Recruiting, Engaging, and Retaining Low Income Parents in Community Parenting Programs: A Phenomenological Study

Jane Elyce Fuqua Glasgow

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Recruiting, Engaging, and Retaining Low Income Parents in Community Parenting Programs: A Phenomenological Study

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER 2014

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ABSTRACT

RECRUITING, ENGAGING, AND RETAINING LOW INCOME PARENTS IN COMMUNITY PARENTING PROGRAMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Jane Elyce Fuqua Glasgow
Old Dominion University, 2014
Chair: Dr. Angela Eckhoff

This study examined factors that impact recruitment, engagement, and retention of low-income parents in community parenting programs. Using a traditional qualitative phenomenological approach, this research sought to develop an understanding of the difficulties that program providers often encounter in engaging low-income parents. Participants included program stakeholders (providers, policy-makers, and funders) and low-income parents with children under the age of five from urban areas. A series of focus groups were held in order to capture the voices and develop a textural description of the lived experiences of participants. Results revealed that a combination of factors impact engagement, including the important role of the community in the lives of the families, and the positive impact of developing relationships and connections between program providers and parents. Further, themes for the data emerged bringing forth the notion that effort and resiliency are strengths and merit attention when engaging parents. Most importantly, results demonstrated that families acquire various forms of community cultural wealth and funds of knowledge that need to be acknowledged and valued when seeking to develop parenting programs. Implications for program development indicate a strong need to consider: developing an understanding of the needs and culture of the specific community in which the program will be provided; intentional efforts in connecting with and building relationships with families prior to program start; designing
programs that allow for parent input, feedback and contribution of social and cultural
capital; and inclusion of assessment mechanisms that account for smaller, individualized
goals that acknowledge for difference in efforts to engage.
I dedicate this dissertation to my family ....

My parents, Jim and Jane Fuqua, who showed me I could do anything I dreamed of

My children, Jacob and Hannah, who have brought me much joy and pride

My husband, Bob, who has supported me through this endeavor
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. First, I would like to acknowledge and thank my chair, colleague, and friend, Dr. Angela Eckhoff. In the midst of a very busy schedule, you always made time to help and guide me through this process, keeping me grounded along the way. Your energy and sense of humor lightened the stress of this process. And yes, you were right... nobody makes their first timeline, or their second! I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Pete Baker, Dr. Kathleen Levingston, and Dr. Kitty Kersey. Pete and Kathleen, your continued encouragement and feedback helped me keep moving forward when the process seemed endless. I thank you both for your help. Kitty, I met you in 1991 when I started my Master’s Degree. You have played a tremendous role in shaping the parent and teacher I have become; something for which I will always be grateful. To my colleagues and stakeholders in the community who helped me schedule focus groups and brought parents together, my sincere thanks. Without your efforts, this study could not have happened. I would like to acknowledge my writing group partner, Nicole Austin. Your feedback and perspective have been invaluable! A special acknowledgement to my brother-in-law, Michael Clark, who painstakingly helped me edit my work.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my friends and family who cheered me along every step of the way and helped my children and husband when I was distracted in my schoolwork. To my parents, I thank you for your love and support. You have both been
an inspiration for me in my pursuit to support children, parents, and families.

To my children, Jacob and Hannah, I could never have finished this dissertation without your encouragement and understanding. You both have been patient when I have been distracted, been helpful when I needed you to lend a hand, and you both have loved me through the difficult times of having a working mother who decided to pursue her Ph.D. I love you both!

To my husband, Bob, words cannot express my gratitude for your support in helping me to achieve this dream. You have cooked, cleaned, chauffeured children, and kept things together at home while I went to class and spent endless hours on the computer. I look forward to resuming our lives now that this is completed! I love you and could have never completed this degree without you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEM STATEMENT</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSE</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURRENT LITERATURE</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRAMEWORK FOR PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTIONS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA COLLECTION METHODS</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANALYSIS</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA CODING</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCHERS ROLE</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMITATIONS</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINDINGS</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUING THE CAPITAL FAMILIES POSSESS</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTIVATIONS AND OUTCOMES</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIERS</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCES IN STAKEHOLDER AND PARENT FINDINGS</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESENTATION OF MAJOR FINDINGS</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. STAKEHOLDER PHONE/E-MAIL SCRIPT</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant Groups</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Participant Demographics</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Study Matrix</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Program Types</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

*The family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child's development. Without family involvement, intervention is likely to be unsuccessful, and what few effects are achieved are likely to disappear once the intervention is discontinued.*

-Urie Bronfenbrenner

In 2012, there were more than 11 million children under the age of three living in the United States. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, an alarming 48% of those children are being raised in low-income families (Jiang, Ekono & Skiner, 2012). The number of children, specifically infants and toddlers, living in poor or low-income families as determined by the federal poverty level, continues to rise on a yearly basis. Jiang, Ekono, and Skinner (2012) reported an increase of 12% in the number of these children living at or below the poverty rate between 2006 and 2011. In fact, the number of children under the age of three living in low-income families outnumbers adults living in low-income situations. Nearly 6 million infants and toddlers lived in low-income homes as of 2012.

The impacts of poverty, especially on very young children, create long-lasting effects seen throughout childhood (McLoyd, 1998). Effects that span from social and emotional development, self-regulation, and cognitive development across all academic areas are well chronicled (Sektnan, McClelland, Acock, and Morrison, 2010; Ayoub, O'Connor, Rappolt-Schlichtmann, Vallotton, Raikes, and Chazan-Cohen, 2009). Further, additional risk factors are often present for those children in poverty, magnifying the
impact for many of the youngest citizens. Single-parent families, low-education levels, and lack of employment or underemployment are frequent realities for families living below, at, or near the federal poverty level (Jiang, Ekono & Skinner, 2014). McLoyd (1998) notes poverty has become more concentrated in urban or inner-city areas, often effecting large groups of families and compounding the difficulty in accessing jobs, high quality child care, and other public and private services that support families. In combination, the effects of poverty on children and the highly concentrated pockets of poverty in urban areas create a challenge for many communities looking to assist these children and families with services that might help overcome some of these detrimental long-lasting effects.

The detrimental effects of poverty on children today are now critical issues as the achievement gaps continue to widen between low-income children and middle and upper class children (Gutman and McLoyd, 2000). In an effort to gain better understanding of a growing achievement gap, many researchers have sought to explore ways in which poverty effects families, looking less at poverty itself, but at the contextual factors that impact children in these families. Focus on the home environment, family structure, available resources, and parenting have all been examined.

Supportive parenting practices, such as maternal sensitivity and responsiveness, have been reported to mediate some effects of poverty on young children. Vick-Whittaker, Harden, See, Meisch, and Westbrook (2011) suggest supportive parenting practices can lead to more positive developmental trajectory for low-income children. In
a study investigating ways to enhance parent-child interactions through home visiting efforts, Peterson, Luze, Eshbaugh, Jeon, and Kantz (2007) present strong support for the connection between parent-child interactions and a child’s developmental trajectory, noting the results of developmental research to substantiate interaction and positive global outcomes for children. Peterson et al. (2007) note that parenting intervention programs frequently target parent-child interactions, because of the recognition of the powerful effect these interactions have on a child’s development. Deutscher, Fewell, and Gross (2006) suggest one of the most consistent predictors of cognitive outcomes for young children and their social development is the quality of the interactions between child and mother.

In addition to interactions themselves, literature shows parent sensitivity and responsiveness to children’s cues and needs tend to be lower for children living in poverty. Vick-Whittaker, Harden, See, Meisch, & Westbrook (2011) found maternal sensitivity served to mediate some of the stresses impacting low-income children. Enhancing social-emotional functioning for many children, however, such as maternal responsiveness, is often infrequent.

Supporting parents in their development of the understanding and importance of their role as their child’s first and lifelong teacher is vital. Engaged parenting where positive and sensitive interactions between parent and child occur routinely is viewed as essential in helping to diminish some of the detrimental outcomes for children living in poverty. Parental education programs are established ways to support parents in their
quest to increase parenting capacity. These offerings take shape in many different ways, including education through Head Start or other preschool programming; community-sponsored parenting classes; intervention-type strategies; home-visiting programs; and options recommended through social service agencies. Voluntary parenting education programs are the context in which this study was framed.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the foundational work of Bronfenbrenner's (1979a) theory of ecological development. This theory illustrates the overlapping spheres in which a child develops. The complex processes that shape a child's development take place within a system of relationships, including family and community, which help to build a rationale for community parenting programs that revolve around the family and community. With children at the center of these overlapping spheres, the family and community contexts in which children develop provide a wealth of valuable knowledge about the child and the family.

Community parenting programs often build programs based on the deficit approach. While deficit-thinking ideologies have a long history in the discussion of minorities and their educational achievement, a more contemporary view of deficit approach is the underlying foundational principle for many community parenting programs. When examined in a modern perspective, Valencia (1997) explains that deficit approaches assert a deficit in skills, resources and abilities, based on genetics, culture, class, and familial socialization. Further, many of the measures of deficit are based on
white, middle class ideals of what parenting and families should look like (Kunjufu, 2006; Valencia, 1997). In this deficit model, cultural perspectives and individual family characteristics may be undervalued, suggesting a scarcity of skills or resources for parenting. These ideas illustrate how programs could undermine even their own well-intentioned efforts from the foundation of this philosophical approach. With beliefs based on the idea that parents have a dearth of skills and are operating at a deficit of parenting resources, programs end up exacerbating the issue, alienating and disparaging families rather than supporting them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a; Olivos, 2006). Moving from this deficit approach, theories of cultural capital and the value of this capital for families, provide alternate approaches to program planning.

Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory (1986) provides the foundational concepts about how communities build human resource, as well as social networks, resulting in a cultural capital system (Lin, 1999). This capital is characterized as the knowledge, attitudes, and skills acquired through family, formal schooling and the community (Lee, 2006). Unfortunately, the cultural capital described is measured or valued from perspective of the white, middle class culture (Linn, 1999; Yosso, 2005; Antrop-González & Cooper, 2009). Moving from deficit approach to an approach that builds on the capital that families have accumulated may appear to be a more positive approach; however, based on how this cultural capital is valued, it can still be considered a deficit.

Conversely, my framework moves past this deficit framework, and builds on the idea that all families have some type of capital. Parent engagement should be approached
from the perspective of working with parents and families, building on the strengths and
on what parents “bring to the table” rather than focusing on family background,
circumstances, or income level. Building on Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital and
understanding that social and cultural capital looks different for different people,
programs can operate on a foundational level, rather than a deficit (Bourdieu, 1986).
Perspectives from González, Moll and Amanti’s (2005) Funds of Knowledge research,
Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) theory, and the critical race theory
(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) focus on the wealth of the community, not on the need to
ascertain certain capital to succeed. Rather than expecting families to have a certain type
of capital, program providers need to see the value of and build on skills, knowledge, and
capital that all families possess. Frequently, the value of capital is based on narrowly
defined white, middle-class values of an institution, rather than valuing other types of
capital each family acquires based on through its experiences (Liou et al., 2009; Larrotta
and Yamamura, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Equally importantly, program providers need to
understand how to help “spend” the various forms of capital they have accumulated
rather than viewing them with a deficit lens for what they do not possess.

