

HOW DO MOTHERS IN CRISIS HELP THEIR CHILDREN ACQUIRE EARLY
LITERACY SKILLS?

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband who has had to take on a dual-parent role while I pursued this arduous quest.

To my children who have been patient, supportive, and understanding.

And to my parents—my dad for whom good enough was never good enough, who instilled a sense of self-efficacy within me, and to my first literacy teacher, my mom—who prepared me to read and write before I entered school and who created my lifelong love for reading.

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ABSTRACT

HOW DO MOTHERS IN CRISIS HELP THEIR CHILDREN ACQUIRE EARLY LITERACY SKILLS?

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This dissertation was conducted using an instrumental case study design to determine the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis that help their children acquire early literacy skills. A 14-question open-ended interview protocol was used to ask three mothers living in a transitional homeless shelter in the mid-Atlantic region to recall what they did to help their children who were exhibiting early literacy skills prior to kindergarten. The mothers were recommended by the shelter child service coordinator and the children's tutor. Analysis was conducted using open, axial, and selective coding. Common themes emerged indicating that mothers in crisis share similar habits and characteristics to help them overcome the obstacles that are often believed to prevent parents in crisis from being available to prepare their children for school and be on an even learning plane with their peers.

Research indicates that parent involvement in education promotes high achievement in school among children (Bempechat, 1992; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 1992). Research also shows that early intervention, including that which takes place before children are of school age, helps prepare children to acquire literacy skills (Bennett, Weigel, & Martin, 2002; Dickinson & DeTemple, 1998; Dodici, Draper, & Peterson, 2003). Data suggest that children who live in stable, traditional, middle, and upper income families are more likely to be prepared to learn to read than students living in unstable and crisis situations. Despite this, there is evidence that children living through crisis situations, including young children who have had no prior formal education, develop strong literacy skills. It seems likely they would learn these skills from their mothers, as single mothers are typically the primary caregivers among families in crisis (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2008). According to this report, 71% of these families headed by mothers became homeless by living under extreme levels of poverty. The report also shows that many family shelters only accept women and children; therefore, mothers are often the sole parent taking care of a child. The purpose of this study was to find out what mothers do to help their children develop early literacy skills and empower them by making them aware of their role in this process.

Keywords: habit, characteristic, early literacy, crisis, capital, deficit theory, empowerment, mainstream, marginalization

CHAPTER 1

The role of parents in their children's education is an issue that has been in the forefront of educational research for over a century. A preponderance of research indicates that children in stable environments tend to be more successful than children who face crises due to poverty (Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002; Tunmer, Chapman, & Pronchow, 2006). Although this might be true, I have seen examples that defy this research. In my work as a teacher and a tutor at a transitional housing facility and a homeless shelter, I have encountered children of diverse backgrounds and abilities. Despite the critical circumstances that the children in these situations experienced, I have seen children who were able to excel in school. Some children had early literacy skills and were able to identify the letters of the alphabet, recognize sounds and words, and understand the concept of how the text tells a story. Because many of these children were not consistently enrolled in any preschool programs to help them learn these skills and the majority of them lived with their mothers, I began to think that the children's success was based on something that their mothers were doing to help them acquire these early skills. I started to explore this concept by examining the research to learn more about a mother's role in helping her child acquire early literacy skills, particularly those living in crisis situations. Finding little research, I decided it was important to find out what mothers, even those living in the most critical circumstances,

do to help their children acquire literacy. By examining what mothers do and by learning from their actions, educators can help mothers become aware of the important role they play in their children's language and literacy development. Doing so may help them feel empowered to advocate for their children. This is the focus of this investigation.

Historical Background

As early as 1908, Edmund Huey examined the importance of a parent's role in a child's literacy acquisition from the earliest stages of development. Different aspects of the parent-child literacy interaction continued to be examined throughout the subsequent years. The correlation of storybook reading and its effect on school literacy has been the subject of many studies (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pelligrini, 1995; Heath, 1982; Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). The effects of other parent-child interactions, such as engagement during play activities, giving positive feedback during various child initiated activities, and teaching children early reading and writing skills, have been examined as well (Rush, 1999; Senechal et al., 1998). The results of these studies show that children whose parents engaged in such activities achieved a higher level of success in acquiring literacy skills than those whose parent did not engage in such activities. Findings such as these prompted the initiation of family literacy intervention programs.

The impact of the unique literacies within families on preschool literacy learning has also been studied (Mui & Anderson, 2008). Research indicates that different literacies within low-income families can make a positive contribution in a child's literacy development (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Hammer, Rodriguez, Lawrence, & Miccio, 2007). These studies examined the various forms of literacy used within

everyday household occurrences, such as reading the television guide, reading directions for board games, and reading the newspaper and advertisements. Results of such studies indicate that engagement in practical forms of literacy can help children develop strong emergent literacy skills.

In the 1990s, researchers began to consider the impact of a family's unique expertise and skills on literacy learning. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez's (1992) funds of knowledge theory took into account that the particular forms of literacy that a family possesses are a valuable resource. For example, a mother who is a seamstress can teach her child how to measure fabrics. Likewise, a father who is a shop owner can teach his child math concepts, such as the quantity of the number of items sold and percentages when giving discounts. By recognizing the specific forms of expertise in each family, connections can be made between the curriculum and home literacy to make learning relevant and increase the likelihood for children to achieve academic success (Valdes, 1996).

Recent studies (Mui & Anderson, 2008; Quintos & Civil 2007; Yosso, 2005) examined the critical impact of family culture on a child's ability to make meaningful connections to school curriculum. In each of these studies, the relationship between the school and the family was strengthened because the school personnel recognized the value of the families' cultures, gave the parents a voice in their child's education, and incorporated their input into the curriculum making learning culturally relevant for the students. In these studies, the parents developed a sense of empowerment in their child's education. If parents believe they can make a difference in their children's education by

using their voice to work in partnership with their schools, a perception of empowerment can be created to encourage them to become strong advocates for their children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000).

Another aspect of parental involvement that has been examined over the last few decades is the misconception that parents who are in marginalized groups are not involved nor care to be involved in their child's education (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Parents of color and parents with low income fall into these groups. Researchers such as Delgado-Gaitan (1991, 1992) examined this issue through extensive ethnographic studies. She identified the cultural conflict that prevents parents from becoming involved in the capacity that is expected by school systems. More recently, Comber and Kamler (2004) examined teacher perceptions of the low-income students and how they re-structured their pedagogy to dispel their deficit thinking. Shared teacher interviews, reflections, and family home visits dispelled their deficit thinking.

When the nature of parental involvement changed, parents in underrepresented groups felt empowered. Parents felt empowered when they had confidence to take a stand and give input in their child's education. Parents who feel empowered might be able to change educators' perceptions of the value of what they can offer (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Swick & Williams, 2010). The initial negative perceptions that prevented schools from creating a welcoming environment to parents who were not considered to be in the mainstream created a barrier that inhibited what is considered to be an adequate level of involvement (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Olivos, 2006; Ramirez, 2003). The results of these

studies indicate it might be beneficial for other school systems to reach out to parents to break down those barriers.

In any event, it is apparent that the role parents play, in any capacity, has a powerful effect on a child's literacy learning. The nationwide effort to encourage parents to become active participants in their child's education emphasizes that this issue is not merely a want, but a critical need. In order for children to be successful in school, they need to have parents who are involved in their education (Bempechat, 1992; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Doan Holbein, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). If parents believe their interactions with their children have merit, then they might make more of an effort to help their children develop literacy skills from the earliest stages of development (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). Parents who feel empowered by the school system are more likely to be strong advocates for their children (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

My role as the researcher in this study is based on my experience as an educator, with the majority of those years spent as a reading specialist. I have had the opportunity to work in schools that are multi-ethnic and economically diverse. Empirical data presented at school- and district-level meetings often indicate that White middle- or upper-income students perform better than children of color and children who receive free or reduced-fee lunch. I have also been an instructional coach at a women's transitional shelter and a homeless shelter for seven years. I have seen that students living in crisis situations, including homelessness, can and do achieve. The extensive research I have read and the preliminary research I conducted through my pilot study

(described in Chapter 3) suggest that children are able to overcome obstacles, such as homelessness, poverty, or unstable living environments, and still be academically on par with their mainstream counterparts who live in stable environments. While this success may be accounted for by resiliency, which is the ability to overcome obstacles and perform to the best of one's ability (Rak & Patterson, 1996), an alternate explanation might account for this: Success might be linked to the early literary and language experiences that children are exposed to in their home environments. For the current study, I examined children's early experiences with their mothers and the climate their mothers provided for them that led to their apparent acquisition of early literacy skills.

Families of children who are not in the mainstream population are often viewed as not having the capital needed to make a valuable contribution in their child's education. This perception, often referred to as the *deficit theory*, perpetuates patterns that inhibit home-school relationships (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Olivos, 2006). Deficit theory is the view that underachievement and social problems are created by the people who are affected. According to Olivos (2006), this theory is based on thinking there is a disadvantaged group, that members of these groups have caused their own disadvantage, that their culture is most likely what caused their disadvantage, and that they must have characteristics within that culture to have caused the deficit. This negative view is often cast over families who fall into the aforementioned marginalized groups. Olivos categorizes these deficits into three categories: biological, structural or environmental, and cultural. He argues that belief in structural or environmental deficit theories create more government intervention, thus perpetuating the notion of neediness.

Unfortunately, this negative perception is perpetuated in educational institutions. Data indicate that test scores are lower among students from low income backgrounds, students of color, and students whose first language is not English. Often, funding for gifted programs is not as prevalent in schools in economically challenged areas as it is in middle- and upper-income areas (Burney & Beilke, 2008; Morales, 2010). There is often the belief that parents with limited financial resources also have limited knowledge resources; therefore, they would not be able to help their children further their learning. This thinking creates barriers between the schools and parents and prevents parents from taking the role that schools expect them to take in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 1992; Morris & Butt, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). In their literature review, Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) described the concept of "othering." This theory, which was prevalent in many of the studies they examined, explains teachers' widely held perceptions that parents' knowledge is inadequate, that it supplements rather than complements teaching, and that it is not important (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008).

Research has indicated that parents involved in their children's education help promote higher achievement. It is also evident that early intervention, including that which takes place before children are of school age, helps prepare children to be ready to acquire literacy skills (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Tunmer et al., 2006). Research suggests that children who live in stable, traditional, middle- and upper-income families are more likely to be prepared to learn to read than students living in unstable and crisis situations. Deplorable living conditions, possessing little or no income, and exposure to

abuse or addiction can be a deterrent in a child's early learning process (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Research Questions

The children I have taught and tutored are from diverse backgrounds. Although some of the children live under critical circumstances, I noticed that some had strong, early literacy skills. They were able to identify the letters of the alphabet and sounds, recognize at least basic sight words, and understand how book text tells a story.

Some of these children have had no formal preschool education to help them learn these skills, and the majority of them lived with their mothers. This led me to wonder if their success was based on something their mothers were doing to help them acquire these early skills. I started to look for research on a mother's role in helping her child acquire early literacy skills, particularly those living in crisis. However, I found little research on this concept. This prompted me to find out what mothers living in the most critical circumstances do to help their children acquire literacy. I thought that the mothers might have particular habits or characteristics that help them overcome the obstacles of living in crisis to teach their children early literacy. Some students I tutor at the shelter have mothers who take a keen interest in their learning. They apprise me of their children's overall work habits and abilities and inform me about their child's homework and assignments. I thought this interest in their child's learning might have started before they entered school and might explain why some children whose mothers are living in crisis obtain early literacy.

Some mothers at the shelter also keep me informed about communication they have with their child's teachers. For example, some mothers have told me about changes they had to make in the way their child's special education services were being delivered. Other mothers have tried to make arrangements to keep their children in the same school they were in before becoming homeless because they believed it would be in the best interests of their children. In some situations, mothers have voiced their concerns about what they believed to be school-related problems for their children. They were seeking advice to take the best approach to getting the problems resolved. Despite the obstacle of homelessness, many mothers tap into their social and cultural capital, the resources they have to advocate for their children to get them what they believe they need to be successful.

My intent in interviewing mothers to find out what they do is to help them become aware of their critical role in their child's literacy acquisition to help them feel empowered to advocate for their children. I thought it would be interesting to find out if there were specific habits or characteristics mothers have to lead their children to early literacy acquisition. I also wanted to find out how mothers use capital to advocate for their children.

This is the focus of this investigation. My research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the habits and characteristics of mothers who are living in crisis that help their children develop early literacy skills?
- 2) How do mothers-in crisis use capital to advocate for their children?

Significance of the Problem

The implementation of policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) mandates that all students meet minimal standards measured through high-stakes testing. Schools are held accountable to ensure that all students, regardless of their prior experiences, ability, and familial support, are expected to meet or exceed state standards. Children who have had ample educational experiences before entering kindergarten often have the tools necessary to prepare them to achieve in school.

On the other hand, children who have lived under circumstances that could prevent them from being prepared to learn may not be able to make what is considered to be adequate progress (Snow et al., 1998). This places a heavy burden on the schools. In order to offset this problem, early education programs such as Even Start, Head Start, and Early Start have been implemented. These programs were formed in collaboration with the federal government to provide guidance and support to families to promote and ensure the health and well-being of children who might not otherwise have access to proper healthcare and early education services (Mantzicopoulos, 1997). Another feature of these programs is that they build family partnerships to emphasize the need for families to play an active role in contributing to the health and well-being of their children as well as their education. Even Start, Early Start, and Head Start aim to provide opportunities for children from low-income families to receive early childhood education. They also offer parenting and adult education, and parent and child joint learning experiences. Such programs service children ranging from birth through elementary school age.

While these programs often accomplish their mission, to enable all children to be on the same educational plane and be ready to learn upon entering elementary school, children who have support at home in addition to attending these programs enjoy a higher level of success than those who do not (Bailey, 2006; Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004; Mantzicopoulos, 1997; Rush, 1999). In fact, there is evidence that children living through crisis situations, including young children who have had no prior formal education, develop strong academic skills. It seems as though they would learn these skills from their predominant caretakers, (i.e., their mothers) because many children who live in these crisis situations live in one-parent households headed by their mothers. According to the 2003 U.S. census report, *America's Families and Living Arrangements* (Fields, 2003), there were 1,014,300 households headed by single mothers: 47,100 were White, 487,000 were non-Hispanic, 312,400 were Black and 180,700 were Hispanic. This is in contrast to a total of 226,000 homes headed by single fathers of all ethnicities. Data prepared in 2008 by The National Center on Family Homelessness indicate that 84% of homeless families are headed by females. The factors provided in the report were as follows: The majority of single-parent families are headed by females and many family shelters do not accept men and thus, families become separated. These statistics about single-parent homes emphasize the critical role that parents play in their child's development.

While mothers may be aware of what they do to promote strong literacy skills in their children, it is often assumed by the public—including the schools and the community—that mothers in crisis have a minimal role in their child's literacy

development (Smit & Liebenberg, 2003). The preconceived notions of what mothers in crisis can do to teach their children often create a mindset that their input is not valuable (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005). This mindset prevents the mothers from feeling welcome in the schools, thus preventing them from becoming strong advocates in their child's education (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; Swick, 2008; Swick & Williams, 2010).

My intent in this study was to find out the habits and characteristics of mothers living in crisis situations that help their children develop strong literacy skills. I wanted to examine the lived experiences of mothers who have endured homelessness at some time in their child's early development and have helped their children develop literacy skills. I chose mothers in crisis as a focus for this study because I was tutoring in a transitional shelter for women and I was privy to the mothers' interactions with their children. Having examined the aforementioned data that indicate that the majority of households led by single parents are headed by mothers, I believed it would be a valuable contribution to research to determine the specific role mothers play in helping their children acquire early literacy. Because the mothers at the transitional housing shelter had all experienced some form of crisis, I wanted to explore the phenomenon of mothers in crisis who appear to help their children acquire early literacy. In order to eradicate this negative ideology (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005), it is critical that mothers who beat the odds and help their children develop literacy skills not only become aware of what they do, but are also recognized by those who play a role in their education. To accomplish this task, it is necessary to find out what mothers do specifically to help their children to develop literacy skills.

Furthermore, by helping mothers become aware of the merit of their role in helping their children learn to read, it is my hope that mothers will become empowered to advocate for their children in school. The findings can be used to inform the research community, education practitioners, community advocates, and other educational stakeholders, such as policy makers and curriculum planners, to change the current ways of thinking so that a mother's intervention can be considered as an essential component in the successful education of their children.

The critical issue addresses the need for a thorough examination to find out specifically what mothers do to help their children learn to read. By facilitating mothers' awareness of what they do can help their children and in understanding the strength of their role, they may be encouraged to become advocates on their child's behalf and seek the resources available to them. Helping the mothers find their voice will enable them to make connections with involved personnel at their children's schools and make them aware of their essential role (Dickinson & DeTemple, 1998).

Definition of Terms

The terms in this study as defined in this manner will be considered as data are collected and analyzed. They are the foundations of the research questions and will be used to determine whether this research can help the investigator achieve the goal of answering these questions. Definitions without citations were developed by the researcher.

For the purpose of this study, a *habit* is defined as a behavior that is performed repeatedly and intuitively. For instance, if a mother habitually asks her child what she or

he thinks might happen in a story by looking at the cover of a book, this act would be considered a habit because it is spontaneous. Another example of a habit might be that a mother routinely asks her child what she or he thinks a term means in a given context. A mother might also spontaneously tell a child to sound a word out when a child is unable to recognize the word by sight.

A *characteristic* is a feature that is recognizable by others. Some examples of characteristics would be if a mother is an avid reader, is highly motivated, or sets high standards for her children. Another example of a characteristic would be the mother's involvement with the child's school and teacher.

Early literacy is the ability of children at the earliest stages of development to recognize letters and sounds and to understand that print relays a message. It is the ability to incorporate this knowledge with developing language skills that lead to understanding the print message. It is also the ability to use strategies to be able to figure out how to read new text such as using prior experiences, using pictures, using context, phonemic awareness, and use of phonics.

Capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Carter, 2005; Olivos, 2006) is the economic, cultural, and social resources that families have to help them navigate their way through their day-to-day lived experiences.

A *crisis* is defined as a situation that would challenge one's day-to-day lived experiences and could impact the daily routine. The home environment might be in turmoil due to loss of job, homelessness, and abuse of any kind (e.g., physical or verbal abuse) that might be toward adults or children. The child might be exposed to volatile

relationships between family members. Children might also be exposed to substance abuse.

Deficit theory (Olivos, 2006) is the belief that marginalized groups cannot achieve to the level of the mainstream population due to the constraints of their culture, race, or low economic status.

Empowerment is the act of people using their voices to take on an advocacy role.

Mainstream is what is considered to be the norm by society's standards, free from crisis and financial instability.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 is comprised of the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature and research relative to the problem under investigation. Chapter 3 contains the methodology and procedures that were used to gather data for this study. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the results and findings of the study. Chapter 5 has a summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the study, a discussion, limitations of the study, implications for future studies, and personal reflections.

CHAPTER 2

The interaction between parents and their children from the earliest stages of development can help children achieve school success. A plethora of studies indicate that students are more likely to achieve in school if they come from language and literacy-rich environments (Dodici et al., 2003; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). In the landmark executive summary, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow et al., 1998), the impact of various factors, including home environment, family literacy, opportunities for language development, and socioeconomic status (SES) on a child's success in school, was examined. While no one factor makes a strong negative impact on literacy success, a combination of factors can make it more difficult for students in situations that are less than ideal to perform as well as their peers who have been exposed to an abundance of language and literacy opportunities. The importance of the specific role that parents play in their child's literacy development is often debated as well (Bennett et al., 2002). In this section, a review of the unique forms of parental involvement and their impact on early literacy acquisition is examined.

This chapter presents the literature that supports the conceptual framework of the study. The research gives an overview of the various ways that parents support their child's literacy. Attention is given to unique literacies in marginalized populations. The chapter begins with a description of the procedure I used to conduct my literature search,

followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework of the study. The next section examines research that discusses the importance of a parent's role in school and literacy in the student's home environment. The subsequent sections focus on literacy approaches in low-income homes, family culture, and storybook reading and writing. The next section examines the literature on ways in which parents promote achievement. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the rationale for conducting the study.

Literature Search Procedure

I conducted a literature search based on my research questions and the conceptual framework of the study. I sought literature related to the following categories: (a) social and cultural capital, (b) deficit theory, (c) funds of knowledge, and (d) parent and teacher perceptions of school involvement. Categories directly related to reading and education included (a) storybook reading and language interaction, (b) literacy in low SES homes, (c) self-efficacy, motivating, and challenging children, and (d) parental involvement in education. I used the ProQuest and JSTOR databases as well as the Google Scholar search engine to conduct my searches. The majority of the journals that had literature related to my study were in the field of education; however, some of the literature I used was published in other branches of social sciences, such as nursing and psychology. Keywords I used to conduct my initial search included *mothers as first literacy teachers*, *funds of knowledge*, *cultural capital*, *homeless mothers teaching early literacy*, *deficit theory*, *effect of early storybook reading achievement*, *teacher perceptions of marginalized parents*, *parent perceptions of teachers/ school environment*, *role of parental involvement*, *challenging and motivating students*, and *self-efficacy*. I conducted

a final search to include current literature and literature based on new themes that emerged from the current study. They are as follows: (a) religion as a form of literacy, (b) parents' academic challenges in school, and (c) use of technology to teach literacy in the home.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the current study is built upon the premise that regardless of SES all people are able to tap into their capital to obtain what they perceive they need to be successful. Capital is the fund of resources, including monetary sources, cultural awareness and attitudes, goods, and academic certifications people use to help them navigate through society and make connections to network with others in their everyday lives (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). According to Bourdieu (1986), people who work in educational institutions have preconceived notions about children based on their SES. While middle- and upper-class children enter school with cultural and social capital recognized by the dominant society, he argues that children of low SES must earn these competencies. He believes there is already bias against these children when they enter school, thus preventing them from attaining the same level of academic achievement as children in higher SES groups. Likewise, contrary to claims that align with deficit theories—that that people who are marginalized, people with low-incomes, homeless people, people in crisis, people of color, and people whose first language is not English, may not be able to attain what people who do not face these obstacles can achieve (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Olivos, 2006)—there is evidence that they can and do use their capital to achieve success, not only for themselves, but for their

children (Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). People can use their capital to find empowerment (Cooper, 2007) and to take a stance to advocate for their children (McClain, 2010). In other words, people who are considered to be members of marginalized groups can find a source of empowerment by using their capital to advocate for what they believe their children need to be successful. By using their capital, people in marginalized groups can help dispel the notions associated with the cultural deficit theory that attributes the underperformance of particular cultural groups to characteristics such as low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and lack of discipline (Olivos 2006; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). This theory is most closely related to the manner in which society attempts to explain how children of families in marginalized groups perform less well than their mainstream peers. For this reason, it is imperative that the current study build upon the pool of research that posits that, regardless of SES, all people have the potential to succeed. Below are various capital theories. Each perspective presents a unique definition of capital, explains the possible impact of a family's SES on a child's achievement in school, and chances for advancement. Following capital theories, studies regarding the impact of capital are provided.

Capital Theories

There is a common thread running through many discussions about what influences school personnel's perception of parents as likely catalysts for their children's success in school. Various texts relating to the role that parents play in the education of diverse learners have discussed how economic, cultural, and social capital determine the place that parents have in the school system and the way in which they are perceived

(Carter, 2005; Olivos, 2006; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). Multiple theories attempt to explain the effect of SES on school performance and its relationship to the capital families possess. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) describe this relationship to explain the prevalence of inequalities in the school system based on the negative perceptions that school personnel hold of children who do not come from what they have described as the elite culture. Bourdieu (1986) argues that though children from all classes can obtain academic success depending on the social and cultural capital invested by the family, school personnel believe that children from low SES families would be at a disadvantage because, like their parents, they lack the capital they need to achieve academic success.

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986) argues that economic, cultural, and social capitals are interrelated; however, economic capital is dominant because all other forms of capital depend on it in some way. He states that economic capital can be converted into money and can be institutionalized into the form of property. Bourdieu maintains that cultural capital exists in three forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state. In the embodied state, defined as the act of self-improvement, cultural capital is acquired in one's mind and body and takes time to be cultivated. The acquisition of capital is contingent upon the time that is needed. He argues that differences in the cultural capital the family possesses determine when family members can begin to acquire the embodied form of cultural capital. He states that the amount of time one can take to accumulate this capital depends upon the free time the family is able to provide in order for that capital to be attained. The objectified state of cultural capital is the material goods and media that people possess. Bourdieu describes the institutional

state of cultural capital as the academic qualifications considered to be certificates of cultural competence. Because the certificate holds a legally guaranteed value, people who hold such certificates would be more marketable than those without certificates. Social capital is the accumulation of resources that are used to form a network of connections. These connections can include membership in a group such as family, class, fellow employees, or political party. According to Bourdieu, the degree of social capital a person holds is related to how large the network he or she has formed, as well as the types of capital those in the network possess. He states that the group can be recognized by its connections (Bourdieu, 1986). Representing a group through its recognizable name could give it a higher social standing. Bourdieu (1986) argues that the best measure of cultural capital is the amount of time given to its acquisition and states that what is important is not only the amount of cultural capital that a family possesses, but also the time the family has available, such as the mother's free time.

Coleman (1988) also defines social capital as relationships between people; however, he further distinguishes its structural forms and functions. According to Coleman, social capital is a combination of entities having some characteristics of social structure that facilitate the achievement of a particular goal. He describes the first form of social capital as obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures. For example, if someone does something for someone, it is expected that the person would reciprocate. Obligation and trustworthiness are two strong characteristics inherent in social capital. Obligation is an important characteristic because it is assumed that the obligation will be returned. Trustworthiness is important because there is a bond of trust

that the obligation will be repaid. Coleman argues that in situations in which people have a large number of debts to be repaid, such as in cases where people rely on aid from government sources, the amount of tangible resources they have to draw on is diminished, and therefore, it is difficult for them to repay their debts.

Another form of social capital Coleman (1986) identifies is information channels, described as the potential to obtain information that can be used to facilitate action. In order to obtain information, people can use the interactions they have with others rather than going directly to the source. Norms and effective sanctions are yet another form of social capital. While some norms might seem restrictive in some instances, such as those that limit what people can do by implementing rules, other norms, such as those that provide recognition for high achievement in school, promote motivation to accomplish the task. According to Coleman (1986), effective norms among social relations depend on closure. In a social structure that features closure, there is a relationship among all people who are involved in a given situation. Coleman defines intergenerational closure as the relations between a parent and child as well as the relations the child has outside the family, including relationships with peers and school personnel. He argues that closure is necessary for trustworthiness to exist. Coleman describes social capital within the family as the relations among children, parents, and extended family members. According to Coleman, strong relations within a family are necessary for children to experience educational growth regardless of the parents' human capital, education, skills and capabilities. However, he argues that single-parent households, families in which both parents work outside the home, and families that do not have strong parent-child

bonds lack social capital. Furthermore, Coleman asserts that the changing structure of families and communities can lead to a decline in the availability of human capital. As a solution, he suggests the creation of voluntary and social organizations to provide social capital to children. He describes this public goods aspect of social capital as being different from the other forms of capital because they provide a resource to bring about change.

DiMaggio (1982) examines cultural capital and its relationship to school success. He indicates that status groups are not as well-defined as they had been in the past; therefore, people can move more fluidly between groups. In this way, people can be members of groups that would be considered more privileged and have access to the cultural resources associated with those groups. He uses the term *status culture participation* rather than *status culture membership* to illustrate this concept. DiMaggio (1982) further argues that participation in these groups would help to decrease the likelihood of identifying students by their early childhood experience and family background. According to DiMaggio, participation in privileged groups would give students with low SES the opportunity to become upwardly mobile. He uses this premise to create the *cultural mobility model*. DiMaggio also argues that students in the lowest SES would be expected to experience the greatest gains when given educational opportunities.

