looking at the roles the woman or man so they can get a feel if that is what they really want to do. My son has his career down locked—football player. I say "that's go and all, you will make a lot of money you will be very successful throwing that ball. So if anything were to happen to your leg you need something else underneath you. He didn't know what I was saying four years ago but now he knows. He told me, "Momma, you are right, anything could happen to me on the field and I do not want to be broke." I said, "you are right, I do not want you to be broke."

He said he wanted to be a construction worker. I said, "Ohh baby what is it going to be like for you as a black man to own your own construction company. He was getting so excited. We were putting ideas on paper. I said, this could be your life. I am planting that little seed I am expanding his exploration of his future. All he knows right now is football, but what if I take him out of that box and find something else that will make you happy too. I had some of this growing up. But my mom really didn't take on that mothering role. I learned this from life. Parenting comes from the heart. My love for my kids goes beyond over my head. I want them to learn respect. Boundaries. Learn a sense of comfort. Everyone needs

accountability. I preach to my son every day, he's the oldest. Your sister is looking at everything you do.

I am in their corner. No matter what. When they are wrong—they are wrong. When they are right—they are right. I believe in education. I want a solid foundation. I believe in teaching character and compassion, no cracks in the foundation. When you are young you are picking up new materials, new experiences. I won't be there every step. I have to be at work. But what I can do when I get home, we can recap, we can talk about it, we can plan together.

They help me plan meals. My son is so manly. You know men, they like their meat. That is him—he's a meat man. While my daughter, on the other hand, she is a vegetable kind of girl. Corn. That is it. I'll ask her, what are you going to eat for dinner? She will say, "Corn." "What are going to have with the corn?" she'll say, "More corn."

I teach them we are planning a meal. They help. Certain meals, I don't need help. But if I'm cooking fried chicken, corn bread, things I need to prepare the dishes for it. I have them wash the dishes. Get certain foods out. Set the table. When the food is all said and done. They are ready to eat.

I Do you sit down for meals?

DJ Oh, yeah. We try to every night. As they got older, I started reading parent books. I try 4 times per week to sit down for dinner. If I can add another day, my son will say I hit my record. He will say, "I done broke my record."

My kids notice. They will say you broke your record. They pay attention. They notice. I watch them and I want them to watch me. My son does it all the time. My daughter will give me high fives and say, "come here my little baby." I will say, I am older than you. She will say, "I don't care—you are still my baby."

She always gives me kisses. Every day. I picked the right name for her. She is so bright. We have many conversations. I tell her mommy is a mommy—not a friend.

I have to be a mom at all times. When she gets older, I will not allow her to do any and all things. I tell her I love her and we can joke around. Cause I have that space in my heart. We can joke around—we can laugh. We can talk about your hair—you can talk about my hair. We talk about clothes. We can have that. But, I have to remain a mom at all times because I don't want you drifting off like your mom did. My kids think I am ancient.

My son says I'm mean. But he made me so happy. He said, "Mom, I learned to accept your meanness. If it wasn't for you being mean, lord knows what I would be doing. I said, I'm not mean to be mean, I'm mean because I love you. I put boundaries on TV.

I notice my son's BMI health report was too high for his age. I said, Ahhh... I see the problem. We are watching TV as we eat. That means we are not doing anything when we eat.

DJ I took the TV out of where we eat. Kids said, Oh mommy we are missing our show. What did I do—I unplugged it. I'm not worried about missing a show. I'm worried about eating, talking about what happened during the day. Our talk is better when the TV is off. We can enjoy a peaceful meal. When the meal is good, I do not hear any arguing or bickering. My kids love when I compliment them. I give them kisses. I give them compliments. I go over and beyond. They are like sponges, they soak it all in. After they eat and get to play a while, I want them to go to bed. I want them to go right on to sleep. My daughter especially— "I love you bye—goodnight." I want to have momma time. She creeps up the stairs at my door. "Mommy ...junior went to sleep." Sometimes I do not even know how she gets in my bed. She is too quiet.

I How were you as a student in school?

DJ I was good. I mean—I see myself a lot in my daughter. I was very talkative, very active. I wasn't as energetic as my daughter.

I Was your mother as involved as you are in school?