This shift in focus provides a rationale for programs to quarry their approach, now
assessing and building on the knowledge and strengths of the family. Both CCW and
Funds of Knowledge theories focus on parents and families within the context of their
cultures, examining the wealth of the community (Lee, 2006). Instead of starting with the
idea that these families have a deficit that requires identification of the source of the
problem and a plan for correction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a), an approach that assesses and builds on strengths, knowledge, and beliefs of the family is more likely to connect with families in a way that encourages them to attend and stay engaged in programing.

The idea of building program approaches on the knowledge that parents and families offer, rather than on what skills or ideals the families are missing and need to acquire, rounds out the framework and lays the foundational knowledge in which this work is grounded. It is important to understand the influence of the home and community environment on both the child and on the ideals and beliefs of the parents, which translate directly into parenting behaviors. These key aspects together are core concepts under which we examine parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs.

**Problem Statement**

In an effort to mitigate some of the devastating effects poverty has on young children, community agencies, non-profits, schools, and churches develop and implement parenting programs. Community parenting programs can differ greatly in intensity and duration, as well as in goals and staffing. These programs are well intended with resources, both human and financial, invested to help low-income parents and their children. Difficulty in getting parents to attend or regularly engage in these programs, however, has become a great challenge in their development and marked success. Program creators, funders, and other stakeholders work diligently to develop and fund programs designed specifically for low-income families only to be left with the question,
"Why can’t we get parents to come?"

Interest in this topic has grown out of personal experience and desire to better understand why parent engagement is difficult when attempting to provide community programs for low-income families. Play and Learn Together: Infants, Toddlers and Parents (PLT), was a community-based parenting program, sponsored by a local community foundation grant. I was the Primary Investigator for PLT. This parenting education/support program was designed to serve parents of children 0-3 living in subsidized housing in a medium-size city in the southeastern U.S. The program was implemented through collaboration between staff and students affiliated with the campus child care center of a large state university located within miles of the public housing area where participants lived. The program itself featured four-month sessions. Parents participated in four monthly play and learn sessions with their children, using toys, books and manipulatives provided for each family through the grant. Each weekly session included dinner and play activities. Play activities were set up and run by early childhood students, modeling appropriate verbal interactions and play activities. The program also included two home visits for each family during the program to support development of relationships. Sessions were held in a community church, easily accessible to families who could walk there.

Based on recommendations from current literature, well intentioned recruitment efforts began prior to the program start. Connections with local agencies were made in an effort to reach families. Flyers, too, played a vital role in publicizing the program’s
availability in the following ways: Hand-delivered to homes with children under three in
the target community; sent home with every child in the local public school and Head
Start Program; placed in community centers and the housing community office; and
given to local churches where potential participants routinely attended programs.
Community members affiliated with a neighborhood church also contacted potential
families in an effort to recruit them. The goal was to enroll 15 families to participate in
the first session. Initially, 11 families signed up to participate.

Planning and purchasing of materials commenced as excitement grew before the
program’s start. Prior to the first session, phone calls to participants were made,
confirming a home visit to drop off program materials and a box of soft blocks for each
child enrolled. All 11 families indicated their intent to participate. After two attempts at
home visits for each family, fewer than half had been accessible. Continued efforts to
reach families were made. Reminder calls were made the morning of the first session,
with nine families planning to attend. Disappointingly, only two families attended the
first session. Continued efforts to engage families included subsequent home visits and
delivery of a second set of toys and books to participants. Again, after several attempts,
connection with families was unsuccessful. Throughout the remainder of the sessions,
with continuing recruitment and engagement efforts, only two families consistently
attended. Not only was a recruitment difficult, but keeping families engaged and
attending regularly proved difficult as well.
It was difficult to understand why parents were not attending. The program was planned designed to address obvious barriers to attendance, including transportation, food, and materials. Keeping these barriers in mind as the program intended was not enough to attract parents to attend. The catalyst for this research is the search to better understand those barriers and reasons parents do not, or are not able to, participate in community parenting programs. Further examination of current research highlighted the prevalence of continued difficulties in recruiting, engaging, and retaining low-income parents in programs like the one described. Whittaker and Cowley (2012) theorize a myriad of factors are involved in parenting program enrollment and reasons behind ongoing participation are not clear cut, thus confounding the issue and creating difficulty in understanding specific obstacles to engagement.

The current body of research on parent engagement focused widely across several areas, most commonly focused on the engagement of parents in school settings. A broad range of research that addressed various aspects of parent engagement in K-12 school settings is available (Epstein, 1986; Goldkind & Farmer, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2012). Specific focus on connecting with low-income parents is prevalent, much of it based on ideas of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 2009) which can be traced back to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theories of development (1979b). Other research focused on parent engagement is provided in the context of mental health or other clinical referral settings, and not specifically in programs parents voluntarily choose to participate. While this body of research may lend knowledge and provide related information to parent
engagement in community parenting programs, a solid examination of barriers present in engaging parents in programs offered in the community is lacking. Moreover, a clear lack of qualitative investigation into the topic is apparent. Additionally, little of the current research takes the perspective of the parent, giving the parent themselves an important voice in the discussion. Little evidence of any discussion about knowledge and strengths parents possess or how programs build on these existing strengths in dealing with families is apparent in the research. Thus, these knowledge gaps demonstrate the need for further exploration into the topic of parent participation in community parenting programs.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of barriers, motivations, and practices that impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs. This examination was completed through the lens of parents and program stakeholders. Believing in the real need to hear the parent’s voice and the perspective of program stakeholders in this dialogue, qualitative methodologies were warranted. This inquiry laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding into the lives of low-income families and the stakeholders in regard to enrolling and staying engaged in community parenting programs.

**Research Questions**

This research is guided by the following questions:
1. What factors do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

2. What motivations and barriers do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

3. What do parents and stakeholders perceive to be effective practices for recruiting, engaging, and retaining low-income parents in community parenting programs?

4. In what ways do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) characterize the value of parents’ cultural wealth and knowledge?

**Operational Definitions**

To clarify the understanding of commonly used terms in regard to this study, the following operational definitions are presented:

Parent Engagement – The process of the parent connecting with, and using the services of a program to the best of the parents’ and the program’s ability and include consistent, continual attendance throughout the program duration (Korfmacher et al., 2008, p. 171)
Community Parenting Program- A parenting education program in which parents voluntarily enroll, may include a center-based facility and/or individual home visits.

Stakeholder- A person involved in the decision making, funding, design, implementation, or evaluation of a community parenting program.

Parent- An adult raising a young child between the age of birth and 5 years of age.

Delimitations

The qualitative approach of this study is narrow in scope. This study was conducted with families living in low-income housing communities within a few miles of each other. Family members interviewed include only parents of a child under the age of five. Further, parent participants voluntarily agreed to be interviewed. Thus, some parents may be more likely to engage in programs than others. Stakeholders included in this study were involved in programs that served residents in these areas in some way within the past three years. Stakeholder participation was not limited to those that were successful in recruiting, engaging, and retaining parents, but those who struggled as well.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five additional chapters and includes a reference list and appendix. Chapter Two will present a review of the literature relating to parent recruitment, engagement, and retention. Initially, a review will outline the current body of literature on parent engagement. Secondly, a contextual overview of the microsystems
that affect the social development of children is presented. Next, a discussion of the
deficit thinking ideology that community parent programs are often built on is explained.
Conversely, the theories of Bourdieu's social and cultural capital are presented and built
on to include Yosso's CCW and González, Moll, and Amanti's Funds of Knowledge.
These theories, based on strengths and knowledge families possess, will be offered as
positive approaches to connect with families and highlighted as key elements in the
design of parenting programs. Chapter Three will discuss research design and
methodology. Participants and selection process also will be discussed, as will a data
collection plan, including interview protocols and questions, focus group protocol
questions, data analysis using horizontalization, and the development of a coding
structure. Chapter Four will discuss the findings of this qualitative study. Presentation of
major findings and implications for future research and practice resulting from the
findings of this study will comprise Chapter Five.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature that not only focuses on parent engagement in community parenting programs, but includes a historical perspective on the theories that build the theoretical framework for this study. An integrated review of the current body of literature is presented, noting the motivations, reported barriers, and effective practices identified through the research. This presentation of current literature will include discussion of gaps in current research, both in subject and in methodological approaches. Building on this body of scholarship, I will present the framework that guides the theoretical and methodological approach to this study.

An examination of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979b) ecological theory of human development will lay the foundational beliefs about young children’s social and emotional development, illustrating contextual settings that overlap and react with each other to shape the developing child. It is important to understand the complex factors that impact the social and emotional development of a child in order for policy makers or program designers for community parenting programs, or any family support program, to develop better programs. A basic understanding of this ecological theory will help policy makers and program planners to provide the best opportunities for positive outcomes for low-income children and their families.

Secondly, deficit ideology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a; Kunjufu, 2006; Valencia, 2010,
1997), the predominate approach used in programs designed to support and engage families in poverty, will be presented. This deficit approach often alienates prospective participants from engaging, based on foundational ideals and approaches to programming. Historically, approaches and explanations of parent engagement focused on the Pre K-12 school setting have been rooted in the ideals that low-income parents lack skills and their children are often blamed for their own difficulties in school (Valencia, 2010).

To conclude the review of literature, contributions from theories of parent engagement including social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), and Funds of Knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) research theories will help weave together recommendations for parenting support and programs that value the resources of the families they aim to serve. The combination of these theories presents the idea that every person has knowledge or skills about their own culture and life, referred to by Bourdieu as social and cultural capital. Use of this capital or knowledge is one of the key links to building bridges between families, schools, and community agencies (Kahne, O’Brien, Brown, & Quinn, 2001).

**Current Literature on Parent Engagement**

A growing body of research presents many of the challenges low-income parents face daily in parenting their children. Community parent education and support programs have appeared throughout neighborhoods in an effort to facilitate positive parenting support and to mitigate some of the negative effects of poverty (Wagner, Spiker &
Inman-Linn, 2002). Many such programs have been developed and implemented over the past decade. With the development of these programs, a heightened focus on effectiveness and outcomes has emerged, requiring examination of all program aspects. Many experimental studies have been conducted to assess the overall effectiveness of parenting education programs (Harachi, Catalono, & Hawkins, 1997; Wagner, Spiker, & Inman-Lin, 2002; Whitaker & Cowley, 2012). However, Bumbarger and Perkins (2008) report replication of results in promising studies is often difficult or impossible, possibly attributed to difficulty in recruitment, engagement, and retention of targeted participants (Axford, Lehtonen, Kaoukji, Tobin, & Berry, 2012). These essential elements, significant in the implementation and effectiveness of programming, are the foundation for building parenting support programs that positively impact the lives of young children in low-income homes. Parent education programs and interventions designed to serve low income families in both clinical and community settings often find difficulty in engaging and retaining families to participate (Doyle & Zhang, 2011). Korfmacher et al. (2008) note that parent involvement and engagement is largely overlooked in early childhood program evaluation literature. This presents a difficult challenge for community advocates who seek to provide programs, but are often unable to fully meet their goals due to limited enrollment of families and lack of retention of those who do participate initially.