Portes (1998, 2000) examines the structures of cultural capital and the attributes of social theory as they relate to individuals or collectively to groups. He defines social capital as (a) a source of social control, (b) a source of family-mediated benefits, and (c) a

source of resources mediated by nonfamily networks. He describes Coleman's (1988) stance on the use of social norms as a source of social control. Portes compares family-mediated benefits to Bourdieu's (1986) description of the way families facilitate educational opportunities for their children by transferring their set of values upon them. He compares the use of resources by nonfamily networks to Bourdieu's theory to explain the way they create social networks in business-related matters. Portes provides two definitions for social capital based on the assets of social capital as they transition from individual to community based resources; individual assets rely on the resources of family. However, other forms of capital rely on the attributes of networks of traders. Finally, collective assets rely on the resources of the community.

Related Studies

Jaeger (2011) sought to compare Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital (1986) to DiMaggio's (1982) cultural mobility model to identify the effects of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital on educational success in a study that he conducted in 2011. He sought to investigate DiMaggio's (1982) claims that regardless of SES all children can benefit from school equally because their low socioeconomic circumstances create incentives that motivate them to achieve. He performed an analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey-Children and Young Adults (NLS-CYS) to investigate the effects of cultural capital on academic achievement. Jaeger (2011) controlled for within-family and within-individual effects to find there is a correlation between high SES and cultural participation, such as attending museums and concerts, reading achievement, and extracurricular activities. Results indicated there was a stronger effect of the number of

books in low SES homes on academic achievement. There was also a positive effect on reading comprehension and math achievement among children whose parents encouraged them to take hobbies in low SES homes. Although these data indicate that cultural capital often favors higher SES, it holds promise that children can overcome the constraints of their low SES and attain academic success.

Yosso (2005) took a progressive view of cultural capital. In her article, she challenged the traditional assumptions of cultural capital by conceptualizing it as critical race theory (CRT). By redefining cultural capital, she sought to transform the view that marginalized students come to school with deficiencies to the notion that these students come instead with cultural wealth. She argued that cultural wealth is comprised of six forms of cultural capital as follows: (a) aspirational capital, (b) linguistic capital, (c) familial capital, (d) social capital, (e) navigational capital, and (f) resistant capital. Yosso describes aspirational capital as the ability to overcome obstacles. Linguistic capital is comprised of the multiple language and communication skills children bring to school. According to Yosso, this rich language background, often characterized by storytelling, gives children skills they can use in reading and in other disciplines. Familial capital is the strength of shared community knowledge that goes beyond the core family. Yosso (2005) contended that this capital empowers individuals by creating a common bond between community members. Social capital helps community members tap into the network of resources to navigate their way through institutions. Similarly, navigational capital provides the opportunity for individuals to make connections to take on the institutional barriers by acknowledging their individual strengths. Finally, resistant

capital enables people in marginalized groups to recognize and challenge the inequalities that exist.

Carter (2005) also discussed cultural capital and the problems students face when they do not acquire the dominant cultural capital accepted by the school system. For instance, if a student wishes to maintain her cultural identity by using her authentic voice to write an essay or a poem, she might risk having her teacher misconstrue her intended meaning. Educators and administrators might perceive the actions of students who are trying to hold onto their cultural identities as acts of defiance. Carter did not believe that students should ignore the dominant culture, but she believed that schools should regard the unique cultural capitals that their students and their families possess.

In *Reading Families: The Literate Lives of Urban Children*, Compton-Lilly (2003) drew references to cultural, economic, and social capital in the discourse analysis of her students and their families. Through her case study discourse, she revealed the inequities that Ms. Holt, an African American woman living in poverty, and her family experienced due to their lack of capital generally accepted by mainstream society. Ms. Holt possessed various skills. She had obtained a high school diploma and a restaurant management certificate. However, her grown children lacked what was regarded as institutional capital, such as high school diplomas, certification, and licenses, often recognized as vehicles for success. Her son, who was on the honor roll in May of his final year in high school, was recommended for vocational training rather than being allowed to graduate. On another occasion, Ms. Holt's children were not accepted into a neighborhood summer program even though she filled out the proper enrollment

paperwork and submitted it on time. When she found out that the slots were filled with children of family members and friends of the people who ran the program, she confronted the organizers of the program but was encouraged to take it to the councilman. Ms. Holt lacked the confidence and the social capital recognized by mainstream society to take both of these issues to the next level to fight for what was right. Although she and her children read and possessed some forms of institutional capital, the stigma of being a poor African American woman led the people with whom she dealt in the various institutions to assume that she was incompetent as a mother and inadequate according to society's judgment. This led her to back down, thereby silencing her voice and appearing to prove existing societal assumptions. In effect, she did not use the opportunity to exercise the capital that she possessed.

In *A Critical Discourse Analysis of Family Literacy Practices*, Rogers (2003) embedded herself in the life of the Treader family in order to understand how each of the members used language and literacy in their everyday life. Through an in-depth case study, she was able to synthesize ethnography and critical discourse analysis to reveal how the family used its capital to negotiate the school system and other institutions with employees whose negative preconceptions are often based on the family's low-income status. Institutional and family literacy practices were evident in the home. Mrs. Treader read through school and other legal documents and discussed these with her family. Despite this attempt on her part, she often did not receive the resources she expected and should have received.

Both of these mothers were strong advocates for their children. Mothers who know what is best for their children and have attempted to be their advocates might become discouraged when their input is not valued and back down when their voices are not being heard. However, when they have the opportunity to use their capital, they can successfully accomplish their goals (Cooper, 2007; McClain, 2010). Although they did not appear to have the social, economic, institutional, and cultural capital deemed to be acceptable by mainstream society, Mrs. Treader and Ms. Holt had the drive that should have helped them achieve the results they needed for their children (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Rogers, 2003).

According to Cosgrove and Flynn (2005), it should not be assumed that all mothers who are homeless should be categorized into the same groups. Through their participatory research, they sought to give voice to homeless mothers by exploring their lived experiences. The interview data in their study helped to erode the stereotypes that are often associated with mothers in this situation. Swick and Williams (2010) interviewed four homeless mothers to understand their perceptions of their situation. The mothers in the study discussed the importance of various facets of parenting, including teaching academic skills. Through these interviews, Swick and Williams revealed what they learned from the mothers' plights, the obstacles they faced, their strengths, and what they felt early childcare professionals could learn from their narratives. Like Cosgrove and Flynn (2005), Swick and Williams called for the eradication of stereotyping of the homeless. The key recommendations the mothers in their study made were to (a) empower homeless families by involving faith-based groups to provide a source of

strength and optimism, (b) dispel the negative and faulty connotations of homeless mothers and their children, and (c) provide more support, mentoring, and direct counseling to homeless mothers.

Mothers who are homeless are marginalized in ways that are similar to the mothers described in Compton-Lilly's (2003) and Rogers's (2003) studies. Despite their high degree of language and literacy competency, other mothers in marginalized groups might also be victims of the same misconceptions suffered by Mrs. Treader, Ms. Holt, and other mothers such as those interviewed in the Swick and Williams (2010) study.

Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) examined transformational resistance through a CRT (Matsuda, 1991) and LatCrit (Garcia, 1995; Espinoza, 1990) theory framework. CRT theory is a means of understanding oppressive factors in society, while LatCrit refers specifically to issues related to people of Latino/Latina ethnicity. The CRT and LatCrit frameworks instill a sense within the individual that change is possible and it incites the individual to strive for social justice. The authors describe four types of resistance students of color in schools take against the dominant culture. They argue that three of the models—self-defeating resistance, reactionary behavior, and conformist resistance—fail to bring about positive results. However, transformative resistance is different. In this study, Solorzano and Delgado Bernal analyzed interviews with women who reflected upon their experiences as students several years earlier. The authors documented the reports of five women who participated in the 1968 school walkouts to take a stand against what they believed was inferior education and what they viewed as oppression. In the interviews, the social justice stance the women took is evident.

Knowing the role that one has in making a change empowers the individual, gives value to what she has done, and motivates her to take further action. In the next section, deficit theories are described.

Deficit Theories

Members of marginalized groups are often victims of the deficit theories upheld by society. These theories evolved as an attempt to explain why certain groups seem to be at a disadvantage to the dominant group (Olivos, 2006; Solorzano, 1997; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). According to these theories, there is a disadvantaged group that is responsible for its own disadvantage and its culture causes this disadvantage (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Olivos, 2006). The three most widely recognized categories of deficit theory are biological deficit theory, structural or environmental theory, and cultural deficit theory. Biological deficit theory attributes racial inequality to the race itself. In other words, those guided by the biological deficit theory believe the reason people of a particular race are subordinate to the dominant society is due to their intellectual inferiority (Olivos, 2006). Structural or environmental theory attributes the plight of a particular cultural group to historical events such as slavery (Olivos, 2006). Lastly, the third type of deficit theory is cultural deficit theory. This theory attributes the underperformance of particular cultural groups to identifying characteristics such as low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and lack of discipline (Olivos, 2006). This theory is most closely related to the way society tries to explain how children of families in marginalized groups perform less well than their mainstream peers.

Valencia and Solorzano (1997) examine the contemporary deficit thinking paradigm in their chapter entitled “Contemporary Deficit Thinking Models” in *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking*. According to Valencia and Solorzano, despite the trend to dispel the negative implications of the deficit thinking model initiated by the civil rights movement in the 1960s, they found many examples where it still exists. They categorized these deficit thinking models according to the following themes: (a) inferior genes, inferior intelligence (i.e., neohereditarianism), (b) blaming the victim, blaming the poor (i.e., the underclass), and (c) inadequate parents (i.e., home and child, current families, 1960s style). Those who use theories classified under the neohereditarianism model attempted to explain the students’ underperformance by claiming they have low IQ scores due to a genetic pathology. Theories that were constructed to blame the victim were created to explain why groups of people remain in poverty. Valencia and Solorzano (1997) further defined the underclass according to theories ascribed to them. These categories are the following: (a) persistence-based theories based on claims that attempt to explain why people remain in poverty, (b) location-based theories based on claims that particular locations have negative characteristics to keep people in the underclass, and (c) behavioral-based theories based on that attempt to explain that people in the underclass have behaviors that are outside of the accepted social norms.

The final category that Valencia and Solorzano (1997) examined relates to the conceptual framework of the current study because it is based on theories that perpetuate negative implications associated with low SES and its effects on education. They classified these theories into the following subcategories: (a) parental value of and

involvement in education, (b) cognitive socialization and competence, and (c) the construct of at-risk child and family. Deficit beliefs associated with parental value and involvement in education are based on the notion that low SES parents do not place high value on the importance of education for their children. Deficit thinking associated with cognitive socialization and competence theories focuses on the premise that students in low SES homes are not situated to be successful because their environments prevent them from the same experiences and language exposure as children who are in the mainstream. Deficit thinking that focuses on the construct of the at-risk child and family was created by policy makers and legislators in response to the propensity of secondary school dropouts among low SES children and children of ethnic minorities. Theories based on these claims focus on the premise that students are considered to be at risk of failing based on deficiencies in their background due to environmental, economic, or cultural factors. (Valencia & Solorzano, 1997)

The theories presented by Valencia and Solorzano (1997) represent the thinking that prevails to some degree in school systems today. While, as the authors state, there has been a trend to move away from this negative thinking, a formidable effort must be made to dispel the notions associated with all forms of deficit theories in order for every children, despite SES, to be able to achieve academic success.

Summary

The conceptual framework that forms the basis of this study is in understanding the way that parents use various forms of capital (Carter, 2005; Olivos, 2006; Jaeger, 2011; Yosso, 2005) to empower parents by giving them a formidable voice in their

child's education (Compton-Lilly, 2003). People who are marginalized by society, people of low-income, homeless people, people of color, and people whose first language is not English are often not acknowledged by the school system as having a valuable voice in the education of their children (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Rogers, 2003). It is often assumed that people who fall within the margins do not have the capital they need to be effective in making educational decisions on behalf of their children. This mindset, which is known as deficit theory, is often conveyed to parents (Olivos, 2006), creating a barrier that discourages them from approaching the schools and taking an active role on behalf of their children. This barrier helps to perpetuate the disconnect between parents in marginalized groups and the school system. As a result, these parents might not advocate for their children and their children might not be given the same opportunities that children of mainstream parents might be given (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000).

Through the narratives and research discussed above, it is apparent that there are women who are marginalized due to homelessness, low SES, race, and/or language barrier, who strive to advocate for their children. Mothers, such as Ms. Holt (Compton-Lilly, 2003) and Mrs. Treader (Rogers, 2003), can be strong advocates for their children. There are also data to show that mothers who are homeless have valid concerns they express in order to help their children's educational needs to be met. Therefore, more needs to be known about mothers' perceptions of the importance of their role in their children's education.

The Importance of The Role Parents of in Their Child's Education

Parents play an important role in their children's education. Some parents provide academic support, while other parents become involved by helping in the classroom and participating in school events. To understand this phenomenon, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) conducted a literature review to understand why parents become involved in their children's education. Through their extensive review, they determined that the three main reasons parents become involved are their (a) beliefs about their role in their child's education, (b) sense of efficacy that makes them believe what they do will have an impact on the academic success or failure of their children, and (c) perception that their children and their schools want them to be involved. According to Dempsey and Sandler, each of these factors is contingent upon the other factors. Parents who believe that their role is important will want to become involved. If they believe that their role is critical, they will also believe their children and schools depend on their input to make decisions in their education. In turn, the schools will value their role in their child's education.

Consequently, not all parents believe that they are able to make a difference in their child's academic success, nor do they feel welcomed by their children's schools (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) examined parental involvement through the perspectives of parents and teachers in urban and rural low-income school districts through a two-part study. In the first part of the 1999 study, teachers were selected to complete a survey of their practices and beliefs using a Likert scale. One of the outcomes of the survey was that teachers did not believe their

involvement was important in the community. Twenty-five teachers from the original study were selected to participate in a subsequent study that included four 90-minute focus group discussions. The poverty levels of the participating teachers' schools ranged from 83% to 90%. The criterion for determining poverty was not reported; however, the authors stated the area where the school was located had suffered a decline in the textile industry causing many factories to move out and other businesses to close, affecting the overall economy of the area. One-third to one-half of the students in the urban school settings were African American or Latino/Latina. Parents were invited to participate in focus groups to discuss their thoughts about their children's best teacher through flyers. While teachers were frustrated with what they considered to be a lack of involvement by the parents, the parents believed the school personnel discouraged their involvement showing a lack of respect for them and their input, thus diminishing their role as advocates for their children. Again, each factor is contingent upon the other factors. Parents who do not believe their input has value will hesitate to give their input and will rely heavily on school-based decisions made for their children.

Perceptions of the barriers that school personnel can create for parents living in poverty were also examined by Smit and Liebenberg (2003). They conducted a qualitative study of parents living in poverty in the Western Cape province of South Africa to examine the perceptions they thought the employees at their children's schools had towards them. In the first phase of this two-phase qualitative study, questionnaires were distributed to parents of community support units to develop guidelines that were later used to form focus groups. Community-based support units were created to support

early drop-outs and street children. Interviews were then conducted with six parents in low-income areas. Social workers conducted interviews with four community-based support workers and two street workers. The data from the interviews revealed that parents believed employees in mainstream schools created barriers for children in poverty and school personnel seemed to be uninformed about what their situation was really like. As a result, parents were less likely to participate in school-related functions and the relationship between the child and the parents was hindered. The parents recommended that teachers in schools in high poverty areas should be especially attentive to the students' basic educational needs and that they should be more sensitive to the students' non-academic needs throughout the instructional day. They also believed the teachers should give respect and empowerment to parents and they should consider the emotional state of parents when they are helping them.

Ramirez (2003) also sought to examine Latino parents' concerns about their children's schools. In this qualitative study, he interviewed 43 Latino parents, including 29 mothers and 14 fathers. The school served predominantly free and reduced-fee lunch within a largely Latino community. The parents revealed that they perceived that their voices were not being heard and they were not being informed because there was no translator. They also stated that they were not aware of the school traditions. The parents expressed their belief that teachers had lower expectations of them and their children than they had of the other parents and students. Many of the parents believed the teachers assumed that they did not care about their children. They indicated that they did not feel welcome in the schools. They also felt that all parents, regardless of their country of

origin, were thought to have the same culture if they were Latino. Parents claimed they failed to speak up because they thought there would be negative consequences, such as deportation or retaliation, towards their children. Instead of creating a welcome environment to encourage participation, this negative mindset prevented the parents from taking an active role in the schools and their child's education. (Ramirez, 2003)

Teacher perceptions were also explored by Comber and Kamler (2004). In their study, they sought to examine whether re-structured pedagogy would dispel the deficit thinking widely held within Victoria and South Australia. In their article, the authors described how teachers took on a teacher-researcher role to reflect upon their own deficit thinking about their low-income students and their families. This three-year study was conducted in two sites: the schools where the teachers taught and at university-held workshops. Twenty teacher participants, 10 in each state, worked in pairs comprised of one early career teacher who was in the first five years of teaching with a late career teacher who had at least 25 years of experience. Teachers attended workshops to read and discuss theory, to reflect on their teaching practices, and to discuss the ways they viewed culturally diverse students from low-income families. In the first of three phases, primary school teachers interviewed each other to talk about their beliefs and experiences. In the second phase, after conducting a case study of a student who was considered to be "at risk," teacher dyads discussed their findings. One student selected in the study was a boy in grade two. The other student in the case study was a six-year-old girl. As the teacher-researchers examined their students, they theorized about how they would be able to help the students to connect with the literature curriculum. In the third

phase, a meta-analysis was conducted to inform teachers about ways to make a positive impact on students within these marginalized groups. Teachers' deficit thinking was dispelled when they made connections with the students' families. Through home visits, they were able to understand the families' cultures, which enabled them to connect the curriculum with their personal experiences. They also took on new perspectives by understanding the multiliteracies within the families. In turn, their pedagogy was transformed to reflect the changes they made in their deficit thinking. They learned that culture and low income were not indicators for academic failure.

McClain (2010) also examined the strength of parental agency as she explored the critical academic decisions that Mexican American parents made for their son. In this phenomenological yearlong ethnographic study, she observed the Torres' three children and how they learned in various settings: at home, at school, and within the community. She sought to gain the perspectives of the parents and their children rather than the teachers' and school administrators' perspectives in order to better inform practitioners. After having been in a bilingual school for four years, the Torres family finally decided to transfer their son Hugo to a parochial school. They based this decision on their concerns about whether he should be in a Spanish- or English-speaking classroom. They perceived that Hugo was not learning enough English in the bilingual program. They believed that their questions were not directly addressed by the school administrators. Throughout his time in the school, the Torres family was persuaded by the administration to keep their son in the bilingual class against their will. After they made the change, Hugo eventually thrived in the English-speaking parochial school setting. Consequentially, however, he

lost his ability to speak Spanish. In this case, the parents took a firm stand when they believed there was a lack of communication with the educators and the administration.

In another study that exemplifies how parental involvement is related to the critical choices they make for their child's education, Cooper (2007) conducted a qualitative in-depth interview study of 14 urban, low-income or working class African-American mothers of middle school children. She contended that mothers find empowerment from a cultural phenomenon called *motherwork*. The mothers in the study enrolled their children in either traditional public schools, charter schools, private Afro-centric, or private Catholic schools. Four of the participants were grandmothers who were the legal guardians of the children. Through two rounds of in-depth interviews, Cooper found that the mothers believed that education was a pathway to educational and financial success, a means of liberation, a vehicle to be on even plane with their mainstream peers, and a way for their children to protect themselves from racism. The mothers expressed their concerns about the prevalence of discipline problems, poor educational facilities, and inadequate teachers and administrators. As a result, the mothers believed it was necessary to use *motherwork* to select quality schools for their children. They sought various features within the schools, such as the degree of rigor employed to take on the demands of high stakes testing. They were all motivated by the need to break down the barriers they believed prevented them from being equal partners in the educational system. Moreover, they perceived the White affluent parents as having had the opportunity to be more vocal when they wanted to bring about change. They believed that this power had to do with being able to hire lawyers when necessary. They

also expressed concerns that parent programs at the schools were held at times they were unable to attend since they were working. The mothers felt that they had to constantly prove that low-income African-American mothers care about their children's education. They also held that it was necessary to advise to other mothers to advocate for their children to push for school choice and the rights of their children as well.

Patrick, Johnson, Mantzicopoulos, and Gray (2011) explored an alternative view of parental involvement from the studies described above by examining the role of parental involvement through the perspectives of kindergarten students. The study was comprised of 79 boys and 81 girls attending four elementary schools in the same school district. The majority of the children received free or reduced-fee lunch. The researchers sought to explore the kindergartners' reports of conversations they had about school with their parents. They asked children what their parents asked them about school and examined the proportion of children who were being questioned while controlling for gender. They explored the association of the students' responses between school adjustment and achievement while disaggregating for gender. The researchers also examined whether the children wanted to talk to their parents about school; once again they disaggregated these responses by gender. Patrick et al. (2011) discovered that more than half the students' parents ask about school; however, only 16% of the parents asked general questions about academic subjects, 17% asked specific questions, 15% asked about conduct, and fewer than 7% of the children reported that their parents asked them if they had fun. Overall, two-thirds of the children reported that their parents had conversations about school with them. The types of conversations parents had with their

kindergartners did not have a statistically significant effect on achievement; however, boys who reported having conversations with parents about school had higher reading scores than those who parents did not ask about school. Likewise, there seemed to be a positive correlation between boys' academic behavior and conversations with parents. On the contrary, there appeared to be a negative effect for girls in the same reporting category. These data indicate that children as young as kindergarten are aware of their parents' interest in their education. Although it is surprising that achievement is not higher among students whose parents ask them about school than those who do not, children were able to relay the specific types of interactions they had with their parents, indicating that they knew their parents were interested and had a role in their education. (Patrick et al., 2011)

Parent and student perceptions were also considered by Loera, Rueda, and Nakamoto (2011). They sought to examine the relationship between Latino parents' involvement in their children's reading involvement and school. The study was comprised of 128 low income Latino parents and their children, who were in second through seventh grade and living in an urban southwestern school district. All parents were immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras, and the majority of them were mothers. The parents' educational background ranged from having some college to no formal education. The parents had low-income occupations, and more than half of the mothers reported that they were homemakers. Parents completed a survey regarding their perceptions about their involvement in reading and their child's school. Reading involvement included reading to children, listening to children, and providing

them with reading choices. The survey also assessed parents' home literacy resources and practices. The children completed a Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MMQ) (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) to determine their reading engagement. Results from the surveys indicated that parental involvement in reading had a significant effect on children's reading engagement. However, the effect of parental involvement in schools was not as significant in increasing children's reading motivation. The researchers suggested that the school-based involvement activities were not necessarily literacy related and therefore would not promote reading engagement (Loera et al., 2011).

Perceptions of Literacy in the Home Environment

Literacy is perceived in various ways within the home environment. In Valdes's (1996) ethnographic study of 10 Latino families, she discovered that the parents took on the role of providing guidance in their moral education rather than taking an active role in providing their literacy education. This type of involvement is often not given merit by teachers who rely on parents to support their instruction by using literacy practices at home that are similar to what they use in school.

In a related study, Gillanders and Jiminez (2004) examined the practices of Mexican immigrant parents who helped their kindergarten children achieve literacy. In this study, the researchers explored the beliefs and literacy activities of four low-income families to find out what specific things they did at home to enable their children to succeed in kindergarten. Although the families approached teaching literacy skills differently, acquiring literacy skills and succeeding in school was given high priority. In turn, the children entered school with high levels of emergent literacy skills.

Similarly, Hammer et al. (2007) explored the contrasting beliefs and practices of 81 Puerto Rican mothers whose children attended Head Start programs. In this study, they sought to determine the differences between children who spoke English and Spanish at home since birth and children who first spoke English when they attended school at age three. Results indicate that mothers in both groups believed that schools play the primary role in educating children; however, they did teach literacy skills at home. They also held progressive views that children should be free to have their opinions. While the mothers in both groups promoted and encouraged their children to be social, children who learned English at school were expected to be more self-directed and non-conformist. Mothers of children who spoke both English and Spanish at home reported teaching literacy-related skills and reading more frequently; however, both groups experienced a lack of reading materials since they lacked financial resources. The researchers concluded that the mothers' beliefs about reading were not directly related to their practices and determined that global beliefs may not be related to their specific literacy practices. They also found that maternal beliefs have an impact on how mothers teach their children literacy skills.

Because homeless shelters may also comprise a child's home environment, the importance of exploring perspectives on the significance of literacy in the homeless setting is imminent. MacGillivray, Lassiter Ardell, and Saucedo Curwen (2010) examined the multiple perspectives of the value of literacy through interviews and observation within homeless shelters in western Tennessee and southern California. They also interviewed stakeholders who were connected to the homeless population:

shelter supervisors, school principals and teachers, personnel who worked with the shelters, and mothers and children who resided in the shelters. They discovered that literacy was considered to be a critical stepping stone from all perspectives and offered hope for the future of the children. The interview and observational data indicated the need for all stakeholders to work closely together to ensure continuity in the literacy education of the students.

The literacy practices and beliefs of low income families were also studied by McTavish (2007). She studied the literacy practices of a low-income family over a one-month period. Although educators are often concerned about the occurrence of literary events and the availability of materials to support literacy in low-income families, McTavish (2007) discovered the opposite to be true. Through observation, interviews, field notes, and artifacts, she revealed the strong support of literacy in their household. The parents provided an abundance of materials and various opportunities for their 4-year-old daughter to engage in reading and writing. Their intention was to help her to be successful in school and to have the opportunities that they had missed.

In related studies of low income teenage and adolescent mothers, researchers found that the majority of children in these households performed less well on performance tests than their peers (Luster, Bates, Fitzgerald, & Vandenbelt, 2000; Neuman & Gallagher, 2001). However, Luster, Bates, Fitzgerald, and Vandenbelt (2000) indicate that children who were in intellectually supportive environments made a smoother transition into elementary school than those who were in an environment lacking support. Teenage mothers who were involved in intervention programs designed

to help them improve the level of literacy interactions with their children promoted a positive change in the way they engaged their children in literacy practices.

Parents' perceptions of literacy within the home were also examined by Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Cunningham (1989). In their study of 108 low- and high-literacy parents, they sought to find out why they thought some children learn to read and write well and whether there was anything parents of 2- to- 4-year-olds could do to promote literacy. In addition to answering two open-ended questions, the parents completed surveys that asked them about the importance of literacy artifacts, literacy events, and interactions with adults in their homes. They also answered questions about how important they thought it was for children to see adults engaged in literacy events. The results showed that parents who had low literacy levels considered literacy artifacts to be more important than higher literacy parents. Artifacts natural to both groups were items such as papers, pens, books, magazines, and skill-oriented materials such as flashcards, educational programs, and alphabet blocks. High literacy parents tended to shy away from skill-based materials. Low literacy parents reported to provide less role modeling and had fewer opinions about how parents can help preschoolers prepare for school. They also had fewer opinions about why some children perform better than others in school. Parents in both groups felt that literacy learning is essential for preschool children (Fitzgerald et al., 1989).

Gregg, Rugg, and Stoneman (2012) also sought to examine the perceptions of parents and their involvement in their children's education. The participants were 14 Latino parents whose 3- to 5-year-old children were attending a Head Start Center in an

unspecified location. The researchers interviewed parents in focus groups, ranging from two to eight in number. They wanted to use focus groups to build a strengths-based family engagement program and at the same time be privy to various parents' perspectives, parents' concerns, and successes in their relationships with the school system as well as to promote discussion about the strengths of their children and families. The researchers used a funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) approach to gain insight into the families' unique dynamics and resources. Understanding a family's resources can enhance a child's education by using the home-school connection to tap into and build upon what the student already knows. The themes that emerged from the interviews were (a) family generated knowledge, (b) hopes and dreams for children, (c) recognition of home learning activities, and (d) home-school interactions. Parents discussed their concerns with their children's schools, such as the language barriers and time constraints. Some parents also believed that teachers did not consider their families' resources and child's interests in teaching the curriculum.