DJ I say yes and no. Because she had three other kids in school as well. She always tells me she could be as involved in all four classrooms at the same time, so she did the best she could. Also, no because I felt that she should have spent that one-on-one time. We always had to do everything together. If she would have done that one-on-one time, individually, then I would be able to say she was all around that supportive. Like me, I give my children their individual one-on-one time. My son always tells me, "you don't spend that much time with me," it's always my daughter. My daughter tells him, ... "because mom works at my school....junior. She go to my school." He notices. I try to implement enough time for him.

I Do you think Head Start has helped you to prepare your child for school?

DJ Head Start helps her a lot. I would strongly recommend parent put their children in Head Start. Think about the factors of your kid not going to school and they go straight to kindergarten. They do not know anything. I'm not saying most parents are not at home with their kid 24-7 or they are really teaching them or educating them. Teaching their names and letters in their name. They need that recognition, they need that recognition of numbers. They need that recognition of being with other kids. I want my kids to have the same chance as I had. I went to preschool. They need that social piece. Going to Head Start, you are really getting a Head Start on learning. Learning colors, learning structure. Not only having structure in your home—you are having structure in the classroom setting to get that ability to say "ok," learning greetings, put your things away in your cubbie, you sign in, get your name tag, come to the carpet and wait on other friends to arrive. Kids need that. Parents do not have

that set up in their home. Routine. We have to build this solid foundation. For the thinking ability. My daughter is ready for kindergarten. The teacher says “overly ready.” Her birthday fell so late in October, she would have went to kindergarten last year.

I What do you think about that age cut-off for starting kindergarten?

DJ I think the system should be set up as soon as she turns five she could get in there. But I know that is not the way it works. With her birthday 2 months after school had started, I felt like she would have lost two months of time with her group. She would not have fallen too far behind because she is so smart and gets things boom boom boom. She grabs on to new information.

DJ I will have to really watch that in kindergarten the teacher is pushing her and not dumbing down her work if she already knows her alphabet that we are not going back and learning the letter A. I really want language, communication and cognitive skills and social skills boosted up.

I Have you selected a kindergarten? Will they address her hearing needs within the classroom?

DJ I noticed her words slurring so I have asked the school to set up speech therapy for her. If I’m having trouble understanding, I know the teacher will have trouble. I inquired about it. I want my daughter to be given everything that she can possibly have. I know she can read lips. I have to keep her out of my conversations at times. She can pick up on words. If I say a bad word, she knows it. I had to teach my children about words we can use and words that should not be used. I use these as teaching moments. Sometimes I will go hard on my children but most of the time, I want to hear their side of the story. We can’t always drill, drill, drill, we have to hear their side before we go ham, baloney, cheese. Then I say, what about a Kool-aid?”

I Laughter.

DJ I expect them at school to get their education nothing more nothing less. Respect their teacher. If I get anything less—we have an issue. My kids know. They say, “My momma was a no-nonsense momma. She will go ham, baloney and cheese.”

DJ One day when they grow up and have little ones of their own they will thank me. My grandma tells me—you will thank me when you get older. When you raise your and you don’t want them mixed in with the wrong crowd. I am glad I listened to every word my mom said.

I use what the women in my life taught me every day. My kids know, Oh lord, she’s getting ready to say it. What did my grandma say this time?” When you say things consistently all the time. They tell you before you say it.



I have a pink cutting board. The kids know when I say, “go get the pink paddle” They say, no we don’t want it. They know. I never use it but they know it’s there.

My kids know I can be the mean parent and the cool parent. I even tell them they are cool kids. I tell them they are intelligent.

I Last question, Do you believe your child is ready for kindergarten?

DJ She’s overly ready. She has shown me in many aspects of her little childhood that she can take care of herself. Its not about just knowing ABCs. It’s about following directions, being able to follow orders if your teacher asks you to do something, she is telling you what you need to do. She can follow multi step directions. She can do it.

I know she is ready because kindergarten is a step bigger than Pre-K. Readiness is to get you ready for what is going to happen in kindergarten. Social relationships she has down pat. With teachers, with her friends. Books and computers. She always asks about library. She does not have a library at her school, so I take her to the public library. She always asks are we going to the library this weekend? I try to make it every weekend. I’m on the computer—they are doing their thing in the children’s section. I trust that Central Library. I can be downstairs and they can be upstairs because they have more than two staff up there.

I What advice would you give parents?