For clarification, this review uses the following operational definition for engagement: “the process of the parent connecting with and using the services of a
program to the best of the parent’s and the program’s ability” (Korfmacher et al., 2008, p. 171) and includes consistent, continual attendance throughout the program duration. Community parenting programs are defined as those that include a center-based facility and/or individual home visits. Through an integrative review of studies included, themes emerged, providing pertinent information about motivation, barriers, and effective practices. First, the complex context of factors involved, including theoretical frameworks will be outlined. Secondly, dimensions of motivation and barriers to participate in programs found in the literature will be illustrated. In conclusion, program practices that lead to successful recruitment and retention as found in the literature will be presented.

Context of Parenting

Setting the context of the parent recruitment, engagement, and retention is important in examining and understanding the literature. Whittaker and Cowley (2012) posit that the myriad of factors involved in parenting program enrollment and ongoing participation are not clear cut. What impacts one family may have no bearing on another family in regard to engaging in parenting programs; thus, indicating the interplay of both personal and contextual factors in the discussion (Whittaker & Cowley, 2012). Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood, and Vesneski (2009) describe how vital the social context of the family is in connecting with needed programming and developing attitudes toward the services that are linked to continued participation and positive outcomes.
Several frameworks of parent engagement have been presented in the literature, most commonly dealing with parent involvement in schools, although this may be pertinent in the discussion of parent engagement in arenas other than formal school settings. For example, Epstein et al. (2009) present a parent involvement theory based on overlapping spheres of influence, noting that children grow and learn in the family, community and school. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979b) ecological theory from the microsystem level through the macrosystem provides an understanding of the relationship between family life, school, and community life. It also helps clarify the roles of families, communities, and later schools in parent recruitment, engagement, and retention. Successful engagement and retention of families in community programs does not happen in isolation, but in a microsystem that includes many members, each with a different role (Manz, 2012; McDonald, Fitzroy, Fuchs, & Klasen, 2012; Rafferty & Griffin, 2010). Acknowledgment of the complexity of this issue, with perspectives from the varied stakeholders involved, rather than observing it only from the parent lens, is essential in creating a full understanding of the challenges that arise in recruitment and engagement.

Motivations for Parents

Determining what motivational factors positively impact parents who decide to participate and stay engaged in programs is important for planning purposes and in negating the barriers reported. The most frequently reported motivation is the desire to make a difference for their child. In a study of 246 ethnically diverse primary grade children, Chaffin et al. (2009) and another study by Bloomquist, August, Lee, Piehler, &
Jensen (2012) reported a strong correlation between parents who have expectations for intervention and change at the beginning of the program. In an effort to identify parent motivations for program participation, Doyle and Zhang (2011) examined parent engagement in family literacy programs by looking at program design through two differently structured programs. Parents report that “they wanted to learn ways to help their child at home” and “wanting to know about what they should expect their children to be able to do… before their children started school” (p. 225). Parents, who believe strongly in the benefit for their children, are reportedly more likely to overcome the barriers and commit to continuous engagement (Chaffin et al., 2009). Other motivational factors included social experiences for both children and families (Doyle and Zhang, 2011). Incentives and materials provided to families were frequently offered and considered a motivation by participants (Axford et al., 2012; Doyle & Zhang, 2011; McDonald et al., 2012).

Interestingly, the value of motivation is not frequently addressed in the research. Instead, the literature more consistently seeks to develop understanding of the barriers. Rather than looking at motivations and barriers, a critical look at effective practices and their connections to motivations and barriers may be more informing. Isolating effective practices may help to disaggregate factors that motivate parents to attend and those that discourage parent participation.
Barriers to Parent Involvement

The discussions around barriers that keep or hinder low-income parent engagement in parenting programs are conceptualized across the literature in different ways. Using terms such as structural or logistical to describe issues that physically impact ability to attend or the terms psychological, perceptual, or attitudinal to describe non-physical barriers that impact engagement (Kazdin, 2000; McDonald et al., 2012; Mendes, Carpenter, LaForrett & Cohen, 2009) identify two general categories of barriers: structural and perceptual. Structural barriers include those that prohibit parents from being physically able to participate and perceptual barriers refer to more abstract barriers, such as psychological or attitudinal barriers.

**Structural Barriers.** Many of the daily issues that typically impact low-income families are reported as barriers. One of the most consistently noted barriers revolves around scheduling issues. Lamb-Parker et al. (2001) surveyed parents using the Barriers to Parent Involvement Survey and found 44% of respondents reported work or school to be a conflict and 37% reported having a schedule that conflicted with activities available to them. Likewise, parents reported inflexible work schedules, or working two jobs, praxis not uncommon for low-income families trying to make ends meet (Chaffin et al. 2009; VanVeslor & Orozco, 2007). Work, school and other scheduling conflicts are reported to greatly compete for the limited time parents have available to participate in these types of programs. Also reported are the preoccupation parents have with just trying to meet daily needs. Parents reportedly were more worried about taking care of children’s
physical needs and making sure they had food and supplies than in participating in parenting education opportunities (Brookes, Summers, Thornburg, Ispa & Lane, 2006; Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood, & Vesneski, 2009). Secondly, transportation was identified as one of the major barriers in several studies, noted in Chaffin et al.’s (2009) Obstacles to Engagement Survey in literature by Lamb- Parker et al. (2001) and Mendez (2009). Transportation can be difficult for low-income families who do not have reliable cars of their own or access to public transportation.

Other structural issues that were identified included instability in housing, phone service, and other crisis situations. In one of the rare qualitative studies on parent engagement, Brookes et al. (2006) explored reasons reported by mothers and home-visiting personnel that were attributed to the success or lack of success in program goals. It was found that low-income families often live with relatives or may move frequently, creating difficulty in contacting and keeping track of families involved in programming. Common resources, such as phone service is commonly disrupted for families living in extreme poverty. When moving frequently, acquiring the money to pay for connection and reconnection fees is often difficult and once established, may be disconnected because of delinquent payments as time goes by (Brookes et al., 2006).

Additionally, a lack of other resources in the home, such as household goods, cleaning and household supplies, and educational support materials, are reported to interfere with engagement. (Brookes et al., 2006; Lamb-Parker, 2001; VanVeslor and Orozco, 2007). Brookes et al. suggest that in addition to family stressors and crises, an
overall disorganization may be present in the lives of some prospective participants, attributed to the many challenges associated with the lifestyle resulting from poverty. This disorganization is not a result of the inability to organize their lives, but more a result of inconsistent access to resources needed to keep a sense of organization. While the needs of each family remain somewhat individual, the commonalities of the difficulty with access to consistent home resources are a common thread for many families living in poverty.

**Perceptual Barriers.** For many families, other barriers exist that are considered perceptual in nature. These would be related to attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about participation. Mendez et al. (2009) expound on the notion that many do not engage and participate in community programs because they simply do not see the need for change. “It may be that low-income families do not perceive preventative intervention as necessary for their children, particularly if there are no pressing cognitive or behavioral concerns” (p. 12). Further, parents recognized school readiness as an issue to be addressed when their children are ready to start formal schooling, rather than something that is built from infancy, through toddlerhood and into the preschool years (Mendez et al., 2009).

Additionally, targeted participants may have fear built on past history with other agencies surface as a perceptual barrier. For example, if a referral for social services or some other community agency has been made, parents may be hesitant to involve themselves with other programs (VanVeslor & Orozco, 2007). Negative prior
experiences with these agencies can be linked to a sense of mistrust which causes a psychological barrier to willingness to participate. This plays into negative attitudes toward engagement and retention (Kemp et al., 2009). Trust issues based on the dynamics of other relationships in the participants' life can impact parent engagement as well. Parents who have not had trusting relationships with families or significant others may not trust program providers enough to engage in programming. Parents may feel threatened or misunderstand program providers' desire to help and worry that the provider will think the parent is not doing a good job in parenting, or is otherwise making judgment.

Social support systems are reported factors in the engagement process. These support systems, including past relationship histories, current patterns in relationships, as well as the amount of support from family, friends and peers, that do not encourage participation, can hamper participant engagement (Brookes et al., 2009). When parents do not have support systems that encourage participation, they are less likely to see the value in parenting programs.

Parental personality traits, confidence, and prior school experiences can all be considered to be perceptual barriers to engagement as well. Parents who are shy may be unlikely to engage in programs due to the social nature and discomfort felt by participating in something that makes them uncomfortable (Brookes et al., 2006). Parents with prior school challenges, negative feelings about learning, or little confidence in their own intellectual abilities, will be less likely to value the learning opportunity provided,
and as such, less likely to engage in programming (VanVeslor et al., 2007). With this knowledge, it is important to understand the complex nature of development, as Bronfenbrenner theorized, and the influences of the family and immediate network when trying to fully understand motivations and barriers to engagement for low-income families.

The cultural differences of targeted participants and program staff, as well as differing values on the need for the program, are also identified. To some families, parenting programs may be culturally non-relevant or be considered inappropriate to participate in (Harachi, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1997). Additionally, cultural differences in program staff and intended participants are noted to inhibit participation for some. In some situations, cultural misunderstandings and language barriers are of issue (Kemp et al., 2009; Lamb-Parker et al., 2001; VanVeslor et al., 2007). Axford et al. (2012) suggest that low-income and minority parents are less likely to engage in programs that reflect the cultural values of the White middle class, with the concern of a lack of understanding about real-world problems affecting low-income, culturally diverse families.

Finally, parents who do not view the value of the parenting program in regard to the outcome for their children, but instead view the program’s value in terms of themselves, will be less likely to gain the positive benefits for their child. Brookes et al. (2009) describe parents who are “self-absorbed” and participate simply to access the benefits provided. For example, a parent may be more interested in dinner, child care, or free materials they will receive, rather than focusing on the outcomes for their children.
Parents who join community parenting programs for these reasons are much more likely to leave the program before completion or participate less fully. As these potential barriers are explored, it is important to recognize that engagement and participation are not only impacted by the structural barriers, but perhaps, more importantly influenced by past experiences and support systems that may not be readily visible.

**Effective Practices for Program Delivery**

It is important to examine what practices that lead to successful recruitment, engagement and retention may look like. Researchers provide examples of effective practices that support the recruitment, engagement and retention of parents in community parenting programs (Brookes et al., 2006; Doyle & Zhang, 2011; Harachi et al., 1997). These practices should be viewed in combination with motivation and barriers research in order to fully develop an understanding of what effective parent engagement models should include.

Specific focus on the recruitment process is important when launching a parenting program. Recruiting and engaging families is an ongoing process that should include home-visits, phone calls prior to and during the program, and other methods of maintaining contact (Axford et al., 2012). Working with partner agencies to identify potential participants has proved successful and can expand the network of services provided to families as well as reaching a larger number of potential participants (Brookes et al., 2006; Doyle & Zhang, 2011; Whittaker & Cowley, 2012). Emphasis on a team approach to identifying participants is supported by McDonald et al. (2012),
contending that when other program parent participants make contact rather than being targeted by the program director, parents will be more likely to engage. This approach, a parent-to-parent engagement method, is characterized by the connection of participating parents with one another. In one study, participants reported most frequently being recruited by a friend or someone in their community (Harachi et al., 1997).