Summary

Parents perceive literacy in different ways within their home environments (Fitzgerald et al., 1989; Gregg et al., 2012; McTavish, 2007). Misconceptions about parents and their desire to be involved in their children's education create a barrier between schools and parents. School personnel often perceive families who are not in the mainstream as lacking the tools necessary to be an asset in their child's education. Although they might not have the same resources or take the same approach to teaching early literacy skills, a child's education in families from various economic and cultural

backgrounds is a priority (Gillanders & Jiminez, 2004; Gregg et al., 2012; Loera et al., 2011). Parents with low incomes, parents in homeless shelters, and teenage mothers often make literacy a priority for their children (Fitzgerald et al., 1989). Parents with low literacy skills give at least as much importance to providing preschool children with literacy artifacts and literacy interactions as high literacy parents. It is critical for schools to work closely with families in crisis situations and shelters to become aware of their role in the literacy education of their children. In this way, they will be able to provide intervention to help children reach and maintain the literacy skills they need to achieve academic success.

Opportunities and Approaches to Teaching Literacy in Low-Income Homes

Early studies focusing on the function of literacy within low income households and its effect on future success in school suggested that despite the ample literacy opportunities in which children in low-income households engage with their parents, the type of literacy events may not effectively help the children in these families to be successful readers (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986). However, more recent studies indicate a shift in both the type of literacy opportunities and the effects of these events on children's academic success.

In a 3-year qualitative longitudinal study Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola (1995) examined the varying roles mothers played in their child's preparation for formal education. Each mother had at least one child within the 2- to 4-year-old range. Interviews of 14 low income mothers showed that emphasis on basic numeracy and literacy, language development, and storybook reading was prevalent in

some families, while in other families socialization and respect for authority were the main focus. The mothers also believed that a good education was critical for their child's future success.

DeBaryshe, Binder, and Buell (2002) also explored mothers' specific practices to help their children acquire early literacy. In their exploratory study, they surveyed 19 mothers of 5- and 6-year-old children. They explored the mothers' beliefs about ways to teach literacy skills to their children. Results of the study indicated that the majority of the parents believed that code knowledge and understanding meaning were critical skills in learning to read. The children of mothers who modeled reading and took part in interactive writing tasks were also more likely to write on their own. The mothers of children who exhibited the strongest skills tended to be more code-oriented in their approach to teaching literacy skills.

MacGillivray et al. (2010) explored the literacy practices that occur in homeless shelters by examining the interactions between homeless mothers and their children. Through interviews and observations, they determined that shelters do not necessarily prohibit literacy opportunities, libraries and churches are often used to support literacy development, and school was seen as a vehicle for literacy.

In an attempt to provide opportunities for children living in shelters to have reading materials and experiences that their mainstream peers enjoy, the Greater Washington Reading Council established The Reading Connection (TRC) in 1989 (Hanning, 1996). According to Hanning (1996), this model is an effective means of helping to (a) foster oral language traditions, (b) strengthen family relationships, and (c)

acknowledge the parents' role as their child's most important teacher. The organization provides materials, support, and guidance to parents living in homeless shelters. In order to provide transitional support, free access to reading materials and activities are available for a year after the families have left the shelter.

The use of technology in the home and its impact on future success in reading is another area of literacy that has been examined. In their report based on a longitudinal study of the kindergarten class of 1998-1999, Espinosa, Laffey, Whittaker, & Sheng (2006) compared the prevalence of available technology and its effect on reading achievement in lower versus higher SES households. The factors they examined were as follows: (a) computer use at home, (b) use of computer programs that teach, (c) internet home use, (d) number of children's books at home, (e) whether the child watches *Sesame Street*, and (f) number of minutes of TV watched from 3:00 p.m. until dinner, as well as after dinner. There was a positive correlation between having access to the Internet, using educational programs, having books at home, and reading achievement. In fact, there was a greater impact for children who used technology in low SES families compared to the children in higher SES families. These findings indicate that children in lower income households can benefit from the use of technology to enhance their literacy learning.

Plowman, Stephen, and McPake (2010) also explored the use of technologies in the home as they sought to compare home use to those used at school. They examined various factors, such as who provided and actually guided the interaction, the types of technologies that were available, and the types of learning that were taking place in each

setting. They found that there was a variety of technology available in most of the households regardless of income; however, there were more limitations placed on children's use of the Internet in lower income homes. There was strong support from immediate and extended family members in all types of households as shown not only by the purchase of LeapPads™, VTech™ games, and DVD players, but also by the guidance they provided. Such findings indicate that regardless of income, family members often provide the tools and support that can be used to enhance learning (Plowman et al., 2010).

Family Culture

Family culture is another factor that makes a considerable impact on the degree and type of involvement parents have in their child's literacy development (Auerbach, 1995). In an NCAL technical report on issues in family literacy, Gadsen (1994) indicated that many of the studies she reviewed focused on the barriers that are formed when family cultures are not considered. Throughout the studies, Gadsen noticed a prevalent issue that parents believed the underrepresentation of their cultures undermined their sense of power and access into the schools. She thus argued that family culture should be an integral part of curriculum development.

Moll et al. (1992) examined the unique knowledge within households, which Moll called "funds of knowledge." These funds are the specific skills a family possesses to help its members navigate through their day-to-day lives. Moll and his colleagues argued that teachers can be better informed about ways to educate students when they are aware of the everyday practices of their students and their families. To explore this

concept, Moll et al. conducted a qualitative study comprised of ethnographic observations, open-ended interviews, life histories, and case studies. Classroom teachers worked in conjunction with university-based researchers to develop classroom practices based on their understanding of the connections between households and classrooms. Ten teachers conducted household research to understand how they could use this information for classroom application. In one example, a teacher developed a unit of study based on information from her students' households that tied into her sixth-grade curriculum. One topic the students wanted to explore was candy-making. A parent of one of the students went into the classroom to teach the students how to make Mexican candy. She used her expertise to make the connection between her household funds of knowledge and the school curriculum. In another study, Browning-Aiken (2005) examined the role of coal mining in the family of her eighth-grade student, Myriam Aguilar. Through historical accounts, photographs, and interviews, she sought to find out what the family knew about mining and how that knowledge could be tied into the middle school curriculum. Through their ethnographies, the various unique aspects of the students' cultures were used to make connections between the curriculum and real-life experiences to make learning meaningful for them.

The inclusion of family culture in the school curriculum was also explored in a mixed-methods study based on longitudinal data collected from two literacy projects implemented in Head Start programs. Quintero (1999) sought to examine the sociocultural interactions among Hmong, Mexican, and Mexican American literacy groups. These programs were designed to promote literacy and bi-literacy of children

and parents by providing opportunities for the parents to collaborate with the staff to create programs that integrated aspects of their culture and expertise into the curriculum. Through intergenerational and hands-on activities, language experience opportunities, and storybook reading, families were empowered by being given the opportunity to add their cultural and social perspectives to the curriculum. Results indicated that creating a non-threatening environment for parents helped to enhance learning for teachers, children, and parents. (Quintero, 1999)

Quintos and Civil (2007) also explored the way including parents in their child's education can help remove the boundaries between the school and parents set by language and course content. In this study, they explored a classroom community of practice that was a collaborative effort between 19 fifth-grade Mexican or Mexican-American students, five of their parents, and the classroom teacher. Quintos and Civil (2007) focused on a case study of one parent and her child as they participated in a homework after-school program and by observing them in the classroom. The mother believed that the opportunity for her to be a peripheral participant enabled her to be seen as a legitimate contributor in her child's education. Through the mother's personal narrative, the researchers concluded that it is imperative for pedagogy to be culturally relevant.

Mui and Anderson (2008) also studied the unique influence that a family's culture makes on the children's literacy development as they explored the literacy practices of an Indo-Canadian extended family. Through observations, field notes, interviews, videotapes, and artifacts, the researchers found that literacy took on many different

forms: storybook reading, functional reading, and reading for enjoyment. The older, more skillful family members helped facilitate the day-to-day function of this family, which helped to strengthen the connection with the schools and in turn promoted academic success. They took on a social practice perspective by situating themselves to support younger developing learners.

Shared Literacy Experiences

Shared literacy interactions take on different forms. In the next section, the role of each of these interactions in helping a child acquire literacy is explored.

Shared storybook reading. The importance of the shared experience of the parent and child during storybook reading emerged as early as 1908 (Huey, 1908). The emphasis on the critical nature of this interaction has transcended throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. Studies that focused on storybook reading revealed that this interaction can lead to the children's future success in reading (Briggs & Elkind, 1977; Bus et al., 1995; Clark, 1976; Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Dunn, 1981; Morrow, 1983).

In their analysis of the effect of mother-child book reading in low-income families, Raikes et al. (2006) found that reading is positively correlated to language and vocabulary development, particularly during the first two years of life. They referred to the *snowball effect* to emphasize how consistent reading opportunities often increase vocabulary, leading to more reading and vocabulary development. The findings of these studies prompted the initiation of federally funded programs to provide young children who might not have adequate literacy exposure in their households with an opportunity to

go to receive services from birth to kindergarten. In their examination of Even Start programs, Tao, Khan, Gamse, St. Pierre, and Tarr (1998) revealed that the majority of the 469 programs they studied provided opportunities in storybook reading as well as pre-reading and language development activities. Rush (1999) examined the impact of shared book reading between parents and children enrolled in Head Start programs. Early literacy was most greatly associated with children whose parents engaged in literacy activities with them. A study geared to examine the ecological influences of the home environment and the childcare setting on literacy development yielded similar results (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2005). They explored the connection between the home and childcare environments in relation to each of four contributing factors: parental demographics, parental literacy habits, parental activities, and parental reading beliefs. Results indicated that children whose parents and teachers involved them in activities that were rich with language and literacy tended to be higher achievers than those who did not enjoy this combined support (Weigel et al., 2005).

In another study, Weigel et al. (2006) explored how mothers' beliefs about literacy affect the literacy development of preschool children. In their yearlong study of 79 mothers and children, they sought to find out (a) the types of beliefs the mothers had, (b) the mother's beliefs about what they did to help their children to acquire literacy to create a particular literacy environment, and (c) the impact on the children's literacy abilities. The children in the study were attending childcare and were at least three years old but were not yet in kindergarten. The mothers completed surveys and were interviewed to find out about their literacy beliefs and home environments. The mothers

were categorized as either *facilitative* or *conventional*. The former were mothers who provided a literacy-rich environment and tended to enjoy the literacy experience; the latter seemed to believe school holds the responsibility to teach literacy skills. Facilitative mothers also enjoyed personal reading and reported that their children saw them writing. To determine the effects of these beliefs, they compared children's emergent literacy skills and reading interests between the two groups of children at the beginning and end of the study. The children whose mothers were in the facilitative group made significant gains in both print knowledge and reading interest as compared to children whose mothers were in the conventional group. These results indicate that children whose mothers show an interest in reading and read in front of their children can help promote literacy skills in their children.

Bailey (2006) also examined the influence of storybook reading by exploring the specific parent behaviors on reading grades. Seventy-nine children who were members of economically at-risk families participated in the QUEST program, which was designed for students who are academically gifted. In the study, students' reading grades were compared to parent responses about their literacy practices. The questionnaire asked about the frequency parents read to their children, the children's exposure to preschool, and the age that children began to receive reading instruction. Results indicated that the most significant factor influencing reading success was the frequency parents read to their children.

In a related study, Morgan (2005) examined the behaviors of shared reading interactions between three mother-child dyads from low-income families. In the study,

the mothers and their 3-year-old children were videotaped while they read at home on four occasions. Analysis of the data indicated that the behaviors differed significantly. While one mother encouraged her son to participate by asking many questions, another mother seemed to take on a managerial role by trying to keep her daughter focused without necessarily encouraging her to participate in the process. The third mother did not offer much explanation of the text during the shared reading time; however, she offered praise and encouragement that tended to lead to a pleasant experience for her son. The results of the study indicate that all of the children in the study benefited from the interactions.

Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002) also examined the interaction between parents and their preschool-aged children during their shared reading experiences. Although this study was not restricted to low-income families, 83% of the families fell into that category. Storybook interactions were videotaped and transcribed. The researchers analyzed utterances based on inferences made about the text and story structure. Researchers also analyzed observable behaviors and reading frequency. They found that reading frequency was highly correlated with literacy skills. Positive interactions prior to kindergarten led to more highly motivated first-grade readers. (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002)

Hammer, Nimmo, Cohen, Draheim, and Johnson (2005) took on a sociocultural perspective in their investigation of the shared reading behaviors of 10 African American and 10 Puerto Rican mothers and their children. The children in the study were enrolled in a Head Start program in central Pennsylvania. The researchers sought to examine

whether there are differences between the groups by analyzing the types of utterances and book reading styles shared between each dyad. The results indicated there was a range of styles; however, there were many similarities between the groups. Mothers in both groups used the shared reading time as a social and affective experience and used the combinational style that is commonly used by mainstream parents. The Puerto Rican mothers tended to make more comments than the African American mothers. While African American mothers used the text reading style, Puerto Rican mothers often used the child-centered approach. The results of this study contradict the findings in Heath's (1983) earlier study of African American mothers in the proportion of utterances they made in relation to the number of labels they provided. Data from this study indicate that culture might have more of an effect on maternal teaching styles than income. These findings emphasize how shared reading was a positive experience and contributed to the emergent literacy of their children.

Davidse, de Jong, Bus, Huijbregts, and Swaab (2011) examined the relationships among early book exposure, cognitive ability, and early literacy skills. In their study, the researchers surveyed Dutch parents of 228 junior kindergarten students with a mean age of 54.29 months using a checklist to find out about the frequency of their shared reading experiences and author recognition. The researchers individually measured students' book cover recognition, receptive vocabulary, letter knowledge, intelligence, and cognitive control. The overall results indicate the home literacy environment plays a critical role in predicting a child's literacy skills. The most prevalent indicator of the literacy environment was book cover recognition. Book cover recognition also accounted

for a 6% of the variance in vocabulary and higher letter knowledge. The researchers also found a significant correlation between short-term memory and vocabulary. Regardless of the student's cognitive control, the findings showed that all children benefitted from shared book reading sessions. The results of this study indicate that frequent shared reading experiences continue to be an important stepping stone to help children develop strong literacy and vocabulary skills (Davidse et al., 2011).

Shared writing interaction. Aram and Levin (2002) researched a different aspect of literacy by examining the relationship between mother-child shared writing and storybook reading as predictors of kindergartners' emergent literacy. The participants included 41 low-income Israeli mothers and their children, 19 boys and 22 girls, with an average age of five years and eight months. The researchers videotaped two joint writing sessions and analyzed the mothers' interventions when addressing their child's word recognition and phonological awareness. The results indicated that joint writing had a significant effect on a child's emergent literacy skills. The outcome of this study shows that low-income mothers can make meaningful contributions when helping their children acquire more than one aspect of emerging literacy by guiding their attempts as early writers.

More recently, Burns, Love, Buell, and Casbergue (2012) examined the interactions between preschoolers and their parents as they engaged in writing tasks. They sought to examine the strengths found in the interactions between low income parents and their children as they write letters together. The participants were comprised of 59 prekindergarten children and their parents. The study was conducted at a school in

a major urban school district that served 3- to 5-year-old low-income students. The researchers wanted to understand (a) the types of information parents and children talk about as they write a friendly letter, (b) how the parent and child interact with one another, who initiates the ideas, the nature of those ideas, what kinds of nonverbal exchanges are made; and (c) whether the final product shows evidence of writing conventions, is age appropriate, and shows the child's use of ideas and writing. The children and their parents were videotaped for 10-minute sessions as they interacted during a letter-writing activity. The transcripts of the observations revealed that parents initiated most of the interactions, though children also initiated interactions regarding letter content, writing conventions, and understanding writing concepts. Both parents and children shared nonverbal exchanges as they observed each other. The process encouraged children and parents to interact on several levels. They discussed letter content, the conventions of writing, and authorship. The study stresses the importance of understanding the ways low income parents can take an active role in promoting all forms of literacy in their children, including writing (Burns et al., 2012).

In a related study, Buell, Burns, Casbergue, and Love (2011) explored the language and literacy practices of bilingual parents as they and their preschool children wrote a letter together. In this study, the interactions of eight parent-child dyads were observed in the preschool setting. The researchers examined the types of interactions the parents made with their children while considering the child's theory of mind (ToM), or the recognition that others may have perspectives and beliefs that differ from their own because they may have been privy to different information. Upon analysis of the

transcripts of the dyads, the researchers determined the most prevalent categories were (a) recipient choice, (b) message clarification/focus, (c) child's thoughts or feelings about the recipient, and (d) recipient's thoughts, knowledge, or feelings. The findings indicated seven adults provided support in helping their children make decisions regarding the message, focus, and/or feelings of the recipient of their letters. These findings show that bilingual parents can play a critical role in helping their children cultivate writing skills while utilizing ToM (Buell et al., 2011).

Language interaction. Various studies examine the significance of language interactions between mothers and their children. Pelligrini, Perlmutter, Galda, and Brody (1990) examined the relationship between vocabulary development and strategies used by Black mothers of Head Start students. In this study, they sought to investigate whether text genre and format affected the strategies they used as well as how effective these strategies were in facilitating their child's participation. The researchers compared results of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) to the strategies that the mothers used. Videotaped sessions of shared reading of narrative and expository text with traditional and familiar format between 13 mother-child dyads revealed that text genre affected the strategies used. The mothers in the study tended to use more effective strategies when sharing familiar expository texts, which in turn had a positive effect on vocabulary scores. Results were similar to earlier studies of middle-income mothers.

Senechal et al. (1998) examined the relationship between storybook reading and oral and written language development. In their study of 110 Canadian middle-income kindergartners and 58 middle-income first graders, the researchers sought to find out

about the children's degree of storybook exposure and the teaching behaviors reported by parents. Students' oral language, phonological awareness, written language, and reading were measured using various test instruments. Results showed that storybook exposure and parent teaching positively affected kindergarten children's language skills. Storybook reading, however, only affected oral language of first graders while parent teaching affected writing skills. (Senechal et al., 1998)

In contrast to these findings, Dodici et al. (2003) examined the parent-child interactions of 27 low-income families. Their findings suggested that various factors, such as parent and child language, emotional tone, joint attention, parental guidance, and parental responsiveness all contributed to helping children develop early literacy skills. In a yearlong exploratory study, O'Neil-Pirozzi (2006) sought to examine the influence of the context of facilitating language interactions between homeless mothers and their preschool children during book-reading and play. Findings indicated that homeless mothers used facilitating language less than 50% of the time, while middle-income parents with homes used facilitating language with their 3- and 4-year-old children more than 60% of the time. In a related study Britto, Brooks-Gunn, and Griffin (2006) examined the relationship between reading and the teaching patterns of low-income African American mothers. They explored the influence of various roles the mothers played in helping their children develop language skills: mother as storyteller, story reader, or teacher. They also examined their levels of support. Standardized tests and video-taped data indicated that children whose language skills were highest had mothers who were identified as storytellers and gave teaching support.

The impact of home literacy was also explored by Payne, Whitehurst, and Angell (1994). They conducted a study of 236 children from low-income families who were enrolled in Head Start programs. In this study, they surveyed the primary caregivers to determine the influence of their home literacy involvement on language and compared the responses to the children's language abilities as measured by test instruments. They examined the effects of the frequency of reading to children, number of trips to the library, and the number of picture books in the home. They also looked at the caregiver's own degree of reading engagement. Results showed that children who were read to frequently from an early age, children who had more books in the home, children who asked to be read to, and children who were taken to the library frequently exhibited strong language skills. This study indicates that children in low income environments can develop strong language skills if they are in a literature and language-rich home (Payne et al., 1994).

In their 7-year longitudinal study, Tunmer et al. (2006) examined the literate cultural capital of children from various SES backgrounds. They described literate cultural capital as a compilation of reading-related variables that children bring to school with them based on early literacy experiences in their home environments. The study explored phonological sensitivity, grammatical sensitivity, receptive vocabulary, and letter name and the relation of these factors to future reading achievement. Data indicated that the children who entered school with lower literate cultural capital performed at least one year below grade level by their seventh year of the study. These findings emphasize the strength in language and its importance in higher achievement.

The results of these studies indicate that there is a discrepancy between the strength of language used in homeless and low SES families and families who are in the mainstream. These discrepancies emphasize the need to explore the use of language interactions between mothers and their children in order to find positive practices that can be documented in order to inform parents and stakeholders of the connection between language and literacy.

Barnyak (2011) also explored shared storybook reading, examining the physical and verbal interactions of rural children and their parents during read alouds. The author based the study on the first sphere of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979), the microsystem, characterized by parents and children sharing literacy experiences. The study was comprised of eight children, whose ages ranged from 2 to 7, and their six parents. Data were collected at various sites in western Pennsylvania based on where the parents preferred to meet. The parents and children were each interviewed to obtain information regarding their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors about their shared experiences during storybook reading. The individual reading sessions of children and parents were also videotaped for analysis. The three themes that emerged from the parent interviews were (a) reading within families' everyday lives, (b) reading supported through parent's positive outlooks, and (c) reading supported through fostering storybook extensions. The two main themes that emerged from the children's interviews were sharing books and attitudes and beliefs. The analysis of the observations indicated that the parents exhibited several behaviors that fell into the category *enhancement of attention to text*, such as sitting close to their children, changing voice, encouraging their

child's active participation, and considering topics that interest their children. The behaviors that were observed that were categorized as *Promotion of Interactive Reading and support of comprehension* were parents pointing to illustrations and asking questions about the text. Under the category *utilization of literacy strategies*, mothers provided ways for children to use strategies such as making predictions, using repetitive language, and using illustrations as visual clues. The interview transcripts indicated that both parents and children reported having positive shared storybook reading experiences.

Summary

The role of literacy in the home takes on many forms. Various studies have shown that storybook reading with children from the earliest stages of development is one way parents can help their children develop an interest in reading and the language skills will promote literacy achievement (Bailey, 2006; Davidse et al., 2011; Morgan, 2005; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Various early childhood programs have been implemented to help children in low-income families support their learning by providing educational opportunities to help prepare them to enter elementary school. These programs feature parent involvement opportunities to give parents the edge they need to help their children enter the elementary school years on an even plane as their mainstream peers (Rush, 1999; Weigel et al., 2005). A family's unique culture determines the way literacy is used by its members. Families tap into their funds of knowledge to help them use their expertise to navigate through their daily lives. The particular expertise that a family possesses can help children make connections between what they learn at home and what they are learning in school. In this way, learning is

relevant and meaningful for children increasing their chances for success (Auerbach, 1995; Moll et al., 1992). In addition to the role of storybook reading and culture on a child's literacy development, parent-child interactions are also critical in helping to develop language skills (Britto et al., 2006; Buell et al., 2011; Burns et al., 2012; Payne et al. 1994). Building vocabulary through rich, frequent language interactions can help children achieve high literacy skills. Children in families that are in crisis might not have the same level of exposure to language experiences as their mainstream peers.

How Parents Promote Achievement

Monitoring reading and academic tasks. Various studies focus on the way parents monitor children during reading and academic tasks. Gutman and McLoyd (2000) examined the differences in the way that low-income African American parents managed their children's education at home between low- and high-achieving students. Results of the qualitative interview study indicated that the majority of parents of high-achieving students monitored their children's homework tasks and used specific strategies to help them by developing homework schedules and providing math and reading practice. This close monitoring made them privy to the strengths and weaknesses in their children's academic skills.

Miliotis, Sesma, and Masten (1999) also explored how parents monitor their children's schoolwork. They sought to examine the relationship between various aspects of parenting as a protective factor in homeless families and school success. In this study, the researchers investigated the effects of specific parenting behaviors in 59 homeless African American 6- to 11-year-old children living in a Midwest shelter. Through

audiotaped interviews, parents revealed information about their relationships with their children, the types of activities they shared, their expectations for their children, and their involvement in their child's education. Student achievement was determined by the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test Screener (WIAT-S; Psychological Corporation, 1992) as well as school records and teacher reports. Parental involvement, including monitoring homework, communicating with the teacher, and talking to their children about school, positively affected their child's academic achievement. Results of this study indicate that the interest and role that parents have in their child's education, regardless of housing circumstances, can affect academic achievement.

In their study to identify home literacy environment, maternal education, and the childcare setting as predictors of kindergarten skills, Christian, Morrison, and Bryant (1998) determined that children of less educated mothers performed higher than children of better educated mothers due in part to their monitoring behavior or taking their children to the library. While these studies reported positive effects of monitoring, a meta-analysis examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation determined that particular forms of monitoring had different effects (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). Students who perceived that their parents valued their effort and supported their academic achievement were motivated to work hard. These data suggest that monitoring a child's education is a vehicle that can bring about success in school. However, students who perceived their parents had too much control had a diminished sense of autonomy and believed they were extrinsically rather than intrinsically rewarded.

Promoting self-efficacy, motivation, and challenging students. Many studies focus on the impact of self-efficacy on high achievement. In a longitudinal study, Liew, McTigue, Barrois, and Hughes (2008) determined that early attempts to self-monitor academic tasks have a positive impact on academic achievement. This self-regulatory behavior increases the likelihood that students will attain high academic success. When this behavior is fostered in the home from the earliest stages of development, it often carries over into the school setting. Furthermore, Howse, Lange, Farran, and Boyles (2003) studied the impact of self-efficacy and self-regulating behavior in children of low income families on academic achievement. A comprehensive analysis of various motivational dispositions revealed that children in these home environments are not less motivated than their peers. In fact, in some areas they displayed a high desire to partake in challenging activities. However, they also found that these children tended to have lower self-regulatory behavior that would lead to a higher level of distractibility on academic tasks.

Scott-Jones (1987) examined the differences in approach taken by mothers of high- and low-achieving low-income Black first graders to support their academic achievement. Through observation in their naturalistic settings, Scott-Jones determined that, for the most part, the mothers of high-achieving students supported their children but let them take the initiative in educational tasks rather than directing them. In this way, the children were given the autonomy to make decisions that affected their education. Other studies (Boardman, Harrington, & Horowitz, 1987; Clark, 1976) also showed that regardless of SES students whose parents monitored their academic progress

and instilled a sense of efficacy within them were more highly motivated to be high-achieving students.

Ceballo (2004) also sought to determine parents' roles in helping their children to achieve academic success. In her qualitative study of 10 Latino and Latina Yale students from impoverished, immigrant families, she examined the responses to questionnaires and open-ended interviews. Findings indicated that the students attributed their parents' support of their autonomy as one reason for their success. Although this was in part due to the fact that they did not have the expertise to help them in some educational areas, this also was attributed to the amount of trust that they placed in their children based on past performance. While some students expressed they would have preferred more of their parents' input in their decision-making process, this trust contributed to their sense of self-efficacy. Other characteristics were the parents' emphasis on education and nonverbal support, such as providing a quiet workspace or being excused from other household responsibilities.

In their meta-analysis on the effect of parental involvement on motivation, Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005) found that parental autonomy determined students' sense of confidence and self-regulation. The literature they examined indicated that parents who praised their children and encouraged them were more likely to help them become intrinsically motivated. These children tended to become responsible for their learning.