DJ Stay involved. Be that mean parent. Give that love and support. Show gratitude. If we don’t give that here today our kids will think my mommy and daddy did not give it to me. They will look for it somewhere else. And you will not want that. Just to be actively involved in your child’s life. When my kids look at me, they see I am trying my best. Because their daddy was never there. I am the only one they see. My kids did not see two people—they see me. I had to make up for two people. Children will make you a better person.

I try to educate other parents and advocate with other parents. I tell them if you can’t do one-on-one time, set play dates. One parent to another parent can be a great support. That is how I got my support—talking to other parents through Parents As Teachers.

How do I pay my bills, my child needs new shoes and how do I do all this? Many days and nights my kids saw me crying not really knowing why I am crying feeling overwhelmed with my kids’ biological dad and dealing with my own struggles.

My kids saw me graduate with my cap and gown. I tell them, “This is going to be you.”

I I can see you are the foundation.

DJ The parent is the foundation. I can look in classrooms and pick out parents who are involved. Parents who are not. Parents who work with their kids. Parents who do not. I can tell the six-to-six parents. The parents who drop off at 6 a.m. and pick up at 6 p.m. Same diaper. Same clothes for days.

Home visits: How will we build together for your child if you do not give me nothing to go on. It is more of the parent involvement. We can't force parents. We just have to keep talking to them. Keep reaching out. Let them know this is a part of the curriculum, this is a part of the program. We have the Home visit program here. It is a program that is all about you and family. We are family. If you have any obstacles that are occurring that stop you from meeting program guidelines, reach out to your family advocate.

I Do you think race sometimes get in the way? For example a white family advocate going to meet with a African-American parent? Do you think race could play a role in the Home Visit program?

DJ Certain families. Latino-African-American. No... its more of a white on anything. Dealing with the issues of what is going on in America right now.

When I went with a teacher on a Home Visit, the parent (African-American) really wasn't prepared for us coming. It was a shock to her when we were at her door.

She did open up her home. Maybe she did it because I was there. She did let us in. Offered us breakfast. We proceeded on. I heard other cases where the parents were home and did not open the door at all. Home Visits are not about snitching you out. I want to pave the way—connecting them with resources.

It starts with trust. We don't know each parent's situation. The whole time I was at another center, we were staying at a homeless shelter. You really don't know what each household situation is like. That is where the parent involvement comes in.

#### **Interview: IV-Izette**

IV I tell my girl (the oldest one) education is very important. In El Salvador we have a saying, Pon tus baterías en (Get your batteries on) to learn the language, learn English, skills that will help you get a better job and won't have to depend on nobody.

I What do you believe helps them be successful in school? (1:56)

IV Support. What we do at home is sing songs in English—the ABC's. I tell my daughter, you have to learn English. Also motivation. I am constantly asking everybody for help. So I tell my daughter how important it is to learn English.

I Do you believe family routines are important and help with your child's success?

IV Yes. Very important.

I Can you tell us about a routine that you use at your house?

IV I have three parts of a routine at my house. When my daughter is not at school. First, I make her clean up her room. Next, I only allow her to watch one hour of TV and three, I make my daughter practice her writing. (3:49)

I suffer from frequent depression so I try to help my daughter as much as possible but struggle at times to encourage her.

Since I have only been here in the United States for one year, we have a different life. My daughter has struggled too, at first, she would not play, adjusting to the new environment. I have sent my daughter to therapy to help her adjust.

I You are right, children pick up on a lot, more than we know.

IV Even when I am feeling depressed, I try not to show that to my daughter. When she is home, I dance and play with her. But when she is gone, I go into the bathroom and cry.

Long pause.

I Before your child entered school, what were some of your concerns? (6:48)

IV I worried that the kids would make fun of her at school. I remember the first thing I asked the teacher, was to make sure they did not make fun of her because she did not know English.

IV Also, because I could not drive, I could not bring my child to school, I was afraid of putting her on the bus.

I How has Head Start helped your child prepare for kindergarten?

IV The teachers have has so much patience with my daughter. My daughter has learned so much English slowly. When she comes home she teaches me English. When my daughter talks with other children from EL Salvador, she only talks English. My daughter will say “my language now is English.”

I Do you believe your daughter is ready for kindergarten?

IV I think so.

I Why, what makes you think that?

IV She knows how to write her name, she knows most of her colors and she knows the alphabet.

I In this Head Start center, do you see your culture recognized in lessons or in the classroom at your child's school?