**Recommendations**

Careful and intentional program structure planning can lead to positive outcomes for recruitment and retention. Recommendations for flexibility in program structure that allow for changes to be made to meet family needs have been found to increase recruitment and retention (Korfmacher et al., 2008). Designing program schedules that meet family needs create greater opportunities for parents to attend. While program dosages (number of hours of intervention) often are predetermined, consideration on continual engagement should be considered (Manz, 2012). The frequency and number of weeks a program meets must be manageable for the participants (Doyle & Zhang, 2011). Curriculum should remain adaptable to meet the needs of participants. With a rigid curriculum, parents may not feel their needs are met and stop attending (Harachi, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1997). Cultural appropriateness and understanding carry greater benefit when built into the curriculum, in an effort to negate the cultural issues that can impact engagement as described in the barriers section (McDonald et al., 2012). Further, special attention should be paid to ensure curriculum, materials, posters and visuals, and
other recruitment paperwork are appropriate, avoiding stereotypes and negative language (Axford et al., 2012).

A common theme across this literature stresses the importance of getting to know participants and building relationships with them. Axford et al. (2012) assert “providers need to build and capitalize on relationships with potential service users” (p. 2062), noting that without such relationships, parents may disengage. Home-visiting programs are greatly impacted by the overall relationship between parent and home visitor (Brookes et al., 2006; Korfmacher et al., 2008). Consideration and thought about how to carefully match program staff and parent, when able to accommodate, has proved to be successful as well (McDonald et al., 2012). This consideration may alleviate some cultural and relationship issues discussed as barriers to parental involvement.

Lastly, use of incentives has been an effective practice in engaging parents. Providing dinner, child care, materials, or other enticing ways to encourage parents to attend has been successful in many parenting programs (McDonald et al., 2012; Doyle & Zhang, 2011; Brookes et al., 2006). Program planning with attention to incentivizing the parent engagement has delivered positive impacts.

**Framework for Parent and Family Engagement**

The current body of literature on parent engagement is only part of the information needed to paint a comprehensive picture of this multi-faceted issue. In order to fully discuss this topic, the components of the framework for the theoretical
perspective are needed to round out the topic of parent involvement and engagement in family support or community parenting programs. Understanding the context in which children develop and the influence the environment has on this development, lends credence to the important role that schools and community agencies play. Parental engagement with their children and children's activities is a dynamic, interactive process. Parents must draw on their past experiences and available resources to fully engage (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological development, deficit approach, Bourdieu's cultural capital, Yosso's CCW, and Funds of Knowledge clarify and lay out the theoretical framework for my study.

Weiss, Lopez, Krieder and Chatman-Nelson (2014) report that family engagement occurs in many contexts: home, community, and schools. While this research looks specifically at parent engagement in community-based programs of parents with children prior to school entrance, parent engagement is a continued process. Early opportunities to engage parents in these types of programs are the foundation for later school engagement (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006). Getting parents to see themselves as their child's first teacher and as an integral part of their child's learning process from infancy through adulthood creates the blueprint for later engagement. Parents who are already part of their child's learning journey when they are engaged prior to preschool or school entry are more likely to stay engaged (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006). Further examination of how parent engagement in their child's learning process transitions between early childhood to school, specifically between home and school, are noted as
important by McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, and Sekino (2004). This is especially true for low-income children in urban areas where parent involvement has been found to be a buffer between poverty and negative school outcomes (McWayne et al., 2004; Marcon, 1999).

**Bronfenbrenner’s Theory of Ecological Development**

Bronfenbrenner (1994) provides a model of human development that helps to explain the importance of communities and schools, as well as the interplay of culture, belief systems, and other societal impacts. Based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development, it is theorized that growth occurs across the overlapping spheres of influence between the child and the environment: the microsystem, mesosystems, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Further, he asserts that a third dimension of the environment, consistency versus change over time, has an effect as well (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979b) ecological paradigm, introduced in the early 1970s, was based on the foundational idea that

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate setting in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between
these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are
embedded. (p. 21)

Two basic ideals are important in outlining this theory. First, a person is a growing, dynamic entity and has the ability to move and change or adapt with the new environment it lives in. Secondly, an awareness that the environment can present an influence on a person, creating a two-way or reciprocal interaction is needed (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b).

Bronfenbrenner's theory is based on the belief that human development occurs through interactions in a nested environment of five concentric structures or spheres of influence (1979c). The first is referred to as the microsystem, which encircles the child in the center. Bronfenbrenner (1979b) defines this as the "pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (p. 22). This describes the immediate environment and contexts within which learning and development take place. Examples of this level would include the family, home, or child care, where it is believed that children typically develop an understanding of the set of behaviors and expectations, associated with social class, culture, and societal position (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b).

The next system, the mesosystems, is where there is an interaction of the microsystems with two or more microsystems intersecting to form a new setting. This level addresses the interaction between families and community agencies or schools and the overlap and relation. Epstein et al.'s (2009) work on parent and school engagement is
based in this system, focusing on the connection between home and school and the
processes between them.

The exosystem, the third sphere in the model, includes an interaction between two
settings with one of them providing an indirect or external influence on the child.
Bronfenbrenner (1979b) provides the examples of these external influential factors like
the parent’s workplace, parent’s network of friends, activities of the school, or older
siblings’ schooling experience. These organizations influence the development of the
child through the indirect impact on the microsystem or family system (Weiss et al.,
2014).

Fourth in the model is the macrosystem. This is the sphere with the greatest
influence. It comprises the consistencies of the micro-, meso-, and exosystems. The
influence of culture and subculture come into play here and include factors such as
political systems, social policy, economic trends, religious organizational policy,
resources, opportunities, and limitations for families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b;
Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Weiss et al., 2014).

Chronosystem, the final element in the model, did not appear in Bronfenbrenner’s
originally published model (1979b); however, in his later publications of the theory, he
added this significant layer. The chronosystem brings a third dimension, one of time, into
the understanding of human development. Time is considered in regard to both the
development trajectory as well as the implication of the historical context
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979b).
Further, in 1986, Bronfenbrenner presented research perspectives on the familial context of human development that incorporated some of his earlier work on ecological development. With the understanding that human development occurred within the overlapping spheres, he then addressed the question, “How are intra-familial processes affected by extra-familial conditions?” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 723). In this study, he examines the external systems (meso-, exo-, and chrono-) that serve to externally effect families. He then defines family processes in context: social address model, process-context model, and person-process-context model. In the mid-1990s, Bronfenbrenner continued to refine his theories. In 2005, the bioecological theory presented included focus on the process-person-context and time. This newly expanded theory placed more emphasis on the proximal processes and not simply on the context of the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which provided further explanation of the intersection of genetics and personal characteristics, along with the process, the environment and across time.

Bronfenbrenner’s theory of ecological development in its earlier stage is the foundational work for my theoretical framework. Looking at the connection between the developing child and family engagement within the many contexts that engagement occurs, within the home, community, and later in the school environment, enables conceptualization of the idea that parenting happens within the context of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem and not as an isolated phenomenon (Manz, 2012; McDonald et al., 2012; Rafferty & Griffin, 2010; Weiss et al.,
Moreover, Weiss et al. (2014) posit, "Family engagement must be understood as having cumulative effects over time" (p. xxiii). Further, support for continuity of family engagement from the very young years throughout young adulthood is made (Weiss et al., 2014). Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP, 2006) in their brief, Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education, notes that parent involvement, not only with their child’s early education site but through daily engagement in the home, is associated with positive preschool performance. Notably, this level of engagement continues with benefits that persist over time and are correlated to family involvement in schools later in the child’s life (Barnard, 2006; Harvard Family Research Project, 2006).

**Deficit Approach**

There has been an extensive body of literature compiled over the last half century about children and families living in poverty, especially in relation to educational outcomes (Huston, McLoyd, & Coll, 1994; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). It is a widely accepted notion that young children and families in poverty today face many challenges (McLoyd, 1998; Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan & Foley, 2001; Huston, McLoyd, & Coll, 1994). This provides a bleak picture of the educational outlook for many of these children. Theorists, social scientists, and scholars have long examined this issue trying to better understand the effects of and outlook for children, often minorities, growing up in poverty. In seeking to explain the lower academic achievement of children living in poverty, especially African-American and non-white students, often attention is focused on a seeming shortfall of skills, placing blame on the children and families for not
possessing the perceived knowledge they will need to succeed in school and life (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). This is often referred to as a deficit thinking approach. This model of thinking has not been limited to school and academic outcomes, but has also been applied to ideologies that shape many of the social policies designed to help children and families (Valencia, 2010). Valencia states,

"Deficit thinking"......... an assault on the prevailing view
that asserted the poor and people of color caused their own
social, economic, and educational problems (p. xiv).

Terms like culturally disadvantaged, cultural deprivation, and accumulated environmental deficits emerged from this idea. To put it in a more simplistic way, deficit thinking generalizes there is something wrong with low-income or culturally different families and that their lack of skills, knowledge, or worse yet, that parents have no interest in, or are unwilling to help their children (Cooper, 2010; Kunjufu, 2006). Bronfenbrenner (1979b) summarizes this deficit model,

If it is not the individual who is inadequate, then it is the family;
they are not giving the child enough cognitive stimulation
or positive reinforcement. And if it is not the family itself that
is deficient, it is the socioeconomic or ethnic group from
which they come. ‘They could do it if they had the get up and go’.
As a result, before we are willing to help anybody up, we first
have to put them down. (p. 103).

Through this quote, Bronfenbrenner clearly illustrates that this deficit ideology is looking to find a source of blame, before we can work toward a solution. This thinking permeates this approach.

**Historical Perspective of Deficit Thinking Model.** The evolution of deficit thinking started in the United States as early as the 1600s with the servitude of racial minorities and has continued for some 400 years in various forms (Valencia, 1997). Examination of the historical perspectives on deficit thinking spans the progression from the early days of slavery into the dark days of racial segregation of ethnic and minority students in the 1920s through the 1950s. The influence of various ideologies has shaped the current dogma of what we call “contemporary deficit thinking.” Valencia (2010, 1997) writes about deficit thinking, much of which is focused on the perspective of educational thought. My discussion on the deficit thinking model is focused somewhat on families and programs in the community, in the frame of family support and parenting programs, and not on the wider focus of the full educational experience for students. This deficit ideology is not a new approach to addressing social issues. There is a long history, dating back over 100 years, that laid the foundation for the contemporary deficit thinking patterns of today.

Menchaca (1997) highlights the racist discourse, based on the ideas of white supremacy and the belief that minorities were inferior physically, cognitively, and culturally to their white counterparts. To build further on the white privilege idea, in the
mid-1800s through the 1900s, racial minorities were deprived of educational opportunities that were closely tied with economic inequities (Menchaca, 1997). More importantly, this early racist discourse set the stage for later ideas of deficit theory. (Menchaca, 1997; Valencia, 1997).