In a related study, Ardel and Eccles (2001) examined whether parents' personal efficacy beliefs promoted self-efficacy and academic success within their children. The study consisted of 376 inner-city mothers and their adolescent children, two-thirds of

whom are Black with the remainder being White mothers who lived in Philadelphia. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires to determine parent efficacy beliefs, *promotive parenting* strategies, child's self-efficacy, marital strength, and mother's education. Promotive parenting strategies are defined as activities that foster children's skills, talents, and interests in order to prevent negative events and experiences. Findings indicated that parents who had strong efficacy beliefs were more likely to use promotive strategies. In addition, children's self-efficacy brought about their own academic success independent of their mother's personal efficacy, promotive strategies, and family and environmental contexts. Parents who believed they could influence their child's behavior and environment helped their children to achieve academic success by setting a good example for them. Studies such as these indicate the need to find out the specific things mothers do to instill self-efficacy and self-regulatory behavior within their children at the earliest stages.

Summary

Parents can make an impact on their children's future achievement. Parents who monitor their children's reading and other academic tasks help them stay focused and develop a sense of responsibility in them (Liew et al., 2008). In turn, they become motivated to become successful in school. Monitoring children also helps parents be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. This puts parents in a better position to provide the support they need to help them with academic tasks. This form of support can lead to higher academic achievement. Parents also have an impact on their children's future success by instilling a sense of self-efficacy within them (Boardman et al., 1987; Clark,

1976). This view maintains that the drive to be successful must be intrinsic; it cannot be for someone else. If children are self-motivated to achieve, they will set their own goals and will work to achieve those goals (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, various types of parental involvement were examined. Storybook reading (Briggs & Elkind, 1977; Bus et al., 1995; Clark, 1976; Dunn, 1981; Morrow, 1983), writing interaction (Aram & Levin, 2002; Buell et al., 2011; Burns et al., 2012), family culture (Auerbach, 1995; Moll et al., 1992; Mui & Anderson, 2008), and language interaction (Dodici et al., 2003; O'Neil-Pirozzi, 2006; Senechal et al., 1998) help create an environment that promotes literacy from the earliest stages of development. An abundance of literature on families in marginalized groups, families in crisis, low-income families, families of color, and families whose first language is not English, focuses on the negative impact of their status on student achievement (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Ramirez, 2003; Slaughter & Epps, 1987). Families in these situations often fall prey to the deficit theory that assumes people within certain cultural groups have created their plight simply by being members of that culture (Olivos, 2006). A family's unique capital often determines the way it is perceived by the school system, the community, and other stakeholders in the education of their children (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Rogers, 2003). Families that have the strength of capital are better received by schools and their role in their child's education is given merit. The intent to dispel widely held theories, such as the deficit model and use of capital, is the basis for the conceptual framework of this study. The case studies presented in this

chapter exemplify the negative consequences that families faced because of these theories. The lack of research on the positive role that mothers in crisis can play in the early acquisition of literacy skills indicates a need to conduct a study.

Rationale

It is apparent through the studies reviewed in this chapter that low-income parents and parents in crisis can make a positive impact on their children's literacy learning. However, the majority of studies on literacy acquisition in low-income families, families in crisis, families whose first language is not English, and families of color focus on the deficit theory. This theory perpetuates the belief that mothers in crisis are not situated to help their children become high-achieving students. The lack of research on mothers in crisis who do help their children develop early literacy skills indicates the need for this qualitative study to find out what they do. The intent of this study is to add to the pool of research that can help educators understand ways to engage parents who are in crisis situations and hone in on their skills so they can help their children meet and exceed grade level expectations. It is also my intention to make mothers aware of the way that they helped their children learn to read by giving them the opportunity to reconstruct the early literacy interactions with their children. Through interview data, I hope the mothers' unique accounts will help to chip away the misconceptions that homeless mothers are not situated to promote academic achievement of their children.

We come to know through our perceptions of our experiences and interactions with others. The actions we take, the decisions we make, our thoughts, and our feelings are based on previous experiences and interactions. I hope this qualitative study will help

unravel this process. Thinking about the strategies they used might help the mothers make a conscious effort to use the tools they have to enhance future learning. A quote made by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at the Alexandria City Public School annual convocation TC Williams High School on September 2, 2010, emphasized the urgency for this study. In response to a question from an Alexandria City Public School teacher, he stated, "Poverty is not destiny." This powerful quote must become a reality. It is my hope that the information revealed through the interviews in this study will indeed prevent poverty from determining a child's destiny.

CHAPTER 3

I conducted this study to examine the positive habits and characteristics of mothers in poverty who helped their children start school armed with the tools necessary to acquire literacy. In this study, I also wanted to find out how mothers in crisis use capital to advocate for their children. Capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Carter, 2005; Olivos, 2006) is the economic, social, and cultural resources that affect the ways families navigate through day-to-day lived experiences.

My research questions were as follows:

- 1) What are the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis who help their children acquire early literacy?
- 2) How do mothers in crisis use capital to advocate for their children?

In this chapter, I discuss the methods used for this study, including the process I used to (a) decide on the design, (b) select the site and participants, and, (c) collect and analyze the data. I also discuss my role as a researcher and the possible threats to internal and external validity as well as ethical issues I considered throughout the process.

Pilot Study

Before undertaking my dissertation study, I conducted a pilot study to determine the most effective design to answer the research question, “What are the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis who help their children develop early literacy skills?”

Maxwell (2005) argues that using a pilot study helps a qualitative researcher determine whether the questions, settings, and methods are appropriate. He also states that pilot studies help the researcher develop an understanding of the meaning of the phenomena and events of the people being studied. I wanted to find out if face-to-face interviews would help me understand the habits and characteristics of mothers living in crisis who help their children acquire early literacy. I also wanted to find out if the questions in the protocol (see Appendix A) would help me answer my research question.

I employed an instrumental case study design (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) to understand the lived experiences of the mothers. Case study research is the study of understanding the uniqueness and complexity of the case being examined (Stake, 1995). I believed this design would be the best approach to portray the essence of each of the mother's experiences; according to Merriam (1998), this is critical. According to Stake (1995), instrumental case study design is used when it is instrumental to understand something else. In the pilot study, the mothers were instrumental in helping me understand the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis who their help children acquire early literacy.

To give mothers in the pilot study an opportunity to express their views openly, I developed a 10-question, open-ended protocol that can be found in Appendix A (Mascarenhas, 2009). The questions focused on how early the mothers began to read to their children, how often they read to their children, the types of reading materials they had in their home, and the specific skills they taught their children to use. The interview questions sought to find out how the mothers perceived these habits helped prepare their

children for school and what recommendations they would make to other mothers to help their children as well. The questions also focused on the mothers' personal reading habits.

I chose the mothers in this pilot study through purposeful selection. Purposeful selection helps the researcher deliberately select the site, setting, and participants that will be the best fit in order to answer the research questions, so she can be more confident in the conclusions that are drawn (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 1989). I selected this site because I had already established a good rapport with the staff and I believed that easy access to the facility would provide an opportunity to conduct my pilot study. I used purposive sampling (Merriam, 1998) because both mothers met the specific criterion I wanted to explore, which was their homeless situation. I had tutored both children when I worked at the transitional housing facility. Both of the children exhibited early literacy, which I describe as the ability of children at the earliest stages of development to recognize letters and sounds and to understand that print relays a message. It is the ability to incorporate this knowledge with developing language skills that lead to understanding the print message. It is also the ability to use strategies to be able to figure out how to read new text, such as using prior experiences, pictures, context, phonemic awareness, or phonics.

Because I knew their children met the criteria of the study, I proceeded to secure permission and consent to interview the mothers. The experience of living in the shelter was critical to the study because I wanted to explore how mothers are able to overcome the obstacles of their crisis situations to help their children learn to read. I wanted to

examine whether there are specific characteristics or habits that mothers possess that help them to assist their children in acquiring early literacy. It was critical for the mothers and children in the study to have experienced homelessness or some form of crisis to help dispel ideas associated with the deficit theory (Olivos, 2006). According to the deficit theory, people in marginalized groups, such as those experiencing homelessness, are not likely to attain the same level of success as their mainstream peers. For the purpose of this study, I defined mainstream as the segment of the population considered by society to be the norm (i.e., free from crisis and financially stable). Mothers who are marginalized are often not given an opportunity to demonstrate their strengths as their child's first teacher (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005). By choosing the transitional housing shelter to conduct the pilot study, I believed the mothers I sought to interview represented other mothers in similar situations who also helped their children attain early literacy. Both mothers in the pilot study were African American; however, that was not a criterion of the study.

One of the mothers in the pilot study had a child who was six at the time of the interview. The other mother had four children who were six years and younger at the time of the interview. The former mother was about to move into an apartment with her daughter, while the latter was going to move with her children back into a house with her husband who was the children's father. Although the mothers' transitions to independence might have affected the role they played in their children's early literacy, they both had been homeless during their children's early development when they reported having read or provided basic skills instruction to them.

I interviewed both of the mothers in the pilot study to explore their perceptions of what they did to help their children acquire early literacy skills. My analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that even though the approaches the mothers took to teach their children to read were extremely different, one taking a skills-based approach and the other providing extensive exposure to storybook reading, both of their children achieved early literacy skills. Some common themes also emerged from the interview transcripts. Both mothers strongly believed in the importance of language as a tool for learning and a critical means of achieving school success and success in life. The mothers also indicated they believed that close monitoring was the key to their child's achievement. They strongly emphasized the importance of self-efficacy by reflecting on their personal experiences and how they felt they affected their perceived successes and failures. They emphasized how important it is for their children to want to achieve for themselves and not for their mothers or anyone else.

The pilot study led to an understanding of what the mothers did to help their children develop early literacy skills. The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the mothers' roles in helping their children acquire early literacy in a way that a large-scale survey might not have. The interview experience provided an opportunity to hear the vocal intonations of the mothers and see their gestures and facial expressions. These face-to-face interviews helped me understand the mothers' perceptions of what they did to help their children acquire early literacy skills.

In order to maintain the integrity of the pilot study, I secured IRB permission, used pseudonyms in the transcripts, and reviewed the audio-tapes multiple times to

ensure that I gave an accurate transcription of each interview. I contacted both mothers after the initial interviews to be sure that my interpretation of their responses aligned with their intended messages. For the second interview, I met face-to-face with the mother of one child; however, I contacted the mother of four by phone because she had moved out of the state after the first interview. Because I was not able to meet with the second mother in person, I might not have had the opportunity to speak with her as long as I would have had we met face-to-face. If we had met, she might have provided me with information that she did not think to discuss due to the constraints presented by using the telephone.

I used open, axial, and selective coding in the pilot study to analyze the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, using open coding, I assigned a code to the data from the interview transcripts to create categories. When no new categories emerged, I used axial coding to reduce the data by considering terms that were repeated within each interview. Finally, I used selective coding to identify the data that were common across both interviews. The prevalent themes that emerged from the pilot study were (a) mothers as avid readers, (b) starting to read early to their children, (c) mothers own challenges in school, (d) self-efficacy in their children, (e) strength of good language, (f) time, and (g) monitoring child's reading.

The responses to the questions in the pilot study indicated that the interview protocol needed to be tweaked in order for the data to provide the specific details that would answer my research question. I amended the protocol to address these issues (see

Appendix B). Because the design and protocol appeared to be effective, I believed they were appropriate for the current study.

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative researchers are “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). “Qualitative researchers...seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them. To make their interpretations, the researchers must gain access to the multiple perspectives of the participants” (Glesne, 2006, pp. 4-5).

Method for the Current Study

Research design

I used an instrumental case study design to facilitate my understanding of what mothers in crisis do to help their children acquire early literacy skills. According to Stake (1995), an instrumental case study design is used when the researcher needs to understand something else. In the current study, the mothers were instrumental in helping me understand the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis who their help children acquire early literacy. Stake maintains that issues are dominant in instrumental case study. The issues that dominate the present study are that people who experience poverty and crisis who been marginalized by others still hold onto their beliefs (i.e., deficit theories; Olivos, 2006; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). They use capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to advocate for their children in order for them to achieve. I employed a qualitative method for the current research because this helped me address these issues. The following characteristics of qualitative design described by Stake (1995, pp. 47-48)

aligned with the focus of this study: (a) It was holistic, (b) empirical, (c) interpretive, and (d) empathic. Because the study was holistic, it was more important to understand each case rather than compare it to other cases. Because the study was empirical, I used authentic language in reporting in an attempt to maintain the natural element of the study. Because the study was interpretive, intuition took precedence over set criteria and I was focused on my interactions with the participants. Because the study was empathetic, I sought to relate the participants' experiences by reporting their perspectives to provide authentic frames of reference. Schram (2006) argues that phenomenological researchers provide a comprehensive description of the individual's perceptions of their experiences. The researcher can accomplish this by engaging in dialogue, reflecting on the underlying meaning of the dialogue, and conveying the meaning of the experience. Arminio and Hultgren (2002) stress the importance of the researcher making connections between what was previously understood and the phenomenon through the written interpretation of their lived experiences. As a researcher in this capacity, I strove to understand and interpret each of the mother's experiences. Understanding each of the mother's stories helped answer my research questions. The ultimate goal of this study was to hear the voices of those who are in situations that might create a sense of powerlessness. It was my responsibility to listen to the mothers' stories, to interpret the meanings of the stories, and to relay my interpretation of their messages so that other mothers in the same predicament could learn from them and feel empowered to become their child's first teacher and advocate.

Selection of Site

I selected transitional housing facilities to conduct my research because I had tutored at one of the facilities and knew the services they provided through my work as an academic coach. I considered data such as those presented in the *2012 Biennial Report to Congress on the Effectiveness of Grant Programs Under the Violence Against Women Act* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012) to understand the critical need for such facilities. From January to June, 2011, between 88% and 89% of domestic violence victims served by grant programs under the act were female. Services comprised of crisis intervention, help with legal assistance, school and health-related services, assistance with finances, employment, transitional housing assistance, and transportation. Mothers were provided with assistance with childcare and tutoring services for their children.

My work as a tutor at the transitional housing facility where I conducted the pilot study made me aware that some of the young children were showing signs of early literacy. I knew that some of the children did not have a formal education before kindergarten. I thought their mothers, who were their predominant caregivers, might be responsible for teaching their early skills. This piqued my interest to conduct the current study at this site. I contacted the child service coordinator to inform her about my study. Because I wanted to have a sufficient number of mothers in my study, I sought permission from the child service coordinators at two additional transitional housing facilities in the northern region of a mid-Atlantic state by letter, in person, and by e-mail in the fall of 2010 and winter of 2011 to inform them about the purpose of this study. I explained that I wanted to examine the positive habits and characteristics of mothers

living in crisis that help their children acquire early literacy. I informed the coordinators that children living in stable environments tend to be more academically successful than children who face crises due to poverty (Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002; Tunmer et al., 2006). At the time, I received promising responses from three of the shelters, one being the shelter where I had previously tutored. I met with coordinators of the shelters where I had not previously tutored. After we met, I received written consent for each of these sites to be included in the study.

Unfortunately, a storm caused severe damage to the facilities where many of the mothers were living. The director of this shelter told me that she no longer wished to have mothers at her site participate in the study. Therefore, I could not conduct my study at this site. The director at the other facility had taken leave and informed me she no longer wished for me to include her site in the study.

The transitional housing shelter where I conducted my current study is where I had tutored and conducted the pilot study described in a previous section. In addition to having already built a good rapport with the staff at this facility, I chose this site because it provides mothers in crisis situations an opportunity to begin to rebuild their lives by affording them with the tools needed to become advocates for themselves and their children and provides services similar to those described in the *Biennial Report to Congress on the Effectiveness of Grant Programs Under the Violence Against Women Act* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). Selecting participants from this site aligned with my conceptual framework: Mothers in crisis can tap into their unique resources of capital

to advocate for their children (Bourdieu, 1986) and misconceptions of people in homeless situations can be dispelled (Olivos, 2006; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997).

Description of the housing facility. The transitional shelter provides housing for mothers and their elementary school-aged and younger children. In order to be eligible to live there, mothers must be living in a homeless shelter or unsuitable living conditions, be in another transitional facility with an end date to residence impending, or facing eviction. The shelter was founded by the Benedictine Sisters and relies on charitable donations. It sits on the grounds of a Catholic school that serves children from kindergarten through 8th grade. There is also a chapel, monastery, and a donation collection center.

Money is put into escrow for each of the mothers. In this way, the mothers have money to take with them when they make the transition back into independent living. There are strict criteria for mothers to maintain residence at the shelter. They must keep a steady income, abide by house rules, and attend a variety of personal development classes. The children attend local schools and are provided tutoring through the county school system.

Support services including case management, counseling, life skills, financial management education, employment assistance, and help in seeking permanent residence are provided. The mothers work with the case manager to develop a plan that covers various areas that they need to be prepared for once they move into independent living, including education, employment, financial matters, and their children's well-being.

The shelter is comprised of three residential areas, each with its own kitchen, playroom, family room, and laundry room shared by up to four families. Each family has its own bedroom, bathroom, and refrigerator. Outside there is a playground and a picnic area.

Participants

Participants included three mothers of children who exhibited strong literacy skills, which I define as the ability to identify letters and sounds, read sight words, use sounds to read new words, and understand that print relays a message. Catherine, the first mother I interviewed, was Caucasian. She was in her 30s and had three children at the time of the interview. Her 8-year-old daughter, Ellen, was the focus of the interview. Stacy, the second mother I interviewed, was African American. She was 28 and had a 6-year-old daughter, Daphne, at the time of the interview. The third mother I interviewed, Katy, was also African American. At the time of the interview, she was 28 and had three daughters. Her 5-year-old daughter, Jasmine, was the focus of our interview.

I considered the number of mothers I interviewed in the pilot study to determine the number of participants for the current study. Because this was the first instrumental case study I conducted, I used this information to guide me. The prevalent themes that emerged from the pilot study were (a) mothers as avid readers, (b) starting to read early to their children, (c) mothers own challenges in school, (d) self-efficacy in their children, (e) strength of good language, (f) time, and (g) monitoring child's reading. My interpretation of the narratives from the two interviews revealed that the approaches the

mothers used to help their daughters achieve early literacy were quite different. One mother used a skills-based approach, while the other mother used a holistic approach.

My initial plan in the current study was to interview more than three mothers. However, as I searched for participants, I encountered some challenges. As stated previously, the directors of two of the sites, who had originally given their approval, decided not to participate in the study. This reduced the number of sites from which I could recruit prospective participants. Another factor I had to consider, which was an ethical consideration as well, was the amount of time the mothers had available to participate in the interview. The mothers in this population have many time constraints and responsibilities. Consenting to participate in my study would have added one more commitment. Some of the mothers who were recommended by the child service coordinator and tutor at the shelter did not wish to participate. For these reasons, there were three participants from one site in my study. I discuss whether I believe this may have impacted the findings in my limitations section. According to Reybold, Lammert, and Stribling (2012), qualitative researchers need to be critical of the methods they use to select participants. This conscious deliberation of the method they use as well as the paths on which their research may take them is called “thinking forward.” I considered the information from the pilot study and the challenges I encountered. The information from the pilot study provided me with confidence to move forward with the procedures I used to select participants and collect data.

Data Collection

I called each of the mothers who agreed to potentially participate in the study and arranged to set up initial contacts to get acquainted, tell them more about my study, and set up an interview date. I met with each of the mothers informally to make initial contacts and to tell them about my study. Seidman (1998) recommends making this initial contact in order to gain the trust of the people who are going to be interviewed. I used this opportunity to explain my study to each of the mothers I interviewed. I also gathered some background information to determine if each mother fit the profile of the study. At each of these meetings, we made arrangements for the actual interviews.

Interviewing gives the researcher the opportunity to go places and understand settings where they otherwise might not have access. Qualitative interviews help the researcher understand the process of how an event occurs (Glesne, 2006; Seidman, 1998; Weiss, 1994). The face-to-face interviews I conducted provided an opportunity to listen to mothers' detailed descriptions. I believe this experience provided an understanding of each of their experiences. The words the mothers used to describe their child's early literacy experiences helped me visualize the process of how they helped their children learn. At the same time, it helped them realize the importance of their actions. Glesne (2006) argues that the process of data gathering is holistic: Each part of the analysis is contingent upon previous analysis. Through holistic description, the researcher is privy to the multiple perspectives gleaned through the various interviews and the unique perceptions of the participants as well as the commonalities in the information drawn from each of the reports. The interviewer makes connections with those being

interviewed by interacting with them, listening to their stories, and trying to think of what it would be like to be in a similar situation. The process of interviewing three mothers provided an opportunity to draw in their distinct perspectives about the same issue before I integrated the ideas that had commonalities.

In addition, as Seidman (1998) states, the purpose of qualitative interview is for the researcher to understand other people's experiences and the "meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). He argues that interview studies give value to the individual stories of those being interviewed. He also claims that interviewing gives researchers a way to explore meaning and context of different behaviors. All of these reasons build a strong case for using qualitative interviews (Weiss, 1994). The purpose of this investigation was to give value to the mothers' roles in helping their children acquire early literacy by giving them the opportunity to retrieve and recount their memories of how they helped their children. By taking these experiences and making meaning of them, I intend to provide information for people in similar situations to help them see the value of actions taken in the early stages of literacy learning.

Instrumentation

To examine what mothers in crisis do to help their children acquire early literacy skills, I conducted a qualitative, open-ended interview study. According to Seidman (1998), using open-ended questions gives participants the opportunity to answer in any direction. I chose this approach because I wanted the mothers to have the option to expand upon my questions without feeling restricted. I used a 14-question, open-ended interview protocol (see Appendix B) based on the interview protocol I used in the pilot

study (see Appendix A). It was important to establish a good rapport with the mothers; therefore, I decided to use a protocol as a guide. As suggested by Merriam (1998), a guide ensures that the interviews are conducted with a good flow. As a new researcher, I wanted to be sure to cover topics related to my research questions. I chose to use this method in order to give the mothers an opportunity to share their unique experiences while ensuring my specific questions were being addressed (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998; Weiss, 1994). Using a protocol facilitates the process of reporting (Weiss, 1994). I found it was helpful to have a guide for reference and believed it did not restrict the flow of the interviews. The mothers interjected their own thoughts throughout the interviews. Using a protocol as a guide made it possible to look for patterns among the responses and later categorize them. Results from the pilot study suggested that questions related to the importance of strong language skills, close monitoring, and self-efficacy should be included; therefore, I included questions in the interview protocol that focused on the mothers' reading experiences as children and their own reading habits. The interview questions asked mothers when they started reading to their children, the frequency with which they read to them, and what they do to engage their children in the stories. The questions also focused on whether mothers thought their habits played a role in helping their children achieve early literacy. The final questions were related to what the mothers planned to do to help their children in the future, what changes they would have made in their child's early years, if any, and what advice they would give to other mothers to help their children acquire early literacy skills.

Although I believed that using an open-ended protocol was the most appropriate method to collect data for this study, there were some drawbacks. The set pattern of questions may have inhibited the length and content of the responses (Creswell, 2005; Weiss, 1994). To minimize this risk, I gave the mothers sufficient time to add to and expand upon their responses. I told the mothers before I interviewed them that they should not feel restricted to answering only the questions in the protocol. The questions in the protocol were designed to help the mothers reflect on their past and think about their influence on their children's acquisition of literacy skills.

Procedure

Each interview session for the current study took approximately one hour; however, I asked each mother if I could revisit her for another interview. I used a digital voice recorder to record the interviews. Using a recorder enabled me to pay close attention to the mothers' responses during the interviews and helped to make the experience more personal because it eliminated the need to write down every word verbatim (Weiss, 1994). It was important to establish a connection with each of the mothers and form a trusting relationship in order for them to recount their experiences. Recording each interview afforded me the opportunity to reflect on the richness of the mothers' unique nuances of speech that would not have been available had I just taken notes. Seidman (1998) argues that recording reduces the possibility of making any misconceptions about what is said by giving the interviewer the opportunity to check back to clarify any doubts in the interviews. Recording also gives the interviewer a means of accountability and an opportunity to improve upon interviewing technique by

self-critique of the playbacks. It was critical that the mothers felt at ease to think about what they did to help their children without feeling intimidated. My role as an interviewer was to ensure the mothers believed what they were saying had value and importance for others. Using the least obstructive means of collecting data helped the mothers to share their experiences without feeling restricted or intimidated and gave voice to their realities. I took field notes to record my first impressions and document my observations, reflections, and perceptions after each interview.

I listened several times to each interview. After I transcribed the interview with Catherine, I called her for a follow-up conversation to talk about our interview because she had moved after our initial meeting. This procedure, called *member checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), is used to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the interview correlates with the participant's intended meaning. After I transcribed the interview with Stacy, I tried to contact her, but she had moved and left no contact information. The cell phone number she provided was no longer in service. I was not able to hear Stacy's interview clearly, but I was able to clarify her responses when I listened to the tape the second time. After I transcribed the interview with Katy, I met her in person to discuss our initial interview. She provided clarification about some of her responses. Then, to answer my research question, I synthesized the data to form a conclusion. I transcribed the interview data to have the opportunity to think about and reflect on what the mothers said.

Data Analysis

Arminio and Hultgren (2002) point out the nature of analyzing qualitative data is to pursue the *qualis*, what it is rather than what it is not. They argue that qualitative researchers must adhere to stringent and transparent methods of data, described as *goodness*. I began to analyze the data as I collected them. This helped me focus on the purpose of my study and to stay organized (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). I analyzed the data by reading through the transcripts multiple times and taking notes as I made observations. As I read through each transcript, I coded each item using open, axial, and selective coding and reduced data by focusing on that which related to the purpose of my study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, I read through each line and used open coding to assign categories. For example, Katy stated, “I have always read below grade level. I have always had trouble with reading and...um...figuring out the words and how to pronounce them.” In that line, I assigned the categories *read below level*, *trouble with reading*, *figuring out words*, *pronounced*, and *struggled*. I followed the same method for every line of all the transcripts of the three interviews. When no new categories emerged, I used axial coding to look for relationships among the categories. Once again, using Katy’s interview transcript as an example, she stated, “I have always had trouble with reading and...um...figuring out the words and how to pronounce them. So I didn’t have a good level growing up.” I assigned the code *struggling reader* because I interpreted trouble with reading, not figuring out words, and not being able to pronounce them to signify a struggle with reading. I looked back at the transcripts and began to look for patterns. After I transcribed the data, I looked for

similarities among the responses from all three interviews and categorized those responses using selective coding. For example, Catherine and Katy both talked about difficulties they had in school. I assigned the code *mother's academic struggles*.

I asked a former colleague with a background in literacy to code each of the interviews for peer review to check the reliability of my findings. She read through each interview and coded the items. First, she identified what she believed were the prevalent themes in each interview, and then she revealed the overarching themes across the three interviews. We discussed our individual results and found that our coding revealed similar themes. To provide a visual representation, I sorted the data into categories by organizing the coded items and integrated them into a framework (see Table 1 in Chapter 4). This table helped me understand what patterns, if any, were emerging. This visual also helped me reflect on whether my first research question, “What are the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis who help their children to acquire early literacy?” was being answered. According to Merriam (1998), providing a display of the data analysis can help the reader understand an otherwise complicated analysis in a direct manner. By providing each step of my analysis, I believe I was cognizant of the integrity of the research process.

After I read through the notes again, I merged the results into a Venn diagram (see Figure 2 in Chapter 4) to show the similarities and differences in the themes that emerged from all of the interviews. I used selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to determine the prevalent themes that related most closely with the focus of the study. To give another example of selective coding, Catherine, Stacy, and Katy all made several

references to *time* throughout their interviews. After I transcribed the three interviews, I noticed it was a prevalent theme and believed it was a central category. Therefore, I assigned the code *time* as one of the themes to analyze. In the following section, I indicate the measures I took to avoid potential internal and external threats to the study.

Validity

Internal validity. Internal validity examines whether the findings determine reality (Merriam, 1998). Bias can threaten the validity of a study if the researcher uses subjectivity (Maxwell, 2005). I entered into this research project with a diversity of experience. Throughout the study, I used these experiences as a source of information rather than as a means to create biases. I did not know any of the mothers before the study. As I listened to and reported the results, I tried to leave out my subjectivity in order to authentically illustrate each of the mother's experiences. I was transparent about reporting findings that were surprising to me. I used rich data to collect the participants' direct quotations and gave thick descriptions of my interpretation of their experiences (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). The interactions I shared with the mothers in each of the interviews provided rich narratives that helped me visualize their experiences.