IV Yes. I did notice the flag for El Salvador.

I Do you have any questions for me?

IV No.

### **Head Start Parent Interview**

I How do you define early academic success for your son—what does that look like?

EC I really do not know as far as the question goes.

I How do you know your child is being successful at school?

EC When he comes home from school, what he talk about that he is learning in the day, with my kid, he's a little on the rough side. I do not want to call him bad but he so mischievous. The school does well with him as far as academics.

I Thank you. Remember—there are no wrong answers, so don't be nervous.

EC Let me tell you a little about him, sorry. He is so bad, I felt like he was behind. He is four years old and will be five soon and will go to kindergarten. He was so behind, he could not write his name, could not say his ABCs up until last month. It took him a long time to know the colors and the shapes. So once, I actually sat down with him as much as possible and I had the teachers work with him. I knew they could not do one-on-one, but I made sure that they tackle those points with him. Basically it is his concentration we were really trying to get him to focus. In order to succeed, he has to put in time, he is not motivated. He is not concentrating. He is one of those kids—right now—doesn't want to learn. He wants to play. The teachers told me it was a maturity issue and he will grow out of it. I'm like ok—I hope that he does.

At home and at school, he does not care. His birthday is in July. So he will be five before he goes into kindergarten. I have another son already in kindergarten and he is making great progress. He has always been ahead—learned his ABCs and numbers before he went to kindergarten. Before he came out of preschool, he learned to write his first year of preschool. Also watching my second child, I know you can't compare the two. I do the age thing. I think, he's five and he should know certain things.

I do not want to drop the ball. I feel like it starts at home. I feel like it is a reflection of me if he is not ready. I really do not have the time to sit down with him one-on-one, as much as I would like to and I feel like I leave it on the teachers to put him where he is at.

I That is hard.

EC It is. It is hard to balance everything. I have another child—he is already taken off and now I have this other child, that I feel like is already behind. It is like where do I balance the two. The things I am sitting down with my older son to work on, I really can't do with my younger son. He still wants to play. My older son is willing to learn. I don't want to drop the ball on him either. I feel like he knows a lot but there is so much more to learn. While I'm working on my younger son.

I want him to succeed academically. I try to help him as much as I can when I have the time. We don't even listen to music in the car anymore. Because I am spending that time on the road, like "Let's sing the nursery songs, or the ABCs." That is what I had to do for him to finally get it. I said, "No music-ABCs, I don't care how long we are driving, we are going to do something educational because we need to use this time."

I am starting to see progress from the first year into preschool. But now I am concerned because time is coming to move to kindergarten and I don't want him left behind. In kindergarten the teacher will have so many more children to work with, she might can't focus on you and I don't want you to just go into first grade and you don't even know what you are supposed to have in kindergarten.

I Do you think your son picks up on what you are stressing about?

EC Yes. I say this to him all the time. But right now in his mind, he does not care. He is not motivated by my rants. He just doesn't care. But he has come so far, now, I'm like of school is almost out.

I Where does the teacher see him in comparison to the rest of the class? Does she have concerns?

EC No one has concerns and not sure if it is fair. Do you know about the classrooms—they are mixed with three-year-olds and four-year-olds, five-year-olds. Kids that are just now coming to preschool. So where he stands is, Teacher is like, well, he knows more than...Or he has more common sense. I'm like ok; of course you are going to say that, he is in here with the three-year-olds. Comparing him with kids in their first year. Maybe they are not going to kindergarten. So I need him, I need to know where he stands in a kindergarten class with those going to kindergarten. The teacher feels like he will adapt, basically. Right now, the teacher feels that he is in the classroom with multi-age kids that he is just showing out—laughing, his behavior. The teacher thinks when he gets with the other kids, they will be more mature and he is gonna eventually adapt and want to follow their lead. I'm like, I really don't want him to follow. I want him to be the lead. To be his own person. A lot of it has to do with, I just try, really I do.

I Have you started looking for schools already?

EC No, my oldest goes to Little School, but I am not thinking they are going to go there next year due to our living arrangements. I was actually going to look at Another School. I heard on the radio they have an elementary. I have known that Another School has been a good school to attend, so can't really say anything about the behavior. I have heard their graduation rate is good.

I Thinking about your son, what factors do you think promote academic success? What things help him be strong academically?