Throughout the 1900s, theorists purport three avenues for which deficit thinking continued to grow: genetics, culture and class, and familial socialization (Valencia, 2010). While a great deal of research has examined the genetic pathology responsible for alleged racial differences in intelligence, referred to as hereditarianism, Valencia (2010, 1997) and Foley (1997) provide strong research-based disagreement to this idea. Valencia (2010) cites research and publications such as Shuey’s *Testing of Negro Intelligence*; Eysenck’s *Race, Intelligence, and Education*; Herrnstein and Murray’s *Bell Curve*; Levin’s *Why Race Matters*; and Lynn’s *Race Differences in Intelligence* as examples of research that supports the hereditarianistic beliefs; however, he clearly repudiates the conclusions and beliefs presented throughout these publications. Foley (1997) and Valencia (2010, 1997) note that these paradigms are based on pseudoscience and call for vigilant examination of scientific racists “who espouse a genetic pathology model regarding racial differences in intelligence” (Valencia, 2010, p. 67).

As the deficit thinking timeline moved into the 1940s, '50s and '60s, models that focused on a more anthropological view of deficit thinking began (Foley, 1997). With this anthropological focus, ideology began to shift from genetics rationale to one that focused more on the cultural influences of poverty. Looking at a more cultural
perspective for difficulties and failure in school and life, Oscar Lewis’ Culture of Poverty theory (as cited by Foley, 1997; Valencia, 2010) posited the idea that families living in poverty live in a culture idealized by negatives—values, norms, and social practices. Lewis listed some 70 traits, organized into four clusters: attitudes, values and character of poor people; nature of the family system for poor people; nature of the slum community; and the poor’s social and civic relationship with the larger society (Foley, 1997).

Furthermore, Foley (1997) characterizes Lewis’ cultural depiction of the poor that portrayed them as lazy, self-indulgent, dysfunctional, chronically unemployed, violent and distrusting, and often living in families with unmarried parents. This theory, along with others, provided the mindset that the culture of poverty itself was to blame for the difficulties of the families and children living without the resources needed to meet their basic needs.

**Contemporary Deficit Thinking.** Moving into a more recent timeframe, the idea of contemporary deficit thinking emerges. Contemporary deficit thinking, as described by Valencia and Solórzano (1997), looks at the idea in three contexts: genetic bases of human behavior in relation to race/ethnic differences in intelligence; culture of poverty paradigm; and cultural and accumulated environmental deficits. These ideas were coupled and applied to the larger scope of social issues including race, ethnicity, gender and class.

One major tenet of contemporary deficit thinking is found in the idea of blaming the victim. Ryan (1970) wrote a classic exposé that illuminated this frequent practice
wherein the middle-class ideology finds fault with the poor and culturally disadvantaged, blaming them and accusing them of causing their own despair. The underlying base of this ideological thought process is the powerful blame-the-innocent expectation (Ryan, 1970). Coining the term underclass as a reference to families living in extreme poverty, it is argued that many of the elements of a life in poverty actually perpetually builds members of the underclass. Blaming the length of time one lives in poverty, the location of the community one lives in (extreme poverty in high concentrations), and the impact of the behavioral models of those living in poverty in comparison to the social norms, as the critical factor for the poor continuing to live in oppression (Ryan, 1970; Valencia, 2010; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Valencia and Solórzano (1997) cite William McDougall (1921) in Is America Safe for Democracy as describing further, the value systems of the poor cause them to behave and live the way they do. García and Guerra (2011) similarly support victim-blaming in their report that low-income parents are often considered at fault because their children are not being taught “prerequisite skills” believed to be important in school due to their lack of caring or values about their child’s education.

Kunjufu (2006) translates the ideals of deficit thinking into action. He reports the social problems of the poor are identified by the victim-blamers, which then creates a need for a study that identifies differences between the poor and the non-poor. In an effort to look for a cause for the societal woes, the identified differences are translated into the cause of the problem. Finally, he contends that interventions are designed by the
government to correct the differences. The difficulty in this process is that the group with the identified “difference” is not included as valuable in the process—their contributions are not valued.

Continuing on the blame-the-victim ideology, deficit thinking is framed around a series of stereotypes about families in poverty and minorities. Payne (2005) presents a framework for understanding the life of families in poverty. Written as a theoretical outline for educators to better understand the perspective, habits, and traits of families living in poverty, Payne’s text is very popular with school divisions and well-received by middle-class educators (Bomer, Dworin, May & Semingson, 2008). Payne (1995) begins by differentiating the effects of what she calls generational poverty, those living in poverty for five to eight years or more, and those middle-class families having difficult financial times, due to loss of employment, illness, or accident, which she calls situational poverty. The framework underlying Payne’s writing rests on her defined commonalities of families affected by generational poverty. As cited by Payne (2005), Oscar Lewis (1971) quotes from his work, Culture of Poverty,

Culture of poverty has some universal characteristics which transcend regional, rural, urban, and even national differences...These are remarkable similarities in family structure, interpersonal relations, time orientations, value systems, spending patterns, and the sense of community in lower-class settlements in London, Glasgow, Paris, Harlem, and Mexico City. (Oscar Lewis, 1971)
Payne's (2005) framework focuses on the lifestyle and personality traits of the families, making assertions about environments, parenting styles, and family dynamics. She reports that the television is often on loud and left on for background noise and that the home environment is often lacking order or organization. Family systems are dominated by a matriarchal structure with the mother in power. Women associate their identity as the martyr and men associate their identity as lover or fighter. Discipline is reported to be harsh, with focus on the punishment, rather than teaching about appropriate behavioral expectations. Payne (2005) also asserts families in generational poverty have a negative orientation toward life, think in a polarized manner that does not allow them to consider other options in decision making, and live their lives in the present with no regard for the future. Lastly, there is a presence of a “mating dance,” as Payne (2005) claims, in which people in poverty use their bodies in sexual ways to attract, in lieu of other financial resources that people not in poverty use to attract others.

Payne (2005) highlights that the characteristics of families in generational poverty are consistent across all groups impacted by this type of poverty. These are the perceived differences between families in poverty and families not living in poverty. Every individual has a set of hidden rules that were ingrained by the culture in which they live (Payne, 1995). Payne affirms that schools and businesses operate from a set of middle-class norms and values, what she calls the hidden rules of the middle class. But more importantly, that movement from poverty to middle class is only accomplished by giving
up the relationships with the people currently in community of poverty in order to achieve (Payne, 1995).

Additional stereotypic portrayals of low-income families are presented with the 1960s attitude that poor families provide inadequate homes and inadequate parenting (Pearl, 1997). To further describe the parenting styles, assertions that parents raising children in poverty, including a large percentage of minorities, do not value the importance of education (Pearl, 1997). All of these stereotypes play a role in the continuation of deficit thinking, now thought of as contemporary deficit thinking.

The real question in deficit thinking ideology is who is defining the deficit? Valencia (2010) avows that the middle-class (or blamers) identify the problems, based on their own ideals and expectations. For example, Ryan (1970) depicts the societal perception of African American families as unstable and in need of fixing. Who defines unstable and what needs fixing? Reportedly, white, middle class values are often the measure of the expectation for families in poverty (Brown, 1999; Greene, 2013; Kunjufu, 2006). Likewise, Payne (2005) is very clear in her statements that both the hidden rules and the important rules for success are based on middle class values. The disconnect lies in the fact that families and children living in poverty are often aided by people not in poverty. The aid is approached from a middle class perspective, rather than a realistic understanding of the issue.
Faults in Deficit Thinking

While examining the body of literature on deficit thinking, many glaring faults in this type of ideology become apparent. First, the stereotypic, racist views that are often portrayed in the literature about families in poverty provides a false foundation on which much of this work is built (Bohn, 2007, 2006; Bomer et al., 2008; Gorski, 2012; Valencia, 2010). Second, the research, often called pseudoscience, on which these ideals are based, is questioned (García & Guerra, 2011; Gorski, 2012; Kunjufu, 2006; Valencia, 2010, 1997; Valencia & Solózano, 1997). Lastly, there is little to no consideration of alternative explanations or understanding of the cultural framework (García & Guerra, 2011; Valencia, 2010).

of thirteen critiques of Payne’s (2005) framework (Valencia, 2010). His analysis shows that 85% of the critiques focus sharply on Payne’s stereotypic illustrations.

On my first read-through of the ‘rules’, I don’t know whether to laugh at the sheer stupidity of some of them or rage at the offensive stereotyping of people in poverty and the thinly veiled bigotry reflected in others (Bohn, 2006, p. 14).

The stereotypes presented in much of the deficit thinking models are offensive at best. Making generalizations about the lives of a group of people, based on their socio-economic status, lacks rational understanding.

Examination of the science that much of deficit thinking is built around leads to the belief that it is questionable to say the least. The framework provided by Payne is lacking any research or scientific basis (Bohn, 2007; Bomer et al., 2008; Valencia, 2010). Asserting that the claims in the Payne’s framework are not research-based, Bomer et al. (2008) refers to them as “truth claims”, noting that Payne has never conducted any actual research (p. 2500). Validity of historical research that supports deficit thinking as cited in Valencia (2010) is brought into question. Frequently called “pseudoscience” (Valencia, 2010; 1997), the basic assumptions, psychometric instrument validity, data collection procedures, and interpretations are critically analyzed and questioned, with accusations of researcher bias heavily impacting the confidence in the research (Valencia, 1997). Furthermore, the pseudoscientific explanations for racial differences in intelligence are
inconclusive and questionably examined (Valencia, 2010; 1997). Valencia (2010) and Foley (1997) discount the genetic pathology paradigm and differences in intelligence by race and claim the hypothesis of genetic differences between African American and Caucasian populations is false. The discounting of these claims devalues much of what deficit thinking ideologies are built on.

It is quite shocking that in 2005, Payne would provide quotes and base her philosophies on work of anthropologist Oscar Lewis in the Culture of Poverty literature, based on research that took place between 1959 and 1971 (Foley, 1997). Certainly, there are more up-to-date studies that provide a more current understanding of a life in poverty. Moreover, the fact that so many middle-class educators are eager and willing to accept her framework as the truth, without substantiation by research, policy, higher education endorsement, or other confirmation perpetuates the misunderstanding of those living in poverty (Bohn, 2006). Interestingly, Payne’s book is self-published by her own company, a multimillion dollar corporation, rather than by a book publishing company that might require peer review or other research support.

Deficit thinking also builds on the ideals of the perceived culture of poverty (Valencia, 2010). With this, little room is left to develop other areas of understanding of factors that may provide alternative explanations. Little discussion is present that allows for examination of the social, economic, and political structures that impact the poor. Full examination of these factors would require a whole different perspective on the topic. I will not discuss these topics, except to postulate that the deficit thinking model does not
take social, economic or political impacts into account when framing its ideological stance.