Member checking is the process a researcher uses to share interpretations of the interview transcripts with the participants to attempt to represent their interviews with accuracy (Glesne, 2006). Member checking was a valuable way to verify my interpretation of the mothers' narratives, clarify points that I did not understand, and ask new questions that I did not ask at our prior meetings. Because one of the mothers

moved and left no means of contacting her, I did not conduct a member check with her interview.

Peer review is the act of consulting with peers to review methods, emerging themes, and findings. As a novice researcher, I had many questions about the research process. For this reason, I consulted with a university professor for guidance on coding, using proper terminology to frame my study, and to examine the themes that I had gleaned from my interpretation of the interview transcripts. I sought the expertise of a former colleague with a background in literacy to independently code the transcripts. She read and coded each of the transcripts using open and axial coding. We compared our findings, discussed the common themes, and used selective coding to identify the themes that focused on the research problem. Peer review helped me focus on my research questions and helped to validate my findings.

External validity. External validity is the degree to which the findings of one study can be generalized and applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998). The small sample sizes that are studied may be considered limitations of qualitative studies. By interviewing three mothers, I sought to examine and present the findings on different perspectives on the same phenomenon in an attempt to make the study more generalizable. I used a 14-question, open-ended interview protocol that focused on my research questions. Using a protocol provided a framework to make connections, code the material, and supply information that is generalizable. Rich description is a means of preventing both internal and external threats to validity. According to Merriam (1998), providing rich details can serve to make a study generalizable. I provided detailed

narratives of each of my interactions with the mothers to give the reader a true sense of my interpretation of how each mother's story answered my research questions.

Ethics

Throughout all phases of qualitative research, ethical issues must be considered (Creswell, 2013). Before the study, I secured permission from the IRB of my university to conduct the study. I received signed consent from the executive director at the shelter to conduct the study. To respect the mothers' privacy, I asked the child service coordinator if I could contact mothers who fit the profile of the study. Before interviewing the mothers, I talked with each of them on the telephone, made an initial contact visit to apprise them of the purpose of the study, and secured their signed consent. I asked each of the mothers the date, place, and time that they would like to meet to avoid my influence. I used pseudonyms in the report to replace all names. I followed each mother's lead throughout each interview to ensure they had the opportunity to tell their stories without being rushed or interrupted. As I analyzed the data, I reported multiple perspectives to be sure all voices would be represented and conducted member checks when it was possible. I presented my thorough interpretation of each of the interactions I had with the mothers. I asked for one mother's permission to include something in the report she told me after the digital recorder had been turned off; she granted her permission. The information will be shared with respect to the participants' privacy and in compliance with the journals and organizations in which it will be presented.

My Role as a Researcher

In a study such as the current study where my interactions with the mothers was an integral part of the process, it is important to understand my role as a researcher and the background I brought to the context. As a novice researcher, it was imperative for me to select a design that was in direct conjunction with the problem of the study. At the same time, I had to choose a method that would be appropriate with the way I think, work, and act. The design had to be suitable with my particular area of expertise to give my study credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted the pilot study described in a previous section. This pilot study enabled me to determine whether the method of data collection would help me gather information to answer my research question. The findings of the pilot study also helped inform the current study. I found the design I chose, instrumental case study, and the method of data collection, qualitative interviews, were appropriate ways to answer my research question.

The pilot study also helped me develop interview skills. Prior to the pilot study, I had conducted three other face-to-face interviews. Therefore, by the time of the current study, I had already conducted five face-to-face interviews. I believed this practice with interviewing enabled me to use it as a form of instrumentation for my study.

My focus of interest, mothers in crisis who teach their children early literacy skills, is based on a combination of factors. I have been a teacher for almost 30 years with the past 23 of those years specializing in reading. As a reading specialist, I worked as a Title 1 reading teacher and as a local reading specialist teaching students of diverse needs and backgrounds in the school system where I still teach. Title 1 funding, formerly

labeled Chapter 1, provides financial assistance to local educational agencies to schools with high percentages of low-income families. I have also tutored at a transitional housing facility and a homeless shelter for over eight years. In both of these roles, I became aware that children who were living in poverty, living with one parent, or were exposed to some form of crisis were experiencing academic success. For example, the children who were the focus of my pilot study were already recognizing basic sight words, reading simple stories, and beginning to write, even though they had never been in school. Because I knew they had only been living with their mothers, I thought it was something that their mothers might have been doing to help them to acquire these early literacy skills.

To add to my role as a researcher, I am also a parent. I have four children with different abilities; my youngest is a child with special needs. I understand the importance of being my daughter's advocate. I believe this role has helped me make the unique connection that parents make with each other.

According to Stake (1995), the researcher takes on six roles. These roles are teacher, advocate, biographer, interpreter, theorist, and evaluator. I took on each of these roles with rigor and fidelity in the study.

My role as a teacher is to take the findings of the research and use the information to provide education to those involved who can most benefit. I will use the information to educate people about the ways they can help in their roles as their children's first teachers. Based on the findings of the study, I will stress the importance of mothers' roles as their children's advocates. I will also use the findings of the study to educate

people in the community who work with the homeless population to provide opportunities for the mothers to become their children's first teachers. Through journal articles and conferences, I will educate professionals in the field of education to promote a positive view of what all parents-in-crisis can do to initiate and enhance their child's literacy learning.

As an advocate, I will use the information I gathered from the study to help dispel the misconceptions of deficit theory (Olivos, 2006; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). While my initial approach in taking on this project was without judgment so that I may give a fair and unbiased analysis of the data, it would be unrealistic for me not to take a stance with the information I have uncovered. In addition to spreading this message through my journal publications and my participation in conferences and community workshops, I will continue to support and advocate for the representation of people in crisis in situations where they need to have their voices amplified.

My role as a biographer is to give the reader a view into the life of each of the mothers I interviewed. I met with two of the mothers twice and one of the mothers three times; therefore, I am giving the reader only a snippet of each mother's life. However, the conversations I had with the mothers when I spoke to them each time gave me insight into what drove them to want to help their children to learn early literacy skills. These conversations helped me understand the importance of education in their lives. In this role, I introduce how each mother brought her child into the world of reading in her own unique way from her child's earliest stages to school age.

In my role as an interpreter, I sought to understand the mother's words through my mind's eye. As I listened to each of the interviews, I thought of ways to connect the mothers' stories to what I was trying to discover. At the same time, I was thinking of the importance of relaying this information with accuracy and authenticity to the reader and how that information would be used by others in similar situations. I took this role with gravity since it is critical for others to be able to benefit from the findings of this study. This is contingent upon my interpretation of the mothers' words.

My role as a theorist was critical to the study. The focus of the study was to dispel aspects of the deficit theory. In order to do this, the mothers had to reconstruct what they did to find out their vital role in their children's literacy learning. I conducted this research through a constructivist stance. Constructivist inquiry examines how realities are constructed and co-constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The constructivist approach helped me understand meaning through the mothers' reconstructions of their experiences of teaching their children early literacy skills. It was my intention that this synthesis would give voice, empower, and liberate the mothers who I interviewed. It was my hope that as the realities of the mothers in the study were revealed, each voice would become recognized for its unique and valuable contribution to the academic success of her child. In turn, I hoped that the mothers' perspectives could be used to help dispel the deficit view by transforming widely accepted negative perceptions into positive impressions and by showing that mothers in these marginalized groups are capable and worthy contributors to their children's education.

As an evaluator, I attempted to rule out any factors within my control that would hinder the trustworthiness of this study. I took field notes after each interview, conducted member checks with two of the three mothers I interviewed, and listened to the digital-voice recorded transcripts multiple times. I consulted with colleagues for their advice when necessary and used reflexivity (Glesne, 2006) to constantly think about whether I was going in the right direction and staying on the right path.

For the current study, I took a qualitative approach because my way of knowing and understanding is by talking to others and listening to their stories (Patton, 1989). This methodology was an appropriate method in order for me to answer the research questions. Arminio and Hultgren (2002) make the distinction between method and methodology, stating that methodology is the route or theoretical perspective the researcher has undertaken. It determines the design and the means of data collection that are used. Method, on the other hand, is the actual process used. Qualitative researchers collect authentic data and interpret and analyze them by looking for patterns or connecting themes. The final report (Arminio & Hultgren 2002; Creswell, 2013) is a compilation of the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a detailed account and thick description of the problem, its importance as a contribution to the literature, and a call to action based on the findings.

Boundaries

The topic of study indicated the need to conduct a qualitative study. Face-to-face interviews were used to answer the research questions. Although the design and method

of data collection were appropriate for the purposes of this study, there were possible boundaries.

The first boundary of this study might lie within the mothers' recollections of what they did to help their children acquire early literacy skills. Although children's literacy skills may have been attributed to mothers' early interactions, they may not have been aware of their role in their child's literacy development and did not provide comprehensive details about what they did to help their child acquire early literacy skills.

The second boundary may be the distinction between the child's success due to the mother's interaction and resiliency (Rak & Patterson, 1996). Careful analysis of the transcripts, field notes, and member checks were used to determine if the student's literacy skills could be attributed to their early interactions with their mothers or resiliency. Despite these possible boundaries, the purpose and the need for this study were evident.

Chapter Summary

An instrumental case study design was used to determine the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis who help their children acquire literacy and how validity was maintained through the use of various measures. Ethical issues were considered throughout each stage of the research process. Finally, possible boundaries, which could have caused limitations to the study, were presented.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter, I discuss each of the interviews with participants in depth, relate my interpretations of these interviews, and portray the themes that emerged. I sought to discover the habits and characteristics of mothers who help their children acquire early literacy skills. I describe early literacy skills as the ability to identify the letters of the alphabet, recognize sounds and words, and understand conceptually that text tells a story. I also wanted to discover the ways women in crisis use capital to advocate for their children. I demonstrate how Catherine, Stacy, and Katy dispelled the negative implications of deficit theory (Olivos, 2006; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997) by showing how they taught their children early literacy skills, even though they were experiencing crisis situations. I also provide evidence to show that women in crisis can tap into their own particular forms of capital to advocate for their children (Bourdieu, 1986; Carter, 2005).

In the next section, I introduce each of the mothers. Following their introductions, I present excerpts from each of the interviews organized by theme, based on my interpretation of their relationship to the problem of the study. I reflect on whether having the opportunity to reconstruct their experiences will help the mothers see the value in teaching their children early literacy. I also discuss factors for the reader to consider.

The Mothers' Stories

My intention to ask the mothers to share their recollections of their experiences was twofold: I was hoping they would see value in their interactions with their children, and I wanted to find out whether there were commonalities in what they did. The ultimate goal was for the mothers in the current study to share what they did to help their children acquire literacy with other mothers in similar situations.

The mothers were recommended for participation in the study by the child service coordinator or the tutor based on their observations of the mothers' interactions with their children. The mothers they referred were those observed consistently interacting with their children in some capacity to help them acquire early literacy skills. For example, the mother may have read a book to her child every day, helped her child to read sight words or to write the letters of the alphabet, or engaged in another type of writing activity with her child. Each of the mothers' recollections of their interactions with their children is below. All of the names given are pseudonyms.

Catherine's Story

Initial contact. The tutor introduced me to Catherine on Thursday, April 7, 2011 just after she had eaten dinner. The tutor had initially recommended Catherine based on her oldest daughter Ellen's strong reading skills and language skills, although she believed her interest in all her children's academic tasks was remarkable. She believed that she kept informed about her children's academic performance and was instrumental in promoting their academic success. She reported that Ellen was an avid reader, read with fluency, and had a keen interest in writing. She also reported that Ellen kept a

journal in which she wrote creative stories. Although she was older than the children in the parameters of the study, Catherine reported that before entering kindergarten, Ellen was able to identify and write the letters of the alphabet and was able to read basic sight words. When I met Catherine for our informal initial meeting, she apprised me that Ellen entered school with above average literacy and language skills. Because the child service coordinator and the tutor recommended Catherine based on their observations of the interaction between Catherine and her children and her keen interest in their educational needs, I felt comfortable proceeding with interviewing her for the study. Catherine was a Caucasian mother of three who was in her mid-thirties, with two girls and one boy. At the time of the interview, her oldest child was her 8-year-old daughter in the second grade. Her middle child was her 6-year-old daughter in first grade, and her youngest child was her 4-year-old son, who was not yet in school. We immediately connected.

Catherine was open to talking to me about her children and seemed especially interested in sharing what she did to help her children develop a love for reading. She herself was an avid reader, reporting that she “lived in a bookstore... in a library.” She talked about how she would read until she finished a book. She conveyed her concern for her two younger children, who she felt were struggling. Her younger daughter had some difficulty acquiring basic skills knowledge. Although her 4-year-old son was already showing signs of early literacy, he had a speech delay and was receiving services as an intervention. She was concerned that his services would be cut off soon because he would become ineligible. Despite the fact that Catherine lived in transitional housing, her income was considered too high for him to be eligible for Head Start. Catherine

provided so much preliminary information that I felt I already knew a substantial amount of her story before I met her for our interview. We set up the date. She wanted to meet with me right away because she would be out of town to take her children to a Midwestern state to see their father shortly thereafter. We set up a time, and I agreed to return to conduct the interview on Saturday, April 9, 2011.

Initial interview. I went back to the shelter to meet with Catherine on Saturday. She and her children were anticipating my arrival. Another mother who lived in their neighborhood answered the door. She had been told that I would be coming; therefore, she knew why I was there and welcomed me in. The children were friendly and needed some transition time. However, once Catherine got them settled and occupied, they were fine and gave her the time she needed to speak to me. We sat on the sofa, and I got the impression she felt very much at ease talking with me. Once again, Catherine was relaxed and made a connection with me immediately. We talked about the local area, work, and the usual “small talk” to ease into the interview and strengthen our bond as residents of the neighborhood.

Catherine had lived in the area years before, but then moved to Chicago. I was not clear on why she moved until much later in the interview. Catherine relayed her love for reading many times throughout the interview; she believed this message was conveyed to her children as well. Her oldest daughter, Ellen, had been recommended for G-T, which is the acronym for the gifted and talented program, and she was in the process of being evaluated. Throughout the interview, I kept wondering if this family truly met my criteria for the study. Yes, they were in transitional housing, but they

seemed to be intact. When the father was mentioned, Catherine's voice seemed to take on a negative tone, but nothing too critical appeared to have taken place during those early years to have hampered Ellen's early literacy acquisition. Yet, snippets of information about the past were coming through as Catherine talked about the need to leave and how leaving her husband was imminent.

Finally, after the recorder was off, Catherine revealed that Ellen knew the difference between a soda can and a beer can by the time she was 1-year-old; her husband was drunk all the time and was abusive. I felt that this was the piece that was missing. This was what Catherine was trying to tell me all along. To be sure that I could include this information in this report, when I contacted Catherine as a follow-up to the interview, she gave me permission to publish this information in the study.

Catherine was an Army contractor when her oldest child was born. They lived in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and then moved to the Midwest for five years where she worked for a local company. At that point, she decided to leave her husband, which she later revealed was due to his alcoholism. She left the children in his care for one year. She bitterly stated that he could not handle being a parent. When she returned, she tried to live with a friend, but that did not work out either. She tried to save her marriage and make it work, but eventually moved to the mid-Atlantic region with the children because her line of work was not being offered in that part of the country. That was how she came to live in transitional housing.

Catherine spoke freely about her crisis throughout the interview, but at the same time made it clear that her children and their success in school was the most important

aspect in her life. The interview gave her an opportunity to reflect on her experiences. It was clear that it empowered her by helping her think about the influence she had on her children's acquisition of early literacy skills. She discussed the burdens she experienced, including time and money constraints and her marital conflict during her children's formative years. I will discuss later that it was apparent that this discourse gave her the opportunity to reconstruct her role in what helped her daughter to be well above grade level to the point of being recommended for the gifted program.

Follow-up interview. Catherine agreed to meet again after I transcribed the interview to be sure that I did not misconstrue anything that she told me. She would have been eligible to stay at the facility for two years until she got herself established in the area. By the time I called back to ask her questions about our initial interview, she had already moved. She moved in with her sister, stating that child care expenses were too high for her to afford; therefore, her sister would watch her children when she was at work and they were not in school.

It is clear that the initial and follow-up interviews were opportunities for Catherine to reflect upon and understand the importance of her role in her children's literacy learning.

Stacy's Story

Initial meeting. Stacy was a 28-year-old African American with one 6-year-old daughter, Daphne, who was in first grade at the time of the interview. She lived at the same transitional housing shelter where Catherine lived. The tutor recommended Stacy for the study based on her daughter Daphne's strong reading skills and love for reading.

The child service coordinator reported that she often saw Stacy and Daphne completing puzzles together and Stacy read with her in the evenings. She believed that Stacy tried to do whatever she could to help Daphne achieve. The child service coordinator commented that she always “saw a book before her face” to emphasize Daphne’s love for reading and that she often saw her reading in the car. She reported that Daphne had strong reading skills and was reading above grade level. The coordinator stressed how proud Daphne was of her reading ability: She would show her books and say, “This is what I’m reading.” I met with Stacy informally on Thursday, May 19, 2011 to ask her if she would interested in talking to me about what she did to pique her daughter’s interest in reading and to help her develop strong early literacy skills. At the time, she was reserved and seemed preoccupied, but was also willing to schedule a time to meet with me to be interviewed. I will admit I was a bit apprehensive before meeting with Stacy for this interview because the tutor who recommended her said that she tended to “keep to herself.” I realized later that she was doing some paperwork and I might have caught her at a bad time.

Interview. When I arrived at the neighborhood where Stacy lived, she was waiting for me. Daphne was also there, and she was very friendly and greeted me. Daphne entertained herself during the whole interview. Stacy offered me a seat at their kitchen table. She seemed more relaxed this time. She was still quite reserved, but was much more at ease when she was speaking with me. I read the introduction to the interview protocol, asked for her consent, and she signed the form. Stacy seemed a little bit reluctant to respond at first, but warmed up as the interview progressed. As she

reflected on what she did with her daughter during the early years, her face seemed to light up. She frequently went back to questions I had asked earlier or expanded upon previous responses. It seemed like the interview gave her an opportunity to open up a window into her past.

Stacy revealed that she had lived in the south and that she had only been in the region since March, but she was pleased with the school system that Daphne was currently attending. She had enrolled her daughter in the Head Start program in the state where she was previously living, but she was so disillusioned with the lack of academics they were offering that she pulled her out of the school. She considered it to be a glorified daycare. She took it upon herself to teach Daphne the literacy skills she believed should have been taught in Head Start.

Stacy was also dissatisfied with the kindergarten program in the southern state where she formerly had been living. Again, she felt that the instruction was lacking. She continued to support her daughter's literacy learning by teaching her at home. She thought of creative ways to help her recognize the sight words, such as taking the words from Bible verses and from Michael Jackson songs; she and her daughter loved Michael Jackson. When she told me about this method of teaching her daughter sight words, she was beaming. I told her I was truly impressed that she found such a creative way to teach sight words and that I would like to use that method with my students. Stacy said she placed words on the wall in their bedroom for her daughter to learn. She added that her daughter had "taken off in reading."

There was no follow-up interview with Stacy because she moved unexpectedly. I tried contacting her, but the cell phone number she had provided was no longer in service.

Katy's Story

Initial meeting. The child service coordinator at the shelter recommended that I contact Katy for an interview. She told me Katy was a preschool teacher and she thought she would be eager to talk to me. According to her, Katy's kindergarten-aged daughter had strong literacy skills. She said that when she was in kindergarten, she was reading books that were at the second-grade level. She also said that Jasmine exhibited strong math skills; however, she stated that her writing was not as strong as either her math or reading. The child service coordinator also reported that Jasmine could read a whole book while she was meeting with her mother for a 40- to 60-minute session. She stated that her teachers rewarded her with gifts for the good grades on her report cards. She claimed that Katy spent a great deal of time helping her children with reading and school-related tasks. She reported that, despite the fact that her youngest child needed help with physical therapy, she made the time to do all she could with all of her daughters. She also revealed that she never hesitated to ask for help if she believed one of her children needed assistance in some way. The child service coordinator stated that she believed Katy wanted her children to have a better future. She gave Katy my phone number and asked for my permission to contact her. For a while, we played telephone tag. Finally, we made arrangements to meet on October 31, 2011 for an informal preliminary meeting in her neighborhood at the shelter. When we set the date, neither of us realizing it was

Halloween. Katy was still out trick-or-treating with her children when I arrived. I waited a little while, but then I left a note saying that I would call to make arrangements to return when it was convenient for her. Katy called me back and asked me to stop by the following week instead.

I met Katy and her children. They had anticipated that I would be coming, and I felt very welcomed. We laughed that we had originally planned to meet on Halloween. I blamed that on the fact that I no longer took my children trick-or-treating; therefore, I had not even thought about it. As the child service coordinator suggested, she was very personable and willing to speak with me. We planned to meet on November 19, 2011.

Initial interview. Katy was a 28-year-old African American mother of three girls. She was living with her daughters in transitional housing at the time of the interview. Katy was eager to meet me to talk about what she did to help her kindergarten-aged daughter, Jasmine, read above grade level. She recalled that she started reading to Jasmine when she was 5 weeks old. She took her to the preschool where she also teaches. At home, she read simple books with her. In addition to reading with Jasmine at home, she practiced reading with her on the bus.

In the interview, she talked about how she grabbed every available moment that she could to support her daughter's learning. Although she seemed to feel that she could have spent more time with her daughter and her other children, she revealed that she used a variety of strategies to teach her early literacy, including drilling her on her weekly required word lists and listening to her read while on the bus, reading with her daily, helping her to identify her sight words, and purchasing technological equipment. Katy's

children have different learning needs. She reported that her oldest daughter, who was in the fourth grade, was having difficulty with reading. She shared that her first language was Spanish because her childcare provider only spoke Spanish to her, and she thought that this might have been problematic when learning to read. Her second daughter, Jasmine, entered school with strong literacy skills. Katy said that Jasmine's first language was English, and she believed that this accounted for her strong literacy skills. Her third daughter was born with special needs. In fact, when I went to meet her for a follow-up interview, she was going to a meeting with specialists to determine what future services her daughter would be receiving.

When I asked about Jasmine's writing skills during the first interview, Katy felt that she was not performing in accordance with her reading level. However, when I asked about her progress on the return visit, Katy wanted Jasmine to show me a note that she had written, which was proudly displayed on the refrigerator. It was a perfectly structured sentence with appropriate ending punctuation and almost no misspellings. Her sentence provided evidence that she was writing above level for a kindergarten student.

Katy reported that learning to read did not come easily for her. She recalled that she loved listening to the stories that her mother read to her, but became frustrated when she had to read herself. However, as an adult, she is an avid reader and loves reading mysteries.

Follow-up interview. Although I did not ask Katy what brought her to be in a homeless situation upon the first meeting, I asked her when I met with her a second time on April 6, 2012. She said that her husband was financially irresponsible and she was

taking care of everything. She took it upon herself to remove the children and start a life for them without him. When she was with him, she was just working one job as a preschool teacher. Now that she is the sole breadwinner, she is working two jobs. She continues to teach at the preschool and is a bus driver.

During this interview, I asked Katy when she believed her reading began to improve. She recalled that it was not until junior high school, and she attributed it to the help she received in school. I asked her if she believed the frustration she experienced impacted the way she works with her children. She said that when she sees that her children are getting frustrated, including Jasmine for whom learning to read is coming easy, she steps back and gives them time.

In the first interview, Katy expressed quite a bit of concern with Jasmine's school experience because she believed Jasmine was not being challenged. She believed that this was causing her to be unmotivated and act out at times. She was working with the teacher to try to find a way to ensure that Jasmine would perform to the best of her ability. In the follow-up interview, she told me she had met with Jasmine's teacher who had set up a program to challenge her. As a result, she was no longer acting out and was not reluctant to go to school in the morning.

The Mothers' Crises

My first concern as a researcher is to honor the dignity and respect of the people with whom I am in contact while maintaining the rigor and fidelity of the research project (Glesne, 2006; Seidman, 1998). I wanted to develop a good relationship with each of the mothers and let them know that my intent was to find out what they did to help their

children acquire early literacy. I knew they were in crisis situations because that was what brought them to live in the shelter, but I did not blatantly ask for the specifics during the first interviews. I knew the transitional housing facility provided housing only to women; I also knew that some of the residents were victims of domestic abuse. A 2008 report published by The National Center on Family Homelessness indicated that the United States has the greatest number of homeless women and children among industrialized nations. The data showed that people fleeing from domestic violence were likely to become homeless and were often without social support. Eighty-four percent of the homeless families were headed by women. One reason given for this prevalence was that many shelters do not accept men; therefore, the families become separated. According to this report, over 92% of homeless mothers were subject to some form of abuse during their lifetime. Bassuk et al. (1997) sought to compare the childhood risk and protective factors of 220 homeless women and 216 housed low-income women. Through interview data, they found that violent victimization was a risk factor for both homeless and housed low-income women. The data in these reports identified a specific crisis that led women into homelessness. Below, each of the mothers' specific crises are reported. Although all of the mothers did not report having been victims of domestic violence, they each experienced some form of crisis that caused them to become homeless.

Catherine revealed quite a bit about her crisis in the first interview. Stacy and Katy were more reserved and did not make specific references to their crises, so I made a mental note to talk about them when contacting them again. I was able to find out about

what Katy had experienced when I met her for a third time. However, when I tried to set up a second interview with Stacy, I found out that she had moved out unexpectedly and did not leave any means of contacting her.

As I stated earlier, Catherine's marriage was riddled with abuse. Her husband was an alcoholic. Yet, she laid in bed at night with her children and wove stories about dragons and princesses. She did everything she could to create a safe world for her children. Her main concern was to do whatever she believed was best academically for her children, even if it meant she had to take care of them on her own, move them away from where they were living, and start their lives over. She eventually sought the transitional housing facility where she would be able to receive support services while she maintained employment and her children attended school.

Katy was married and living with her husband during her children's earliest years and moved out at the beginning of Jasmine's kindergarten year. But she revealed in our follow-up interview that her life was in crisis, consumed with constant worries about the financial mess created by her husband. Yet, she still read to her daughters every night. She said they had their own bookshelf with books she would read to them. Again, despite what was going on in her life, her children and their health and well-being were her priority. Her youngest child was born with special needs. While she was ensuring she received the services to specifically address her particular disability, she was also helping Jasmine's older sister who was having difficulties with reading. Despite this, she recognized the need for Jasmine to be challenged in school and maintained open communication with her teacher. She made the decision to move into transitional

housing, maintained employment at two jobs, and received support services from the shelter while her children attended school.

Stacy was living in a temporary shelter for women before she lived in the transitional shelter. However, she made the critical decision to move to transitional housing. During her time of residence at the transitional housing facility, she received support services while she maintained employment and her daughter attended school. Daphne was attending a Head Start program in the south; therefore, Stacy's income qualified her for eligibility in the program. When her daughter attended the Head Start program, she elected to withdraw her because she claimed it was like a daycare. She took it upon herself to teach her daughter letters, sounds, sight words, sentences, and math skills. In the interview, she talked about how they were just coloring and playing in her Head Start program. To maintain her confidentiality and dignity, I cannot specifically disclose what her crisis was, but I can say that while her life was in turmoil, one of the most important things to her was her daughter's ability to read; she decided to take the lead and teach her.