EC If I could get him to concentrate. Time management for me. So he could benefit from me helping him. Memorizing, but not really memorizing, I want him to get what he is doing. I want to see that light bulb come on.

I What factors prevent academic success?

EC Not being able to pay attention. I was just going to say, stress. That is not for him. It is still for me. I feel like I play a big part on his education. I do feel like I dropped the ball as far as he has never had to really sit down and learn, sit down and engage in any structured activities. He has always had free play, free play. Even going into his first year at preschool, the teacher fell in love with him and really did not push him towards kindergarten readiness. School was more like play and doing the things he wants to do. It is like now, I'm trying to pull him back, and stress learning is imperative. He looked at me the other day and said, "What is that word?" I told him, "Education is the key." I tell him that every morning.

So many factors can play a part. My five-year-old comes home talking about showing perseverance. I said, "What?" "What is that word even doing coming out of your mouth? You are five. He comes home talking about nouns and verbs. I love it. But in kindergarten? Adjectives? Or do you really understand what that is? He comes talking about the first president and second president. And perseverance. How are you putting all this...you are five.

I Talk about family routines?

EC Right now our routine is so chaotic. I can't stress that enough. I am in school, I have a job and I'm raising my kids. I work from 8:30 a.m. until I go to class at 4 p.m. If I don't go to class, I work until 8 o'clock at night.

I go to class from 5-6:30 p.m., then I'm going back to work to finish a shift or I am going home. With two children, they are at two different schools right now. I have Head Start and elementary. My routine messes them up too because I'm not there. If I'm handing my children over to you, I can tell you what I want them to do. Like this is spring break, so I went to Dollar Tree and bought little workbooks because I want them to do that over spring break instead of just having play. I want them to take a break out of their day to work on something. I can take the workbooks over, but who is to say the childcare will actually sit down with them and do it or teach them a little bit out of the book, which is what I want. Or read books to them. I can't get no one

else to step up. If everyone in my life was on the same level, it would help my goals I am trying to accomplish with them. I'm trying to carrying everything by myself.

Another routine that affects my kids, is one has homework and my Head Start son does not. So if I am coming home at 8 p.m., I can't force my childcare to do his homework with him. Even though you would think they would do it with them. By the time I come home, if they have homework, I'm trying to get them in bed by 9 p.m. The structure is off. I have to check in with them and I still have two papers to write for school for my classes.

I Before your son goes to kindergarten, what concerns do you have?

EC My main concern is behavior. I really hope he does mature more than what he is doing now. I can tell you, I get a call every day about his behavior. His main thing is not taking a nap. Around 1 o'clock, I get a call about not a taking a nap. He refuses to take a nap. It is something about when the teachers switch and go on their breaks; he will not take authority from other staff.

I will need to talk to his new kindergarten teacher. I hope he grows out of it before he gets there.

When I look at my older son's teacher, I think she is too hard for him, but I think she would be perfect for my 4-year-old.

I do not want him to be left behind. I have been holding meetings with the Head Start center to try and get him extra help, I really was concerned. I have been looking for ways, for resources, ideas, solutions as far as what I could do with him, because I really felt he was behind.

The teacher really did not see anything wrong with him. He gets it and all that. I felt like teachers said he gets it but he is in a classroom with multiage children. Of course he will know more than what a three-year-old knows. I was really worried. My son has progressed. He has made real progress. The only thing is still his behavior.

He writes his name and holds pencil correctly. It is still sloppy but he will get it. We still need to work on last name. It is so long, I know it will be a challenge but we have all summer to try to help him.

Kindergarten, at least the first few months, you should be helping a child learn how to write their first and last name. The teacher should be there helping them form letters. It is a job for teachers to focus on. They need to know numbers and colors. By winter break a kindergartner should know these things. I really don't know what they are teaching in kindergarten, but if my son is coming home talking about nouns and adjectives and perseverance.

My mother held high expectations for us but she was not involved. She was working. As a mother, I have been the complete opposite. A parent's engagement in a child's

learning is very important. I want to know what is going on. A teacher can call me and tell me my younger son is acting up and I know, I've been there. But if you were to call me and say my oldest son was acting up, I would have to second-guess. If it is true, I am going to go to him and figure out why. When I was in school, I know this was something I needed to complete. Not even for my mother, but more for me. I just did a paper at school on poverty and that was so big for me. My own mother was not engaged, not in school or any of my activities. She didn't care if we signed up for sports or none of that, but at the same time she was busy too. Trying to make it. I never blamed her, I just always wanted to be different, the opposite. Do better for my own kids.