**Beyond Deficit Thinking**

Painting the picture of the ecological system in which a child develops, highlighting the overlapping spheres of influence that occur across the micro, meso, exo, macro and chronosystem provides a contextualized explanation of the importance of the connection and communication between these systems—family, community, and later, schools. It is important for program providers to build on that knowledge, knowing that the reality for many young children and families living in poverty is often misunderstood by the middle and upper class, as well as governmental agencies that want to help. Careful examination of the body of literature about parenting support and other community resource programs grounded in deficit ideology, it becomes clear that in order for program providers to connect with and value these families, that there is something missing.

I have identified the difficulties that community parenting programs often experience in their quest to recruit families to participate in programs and initiatives. Thinking about why programs have difficulties from the very first step of program planning, connecting with families and getting them interested in attending, it is evident that common approaches to recruiting and engaging parents miss the mark. When community agencies and parenting support program planners find themselves viewing
low-income or families living in poverty from the deficit ideology perspective, they in
many ways, undermine their own efforts from the very beginning.

In her framework for understanding poverty, Payne (2005) focuses on the hidden
rules of the culture as the key to becoming successful. What is missing from the deficit
ideology is the understanding that children and families must not be defined by their
struggles, but by the strengths that they possess (Sugarman, 2010). In the deficit
ideology, the lens focuses on what these children and families are missing and what
problems need to be fixed. Conversely, rather than focusing on what low-income families
are believed to be missing, we must focus on the strengths and knowledge that parents
possess about their child, family, culture, and community. By identifying the knowledge
and ideas that these parents bring to the table, we develop a model that moves from
filling the gaps (deficit ideology) to building on the knowledge, skills, and resources that
families already have (González et al., 2005; Magdaleno, 2013; Sugarman, 2010).

**Bourdieu’s Social and Cultural Capital**

A large body of literature details the United States educational systems and the
implications of social and cultural capital for low-income children and families
(Dimaggio, 1982; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 1987; Lin, 1999; Sullivan,
2002). Both social and cultural capital ideas are based on the writings of Bourdieu (1986)
and are frequently discussed in a much larger context, including larger social and
economic impacts. For purposes of this discussion, I will focus on social and cultural
capital as it relates to families, children, and the educational process. Much of the past
research on social and cultural capital examines how capital relates to differences in acquired capital, race, socioeconomic-class, and school success. Capital, in this discussion, refers to a set of assets that are possessed based on an investment of some type, rather than the financial definition more commonly used (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). It is asserted that capital is acquired through the family, the community, and formal schooling (Bourdieu, 1986).

The concepts of cultural and social capital are often discussed together, with the supposition that social capital impacts cultural capital. Cultural capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are acquired indirectly through family, culture, environment, and formal schooling. Bourdieu (1986) presents cultural capital in three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. In the context of parent engagement, cultural capital is viewed in its embodied state, which includes “the long lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 3). Sullivan (2002) writes about Bourdieu’s theories in regard to educational system, from a sociological perspective. Sullivan (2002) defines cultural capital as “familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand the use of ‘educated language’. Possession of cultural capital varies with social class.” (p. 145). Cultural capital, as characterized by Condron (2009) is the capital that aligns with the “institutionalized values” (p. 687). As indicated by the term name, cultural capital acquisition is highly impacted by culture and the cultivation of capital thorough that culture.
Social capital is described as the understanding of the social norms, social control and information, often embedded in the social interactions and relationships between people (Horvat et al., 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lin, 1999; Sullivan, 2002). Bourdieu (1986) classifies social capital as the aggregate of resources that are accumulated from the social groups, social networks, or groups with whom one is connected. Condron (2009) further explains social capital as the trust, information channels, and norms. The key tenet of the concept of social capital is that it is embedded within relationships—family, parents, home, community, and school (Condron, 2009; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Much of the research on social and cultural capital supports the notion that children and families who have acquired larger quantities of cultural capital will have an easier time in school (DiMaggio, 1982; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). It is also reported that lower-income peers, especially those in the racial minority, are negatively impacted by poorer stores of cultural capital (DiMaggio, 1982; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Condron (2009) testifies that parent engagement in school or educational process is stronger when the parent has strong social and cultural capital accumulation. Lee (2006) acknowledges the fact that much of the cultural capital is learned in formal school settings and in the family.

Critical analysis of Bourdieu’s (1984) cultural capital theory brings to light the notion that some cultures are richer in cultural capital and others are considered culturally poor (Yosso, 2005). This notion conveys the continued inequities in opportunities for
some children and their families, especially those with low socioeconomic level or minorities. We can compare values, knowledge, and skill associated with cultural capital to Payne’s (2005) “hidden rules” of a culture. Payne claims that everyone learns these hidden rules, but there are some rules that are considered to be “more correct” than others, especially in relation to school and society. The rules of the middle class White culture are more favorably viewed by societal institutions and schools (Payne, 2005).

Bourdieu’s theory asserts that families acquire capital differently and that some skills and abilities are valued more by certain groups in society (Yosso, 2005). While Bourdieu’s theory values different types of culture in different ways, the deficit ideology is not as apparently present as it is portrayed in a framework like Payne’s (2005). Cultural capital is acquired by all, it is just valued differently. Unfortunately, most often, the value of cultural and social capital is measured by values of the privileged, well-educated, White class (Liou et al., 2009). While everyone acquires cultural capital, the argument becomes about the value of the capital. The question, then, for marginalized, low-income groups, becomes whether or not the capital they bring is acknowledged and valued (Yosso, 2005) and how do they activate that capital (Lareau & Horvat, 1999)?

**Community Cultural Wealth**

Moving forward from this idea of valuable cultural capital, Yosso (1995) presents a model of community cultural wealth (CCW). This model evolved from ideas of Critical Race Theory in that Communities of Color have accumulated assets and learned resources that are not measured through Bourdieu’s social and cultural capital definitions.
This model builds on the idea that cultural wealth is built from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and interactions through their communities (Magdaleno, 2013). CCW comprises six forms of capital found in the community: aspirational, familial, social, linguistic, resistant, and navigational, each interconnected with the other. (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Yosso, 2005). These forms of capital are not static, but ever changing, building on each other in a dynamic process, bringing together a community of wealth (Yosso, 2005). Aspirational capital focuses on goals, hopes and dreams one may have for the future, without regard to perceived or real barriers. Aspirational capital represents the “culture of possibility” (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Familial capital acknowledges the cultural practices, history, and knowledge shared among networked family members (Liou et al, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Social capital is defined much in the same way as Bourdieus’s social capital, through the networks, community resources, and peer support that assist in navigation of social institutions (Liou et al, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Linguistic capital explains the knowledge and skills attained through communication experiences, often experienced through more than one language or dialect (Yosso, 2005). Knowledge about navigating through unfamiliar or other social institutions typically with unrepresented minority and low income populations is referred to as navigational capital (Liou et al., 2009). Lastly, resistant capital is built through experiences with oppositional identities and challenges of inequality (Yosso, 2005).
The type of wealth described in CCW, comprised of many types of capital, is accumulated from the history and lived experiences of people. Central to this idea is the acknowledgement that all members of society bring cultural value to the table (Magdaleno, 2013). Further, Liou et al. (2009) make note that the types of capital valued in CCW have been historically undervalued and not recognized for its value by many institutions that are defined by White, middle class values. Rather than looking at cultural capital as valuable or in valuable, CCW looks at the multiple strengths of the community (Yosso, 2005).

Expanding Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of social and cultural capital to incorporate the idea that families, especially those living in poverty or racial minorities, accumulate different types of valuable capital. Those other types of valuable capital (aspirational, familial, social, linguistic, resistant and navigational) need to be acknowledged and used to build on when community agency or school personnel work to connect with families, rather than assuming that families operate from a deficit. Focusing on the strengths that a family possesses based on their life experiences, rather than approaching them with the idea they are lacking the needed skills, undermines efforts to connect and stay connected with families. Building a connection with the CCW theory, González et al.’s (2005) Funds of Knowledge research presents the idea that every household has valuable knowledge to contribute.
Funds of Knowledge

Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González (1992) built a theory on connecting with and better understanding the strengths and knowledge working-class families possess. Having worked with low-income Mexican, African American, and American Indian households, their research focused on home/school connection that went beyond traditional models. The foundation of the Funds of Knowledge research was based on the idea that teachers can better connect with students and their families when they learn more about students’ lives (González et al., 2005). They further explain the foundation of this work is grounded in the belief all families are competent and have knowledge to share. The research also builds on cultural and life experiences. Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) purports the strength of Funds of Knowledge to be the way in which it emphasizes and values the resources and knowledge embedded in children, families, and communities.

The original study for Funds of Knowledge took an ethnographic examination of the dynamics of households. Teachers in this study took on the role of the learners, allowing them to view families from a new perspective (Moll et al., 1992). Findings from this research indicate that building a relationship with families, and establishing mutual trust, serve well as the catalyst for sharing of knowledge about families (Moll et al., 1992). In doing so, teachers were able to see the knowledge that parents possess and the important social networks that support and build future knowledge.

The idea of culture is central to this theory. An understanding of how households draw from many cultural systems and that these are in fact, resources that the family
acquires knowledge from is needed (González et al., 2005). Moving away from the notion that culture provides a set of rules for behavior (González et al., 2005) to an understanding that culture can influence the way that communities organize themselves and that the varied life experiences and interest of the members are what makes up that culture (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Culture is not simply a set of rules, but a compilation of the lived experiences of children and families. These lived experiences of the members of the community are a source of knowledge and strength and should be valued as such (González et al., 2005). Further connecting the Funds of Knowledge rooted in the foundation of all families, while incorporating the social networks and interconnectedness of households in those communities, the rationale for an approach built on strength and knowledge rather than on the deficit is evident (González et al., 2005; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

Putting the central elements of both CCW and Funds of Knowledge research together, an approach to working with low-income families is developed. While a great deal of research has examined the process involved in engaging parents in school settings, much of which is based on the view of parents from a deficit perspective, the benefits of building parent engagement philosophies based on the valued strength and knowledge of families provides a more effective approach. A deeper understanding of cultural impacts and broader definitions of the types of capital families possess and the value of such capital enhances this approach and builds families, rather than communicating the idea that they are not valuable.
Connection to Research Questions

The literature review presented provides an analysis of the current body of literature related to parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs. Further outlined are pieces of the theoretical framework that shape my perspectives on engaging parents. Each piece of the framework, the ecological theory of development, exploration of deficit thinking ideology, followed by research-supported theories of engaging and connecting with parents, provides foundational knowledge that will shape the methodology and data collection in order to answer the following research questions.

1. What factors do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

2. What motivations and barriers do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

3. What do parents and stakeholders perceive to be effective practices for recruiting, engaging, and retaining low income parents in community parenting programs?

4. In what ways do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) characterize the value of parents' cultural wealth and knowledge?
This study itself, grounded in a phenomenological approach that seeks to hear the voice of both parents and stakeholders, gets right to the heart of the issue—valuing the knowledge and capital of the parents—in order to develop a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon.