Themes

The themes that repeatedly surfaced were (a) the mothers' love for reading; (b) the mothers' own challenges in school; (c) time, which I divided further into the subcategories time for reading and working on literacy related activities and time constraints due to everyday responsibilities; (d) how early the mothers began to read to their children; (e) use of technology as a teaching tool; (f) challenging and motivating children; (g) religion; and (h) preschool. The emergence of this last theme was

unexpected because my original intention was to interview mothers who had children with no preschool experience. However, the mothers' reflections on their daughters' preschool experiences were quite varied and will be examined later in the findings. See Table 1 for a visual representation of these themes.

Table 1

Initial Coding of Emerging Themes

Emerging Themes	Catherine	Stacy	Katy
Mother's reading experiences	Avid reader Spent babysitting money on books	Avid reader	Difficulty learning to read Loved listening to mother read to her
Types of books mothers read	Religious books (Amish, Christian) mysteries, series)	Mysteries, series	Mysteries, series
Mothers' educational experiences	Bored in high school, loved reading, history, did not like math; turned around in upper high school years, college diploma	Not reported	Had difficulty learning to read in early elementary; Reading improved in middle school
How early mothers started reading to children	At birth	Toddler	5 weeks
Teaching approach	Combination read aloud, creating stories, basic skills practice	Basic skills/ drill	Combination read aloud, basic skills/ drill
Time (constraints)	Job responsibilities Lack of time to read to self	Job Responsibilities	Jobs Lack of time to read to self

	Lack of time to read to children	Lack of time to read to self	Lack of time to read to other children
Time (reads to child)	Bedtime	Lack of time to read to child At night	Other child with special needs Bedtime
Everyday responsibilities/ struggles	Worried about job loss Daycare costs/household expenses	Looking for summer daycare	Child with special needs
Preschool experience	Positive/ academic	Just play, coloring/ negative	Positive/ academic
Degree of monitoring	Suggests particular book titles Offers help when needed Assigns work when school not in session Does not hover	Assigns a book a day	Expects daily reading
Language skills/ communication	Strong adult influence First child/ no young children around	Not reported however discusses future goals	Ask open-ended questions
Reading/ writing connection	Reading improves with writing Use vocabulary in writing	Looking at the pictures help; help writing Use vocabulary in writing	Reading improves writing Use vocabulary in writing
Mother's career	Government contractor	Not reported	Drives school bus Teaches at preschool

Religion	Genre of reading interest	Teaching tool	
Crisis	Husband alcoholic/ /left husband	*Not reported/ homeless before transitional housing/ eligible for Head Start program	Husband financially irresponsible Led to overwhelming debt/ left husband
Advice for other mothers	Start to read to children when they are young Everything requires reading Provide opportunities to enrich vocabulary	Start to read to children when they are young You have to read to be successful	Start to read to children when they are young
Student as teacher	Daughter assigns work to other siblings Daughter reads to others Corrects other's work Reads to self	Daughter reads to others in shelter Reads to self	Reads to self
Motivating students/ Challenging students	Seeing mother as avid reader Success motivating in itself Always push above level where students are performing	Significant reward system Not motivated when she was young Future success depends on effort made today	Linked to need to be challenged in school Became motivated to work when school work became more challenging Worked with teacher to assign more challenging work
Use of technology	Storybook readers	E-readers, story book readers, VTech™, other (name not recalled)	DVD's, CD's, sound magnets

Time

Time was referred to in more than one context. Catherine talked about the constraints that were placed on her time because of her long commute, having to make dinner, and having to get in bed early to get up early and take her children to daycare. She also stated that she did not have enough time for personal reading, nor did she believe she had enough time to read to or with her children: “I don’t read as much as I would like to simply because I’m too busy. Ellen will read to herself. She’ll read to her sister.” The time that she read most often to her children was at bedtime. She shared, “It’s our quiet time. We sit down, relax, and go through a few books.” She seemed to believe that because Ellen had such strong independent reading skills it was no longer critical for her to spend as much time reading to her as it was to read to her other children. She also believed it was not as important for her to spend as much time reading with her middle child, as her reading skills had improved in the past year. She did, however, state that she tried to spend as much time as she could reading with her 4-year-old son. He was not attending any preschool program, but was receiving an intervention for a speech delay. The time constraints Catherine experienced were directly related to her homeless status. As the sole parent responsible for the education and health and well-being of her children, she no longer had the time to read to her children as when they were younger. In order for her to maintain residency at the facility, it was mandatory for her to be employed. Because she worked long hours, the amount of time she had to spend with the children was limited.

Stacy also stated that she did not have the time she would have liked to read to herself or her daughter. When she did get the chance to read, she read local news and gave Daphne the cartoon section. Because Daphne is an independent reader, they often did not read together anymore. In fact, she frequently told Stacy that she preferred to read to herself. Daphne also loved reading to the other children at the shelter. Stacy reported that the time she read most often to Daphne was at night, although Daphne liked to read during the day when reading to herself. As the sole parent responsible for the Daphne's education, time constraints were placed on Stacy. In order to maintain residency, it was mandatory for her to be employed. Despite this, she reported that she still read with Daphne when time permitted.

In the interview with Katy, the theme of time was prevalent as well. She believed that she lacked the time to engage in personal reading and stated that she had to split her time among her three children (including her youngest daughter who is a child with special needs) and her work. When I asked her if she read in front of her children, she responded, "Not much anymore since the baby has come along, and she has special needs as well. So, it's just hard to sit down and read a book." She did, however, make sure she made time to read with Jasmine. When I asked her how often they read, she told me, "Every day. We read every day." When I asked when Katy usually read to Jasmine, she shared "Um...normally after dinner. Sometimes she really wants to read and we'll read on the bus." She also stated that the time she read most often was at night. Katy's responsibility as the sole parent was compounded by the fact that her older daughter was having academic difficulties and her youngest daughter had special needs. Prior to

becoming homeless, Katy reported that she only had worked as a preschool teacher. As the sole parent responsible for her daughters, she took on a second job as a bus driver for the preschool where she taught. It was mandatory that she be employed to maintain residency at the shelter.

The commitment each of the mothers made to maintain employment in order to stay at the transitional housing shelter put a drain on the amount of time they had available for personal reading and reading with their children. However, the decision they made to take their children to a safe and secure environment took priority over other activities and personal time. Because the shelter offered many other services that benefited the mothers and their children, it was a critical decision to maintain residency status.

Religion

Religion was a theme that surfaced in Catherine's and Stacy's interviews; however, it was referenced in different contexts. In the following section, religion is discussed as an important aspect and as a means for teaching.

Catherine referred to religion as an important aspect in literacy acquisition. She said she "read a lot of Christian fiction books. Read a lot of Amish...different Amish stories. My mother-in-law had these books and I borrowed them from her." Catherine did not make any reference to reading religious material with her children. She did not talk about the role of religion in her present life; however, based on the fact that she read books that had a religious genre, it was evident that at some point in her life religion held

a degree of importance. While she did try to encourage Ellen to read certain titles, she did not report recommending books with a religious theme to her children.

Religion was also important in Stacy's life. In fact, she taught Daphne sight words by having her memorize Bible verses. For instance, she asked me, "You know the Bible verse 'I can do all things with Christ?' I got her...I got her to memorize it." There are six sight words in that verse. By teaching Daphne to read the verse, she believed she would be able to recognize those sight words in other contexts. Religion was a theme that surfaced in one of the pilot studies as well. Like Stacy, one mother in the pilot study used religion as means of teaching literacy. She and her daughter read the Bible regularly, and the daughter memorized Bible verses. She did not talk about her religious beliefs; however, it was evident that she had strong convictions because of her familiarity with the specific verses she used to teach Daphne to read.

It was apparent that religion played a role in some capacity in Catherine's and Stacy's lives; Katy made no reference to religion in my interviews with her. In the next chapter, I will explore the possible connection between homelessness and religion further.

Preschool

Preschool is a theme I did not anticipate because my original intention was to interview mothers of children without preschool experience to determine their sole influence on helping their children acquire early literacy. However, all of the children in the current study attended preschool. Catherine believed that preschool helped Ellen learn some of the basic skills she needed to become the good reader that she was when

entering kindergarten. Therefore, it is important to examine the influence of Catherine's earliest interactions with Ellen when she started reading to her and telling her stories. Her love of reading and the importance she placed on developing a rich vocabulary could have laid the foundations for Ellen's literacy acquisition: "They see me read my books and stuff and then I'll read their books to them."

Catherine reported that it was a time in her life when she was experiencing abuse. Regardless of the tumultuous circumstances she faced in her life, her priority was to build Ellen's language skills from an early age. She claimed that Ellen was around adults until she was about two-and-a-half and she believed that prevented her from using baby talk. She also stated that better language skills would help her to comprehend more complex text when she enters the upper grades. It appears that a combination of preschool and Catherine's emphasis on storybook reading, storytelling, and rich vocabulary interaction helped Ellen to enter kindergarten with early literacy skills.

I also wanted to make sure that Stacy's daughter's strong skills were influenced by her interactions with Daphne and not just the instruction she had in Head Start. I knew this would be difficult to tease out, but Stacy did reported that the instruction was lacking, which resulted in her removing Daphne from the program to teach her literacy skills at home. She recalled:

It seems that all they did was they had them playing games. Coloring things only. I ended up taking her out. It was like a half a day program and I didn't see nothing she was doing. So I'm like it was not worth it. She wasn't learning anything.

Because Stacy taught Daphne at home, it is likely she contributed to preparing her to enter school with strong literacy skills. Stacy made a critical decision to pull Daphne out of the program because she believed she could provide instruction that was better than what she was receiving. Prior to her short time at the transitional shelter, she had been in other homeless situations. However, the instruction she provided to Daphne was something she could take with her no matter where they lived.

Katy's situation was unique. She returned to work as a preschool teacher when Jasmine was 5 weeks old and took Jasmine to work with her to receive daycare at the same facility. At 2 years old, Jasmine started in the preschool program. Katy reported that she read to Jasmine at home from the time she was 5 weeks old every day to ensure that her home environment was as language and literature rich as the school environment where she taught. She also stated that she repeated some of the other forms of instruction that she used in the preschool setting. This instruction included practicing letters and sounds, using manipulatives, using books with tapes, and writing books together. Katy returned to work when Jasmine was only 5 weeks old to take care of financial obligations. However, because of the nature of her job, Jasmine had the benefit of staying with her mother and getting a double dose of instruction. It is evident that Katy played a key role in Jasmine's early literacy acquisition.

Mother's Habits and Characteristics

In this section, I examine the themes that relate specifically to the habits and characteristics of the mothers. In Figure 1 (see below), I illustrated the themes that

emerged from each study and compared the ones that were prevalent in more than one interview.

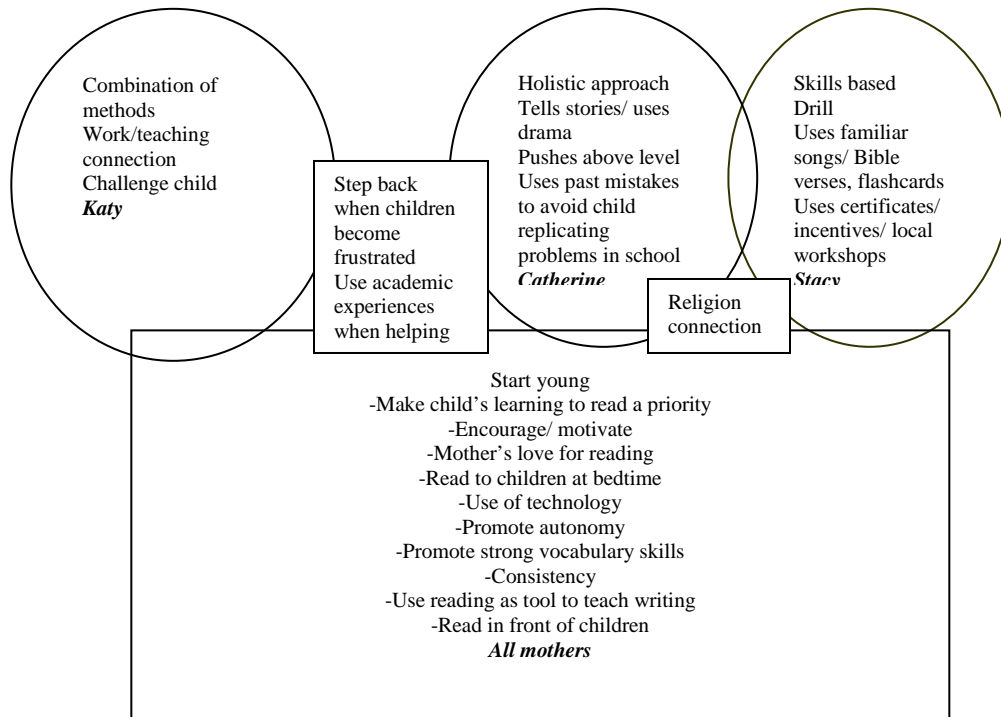


Figure 1. Within and across case comparison of themes. Each oval represents the prevalent themes unique to each mother. The rectangle represents the themes that were prevalent in all interviews.

Table 2 shows a visual representation of the habits and characteristics that pertain to each mother.

Table 2

Mothers' Habits and Characteristics

	Habits	Characteristics
Catherine	Read to children at birth	Avid reader
	Used reader systems	Academic struggles
	Challenged children	Used cultural, social capital
	Holistic approach	
Stacy	Read to daughter as toddler	Avid reader
	Challenged and motivated daughter	Used cultural capital
	Used reader system, Internet	
	Skill-based approach	
Katy	Read to daughter at five weeks	Avid reader
	Challenged daughter	Academic struggles
	Used DVD's, CD's	Used cultural capital
	Combined approach	

Habits

I defined habit as a behavior that is performed repeatedly and intuitively. In the section below, I identify the themes that emerged relating to how mothers described behaviors that they reported performing on a regular basis with their children.

Starting early. In all three interviews, the mothers started reading to their children early. Although Catherine was already experiencing crisis in her personal life due to her husband's alcoholism, teaching her oldest daughter early literacy skills was a priority. She started teaching her children to read from a very early age. Catherine stated, "I would read little books and I would tell them a story. I would make up stories and they would lay down in bed and I would make up a princess story. And then she got older and she could pick out picture books and we would read those together." Catherine believed that reading early to her children contributed to their later success in reading. She emphasized the importance of reading above level throughout the course of the interview. She believed that reading above level would lead to academic success. Despite the turmoil she experienced, she believed that by reading to her children from a young age and telling stories, she was situating them for future academic success.

Stacy said she began to read to Daphne "when she was a baby...when she was in her toddler years." She said that she read kid's books, ABC books, and "other books like that." She proudly talked about how much reading Daphne was doing at the time of the interview by stating, "She has gone through all the books they get in the book club." She laughingly told me that if somebody else was reading, "Then she'll take over and start reading to them." She did not expand quite as much as Catherine, but when I asked her

what important message she had for other mothers she emphasized, “Work with them every day and when they’re small.” Stacy was a single-mother raising Daphne at the time of the interview. They had lived in several places for short periods of time. However, Stacy spent a great deal of this time attending to Daphne’s educational needs. Her advice for other mothers indicated her belief in the importance of reading to and working with children from the earliest stages of development. Regardless of the underlying circumstances, Stacy made it clear that Daphne’s education was her priority.

Katy reported that she started to read to Jasmine every day when she was about 5 weeks old. She stated:

It started pretty early because I started working at a childcare. I think the early start really helped her. Even reading books at five weeks knowing that, you know, she may not be looking at pictures, but she’s hearing it. She’s hearing the sounds, and she’s hearing the words. I think the early start really helped her and having the older sister, also. And she’s seeing that, okay older sister has to read the books every night as well with homework.

She believed the mere sound of the words helped build Jasmine’s excellent literacy skills to prepare for kindergarten. She said that young age babies can hear the voice changes and this helps to build vocabulary, which eventually leads to good comprehension. As a preschool teacher, Katy also made the same recommendations to the parents of her students. Katy returned to work when Jasmine was 5 weeks old to carry out the financial responsibility for her family. When she returned to work, she was already a mother of

two. However, she believed reading to Jasmine from an early age took precedence over her personal free time. Jasmine was performing above level in kindergarten.

Use of technology. Another theme that ran through all three interviews was the mothers' use of technology as a teaching tool. They all used technology in some form to teach or support their child's early literacy acquisition. All of the mothers were strong proponents of the Leapfrog™ and Leap Pad™ systems and believed these electronic toys contributed to their children's early success in learning letters, sounds, and simple sight words. The electronic systems are designed to provide instruction in a wide range of academic skills, such as pre-reading, spelling, reading, math, and science, to children of all ages. Some systems offer the option to buy additional cartridges and books to teach specific skills at various levels.

Catherine bought her middle child what she called a reader system and claimed she caught her son using it. She recalled, "I caught her brother one day. He was so quiet one day and I thought, 'He's so quiet. What's he up to?' He had sat down and he had gotten it out and was just following along." Catherine said she bought the system for her younger daughter because she was struggling a bit in school at the beginning of the school year. She reported that the difficulty might have been due to missing school; the children had to be pulled out of school for a few weeks while they made the move to the transitional housing. At the time of the interview, however, she claimed that she had caught up. She believed the system helped her daughter because she would recognize the sounds associated with different words. Catherine reported using technology to help her middle child catch up on academic skills during the time they were moving and

transitioning to the shelter. Because she was the sole parent responsible for three children and working full time, using technology as a supplement was a means to help her daughter. Catherine emphasized the importance for her children to be on or above grade level throughout each of the interviews. Using technology helped her accomplish that goal because she claimed that her daughter was performing on grade level by the time of our first interview.

Stacy talked about the VTech™ System that she bought for Daphne. VTech™ products are electronic toys available for children in all ages to teach academic skills. The games are sold in a variety of models, including handheld and laptop styles. Stacy said, “She takes the pen and it follows the word and it says what it is.” Daphne would then repeat what it said. She promoted another system that she used; however, she was not able to recall the particular name of the product. She said that she bought the books for it, which she reported were expensive at first, but the price went down quite a bit. She believed this system helped her daughter: “Cause you can change the pen...when she marked the word you can read what the word is and then she had it so it can read the whole story to her.” I asked Stacy if someone recommended she buy that type of system to help her daughter learn to read. She firmly stated that she bought it because the Head Start program was not teaching Daphne anything, so she believed she needed to do something. She purchased the VTech™ system because she believed it would help prepare Daphne to enter school with the literacy skills she needed. Stacy was tech savvy and talked about the future of technology in society. By using technology with Daphne,

she was providing her with the skills she would need to be technologically literate as well.

Katy also used technology as a teaching tool. She raved about a DVD that she believed was very helpful, *Leapfrog: Letter Factory* (D'Angelo & Smith, 2003), that she used to teach her daughter letters and sounds. She explained, "Yeah, like it's a little DVD, and it goes through all the letters and then letters take on a certain character, and it makes a certain sound." She also bought magnets that named each letter and sang a song when they were pressed. Katy also used the CDs and DVDs to support what Jasmine was learning in school. When I mentioned I had heard positive things about this system, she stated, "I think it really makes a difference." In fact, she promoted this product so much, that I purchased them for my grandson. Katy made several references to language, listening, and sounds that she believed helped Jasmine to acquire early literacy. The technological tools she used featured sound-symbol components. She believed the time she took to use these technological tools helped Jasmine to read above level in kindergarten.

Challenging and motivating children. All of the mothers wanted to challenge their children; however, each mother had her own perception of what she viewed as motivation. Catherine reported that watching her daughter read and succeed in school would be a motivating factor. She also believed her children would be motivated by her love for reading. Catherine used the term "challenge" more often than the other mothers. She made several references to feeling bored when she was in school; therefore, she wanted to challenge her children to prevent the same thing from happening to them. She

stressed that she wanted Ellen to be able to read high school books by the time she was in fourth grade. She used words such as “pushing that boundary” to emphasize how important she thought it was to challenge her. She wanted Ellen to read thicker books with more in-depth stories and harder words. She expected her to be reading books that require more thinking, which she felt would lead to better grades. She said she wanted to keep “pushing her always two, three, four steps ahead.” Catherine believed that by challenging her children to perform above and beyond grade level expectation, their future would be successful.

Stacy did not talk about challenging Daphne to a great extent, although she said she encouraged her to read challenging books. She recalled, “When she was younger and didn’t have that drive, she didn’t want to do it.” However, at the time of the interview, she described Jasmine as “self-motivated.” She was no longer worried that Daphne was not doing her homework or reading. Stacy expected Daphne to read a book each day. She felt she had to step in when she believed that the Head Start program was not challenging Daphne in the way she expected. She commented, “It seems like all they did was play games. It was a half a day program, and I didn’t see nothing she was doing.” She eventually pulled her out for this reason. She took it upon herself to teach her to read. The summer before kindergarten, she prepared Daphne by using a variety of strategies that will be examined in a separate section. Stacy had an impressive reward system in place. She told me she went on the Chuck E. Cheese website and rewarded Daphne with certificates for cleaning her room or getting good grades. Then she would put a sticker on the certificate and take her to Chuck E. Cheese. Chuck E. Cheese offers

various types of rewards on their website that parents can download and print for free. For example, they have a reading rewards calendar on the website for children to keep track of their daily reading. Once they have filled in boxes for two weeks, they are eligible to receive 10 free tokens at Chuck E. Cheese locations to use on arcade games.

During our discussion about motivation, Stacy said, “You have to want to do it.” She also took her to the home improvement chains Lowe’s and Home Depot which held workshops for children to build something. She explained that the children received an apron and a certificate and took home whatever they built. She said she was having a conversation with Daphne and she said, “She...she knows she got to learn for anything in life. We had a conversation about it. She asked me one day. She said, ‘Which one makes more money, a doctor or a teacher?’ And I told her ‘A doctor.’ She said, ‘I guess I’ll be a children’s doctor.’” She also said that when she got enough money she would put it into a bank account and save it. Stacy motivated Daphne by establishing rewards, which was similar to earning a paycheck because she had to work to earn benefits. Stacy clearly stated her expectations for Daphne. This system seemed to be working for both of them because Daphne loved school, loved to read, and seemed to be well-adjusted.

Katy believed Jasmine needed to be challenged in the school setting. Although Jasmine was in kindergarten, her teacher reported that she was giving her first-grade level material to read. Katy was concerned Jasmine was beginning to act out in her classroom out of boredom and a lack of challenge. Her teacher claimed she finished her work more quickly than the other students. Katy said she had difficulty trying to motivate her to go

to school. To solve this problem, she and the teacher set up a line of communication for her to receive a daily report. She stated:

I try to keep as much communication with her teacher as I can. Her teacher tells me or she's explained to me that she's having trouble keeping her attention. And she gets her work done quicker than the other [sic] class. So well we're working on a type of system where we can help her with that. Yeah. I try to be involved as much as I can, especially with her being, you know, a little advanced and I don't want her to get discouraged. Or it's causing her to get in trouble. But she is a little above the other children in her class. She needs a bit of a challenge. I have sometimes like trouble coaching her to go to school.

Although Jasmine's teacher was already giving her first-grade reading materials, Katy planned to meet with her to do something more proactive to be sure that she maximized her performance and challenged her with enriching learning experiences. When I met Katy for the second visit, she reported that she and the teacher worked out a plan. The teacher created folders with activities for Jasmine to work on when she had finished her other work. This seemed to be working for her. Katy was no longer struggling to get her ready for school. Katy took an active role to work with Jasmine's teacher to ensure that she was receiving challenging material to keep her motivated.

Approaches

In this section, I examine the different approaches the mothers took to teaching their children early literacy skills. It is apparent that the mothers used a) a holistic

approach, including reading, story-telling, and using rich language, b) a skill-based approach, or c) a combination of all three.

Catherine wanted to help her children practice using reading skills throughout the school year; therefore, she gave them workbook pages to do over breaks from school, such as at Christmas and over the summer. She believed this consistency would help prevent learning skill loss that often occurs when students are not in school. She told me to teach her children something new she would sit would sit down and model how to do it, but emphasized that she did not do the children's work for them; they would have to learn how to do it themselves in order to understand it. She stated, "You know I can't just tell you the answer, you have to learn how to solve that." She explained to her children that they get homework to teach them how to do things. She went on to explain how she understood the frustration they had when something was new. Catherine reassured her children by telling them, "Mommy never did it right the first time." She used this approach consistently. Even though she used workbooks, she also seemed to have an informal approach to working with her children. Catherine's detailed account of the ways she helped her children exemplifies the importance she placed on learning literacy skills. She used vivid storytelling, read to her children from an early age, often changed her voice to act out the story characters, and assigned work.

Catherine also believed in the importance of using mature language with her children from an early age. She used mature language rather than "baby talk" on a consistent basis. She believed this helped Ellen to obtain above average literacy skills

because it enabled her to comprehend more complex text. She emphasized how understanding higher level text leads to a student being above level.

Stacy used a skills-based approach to teach Daphne. She spent much of the time with teaching her daughter explicit skills, such as sight words, spelling words, and sounds. She reported that she bought her flash cards with words such as “of,” “we,” and “they.” She said they used those cards often to memorize words. She explained how they would work on the words for a whole week. This was something she decided to do on her own. A unique way Stacy helped Daphne recognize the sight words was to associate them with the words in the title of the Michael Jackson movie, “This is It (2009).” Daphne is a Michael Jackson fan. Stacy asked me, “You know when that Michael Jackson when that movie came out, ‘This Is It (2009)?’ I got her things from the movie so she can remember the words, so she learned how to spell it, pronounce it.” Stacy believed if she got Daphne articles associated with the movie, it would help her remember the sight words. She believed it helped her learn to spell and pronounce the words. Stacy used the same technique by teaching Daphne Bible verses. She also said that she put all of Daphne’s spelling words up on her bedroom wall. She also expected her to read a book a day. Stacy helped Daphne practice her writing skills as well. She talked about how the teacher suggested she help Daphne with her writing by using the picture to generate a story. They also regularly worked on puzzles together.

In addition to teaching her literacy skills, Stacy also taught Daphne math skills. She reported that she bought her huge coins at the dollar store to teach her to use money. Stacy explained how she drilled her daughter while she was driving. She would ask her

to spell something or would ask her basic addition facts while they were in the car. Stacy consistently practiced sight words with Daphne, she helped her to write stories, drilled her on math skills using flash cards, and helped her to practice her weekly spelling words.

Katy recalled that when Jasmine was in preschool she helped her practice learning letters and sounds every day. She said she used the same strategies to teach her at home that she was using to teach in the learning centers at school. One such example she gave was using macaroni to form letter shapes and teaching the sounds that correspond with the letters. When Jasmine was in kindergarten, Katy reported that she drilled Jasmine a few times a day on a list of words. Like Stacy, she also practiced literacy related skills while she was driving. She did this when she was at her second job, which was driving the preschool bus. This is also a time when she practiced reading. “Sometimes she really wants to read and we’ll read on the bus. So we’ll read on the bus sometimes. She reads to me and I’ll be listening.” She explained that in order to help Jasmine understand language and enrich her vocabulary, “Just ask questions while reading the book or after you’re done. And a lot of open-ended questions require them to respond. Not just ‘yes, no.’ Where she has to think about what she is going to say.” Katy consistently drilled Jasmine on the sight words a few times a day. She also listened to Jasmine read stories to her while she was driving the bus. In addition to practicing the sight words with Jasmine, they created books together. She reported that Jasmine generated the ideas and she helped her to write the stories. Katy was also consistent about making contact with Jasmine’s teacher to keep up with her daily progress and behavior at school.

Characteristics

For this study, I defined characteristics as features that are recognized by others. I categorized the themes that were related to personal attributes as characteristics.

Mothers' love for reading. A theme that emerged from the data was the mothers' love for reading. Catherine made many references to how she would take every penny she earned as a teenager and spend it on books. She recalled:

I used to scour the books. I knew we didn't have a lot of money. And I would get the dollar books and the quarter books. Anything that was dirt cheap that I think would be interesting. But then when I got older I would take my babysitting money and I'd buy even though I was poor at the time. And I'd be done in one day.