I Are there any neighborhood factors that promote school readiness?

EC I can't find anything now. That is something I have talked with my family advocate about. I have always told her I wanted to do something like volunteering. I'm from this area and I can honestly say I do not see or hear about anything going on to get the children involved. I don't see it. There is nothing. If there was more to do.

Are we dropping the ball? Being from this area, I feel like I can say I am engaged as much as I can. Even at the Head Start site there is not much engagement. I'm not sure if it is because it is too diverse? My main advice for the Head Start center, they do put out papers and things where they try to provide the resources but it is singled out to the Hispanics or Somalians. I have never attended a parent meeting simply because what are you going to tell me to help my child. I speak English. I see it as kind of a barrier.

It goes back to my preschool son, of course you are going to say he is progressing compared to the other children because not only is his class multiage but it is a diverse classroom. So you have Somalian kids, Mexican kids in here, non-English speakers. There is a boy in my son's class that is lost everyday. His mother is holding him back from going to kindergarten. How can we all really get on the same level? If the parent does not speak English, how do we get the kids ready?

I'm not sure if parents will be involved. Schools can throw community events, but who is going to say the community will come out? At parent conferences, not that many parents came. It was held over two days, not that many parents came. I think the classrooms should be set up by age group. 3s and 4s and 5s. Or put them where they are ready.

I Has Head Start helped prepare your child for school?

EC Yes, they have helped but only because I have helped myself. I get up there to the school. I am a big part of the school. I am there all the time volunteering when I can. I know what is going on. I feel like we have worked together.



Head Start welcomes my involvement. My family advocate meets with me every few months and we discuss goals. The involvement is encouraged. No one knows your kids better than you. I have a close relationship with all staff.

I Do you think your son is ready for kindergarten?

EC Now, I do. I think he is ready to go on to kindergarten. He has everything in order, except the behavior. It might just be maturity. It just I'm scared, I do not want a child that is not disciplined. It makes it look like it's coming from the parent. My son wants to do what he wants to do. I just started panicking that I had a child going to kindergarten who did not know his ABCs. The teacher would tell me, we sing the alphabet every day. I'm like, it is just him.

## APPENDIX F

### IRB STUDY APPROVAL

**From:** umkcirb@umkc.edu  
**Sent Date:** Wednesday, December 07, 2016 13:04:33 PM  
**To:** nck836@mail.umkc.edu  
**Cc:** turnercd@umkc.edu  
**Bcc:**  
**Subject:** IRB Protocol Approved: 16-522, NICOLE KING

**Message:**

The UMKC IRB has approved the protocol with the following details. This is not the official approval document. To identify the specifics of this approval download the official approval letter, under event history, from the eProtocol system.

Protocol ID: 16-522

Principal Investigator: Ms. KING

Protocol Title: REFRAMING SCHOOL READINESS: CASE STUDIES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND LATINO HEAD START PARENTS

Review Type: Panel Manager Review

Department: School of Education

Approval Date: 12/07/2016

The formal approval letter and stamped consent forms, if applicable, can be found by accessing the protocol in the eProtocol system. Please contact the Research Compliance Office (email: umkcirb@umkc.edu; phone: (816)235-5927) if you have questions or require further information.

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## VITA

Nicole King was born in Kansas City, Missouri, and attended elementary and high school in Shawnee Mission, Kansas. She received her Bachelor's degree from Avila University, where she majored in elementary education. She received her Master's degree in Urban Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1999 and her Education Specialist in Urban Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2000. Nicole started her career teaching second, third, and fifth grades before moving to the position of Assistant Principal. Then, Nicole served as a Principal in the Kansas City, Missouri School District for three years. Next, she was offered a position as Principal at Scuola Vita Nuova Charter School, where she worked to create a democratic school culture, effective instructional practices, and inclusive classrooms for all staff and students. She then accepted a position at Operation Breakthrough, serving as the Director of Early Learning, where she had the opportunity to work on the implementation of Project Construct curriculum and to increase the readiness skills among preschool students as they transitioned to kindergarten. She has served as a charter school proposal writer and is currently working to establish a PK-8 charter school in Kansas City, Missouri.