**Conclusion**

When examining components of the conceptual framework for this study, through this literature review, it becomes clear that there is a need to view parent engagement, recruitment, and retention through a lens that highlights the large impact of culture and families. I have proposed a framework that provides a better understanding of the complexities of low-income engaging parents of young children in activities and community programs that support them in their role as child’s first teacher. First, an understanding of the ecology of child development within the context of family and community provides the foundation for which we build knowledge about engaging and retaining parents in community parenting programs. Second, the presentation of deficit thinking ideology illuminates a common mindset in working with families living in poverty as well as minority populations. By pointing out the negative, condescending ideals on which the deficit ideology is built, the stereotypic portrayals, and the pseudoscientific backing, it becomes apparent that this victim-blaming approach is not likely to engage or develop relationships with parents. In looking for alternative approaches to connect with parents and valuing their knowledge about their child and family, a need for deeper understanding becomes apparent. The theoretical framework
expands Bourdieu’s social and cultural capital theories, incorporating new types of valued capital. Yosso’s (2005) CCW in conjunction with González et al.’s (2005) Funds of Knowledge work, provides a lens that views parent engagement from a different perspective—one that examines the intersections of families and social environments and clearly incorporates the strength and knowledge embedded in families. In doing so, there is validation and acknowledgement of the value of the capital and funds of knowledge that any family, regardless of socio-economic status, possesses and contributes.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of factors, barriers, motivations, and effective practices that impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programming for low-income parents. This examination was completed through the lens of parents and program stakeholders.

Believing in the need to account for the parent and stakeholder voices in this dialogue, I felt that implementing a qualitative methodology would provide a new and different look at the phenomenon of parent engagement in community parenting programs.

Understanding the essence of how and why low-income parents choose to engage or not could not be captured through a quantitative approach. This study lays groundwork for a deeper understanding of the lives of low-income families and the stakeholders in regard to engaging and staying engaged in community parenting programs. Seeking to gain a better understanding of the shared experiences of parent and stakeholder participants, a qualitative phenomenological research approach will be utilized (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Design

Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach provided an opportunity for examination of the lived experiences of the participants, including both parents and community programming stakeholders. This exploration was designed to take individual
experiences of the participants and develop a universal essence of the phenomenon of recruitment, voluntary engagement, and retention in community parenting programs (Creswell, 2013).

It is difficult to fully understand the phenomenon and reality of parents from low income communities and what factors impact their ability and choices in engaging in parenting programs without examining the perspectives of those who actually experience the phenomenon in a real life context. Past research has largely approached this issue from a quantitative or program evaluation angle (McDonald et al., 2012; Mendes et al., 2009; Rafferty & Griffin, 2010; Wagner, Spiker, & Inman-Lin, 2002). While this research has been important in laying the foundation for understanding these experiences for families, it fails to account for the true voice of those at the center of the issue—parents and program stakeholders (i.e., funders, policy makers, and program staff). In an effort to explore this topic from the qualitative approach, this study will provide an opportunity to begin to develop a deeper understanding of the complex issues that impact engagement and retention of low-income parents in parenting education opportunities.

The qualitative tradition of phenomenology was determined to be the most appropriate approach and basis for this design because this approach supported focus on the development of an understanding of the lived experience and theory formulation. The phenomenological paradigm is a strong rationale for this context, based on the great extent to which the day-to-day experiences of these families and their prior experiences with other community programs and stakeholders shape who and where they are.
Described by Moustakas (1994), phenomenology looks at the individual and collective human experiences together to seek understanding of lived experiences of the group. More than just looking at the phenomenon from one angle, the phenomenological approach is “concerned with the wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved” (p. 58). This examination of individual experiences moves from observing commonly shared features of individual experiences to a more full description of the universal essence of stakeholder experiences and perceptions about low-income parent engagement (Creswell, 2013). The inclusion of stakeholder perspectives allowed a fuller exploration of the issue, looking at the whole issue from different sides, angles, and perspectives.

Phenomenology includes a descriptive piece, but also important is the interpretive process of the researcher in understanding the meaning of the lived experiences. This descriptive piece, provided through the data collection, informs, and the interpretive piece emerges from the researcher’s role in making sense of the experiences shared. Examination of the experiences both from the family perspective and the stakeholder perspective, recorded through focus group interviews with stakeholders and parents, is crucial in the construction of deeper understanding of parent engagement and retention experiences in this study.

This study is grounded in transcendental phenomenology, often referred to as empirical phenomenology. Building on the early works of Edmund Husserl (1931),
Moustakas (1994) writes extensively about transcendental phenomenology. This concept is characterized by the idea that participants feel fully understood, facilitating deeper understanding on two descriptive levels: the original data collected through open-ended questions and dialogue and through the researcher's reflective analysis to interpret the structure of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas adds,

> Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus on meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concerns, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced (p. 59).

Critical in answering these research questions is the understanding of how parents choose to engage, or not, in community parenting programs that allows for parents to feel fully understood and have their perspective heard.

Complementing the parent voice with stakeholder perspectives, highlighting real-life experiences in engaging and retaining parents in community programs, provides an opportunity to illustrate a better representation of the overall experiences for others. Exploring the topic from these different angles provides the development of a solid understanding of the issue of parent engagement including how these two perspectives intersect or differ.

In a qualitative research approach, the role of the researcher can inherently lead to researcher bias in data interpretation. The interpretive role of the researcher is refined through Husserl's (1931) concept of َEpoche. This concept, based on the Greek definition
meaning "refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from every day, ordinary way of perceiving things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33), is the cornerstone of transcendental phenomenology. This unbiased judgment, where preconceived ideas, notions, knowledge, and understandings about the subject were set aside, allowed for a fresh exploration of the phenomenon with a clear new lens. A fresh lens without bias or preconceived notions was essential to develop a true understanding of the reality of parent engagement.

Use of this methodology presents an interesting view of a topic that has been investigated through little qualitative research. The strength in this research study lies in the use of a research methodology that allows a clear plan for data collection that includes three phases of information gathering and analysis with rigorous attention to processes that supports the reliability and validity of the research. These processes include member-checking, triangulation, and collaboration with colleagues to reach consensus on interpretation and findings (Creswell, 2013). The following sections explain in detail the methods used for sampling, data collection, and the process for analysis.

**Sampling Techniques and Description of Participants**

Participants in this study consisted of stakeholders associated with community parenting programs and low-income parents with at least one child under the age of five in a metropolitan, southeastern region. Stakeholders included policy makers, funders, program directors, and program implementation staff in local community programs, each of which offers some sort of parenting program in which parents voluntarily agrees to participate. Low-income parents all resided in the same regional area.
Sampling

The sampling method for this study was a purposeful random sample as well as a sample of convenience. The purposeful random sample was used to increase variation of participants within the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). For example, a range of stakeholder participants with different functions were included in the focus groups and the sample of parent participants that have participated in some type of parent support program were included.

Since there was no predetermined group of participants, a random sample from those who meet the criteria and are recommended by stakeholders were included in the study. Because of the nature of this study, this type of sample was essential to obtain rich information cases to fully develop an understanding of the issues (Hays & Singh, 2012; Creswell, 2013). A purposeful sampling provided the opportunity to identify a populace not represented in current literature. The convenience sample was used in an effort to identify parents and stakeholders that would be willing to participate.

Given the inherent difficulties with engaging these parents, it was deemed more appropriate to include parents that were recommended or had been asked by a community stakeholder because I would be able to connect with them, based on their relationship with the stakeholder or agency. Access to parent participants willing to participate was essential to get the perspective needed to address the research questions through a convenience sample.

Both stakeholder and parent participant identities are kept in confidence, with
pseudonyms for agency names used to report findings. All parents and participant
contributions are reported simply as participant. No identifying information on parent
participants was collected, with the exception of gender and race.

Participants

Stakeholder participants were identified through professional connections with
staff of community programs that have offered some type of parenting program in the
community and through recommendations from other stakeholder participants. I
contacted groups that offered some type of parenting programs by phone to explain the
project and invite their participation. Community groups included non-profit
organizations, city organizations, churches, and housing authority family support
personnel. Stakeholders were selected from well-established local groups providing
parenting programs and had worked effectively with families in the communities for a
minimum of five years. I asked my contacts for recommendations of possible
participants in the focus groups that had worked with their organizations in some type of
community parenting programs and could offer valuable insight into the barriers and
motivations for parents to engage in parenting programs and their experience with these
programs. A standardized script for phone calls and e-mails was used to ensure
consistency (see Appendix A for phone and e-mail scripts). The processes for data
collection was explained and a tentative schedule shared.

Stakeholder recommendations for participant inclusion were documented, and I
followed up with a stakeholder invitation letter sent by e-mail (see Appendix B for the
Stakeholder Invitation Letter to those recommended). Given the small size of the organization of each proposed program participant, I was able to include all stakeholders recommended. Stakeholder participation included partaking in a one to one and a half hour focus group meeting at the agency's office. For the group that included funders and policy makers, participants were combined from three different agencies, in an effort to ensure representation from this group of stakeholders.

Parent participants were identified through recommendations from community agencies that I coordinated with for stakeholder participants. The director or other contact at the agency assisted in coordinating these parent groups, based on their knowledge of parents who may be willing to talk with me. Parents with young children and grandparents directly involved in raising young children who were actively participating, had participated in any capacity, had agreed to participate but did not participate, and those who did not routinely participate in a community parenting program were included. Parent participants were contacted by the assisting agency and asked to voluntarily participate in the research. A follow-up parent invitation letter was mailed or dropped off to the assisting agency for them to disseminate to the parents identified to participate (see Appendix C for the Parent Invitation Letter). Parent participation required a focus group meeting lasting 45 minutes to one hour.

The number of focus groups and number of participants in each group for this project was difficult to establish prior to data collection. Creswell (2013) and Dukes
(1984) assert that an acceptable sample size in phenomenology lies anywhere between 1 and 10 subjects or individuals. However, Hays and Singh (2012) contend that sample size should be largely dependent on the point at which the research purpose is met. With that in mind, I conducted three focus groups for stakeholders and three focus groups for parents. This number of focus groups was used because it provided me with enough data to exhaust the research perspectives, which was evident as data analysis was concluded. I included parent participants who had participated, as well as parents who had agreed to participate but had not participated in community parenting programs in order to gain a well-rounded parent perspective.

**Stakeholder participants.** Three stakeholder focus groups included a total of 21 participants. One stakeholder focus group was comprised of five policy makers and funders. The two remaining focus groups consisted of a total of 16 program implementation staff. Stakeholder participants numbered 19 females and two males and included Caucasian, African American, and one Hispanic participant. All of the stakeholder participants were currently involved in providing a parenting program initiative. Specific demographics of gender and race are shown in Table 2.

Stakeholders, in the role of funders and policymakers, were combined to make up the group Center for Families. Stakeholders from Parenting Partners were a group of ten program providers that worked in a well-established local community agency providing parenting support and home visiting for parents with newborn babies through the age of two. Six program providers from Happy Family Center, another well-established
community agency that provided parenting support programs to families with children through age five, shared information from their experiences with parent engagement referrals. Happy Family Center gathers referrals and reaches parents through community contacts. All of the stakeholder participants worked with programs funded by non-profit organizations, public-private partnerships, or through funding by city governments.