After she read all the books she had, she would read them again. She enjoyed reading Christian fiction books, particularly suspense novels and Amish books, which she said she often borrowed from her mother-in-law.

Stacy's love for reading was also apparent. She reported that she read every book in the *Babysitter's Club* series by Ann M. Martin (1986-2000). In fact, she told me, "I couldn't miss a number." She also shared, "I read the news, like the local editions, see what's going on and she'll (Daphne) get the cartoon section when I read it." She also talked quite a bit about how they had e-readers at school. She explained, "They have a book reader that reads...like say you go in the school and they got a book reader and you can download the book from there." We discussed how they might replace books and the newspaper one day. She stated, "Technology is just taking over, period!"

Katy also revealed that she is an avid reader. She enjoys reading mystery books and other books in series. Unlike the other mothers, however, she revealed that learning to read was a struggle for her when she was a child. She recounted, "I have always read below grade level. I...I liked books. I liked them being read to me. Mostly my mother would read to me...mostly at night before bed." She reported that her current reading habits had changed. "Once I get involved in a book, I like to keep going...keep going. I like to read. I enjoy it now." The experiences she had when she learned to read were not pleasant in comparison to the other mothers' experiences. She appeared to draw on those experiences to make decisions about the way she helped her children learn to read. In fact, I asked her if thinking about how frustrated she got when learning how to read helped her to recognize when her children were having difficulties with reading. She agreed that she did not want her children to have the same type of negative feelings she had when she struggled to learn to read. When I met Katy on the return visit, I asked her when she believed that her reading began to improve. She recalled that it was not until junior high school and it was due to the help that she received in school.

Mothers' academic struggles. Catherine stated that she was a good student, but strayed in high school. At one point in the interview, she hinted that she might have had a learning disability related to handwriting. She claimed that once she got to junior high school, she started to make bad academic choices. She recalled:

I was threatened. If I didn't perk up, my cousin, who was like my big brother, was going to come to school with me. So for my last two years of high school, I

got straight A's and I...um...graduated early. I knew what I had to do. I just didn't apply myself.

She talked about how she did not like math in particular. She talked about being bored and how she felt that she was not challenged enough. In the interview, Catherine made frequent references to wanting to challenge her daughter beyond her limits. Catherine recounted her past struggles in school. In highlighting this period in her education, she was exemplifying the negative consequence of not applying oneself. She made frequent references to challenging her children to go above and beyond grade level.

Katy also revealed that she had academic struggles. However, unlike Catherine's struggles, which seem to have been self-imposed, Katy's were not. Learning to read was difficult for her. She recalled, "I always read below grade level. I have always had trouble with reading and...um...figuring out the words and how to pronounce them. So I didn't have a good reading level growing up." Katy emphasized how she did not want her children to experience the same frustration she faced in her early academic career.

Use of capital. In the current study, I sought to find how a mother in crisis uses capital to advocate for her child. Social, cultural, and economic capital are the resources people have available to obtain what they believe they need to be successful. There is a belief that people of low SES do not possess the same capital as those of higher economic status (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977); therefore, they are not able to attain the same level of success. These views are held against children and their parents who are in marginalized groups such as people living in poverty, people experiencing crisis, and people whose first language is not English. My analysis of the data indicates that a

characteristic the mothers in crisis in this study had in common was their use of capital to advocate for their children. All of the mothers used cultural capital to seek a safe place for their children to live while they tried to make the transition to becoming independent. They also all held certifications, which helped to obtain employment. Catherine used social and cultural capital to network through the job market, to work with the faculty at Ellen's school as she went through the process of being tested for gifted education, to ensure that her son continued to receive speech services, and to set up a co-op system with the other moms at the shelter to save on daycare expenses. She was beaming when she told me about how Ellen was recommended for the gifted program:

I got a letter when I came home and I was like, this is cool. So they took her and there's three other students in her class. ...It's for third grade year. The schools are separated... kindergarten through second grade in one building, and in another building third grade through fifth grade.

She stated that if Ellen was found eligible, the placement would occur in the third grade.

Stacy used cultural capital to seek neighborhood make-and-take workshops and located a pizza chain that participated in a reading incentive program to reward her daughter and enrich her learning. She told me, "Chuck E. Cheese got certificates on their website...motivate her to clean her room, and you get good grades and then you put a sticker there that means you get to go to Chucky Cheese for, you have to want to do it." She also told me, "They have Lowe's; Lowe's and Home Depot have workshops for kids and they get to build something." She searched for summer programs in order to avoid Daphne having to be in daycare for the entire summer. She also used cultural capital

when she decided to withdraw Daphne from the Head Start program. She recalled, “I just decided as a matter of fact they weren’t teaching them. It was more like a daycare. You know you got some schools the teachers...they teaching the students.” She also used cultural capital when she worked with Daphne’s teacher to ask for good approaches to help her practice writing. She shared, “Her teacher is like...when they give her a picture of a house or something and they say write, you could write a story about the house. And that’s how they learn how to write. They put words with the picture.” She used cultural capital as she tapped into her technological expertise.

Katy used cultural capital when she met with a team of specialists and advocated for her youngest daughter to ensure she would be receiving the appropriate special education services. She also used cultural capital when she met with Jasmine’s teacher to develop a plan to ensure that she was being challenged in school. In order to facilitate this process Katy shared, “I get a daily report from the school. I try to keep as much communication as I can.”

See Figure 2 for a visual representation of how each mother used social and cultural capital.

Catherine	Stacy	Katy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Social • Networked with other mothers to watch each others' children • Networked with others regarding job openings •Cultural • Found safe and secure housing for self and children • Had certification that led to employment • Worked with faculty members at Ellen's school as she was evaluated for G-T • Owned technological equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cultural • Found safe and secure housing for self and child • Had certification that led to employment • Searched Internet for ways to reward Daphne • Took Daphne to neighborhood programs • Pulled Daphne out of Head Start • Asked Daphne's teacher for ways to help her to write • Owned technological equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cultural • Found safe and secure housing for self and children • Had certification that led to employment • Worked with Jasmine's teacher to create an academic plan to meet her needs • Owned technological equipment • Worked with specialists to provide special services for youngest child

Figure 2. Mothers' use of capital. Each bar represents the types of capital each of the mothers used.

Factors to Consider

My original intent was to examine what mothers in crisis situations did to help prepare their children even if they did not attend preschool. All three mothers had their children enrolled in preschool. It was my challenge then to tease out the role preschool played in helping these children to become early readers.

Another factor to consider was the influence of the crisis situation on the role mothers played in helping their children to be prepared to read. I contended that mothers can overcome crises and make their child's education their number one priority. Each mother's crisis needs to be examined, considering whether she had particular habits or

characteristics that set her child's education on the right path. This is further discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced Catherine, Stacy, and Katy, and interpreted of each of their stories. I discussed each of the mother's crises to give the reader a picture of their unique experiences and how they influenced their roles as their child's first literacy teacher. I presented the themes that emerged as they related to Catherine, Stacy, and Katy. I examined the themes that specifically related to the mother's habits and characteristics to help me to answer my first research question. To answer my second research question, I identified capital as a characteristic and discussed how each mother used it to advocate for her child. Finally, I revealed that the children attended preschool, which may have accounted for their early literacy skills. However, I examined how each child's achievements was based on her mother's actions.

CHAPTER 5

In this chapter, I present a summary of the findings, discuss the ways that they answer my research questions, and show how the current study connects to the literature. I also reveal unanticipated themes that emerged. I point out the possible limitations of the study and explore implications for future studies based on the new questions that arise from this study. I conclude with a personal reflection to provide the reader a perspective on the impact the study had on me.

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to discover the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis who help their children acquire early literacy and to find out how mothers use various forms of capital to advocate for their children. I argued that mothers in crisis can and do make a difference in their child's preparedness for reading even though many of the obstacles they face would seem to hinder their availability to their children. The preponderance of research suggests that mothers in crisis are not able to do what mothers who are in the mainstream population and who are living in a stable environment do, that is, give their children the tools they need to be successful readers (Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002; Tunmer et al., 2006).

How Mothers in Crisis Promote Their Children's Literacy Learning

The three interviews I conducted show that a mother in crisis can and does make a difference in her child's literacy learning. She is an avid reader and she taps into her strengths and the resources available, such as using Bible verses, as a means to teach. She challenges her children to be high achievers and motivates them to want to learn. She believes in reading to her children regularly. She uses technology as an instructional tool. She teaches her children holistically, through drill, or a combination of both. She uses various forms of capital in her everyday life to help her children to be successful. She believes in the benefits of building her children's vocabulary and verbal skills. She uses her own negative educational experiences to prevent her children from experiencing what she had to endure. Above all, she puts her child's learning and success above the crisis she is experiencing because her child's education takes priority.

I conducted three face-to-face interviews to answer the research questions: "What are the habits and characteristics of mothers in crisis who help their children acquire early literacy?" and "How do mothers in crisis use capital to advocate for their children?" I used a 14-question, open-ended protocol. Eight themes were prevalent throughout the three interviews. These themes were (a) the mothers' love for reading, (b) the mothers' own challenges in school, (c) time, which I divided further into the subcategories time for reading, time for working on literacy-related activities, and time constraints due to everyday responsibilities, (d) how early the mothers began to read to their children, (e) use of technology as a teaching tool, (f) challenging children to be high achievers and motivating children to want to learn, (g) religion, and (h) preschool attendance. The

relationship of these themes to the research questions is described below. I explore the connection between the mothers who used it successfully. I make references to the pilot study and examine the possible reasons why the habits or characteristics that these mothers possess helped them to give their daughters the tools they needed to enter school with strong literacy skills despite the crisis they faced during their formative years.

Research Question #1: What are the Habits and Characteristics of Mothers who are Living in Crisis who Help Their Children Develop Early Literacy Skills?

The first research question to answer is whether the mothers have particular habits or characteristics in common that might have enabled them to soar above the crises they were experiencing in their lives to make teaching their children early literacy skills a priority.

Mothers' love for reading. All of the mothers were avid readers in some way. They reported having read books in series and shared similar interests in reading mystery as a genre. Catherine and Stacy's early experiences were different from Katy's because, unlike Katy, they did not report having any difficulty with the process of learning to read. Although Katy admitted that she struggled to learn to read, she loved listening to the books her mother read to her. She too became an avid reader when she was able to read independently, which she reported began when she was in junior high school. She attributed this to the extra support she received from the teachers who worked with her.

The mothers reported that they continued to read whenever they had a chance. Catherine believed reading in front of her children was motivation in itself for her children to want to read. Stacy shared reading time with Daphne by reading the

newspaper while Daphne read the comics. The mothers set a positive example for their children by creating a literate environment through reading in front of them. This example might have encouraged their children to want to become avid readers as well.

To explore the connection between parents who are avid readers and the likelihood of promoting early literacy in their children, the work of Ardel and Eccles (2001) can be considered. They sought to determine whether parents' personal efficacy beliefs promoted self-efficacy and academic success within their children. They discovered that parents who believed they could influence their child's behavior and environment helped their children achieve academic success by setting a good example for them. By reading in front of their children, Catherine, Stacy, and Katy were modeling a particular behavior and creating an environment that could lead to future academic success. By living the example rather than just telling their children to read, they were more likely to encourage them to want to become avid readers too.

Weigel et al. (2006) also explored how mothers' beliefs about literacy affect the literacy development of preschool children. In their yearlong study, they found that mothers who believe they can help their children acquire literacy by creating a particular literacy environment can make an impact on a child's literacy abilities. The mothers who were labeled *facilitative* reported that they enjoyed personal reading and that their children saw them reading and writing. As a result, their children made significant gains in both print knowledge and reading interest as compared to children whose mothers were in the *conventional* group. In this latter group, mothers believed that the school was responsible for teaching literacy skills. Catherine, Stacy, and Katy reported that they

were avid readers. Catherine believed that her children's motivation to read was piqued by her love for reading. Stacy read the newspaper while Daphne read the comic section. These reading events could have facilitated their child's reading interest and print knowledge similar to the Weigel et al. (2006) study.

McKool (2007) examined the relationship between a student's leisure reading and success in reading. In her mixed-methods study of 199 students living in a metropolitan area in the southwestern United States, she sought to find out about the students' home life and their preschool literacy experiences. She discovered that the majority of students who were avid readers in fifth grade were read to by their mothers before they started school, read before they entered kindergarten, and had mothers and siblings who also read for leisure.

MacGillivray et al. (2010) examined the role of literacy in the lives of homeless mothers and their children living in shelters. The researchers interviewed five mothers, nine children whose ages ranged from 6 to 13, and two members of the shelter staff. Interviews with the children explored their perceptions about reading and writing, their literacy activities both in and out of school, the way they believed others helped or hindered their ability to do homework and read for leisure at the shelter, and whether they believed the shelter affected their success at school. They also addressed the same issues when they interviewed the mothers; however, mothers were also asked about their children's literacy development and whether they believed the shelters supported or created barriers to their children's literacy progress. The results indicated that, for the most part, the homeless shelter did not prevent the mothers and children from reading for

leisure and writing opportunities. One author described a mother's experience as an opportunity to escape through books. Another mother believed the shelter provided a more stable environment for her children than when she was living with family members—she thought this promoted her toddler son's keen interest in reading and writing as he looked up to his sister who was working on crossword puzzles. The mother's interest in literacy piqued her children's interest in reading.

These results of these studies indicate that children whose mothers show an interest in reading and read in front of their children can help to promote their literacy skills (MacGillivray et al., 2010; McKool, 2007; Weigel et al., 2006). Catherine, Stacy, and Katy set a positive example by reading in front of their children. They facilitated their literacy learning by showing them that learning begins at home, not at school. The environments they created were welcoming, creative, and rich with literacy, which prepared their children to start kindergarten at or above level. Despite their individual crises, reading took precedence. As in the MacGillivray et al., (2010) study, the mothers might have deemed reading to be an opportunity to escape from their current situation. In this way, they might have believed they were creating a safe haven for their children as well.

Mothers' own challenges in school. Two of the mothers reported having had some type of academic struggle when they were in school. Catherine stated that her struggles were self-imposed and created out of boredom. Katy reported that she had difficulty learning how to read. In her interview, she recalled the frustration she experienced as a child. When she talked about working with Jasmine, she used the word

“frustration” repeatedly to emphasize how she stopped working with her if things ever got to the point of frustration. It seemed as though she used that negative memory as a self-check to stop and provide just the right kind of support she thought Jasmine would need to be successful without becoming overwhelmed. It appears that the negative experiences in the mothers’ lives were so painful that they did not want their children to have to live through what they did. Katy was using her past experiences to prevent Jasmine or her other daughter from repeating them and having the negative feelings she had when she was learning to read. She was trying to reconstruct her experience and situate herself in her children’s reading experiences to support them in a way that would help them be most successful. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that the mothers were motivated to teach their children literacy skills despite the crises they were enduring.

Research indicates that parents who have negative experiences as students tend to want their children to avoid having the same problems. In a case study investigating the practices of two low literacy fathers whose children were enrolled in the Even Start program, Karther (2002) found that, despite the difficulty the fathers had in school, they placed a high value on the early literacy learning for their children. One father indicated that he wanted more for his children than what he was doing, while the other father believed that if his children learned to read, then they would be able to obtain a high school diploma. He believed that would help his children to be marketable in the work force.

Slonimsky and Stein (2001) conducted an ethnographic case study of the successful literacy behaviors of three families in Gaunteng, an area where poverty

prevents children from receiving an early childhood education. In one family Mr. Kapa, the father of a 9-year-old girl named Dineo, stated that he did not finish school, because he was “naughty.” However, he believed that his parents prepared him for school and he made every effort to do the same for his daughter and his other children so they can reach their goals. He and his wife helped their children accomplish this by helping them with their homework and literacy learning. The authors compare Dineo’s literacy instruction to a religious event in which the whole family rallied together to co-teach. Dineo’s mother, offered support and encouragement while Mr. Kapa focused on drill and instruction. Their ultimate goal was for Dineo to be prepared for the future and to achieve her dreams.

Gregg et al. (2012) explored parents’ perceptions and their involvement in their children’s education in their study of 14 Latino parents whose 3- to 5-year-old children were attending a Head Start Center in an unspecified location. Parents expressed their views about their hopes and dreams for their children. One hope the parents had for their children was how they wanted them to achieve more than what they had achieved. One parent believed that education would be a strength for her children, while another parent who commented on her own missed opportunities believed that her daughter could achieve more than what she had achieved through education (Gregg et al., 2012).

Like the families in these studies (Gregg et al., 2012; Karther, 2002; Slonimsky & Stein, 2001), Catherine and Katy reported that they experienced problems in their own academic lives. Perhaps the unpleasant memories of their experiences in school prompted them to teach their children to read early on to help them to avoid similar

negative experiences. They too wanted to help their children be prepared for the future and to achieve their dreams. The parents cited in the studies discussed what they might have done differently if they were to start over. Similarly, Catherine frequently made references to what she might have done differently given the same opportunity again. The frustration that Katy experienced as she struggled to learn to read resounds throughout each interview. In each case, the mothers made it clear that they want their children's future to be free of the obstacles that they faced in their past. Although Stacy did not report any academic challenges, she faced the challenge of homelessness. By taking their children to the safety of transitional housing, all of the mothers made the choice to provide their children with a better opportunity by providing them with a more stable environment.

The connection between a mother's own negative educational experiences and how she uses these experiences to teach her children early literacy to avoid having them live through similar experiences is one that I had not explored prior to the current study. However, upon examination of what was most important to Catherine, Stacy, and Katy, it seems that it was for them to promote success in their children. They took their negative experiences and transformed them into opportunities for their children so that they would not face the problems that they did when they were in school. The mothers in the pilot study also spoke strongly about their academic pitfalls and how they wanted to make sure that their children would not make the same mistakes.

How early the mothers began to read to their children. The mothers all started to read to their children when they were young. Catherine started reading to her children

when they were babies even though her life was in turmoil due to her husband's alcoholism and abuse. Stacy reported that she started reading to Daphne when she was a toddler. Although Katy was experiencing financial worries, she began reading to her daughter when she was five-weeks old. In fact, when asked what recommendations they would make to other mothers, all three mothers urged how important it is to start early. Stacy said to "work with them (the children) when they're small," while Katy said, "Don't wait, just the earlier the better."

An abundance of research indicates that teaching children early reading and writing skills sets them on the course to be successful when they enter school (Rush, 1999; Senechal et al., 1998). In their study to explore the effects of mother-child book reading in low-income families, Raikes et al. (2006) determined there is a positive correlation between reading and language and vocabulary development, especially during the first two years of life. They indicated that consistent reading opportunities lead to the phenomenon termed the *snowball effect* because they increase vocabulary, which in turn leads to more reading and vocabulary development.

Bailey (2006) studied the influence of specific parent behaviors on the reading grades of children who were members of families who were economically at risk. Children participated in the QUEST program, which was created for students who are academically gifted. Parents were asked how often they read to their children, what preschool experiences the children had, and the age that children began to receive reading instruction. The most significant factors that led to reading achievement were that the parents read to their children early and the parents read to their children often.

Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002) explored the storybook interactions between parents and their preschool-aged children during their shared reading experiences. Eighty-three percent of the families in this study were in the low income category. Storybook interactions were videotaped and transcribed. After observing and transcribing the interactions and analyzing data, researchers found a positive correlation between reading frequency and literacy skills. Findings indicated that positive interactions prior to kindergarten led to highly motivated first-grade readers. Results of this study show that, regardless of SES, parents can play a positive role in helping their children to develop the literacy skills they will need to become successful readers when they enter school.

Davidse et al. (2011) surveyed native Dutch parents of 228 junior kindergarten students with a mean age of 54.29 months, to find out about the frequency of their shared reading experiences and author recognition. In this study, they sought to examine the relationship between early book exposure, cognitive ability, and early literacy skills. The overall results indicate the home literacy environment plays a critical role in predicting a child's literacy skills with book cover recognition being the strongest indicator of the home literacy environment, followed by vocabulary and higher letter knowledge. The findings also indicated there was a significant correlation between short-term memory and vocabulary. The results showed that all children benefitted from shared book reading sessions and showed that frequent shared reading experiences help children develop strong literacy and vocabulary skills.

Catherine, Stacy, and Katy all read to their children when they were infants. They reported that they continued to read to them on a daily basis with continuity. All of their daughters were reported to be highly motivated readers who exhibited above average literacy skills. Catherine, Stacy, and Katy read to their children to help them develop strong literacy skills. Catherine and Katy emphasized the importance of helping their children to build strong vocabulary skills and discussed the ways they believed strong vocabulary was related to understanding story content. Despite the fact that Catherine was in an abusive relationship, Stacy was experiencing periodic homelessness, and Katy was concerned about her husband's mismanagement of finances, they all made the choice to set their children's literacy as a priority.

Mothers' use of technology. Another characteristic the mothers shared is their belief in the use of technology as a tool to enhance their children's literacy skills. Catherine purchased the Leap Frog™ system for her middle child because she believed that she was struggling in school. Stacy bought the VTech™ system for her daughter and raved about its benefits and how she believed that it helped Daphne learn to read at home. Katy used the Leapfrog™ system and *Leapfrog: Letter Factory* (D'Angelo & Smith, 2003) and discussed how the letters took on a character to make a sound. She also had the magnets that made the letter sound and sang the alphabet song.

Research indicates that the availability of technology in the home can have a positive impact on reading achievement. Espinosa et al. (2006) compared technology use in low and higher SES households and its effect on reading achievement by examining (a) computer use at home, (b) the use of educational computer programs, (c) internet use

at home, (d) the number of children's books in the home, (e) whether the child watches *Sesame Street*, and (f) the number of minutes watching TV from 3 p.m. until dinner as well as after dinner. Despite the fact that fewer students in lower SES homes had access to technology, they found a positive correlation between reading achievement and having books at home and having access to the Internet and using programs that teach. They also found that there was a greater impact on children in low SES as compared to children in higher SES families. These findings indicate that children in lower income households can benefit from the use of technology to enhance their literacy learning.

Plowman et al. (2010) reported on the types of technologies that were available in the home as well as who provided the technology and support and the types of learning that were taking place. The results indicated that, regardless of income, technology was available in most of the homes. There was also strong support from immediate and extended family members in all types of households as shown not only by the purchase of LeapPads™, VTech™ games, and DVD players, but also by the guidance the family members provided. This concurs with the findings in the current study because limited financial resources did not prevent Catherine, Stacy, or Katy from using technology as a tool to teach reading skills to their children. Catherine used technology as an instructional tool to help her middle daughter catch up when she experienced learning loss when she moved to transitional housing. Katy used technology as a learning instrument as well. Stacy used technology extensively: She used it as a teaching instrument, to find incentives, and to find community activities and possible summer programs for Daphne. The mothers also had access to technology in the homeless

environment. In addition to the children's equipment the families owned, the transitional facility provided personal computers in each of the neighborhoods. The availability and use of technology was a means for the mothers to continue to maintain contact with friends, seek other possible employment opportunities, and provide a source of information.

Challenging and motivating children. Upon examination of the way the mothers reported that they promoted success in their children, it is clear that they had differing beliefs in their approaches. While Catherine focused more on challenging Ellen to "push" her ahead, stating time and again how she wanted her to be several steps ahead and always reading above grade level, Stacy believed that the best way to encourage Daphne was through a reward system. She did not explicitly talk about challenging Daphne. Because she was already reading above grade level and she was making so much progress, perhaps she did not feel the need to challenge her further. Instead, she set a goal for her to read a book a day. Perhaps when Stacy pulled Daphne from Head Start, she was challenging her because she wanted her to do more than color pictures and play, activities she reported they were doing at school. Katy's approach was similar to Catherine's in that she believed that Jasmine needed to be challenged; however, she strongly believed that the brunt of the challenges had to come from her teacher.

Miliotis et al. (1999) found that the interest and role of parents in their child's education, regardless of housing circumstances, can affect academic achievement. In this study, they sought to examine how parents monitor their children's schoolwork and the relationships among various aspects of parenting as protective factors in homeless

families and school success. The researchers investigated the effects of specific parenting behaviors of 59 homeless African American 6- to 11-year-old children living in a Midwest shelter through audiotaped interviews. Parents shared information about their relationships with their children, including the types of activities they shared, their expectations for their children, and their involvement in their child's education. To determine student achievement, the WIAT-S (Psychological Corporation, 1992), school records, and teacher reports were utilized. Results indicated that children whose parents had high expectations for their children, who were directly involved in their education, and who were close to them made the highest academic achievement.

Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005) found that parental autonomy plays an important role in determining a students' sense of confidence and self-regulation. They found that parents who praised their children and encouraged them were more likely to help them become intrinsically motivated which in turn led them to become responsible for their learning. In effect, these children tended to become responsible for their learning.

Scott-Jones (1987) explored the differences in the approaches taken by mothers of high- and low-achieving low-income Black first graders. She found that the mothers of high-achieving students supported their children but let them take the initiative in educational tasks to motivate them to play a key role in making educational decisions that determine their academic success. In this way, the children's own decisions directly affected their education.

The Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005), Miliotis et al., (1999), and Scott-Jones (1987) studies indicate that parents can promote academic success in their children regardless of

SES, family background, or approach. Like the families in these studies, Catherine, Stacy, and Katy had different beliefs and approaches to challenge and motivate their children to be successful. They too have different backgrounds and have experienced different types of crises, which may have affected the approaches they used to challenge and motivate their children. Catherine was critical of the academic choices she made for herself and this might have prompted her to continually challenge her children to perform above level. Stacy experienced many hardships and had to work hard as single mom. The reward system she put in place for Daphne might have reflected her belief that one is rewarded if effort is put forth. Lastly, Katy wanted Jasmine to be challenged in school. She was proud that she was performing above level. Perhaps she was thinking of the negative experiences she had when she was in school and she wanted to make it possible for Jasmine to maximize her own achievement. As the transcripts indicate, whatever means the mothers used, they all promoted success in their children.

Religion. Catherine and Stacy both made references to religion, but in different contexts. Catherine read Christian books in her youth and talked about borrowing Amish books from her mother-in-law. She did not say she read religious books to her children or use religion in any way as a means to teach her children. Stacy taught Daphne to memorize Bible verses to teach her basic sight words. By teaching her verses such as, “I can do all things with Christ,” and “I can do it, I can be,” she intended to teach her seven different high frequency sight words.

The connection between religion and teaching early literacy skills is one I had not encountered in my preliminary search to find out what parents do to prepare their

children for school. However, this theme emerged in two of the interviews in the current study and in one of the interviews in the pilot study, in which one of the mothers read the Bible as an area of interest. Like Stacy, she used it as a tool to teach her daughter to read sight words and whole verses. For this reason, I decided to explore this topic to see if there was any research on using religion to teach literacy to young learners. As I alluded to in the introduction of the chapter, perhaps the connection lies within the mothers' drive to use what is familiar and what they believe in as means of instruction.

Slonimsky and Stein (2001) examined the multimodal literacies of families in Cape, Gaunteng and the Limpopo Province. In their ethnographic study of Children's Early Literacy Learning (CELL) of three families, they sought to find out why some children acquire early literacy while some do not. In one of the families in the study, religion played an important role. Dineo Kapa, the 9-year-old girl in the study, regularly attended weekly church services and meetings that represented both her African culture and Christianity within her family. Her father emphasized the need for her to be well-versed in literacy-related tasks that pertained to both. Dineo's parents believed her future success was contingent upon her being able to use her literacy skills to live in a diverse and transformative environment. Religion was one form of literacy that was used regularly in this family. Exposure to religious text may have helped Dineo to build vocabulary and word recognition skills.

MacGillivray et al. (2010) sought to examine the continued role of neighborhood institutions in the literacy of five homeless mothers and their nine 6- to 13-year-old children living in shelters. In this study, one of the institutions the researchers explored

was the mothers' connections with church. The authors determined that the mothers made positive references to church because they perceived it as a safe haven both physically and emotionally. The mothers also viewed church as a constant in their lives. The Bible was referred to as central both to religious and literacy practices. Children performed many literacy acts including reading the Bible, church bulletins, and the hymnal. Children were encouraged to take notes during the sermon, ask questions about Bible passages, and memorize passages from the Bible. One child shared what she had written about the sermon with one of the researchers. A mother indicated that her daughter decided to read the entire Bible in her time at the shelter. Despite their homeless situation, these findings show the mothers' connections with the church remained strong (MacGillivray et al., 2010).

The Slonimsky and Stein (2001) and MacGillivray et al. (2010) studies show how religious practices can help promote literacy. Stacy used religion as a form of literacy by providing Bible verses to help Daphne learn sight words. The mothers in the MacGillivray et al. study indicated that the church provided emotional strength and stability in contrast to the instability associated with living in the shelter. Stacy continued to practice religion amidst the uncertainty of her homeless situation. While she used religion as an effective means to teach Daphne, religious beliefs were the constant in her life. Perhaps she wanted this to be a stabilizing force in Daphne's life as well.

Research Question # 2: How do Mothers in Crisis use Capital to Advocate for Their Children?

The second problem I examined pertains to the influence of capital and the ways by which mothers in crisis use it to help their children be successful in school by taking an advocacy role. According to this theory, the types of capital or power are cultural, social, and economic (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) argues that the types of capital are interrelated; however, economic capital, which is based on the source of monetary funds, is dominant because all other forms of capital depend on it in some way. Therefore, economic capital can be converted into the other forms of capital. Cultural capital exists in three states: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state. Social capital can be used to interact with others to form a network of resources. People of low SES are not perceived to have the capital resources they would need to be successful. According to Bourdieu (1986), because children enter school with this negative label attached, they are not expected to achieve the level of success that children of higher SES do because school personnel hold preconceptions about them based on their background. I examined whether the mothers used any of these forms of capital to advocate for their children. I also explored the possibility that one characteristic of mothers who are in crisis is that they help their children acquire early literacy by using capital in some aspect of their lives, whether it is job-related, socially related, or related to their children's education. I also demonstrated how SES and the mothers' homelessness did not affect their ability to use capital effectively. This

effective use of capital defies the misconception that low SES determines a child's ability to achieve.

Catherine used social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to advocate for herself and her daughter. Throughout our interview, she talked about how she networked with other people in her career, with daycare workers, and with specialists for her son. Catherine also talked about how she and the other mothers at the shelter helped each other to defray the high cost of daycare by watching each other's children. As she talked about how Ellen was recommended for the gifted program, she seemed to be knowledgeable about the referral process. She stated that she was friends with her daughter's teacher. It thus seems that Catherine's sense of social capital contributed to her being a strong advocate for her children, and it might have helped her eldest child to be a gifted reader.

Stacy was reserved in her manner of speaking, yet her actions proved that she too used capital to advocate for her daughter. Her choice to pull Daphne out of the Head Start program indicates that she made a proactive decision regarding her daughter's education. Her actions show that she took a stand and made a personal protest against the system that she believed was well below her expectations. Although Stacy was not outgoing, she used cultural capital to make connections when she believed it was necessary to make a positive change for her daughter. She met with Daphne's teacher to find out about ways to help her to write. She also possessed a sense of cultural capital in the objectified state by searching through the Internet to find community programs to reward her Daphne for academic excellence. At the time of the interview, she was

seeking a summer program for Daphne to participate in for the summer. These actions show that Stacy uses capital to advocate for herself and for her daughter.

Katy also showed that she was confident in her use of capital to work through the educational system. She used cultural capital in the institutionalized state to act upon her concerns when she believed that Jasmine was not being challenged in the classroom. She met with Jasmine's teacher to work out a plan for her to be successful in school. She did not hesitate to step in to make sure that a change would be brought about in order for Jasmine to learn to her fullest potential. Katy also used capital to be sure that her youngest daughter was receiving the proper special education services. On the day of our follow-up interview, she was scheduled to meet with a committee of specialists to find out if her youngest daughter's special educational services would be continued.

I used the theory of capital as a framework for this study because there is an overarching belief that many people in crisis situations lack the necessary capital, whether it is economic, social, cultural capital, or all three. After examining the transcripts from the interviews and exploring the actions that the mothers reported taking in various aspects of their lives, it is clear that they used capital successfully to proceed through their everyday lives. First and foremost, the mothers used capital to find a safe and secure environment to take their children to while they were rebuilding their lives. In addition to using capital to navigate through their careers, to interact with their peers, and to traverse various institutions, the mothers also used their strong sense of capital to help their daughters build strong literacy skills when they started kindergarten. They relied on

their use of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to make their voices heard to advocate for their children.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the role of capital, how parents use it to advocate for their children in the school system, and the differences among socioeconomic groups' use of capital. Diamond and Gomez (2004) explored the attitudes, perceptions, and believed involvement of African American middle class and working class parents. They sought to discover if there were differences between the parents' attitudes of the school personnel and the impressions they believed that the school personnel held of them. The middle class parents in the study tended to play a greater role in determining school choice and in turn, felt more positive about the schools their children were attending. They also believed the school personnel had good opinions of them and knew they were involved in their child's education. One middle class father who was dissatisfied with the choices his family had made pulled his daughter out of the first two schools she was attending because he believed they did not offer what she needed to gain from a preschool program. In another instance, a middle class father believed that his son was receiving the appropriate education because he was being challenged. In the same study, working class parents sent their children to lower-performing neighborhood schools. They tended to be dissatisfied with the education their children were receiving, and they believed they were not seen as being highly involved in their child's education.

The conscious decision that Stacy made to pull Daphne out of the Head Start program is evidence that she was using cultural capital in the embodied state to take the

same action as the middle class father in the Diamond and Gomez study (2004). Unlike the father who was able to find a suitable placement for his daughter, Stacy lacked the economic capital to place Daphne in an alternative preschool. The middle class father in the same study, who believed his son was receiving the appropriate amount of challenge, used social capital to ensure that his son was placed in the school of his choice. Katy believed that Jasmine was not being challenged in her kindergarten classroom. Like the middle class father, she used cultural capital to bring about a change. Because Katy has credentials in teaching, she used cultural capital in the institutionalized state to create an educational plan with Jasmine's teacher to challenge her and meet her educational needs. In both of these situations, there is evidence of the way in which the mothers used capital to contradict widely held beliefs of what they might have done in these situations given their circumstances.

Horvat, Weinger, and Lareau (2003) examined the role of social class and the impact it makes on social capital in the manner by which parents use networking related to their children's schooling. In this study, they interviewed people in 88 families of various middle, working, and poor economic backgrounds from three different schools. They showed how middle class parents used social capital to network to a greater extent than working class and low income parents on issues regarding inappropriate teacher behavior, specialized educational needs of their students, and contesting the curriculum. (Horvat et al., 2003)

Like the middle class parents in the Horvat et al. (2003) study, Catherine seemed to have good rapport with Ellen's teachers. In fact, she reported that she was friends with

one teacher. She appeared to be comfortable talking about the process of Ellen being evaluated for the gifted program. Catherine was familiar with the number of students who were recommended and she knew when services would begin if Ellen was determined eligible for the G-T program. In this case, she used capital to tap into her relationship with Ellen's teacher. She also used capital to navigate through the school system without regard to barriers that people in poverty and crisis face when trying to make connections with the school personnel. Stacy described how she asked Daphne's teacher for advice about how to help her with writing. Likewise, Katy set up meetings and met with a special education team to discuss what services her baby would be eligible to receive. She also met with Jasmine's teacher to develop a plan to challenge her with work above grade level. Again, she was addressing the needs for her daughter to receive an accelerated curriculum. Although the findings in the Horvat et al. (2003) study indicated that parents of low SES tend not to advocate for the services of special needs students and initiate placement into gifted education programs, both Catherine's and Katy's actions exemplify the opposite. In both of these cases, the mothers did not perceive the educational institutions as barriers. They used capital to advocate for their children. Unlike Ms. Holt and Ms. Treader (Compton-Lily, 2003; Rogers, 2003) they used their voices to ensure that the school system provide what their children needed to meet their specific learning needs.

Dispelling the Deficit Theory

Ultimately, I conducted this research to dispel the deficit theory (Olivos, 2006). This theory attempts to explain why people in marginalized groups cannot achieve

success. The three most widely recognized categories of deficit theory are biological deficit theory, structural or environmental theory, and cultural deficit theory. I explored how the roles that Catherine, Stacy, and Katy played as their children's first literacy teachers can eradicate the notion that mothers in poverty are not likely to help their children start school on an even plane with mainstream students. Here, I examine how the interviews indicate this to be true.

Catherine reported that her marriage was in turmoil and that she was abused. Despite the turbulence in her marriage, she stated that she started reading to Ellen when she was born. Although Ellen did go to preschool, Catherine had already been reading to Ellen and making up stories from the time she was born. She also reported that she consistently spoke to her using adult language to be sure that she would have a good vocabulary. She believed that this would help her to comprehend higher level texts. Ellen entered kindergarten reading above grade level. At the time of the interview, Ellen was being tested for the gifted program. These actions account for her daughter's high and early achievement in literacy.

Stacy experienced economic hardship. While I cannot disclose the specific crisis that brought her to the transitional housing shelter, I am able to reveal that she had been in a homeless situation more than once and that she was raising her daughter on her own. Despite this, Stacy helped her daughter learn the skills she needed to enter kindergarten on an even plane with her mainstream peers. In her case, she elected to pull her out of the very program in which she was enrolled, which was designed to help her prepare for school, because she was not satisfied. She took the initiative to teach her letters, sounds,

and sight words to be ready for kindergarten. It is evident that Stacy's critical role in her daughter's literacy learning directly contradicts the deficit theory.

Katy also experienced economic hardship. Although she was married during her children's early years, she talked about how her marriage eventually ended due to her husband's financial mismanagement. Throughout this crisis, however, she maintained her focus on her children. She started reading to her daughters from birth. When Jasmine was five weeks old, Katy went back to work. Although she is a preschool and daycare teacher and has the advantage of knowing what is important to enhance her children's early literacy skills at home, she was still living in crisis. She captured every available moment to read with her daughter, even if it was simply listening to her reading while she was driving the school bus, her second job. In this way, she helped to prepare her to read above level in kindergarten to the point where she and the teacher had to devise a plan to challenge her so that she would not be bored. Once again, here is evidence that Katy's role in helping her daughter can help dispel the deficit theory.

The information that can be gleaned from this study is that the deficit theory about mothers in crisis can be dispelled. With every word in the stories the mothers read or created for their children, every word card that they flashed, every piece of technology they used to help prepare their child for school, and every reward that they bestowed, they were proving those theories were wrong. Now the onus is upon stakeholders, experts in the field of literacy, practitioners, and mothers who are privy to the information in this study, to spread the word to other mothers in similar situations so that they too will understand the value and the power they have in what they might already be doing. If

mothers value what they are doing, they will be encouraged to be formidable advocates for their children when they are of school age. They will not be inhibited by the school institution because of their low SES or their living situation knowing they have played a significant role as their child's first literacy teacher. They will be able to take an active and equal stance, rather than a subordinate role in making decisions regarding their children's education. Freire (1970) tells us that *word* is synonymous with reflection and action. Through the interviews I conducted, Catherine, Stacy, and Katy reflected upon what they did to help their children enter kindergarten with strong literacy skills, even though they had all experienced crisis in their lives. In their own ways, each mother acted upon her words. Catherine was a strong partner with her daughter Ellen's school. She worked with her teachers while she was being evaluated for G-T, she provided materials for her to explore her love of writing, and she encouraged her to always stay a step ahead. Stacy chose to teach Daphne at home to prepare her for kindergarten in lieu of the program that she believed was not helping her. Katy partnered with Jasmine's teacher to develop a plan that she felt would challenge and motivate her so that she could work to her potential. Each of these women carried out her praxis.

However, the deficit theory cannot be eradicated if the mothers' stories end here. It is imperative that this information be shared with mothers in similar circumstances so that they too will understand the value and importance of their role as their child's first literacy teacher. One way to accomplish this is for mothers of successful students to hold sessions at shelters and community centers to give presentations about what they did to help their children acquire early literacy. It would also be beneficial for mothers in crisis

to be able to relate to mothers who have experienced similar hardships so that they can see it is possible to replicate what they did. It is also important for the information from this study to be shared in educational publications. Teachers might not be aware that parents who experience homelessness or other major crises could play a major role in helping their children to build the foundation for reading. Sharing this information in practitioner journals would help educators to become aware of the positive impact that mothers in these and similar circumstances can make to dispel the misconceptions they might have had and instead see them as partners in their child's education. Seeing the value in the role that all parents play in their students' education will encourage teachers to reach out to parents and break down the barriers that prevented them from becoming active in the schools.

Limitations

This study was based on data that was interpreted from transcripts taken from three face-to-face to face interviews. My original intention was to interview mothers of children with no preschool experience. It is possible that some of the success that the students enjoyed as they entered kindergarten with strong literacy skills can be attributed to the preschool experiences that they had. As I indicated earlier, it is likely that the mothers' strong support for their children from their earliest developmental days accounts for this success. The in-depth recollections that I showed had a strong influence in helping their children to acquire early literacy skills.

Another limitation of the study could be the way in which I interpreted Stacy's transcript. Although I conducted member checks with Catherine and Katy to correlate

my interpretation with their intended meanings, Stacy moved and left no means of contact. Through multiple readings and a peer review of the transcripts to code the material, I believe the report is an honest and reliable interpretation of Stacy's narrative.

A further limitation of this study is the small number of participants who were involved in the study. The themes that boldly emerged from the three interviews indicate that this data will make a valuable contribution to the existing pool of research on early literacy acquisition. Expanding upon the study to explore a larger group of participants would add valuable information to the field of literacy.

Implications for Future Research

The current study is limited to mothers in crisis because my interest in this problem was piqued when I was working in a transitional housing shelter for women and children. Several families in the homeless shelter have been headed by fathers, however. I have seen that many of these fathers take a keen interest in the educational needs of their children. In an initial attempt to conduct a literature search on the father's role in his child's literacy development, I discovered that there is a paucity of research on this topic. Saracho (2008) conducted a study to examine fathers' engagement and contributions in their child's literacy development as they participated in an intervention program. However, the focus of this study was not specifically on fathers in crisis. Because a father's role is also integral in his child's literacy development, future studies are needed to explore the role that fathers in crisis play in helping their children to acquire early literacy.

I have also seen that in families working closely together, older siblings who have already acquired literacy read with and to younger siblings. It would be interesting to examine whether older siblings who have already acquired literacy skills have an influence on the literacy development of younger siblings. While this phenomenon has been explored (Farver, Xu, Lonigan, & Eppe, 2012; Gregory, 2001), it would be interesting to explore the role of siblings teaching siblings in homeless situations. It would also be informative to examine the roles that extended family members such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents might play in helping children in crisis to develop early literacy skills. At the shelter where I tutor, children often live with extended family members for a long period of time. Children are in their care while their parents are at work. Their strong literacy skills may be attributed to the roles of their other family members. In the current study, Catherine recounted how her mother-in-law also read to Ellen while she was at work.

Religion emerged as a theme in two interviews. While studies have touched upon how a family's attendance at religious services and reading the Bible can add to its literacy resources (Slonimsky & Stein, 2001), there is minimal research available on the ways that families in crisis use religion as a form of literacy. It would be interesting to explore this phenomenon further to determine if there is a connection between the role religion plays in the life of a mother in crisis and how she uses it to teach early literacy skills to her child.

Further studies could also be conducted to track the progress of students whose early years started in crisis. It would be revealing to track the students' progress

throughout their elementary school years. When I contacted both mothers who participated in the pilot study, their daughters were both performing well above grade level and one child had been placed in the gifted program. It would be interesting to follow that progress throughout the grades to study the impact of the mothers' early interventions.

It would also be valuable to explore the success of college students or graduates whose early years started out in crisis. I have seen adult offspring who were raised predominantly by mothers who lived through crisis who pursued college educations, and even post-graduate education. In these cases, the students excelled in school and earned academic scholarships.

Final Reflections and Conclusion

The strength of this study and the possible effects it could produce rely on the spoken word. According to Freire (1970), reflection and action are found within the word. He argues that a true word is the praxis by which we are committed to transform the world. The words the mothers spoke helped them reflect upon what they did to help their children to acquire literacy. Understanding the importance of their roles as their child's first teachers has the potential of empowering the mothers to advocate for their children and form partnerships with their children's schools. This action can help them to become role models for mothers in similar situations who can also see the value in what they have done for their children.

The intent of this instrumental case study was to reveal the process that each mother takes to help her child to acquire early literacy skills. It is intended that the

findings of this research will provide information to various stakeholders in education about what mothers in crisis can do to help their children. The results of the study will inform those in the school community about the strengths of the mothers of the children that they might otherwise have believed would not have had the capital to help their children to succeed in school. Understanding the importance of the mother's role might encourage school personnel to reach out to ask for mothers' input in making educational decisions for their children. This collaborative effort will create the potential to improve academic achievement for children who might have fallen through the cracks. It is imperative that all children be given the same opportunity to be successful regardless of their home environment, SES, and ethnicity.

In this study, I also sought to find out how mothers use capital to advocate for their children. The three interviews I conducted with the mothers indicated that there were prevalent themes connecting the mothers' recollections of their experiences. A preponderance of literature suggests that children living in crisis do not start school prepared to learn to read. The results of this study show that mothers who face crisis can play a positive and formidable role in helping their children to learn early literacy skills, to enter school situated to make progress, and in some cases, to perform above grade level expectations.

As I discussed earlier, most of the themes that emerged from the current study connect back to the literature that I had reviewed; however, two of themes did not. The mothers' references to religion either as an area of interest for personal reading or as a teaching tool was a theme that I had not previously explored. There is a lack of literature

which would indicate that there is a link between a mother's religious convictions and her motivation to teach early literacy skills. As I suggested in my summary of the characteristics of mothers in crisis who teach early literacy, they tap into their strengths to find ways to teach their children. Religion was a means for Stacy to teach reading skills since it was prevalent in her life.

Another area that I did not examine prior to the current study is the literature on how parents' negative educational experiences can inspire them to teach early literacy to their children. It is not surprising that mothers who want to do whatever they can to help their children achieve in school would use their own negative experiences to incite them to build strong skills in their children to avoid replicating the same bad experiences they had when they were in school. While teachers often want what is best for their students, the bond and the emotions are not as strong as they are between a parent and a child. Katy expressed that she does not want her children to feel the pain and the frustration that she did when she was learning to read, so she does whatever it takes to prevent that from happening to her children. Teachers might not have the luxury of time or maybe even the intuition to know when students are feeling that frustration.

The mothers in the study were zealous participants. They believed that their children were excelling in reading and they wanted to reflect upon and share their stories about what they did to get their children to that point. They all knew that crisis situations often have negative consequences for children which surface when they enter school and attempt to master the skills that other children who have not had the same obstacles are able to attain. The mothers also understood the importance of spreading the message to

other mothers in the same situation, so they can help their children acquire literacy and advocate for them when their need to take a stance and effect a change.

The results of the study, although small in scope, send a clear and important message: mothers in crisis can help their children acquire early literacy as they use various forms of capital to make that happen. There are prevalent habits and characteristics that the mothers share which led them to make their children's literacy learning a priority. This is an important message that must be added to the pool of literature that focuses on the typical profile of parents who help their children succeed and excel as readers.

The mothers in this study faced different types of crises and living situations prior to experiencing homelessness. However, they all set aside time and space in their tumultuous lives to make teaching their children a priority. Mothers who are experiencing situations that could prevent them from thinking that they make an impact on their children's academic success need to understand this truth.

This study gives validation to the important role mothers have in helping their children acquire early literacy skills. The significance of this study incites a change in thinking from a deficit perspective to a perspective that acknowledges that it is feasible for anyone, regardless of living circumstances, income, and culture, to make a difference in his/her child's education. This promising and reassuring revelation can now be considered a reality.

The look in Stacy's eyes as she recalled her experiences with Daphne revealed how impassioned she was about having the opportunity to share her memories with me.

Throughout the interview, she would often jump back to a previous question as her memories unfolded. It was evident that the interview gave her the opportunity to unlock the experiences of what she did to help her daughter to acquire literacy skills. Telling her story helped her to see the value in the drilling, the use of flash cards, the use of Bible verses and Michael Jackson song titles, and the purchase of technological equipment that she used to teach her daughter to read. The interview also gave her a sounding board to vent her frustration and disappointment with the Head Start program that her daughter had been attending. By stating how she pulled Daphne out of the program because she believed they were not teaching her anything, she was taking a firm stand. It is clear that Stacy had a powerful role as one of her daughter's first literacy teachers.

It is my hope that helping the mothers think about their positive role gave them a sense of empowerment in their relationship with their children's schools since it is critical for them to be aware of their children's skills to help them to achieve academic success. Through workshops offered for mothers, the example of what mothers can do to help their children acquire early literacy despite the crisis conditions they may live in can inspire other mothers in similar circumstances to help their children enter school with the tools they need to meet and exceed academic goals. Arming children with the skills they need to acquire literacy can reduce the number of children needing intervention. Mothers who take an active role in helping their children to acquire literacy might believe that they can work collaboratively with their children's teachers. This collaboration can help teachers form positive perceptions of the mothers which, in turn, might make the mothers feel welcome in the schools. Parents who feel welcome when their children first enter

school might stay involved in their children's education. This involvement can make it possible for their children to be successful throughout their academic careers.

Importance

The intent of this study was to discover what mothers who have experienced crises do to help their children develop literacy skills. Currently, there is insufficient literature on this topic. The majority of the studies of people in marginalized groups, people of low income, people of color, people who have experienced homelessness, and people who have experienced some form of crisis, show that children from these homes perform less well than children of mainstream families (Purcell-Gates, 1995; Snow et al., 1998). The current trend in education is for all students, regardless of their living situation, family background, and prior experiences, to achieve standards set forth by policy mandates. Yet, the data indicate that it would be difficult for children in these situations to meet expectations (Tunmer et al., 2006). Despite the abundance of literature that supports this notion, there is evidence that students in these marginalized groups can and do achieve expected goals. Examples of this phenomenon are evident in schools and shelters. It is crucial to find out how these children were prepared to enter school despite the seemingly detrimental circumstances that they face. It is imperative to find out what their mothers, their predominant caretakers, did to help their children to be on an even plane with their mainstream peers.

These findings will be used to inform the research community, teacher practitioners, community-school liaisons, and parents through published reports and presentations. The goal is for these findings to be a vehicle for an otherwise powerless

segment of society to use their voice by reporting on the power of each unique form of capital. Providing this information to the public will be make it possible to start chipping away at the social deficit theory.

APPENDIX A

Pilot Study Protocol

Interview Protocol

A Mother's role in Helping Young Children to Develop
Strong, Early Literacy Skills

Arlene Prinzivalli Mascarenhas

PhD Student in Literacy

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Research has indicated that students whose parents are involved in their education help to promote higher achievement. Research also indicates that early intervention, including that which takes place before children are of school age, helps to prepare children to be ready to acquire literacy skills. Data suggest that children who live in stable, traditional, middle and upper income families are more likely to be prepared to learn to read than students living in unstable and crisis situations. Despite this, there is evidence that children living through crisis situations, including young children who have had no prior formal education, develop strong literacy skills. It seems like they would learn these skills from their predominant caretakers, their mothers. To explore this phenomenon, I

would like to ask you about what you did to prepare your child to develop strong literacy skills before he or she entered school.

Interview Questions

1. When did you begin to read to your child? What types of books did you read?
2. How often do you read with your child?
3. What types of reading materials do you have in your home?
4. Do you read regularly? Do you read in front of your child? Describe your early literacy experiences as a developing reader.
5. When reading with your child what do you do to engage him or her in the story?
(E.g. preview the book, relate the story to own experience, have child make predictions).
6. What specific skills, such as letter and sound recognition, blending sounds, using picture and context clues, relating to your own experiences, have you taught your child to use?
7. In what ways do you think these habits helped your child to achieve when he or

she entered school?

8. What will you do to continue to support your child's literacy development?
throughout the school years?
9. What changes, if any, would you make in the support you have given?
10. What recommendations would you make to other mothers to help their children
to develop strong literacy skills?

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

How do Mothers in Crisis Teach Their Children Early Literacy Skills?

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Research indicates that students whose parents are involved in their education help to promote higher achievement. Research also indicates that early intervention, including that which takes place before children are of school age, helps to prepare children to be ready to acquire literacy skills. Data suggest that children who live in stable, traditional, middle and upper income families are more likely to be prepared to learn to read than students living in unstable and crisis situations. Despite this, there is evidence that children living through crisis situations, including young children who have had no prior formal education, develop strong literacy skills. It seems like they would learn these skills from their predominant caretakers, their mothers. To explore this further, I would like to ask you about what you did to prepare your child to develop strong literacy skills before he or she entered school.

Interview Questions

1. Describe your reading experiences as a child.
2. Describe your current reading habits. Do you read in front of your child?
3. What types of reading materials do you have in your home?
4. When did you begin to read to your child? What types of books did you read?
5. How often do you read with your child? When do you typically read to him or her?
6. When reading with your child what do you do to engage him or her in the story?
(E.g. preview the book, relate the story to own experience, have child make predictions).
7. What specific skills, such as letter and sound recognition, blending sounds, using picture and context clues, relating to your own experiences, have you taught your child to use?
8. In what ways do you think these habits helped your child to achieve when he or she entered school?
9. What do you do to help your child understand and use language?

10. How do you monitor your child during reading and other academic tasks?

11. How do you help your child understand that learning is for him or her and not for you?

12. What will you do to continue to support your child as a reader?

13. What changes, if any, would you have made in the way that you helped your child learn to read?

14. What message would you give to other mothers to help them understand the importance of reading with their children and helping them to build reading skills?

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BIOGRAPHY

Arlene Prinzi Valli Mascarenhas has had extensive experience in the field of education. She has been in her current position as a reading specialist in a public school system in a diverse, urban school district for over 20 years. Over the years, the school enrollment has surged from over 400 students to nearly 700 students. As a result, teachers have had to be fully prepared to meet the needs of the changing population. Policy mandates initiated changes in the curriculum and assessments used to establish accountability. While these changes were created to ensure that all students, regardless of their ability, or their cultural, economic, or linguistic background, students would be expected to make adequate progress. However, they put pressure on administrators and teachers. In her role as a reading specialist, Arlene has guided teachers to help them meet the individual needs of their students. As a teacher, she supports students by tapping into their individual strengths and provides ways to incorporate their culture and background knowledge into her lessons to help them learn strategies to become successful.

In *Preparing Teachers for High Needs Schools: A Focus on Thoughtfully Adaptive Teaching* (Mascarenhas, Parsons, & Burrowbridge, 2010), Arlene and her co-authors addressed these critical issues that teachers face. In this article, they discussed the importance for teachers to be thoughtfully adaptive to meet the individual needs of students in order to make instruction relevant. In order to provide high quality education, teachers must be given the tools to be fully prepared to teach in high needs schools.

Arlene has also taught several graduate classes at George Mason University as a student lecturer. She uses her field experience to provide pre-service and new teachers practical ideas for implementing the curriculum.

Arlene's interests also lie within the needs of the homeless population. She is an instructional coach for school-aged children at a family homeless shelter. She also organizes a weekend backpack program that is a joint project with local places of worship and the public school system where she resides. She believes this program is a way to ensure that students have nutritious food to eat throughout the weekend in order to be prepared to learn when they return to school.

Mascarenhas, Parsons, & Burrowbridge (2010). Preparing teachers for high-needs schools: A focus on thoughtfully adaptive teaching. *Bank Street College of Education*, 25, 28-43.