**Parent participants.** A total of 21 parent participants were included in one of three parent focus groups, and provided insight and discussion during the sessions. While the majority of the parent participants were African American mothers; however, one Caucasian mother, two African American grandmothers, one African American father were among the other parent participants. This group of participants included those actively participating, or had participated in, a parenting program and those who had an opportunity to participate in parenting programs in the past but chose not to. Parents Who Care was made up of five mothers and two grandmothers who resided in low-income neighborhoods within two local cities. They routinely came together as part of a church organization. Strong Parents, Strong Kids participants resided in a low-income public housing project and all had at least one school-age child in addition to a child under five. Strong Parents, Strong Kids participants originally met through a school connection. Lastly, Place for Children and Families participants consisted of a group of parents who were actively participating in a local parenting program that provided support, resources, education, and health initiatives for children under five. Specific demographics of gender and race for stakeholder and parent groups are shown in Table 2.
### Table 1
**Participant Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Focus Groups</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Partners</td>
<td>Staff member</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Family Center</td>
<td>Staff member</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Families</td>
<td>Policy maker and/or funder</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Focus Groups</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents Who Care</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Parents, Strong Kids</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place for Children and Families</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2
**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female- Caucasian</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female- African American</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male- Caucasian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male- African American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female- Caucasian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female- African American</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male- African American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Human Subjects**
This study was reviewed and approved as exempt through the university Institutional Review Board (IRB), as required for human subjects research. All participants, both stakeholders and parents, were provided with an informational letter that explained their role and included my contact information (see Appendix E for Stakeholder Information Letter and Appendix F for Parent Information Letter). The informational letter also highlighted the procedures to ensure confidentiality, the role of the researcher, and information about data storage.

**Limitations of Sampling Procedures**

There are inherent limitations to sampling procedures that utilize purposeful and convenience sampling methods. First, a convenience sample is considered to offer the least representative option for data collection, leading to the possibility of flawed findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). Secondly, Creswell (2013) notes that convenience sampling is used at the expense of information and credibility. Another limitation for the sampling procedures may be the confined perspective provided by parent participants who were contacted through referral by a community agency included in the stakeholder group. Asking whether these parents will feel comfortable with me as a researcher and be honest and open with their contributions is important to consider. It may be that participants felt obligated to participate because the community stakeholder asked them.

In regard to stakeholder participants, limitations may be noted in my prior relationship or work with some of these agencies. Having worked on committees, participated in meetings, or having worked with these stakeholders in another capacity
could be viewed as a limitation. Conversely, the fact that I had a relationship with some participants could also be viewed as strength, in that they may have been more willing to share information with me. However, given the difficulty with access and willingness to participate, the sample methodology is appropriate.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Data collection for qualitative research is generally broken into four basic approaches: observation, interviews, documents and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2013). For purposes of this phenomenological study, data collection consisted primarily of focus groups. Pilot interviews were held during phase one of the data collection in order to refine the interview and focus group instruments. Given that phenomenological research is interested in understanding the sense of the lived experiences of participants, Dukes (1984) explains that extensive and prolonged contact with participants is important to see the experiences as they see them and develop a shared understanding of their experience. Moreover, Dukes (1984) articulates that participants need to be given the opportunity “to speak, in their own way and their own time, about those aspects of the experience in question that seem relevant to them” (p. 200). Thus, focus groups gave participants the opportunity to share a voice that is hidden in the current body of research.

The following study matrix served an outline for this research study. Directions regarding the specific procedures for these data collection processes are described in the next section.

Table 3
### Study Matrix

#### Phase 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Interview Instrument</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process Objectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot parent focus group</td>
<td>Parent focus group and questions 1-12</td>
<td>One interview</td>
<td>Analyze interview data to assess effectiveness of questions, order, assess gaps in data collection, and redundancy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Focus Group Instrument</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process Objectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot stakeholder focus group</td>
<td>Stakeholder focus group and questions 1-12</td>
<td>One interview</td>
<td>Analyze interview data to assess effectiveness of questions, order, assess gaps in data collection, and redundancy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Phase 2

**Research Question 1:**

What factors do low-income parents and stakeholder (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

**Sub Question: Parents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Objectives</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify factors impacting programing reported by parents with examples and discussion</td>
<td>Parent focus group protocol &amp; questions 2, 2a, 3, 4, 5, 7, 7a, 8, 9, 10</td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sub Question: Stakeholders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Method(s)/Source</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify factors impacting programing reported by Stakeholders with examples and discussion</td>
<td>Stakeholder focus group questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 6a, 7, 7a, 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 2:**

What motivations and barriers do low-income parents and stakeholder (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

**Sub Question: Parents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Objectives</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify motivations and barriers for participation and retention reported by parents with examples and discussion</td>
<td>Parent focus group protocol &amp; questions 2, 2a, 3, 5</td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6, 6a, 8, 8a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sub Question: Stakeholders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Objectives</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify motivations and barriers perceived by Stakeholders with examples and discussion</td>
<td>Stakeholder focus group protocol &amp; questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5a, 7, 7a, 9</td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do parents and stakeholders perceive to be effective practices for recruiting, engaging, and retaining low income parents in community parenting programs?

### Sub Question: Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Objectives</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify parent perceived effective practices for recruiting, engaging, and retaining parents with examples and discussion</td>
<td>Focus group protocol &amp; questions 4, 5, 7, 10</td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sub Question: Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Objectives</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify effective practices for recruiting, engaging, and retaining parents as identified by Stakeholders with examples and discussion</td>
<td>Focus group protocol &amp; questions 6, 6a, 8, 9</td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 4:

In what ways do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, and program implementation staff) characterize the value of parents' cultural wealth and knowledge?

### Sub Question: Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Objectives</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify how parents characterize the value of parents</td>
<td>Focus group questions 9, 9a, 10</td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cultural capital and wealth with examples and discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub Question: Stakeholders</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify how stakeholders characterize the value of parents' cultural capital and wealth with examples and discussion</td>
<td>Focus group questions 7, 7a, 8</td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 3

Research Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup: Parents</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)/Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member checking of transcriptions, significant statements, and meaning unit, textural description</td>
<td>Transcription from original data collection, list of significant statements and meaning units, textural description</td>
<td>3 Focus groups</td>
<td>Analyze using Horizontalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub Question: Stakeholders
Procedures for Phase One

Data collection and analysis procedures. Data collection in Phase One consisted of two interviews to pilot the parent interview script and the stakeholder focus group protocol. This pilot data collection provided the opportunity to assess the instrument and make needed revisions prior to the full data collection process. Leedy and Ormond (2010) recommend a pilot test of interview questions to assist with the development of clear and concise questions. Using this pilot phase as a “dress rehearsal” (Yin, 2009, p. 96), allowed for experience with the questions, for specific piloting of the wording and order, and more importantly, assessed gaps to develop relevant lines of questions prior to phase two of the data collection (Creswell, 2013). After the pilot interviews, questions were slightly edited to better address topics needed to gather data that will inform the research questions.

One stakeholder and one parent were selected from the list of proposed participants for pilot interviews. These participants were selected strictly for convenience.
and easy access since the data collected were used to assess instrumentation only and did not contribute to the analysis of data collected in phase two (Creswell, 2013; Yin 2009). Pilot interviews were conducted in the same manner in which later focus groups were conducted in an effort to maintain consistency with the second data collection. These two participants were used only for pilot interviews and not included in other interviews or focus groups.

The first pilot interview was a one-on-one parent interview, held at the home of the parent participant. At the start of the interview, the participant was provided with the Parent Information Letter. The Parent Focus Group Protocol and Questions containing 12 open-ended questions was used to explore the questions (see Appendix G for the full Parent Interview Protocol and Questions). The interview was audio-recorded and field notes collected during and following the interview. A second interview with a stakeholder was held to pilot the Stakeholder Focus Group Question instrument. Although the protocol and questions are designed for a focus group, the questions were designed with the idea that they could serve as one-on-one interview questions as well (see Appendix H for the Stakeholder Focus Group Protocol and Questions).

After the interviews, each recording and field notes were reviewed. Audio-recordings were listened to twice. Analysis of these pilot interviews was directed at assessing the clarity and conciseness of the questions, the level of conversation elicited the order of questions, redundancy of ideas, and to identify gaps in the questions based on the research questions (Leedy & Ormond, 2010). After evaluation and analysis, the pilot
interviews guided the revisions and refinement of both the Parent Focus Group Question instrument and the Stakeholder Focus Group instrument.

**Procedures for Phase Two**

In this phase of the study, a series of focus group with stakeholders and parent participants were conducted. The protocol and questions asked generated data that informed the following research questions:

1. What factors do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

2. What motivations and barriers do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

3. What do parents and stakeholders perceive to be effective practices for recruiting, engaging, and retaining low income parents in community parenting programs?

4. In what ways do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) characterize the value of parents’ cultural wealth and knowledge?

**Phase two data collection.** A series of three focus groups were held with stakeholders. Ideally, each focus group would have consisted of six to eight participants (Hays & Singh, 2012); however, my focus groups were made up of five, six, and ten
participants respectively. Focus group one was comprised of policy makers and funders. Focus groups two and three consisted of program directors and program implementation staff. The groupings for these focus groups, I believe, helped to manage the focus of the group, rather than mixing policy makers and funders with the program staff. The different roles of the stakeholders gave them each a different perspective about how parents engage and may view things differently. The social nature of the focus group data collection method was chosen in an effort to create a more relaxed feeling for participants, as well as the idea that conversations with the groups of stakeholders may foster further dialogue than individual interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Kress and Shoffner (2007) contend that focus groups offer a strong evaluation tool to understand how people view an experience or phenomenon. Given frequent collaboration between members of these community organizations, it was appropriate to use a focus group approach. Frequent community collaboration is how these stakeholders often operate and kept the discussion in this context built on participants’ common interest/experience on this particular topic (Hays & Singh, 2012).

A series of three focus groups for parent participants was completed in the same format. Given the inherent social nature of focus group data collection, I felt it best to meet with the parent participant groups in a group setting. I planned to conduct three focus groups each with stakeholder and parent participants. This number provided me with the depth of data that common themes emerged during analysis, creating a data set that provided for saturation of the topic. Participants were already grouped and met
routinely (e.g., resident management group, class participants, and support group participants), so by talking with them in their current groupings, I felt they would be most comfortable. Hays and Singh (2012) report that the interactive nature of focus groups allows the researcher to gather data that cannot be obtained in individual interviews. Thus, the focus group approach with parent participants, I believe, provided additional data that might not be garnered through individual interviews. Another benefit to focus group data collection was the self-exploration aspect where participant experiences are validated and shared in a way that might enlighten other participants (Hays and Singh, 2012). Frequently, during the group, a common idea or theme was more fully discussed as participants agreed with or built upon comments of another participant, thus, assisting in a richer, more fully illustrated idea.

I used a standardized protocol with predetermined questions for each focus group. Questions for each group were essentially the same, but tailored to stakeholder participants or parent participants respectively. Each focus group set of questions included specific questions with one additional open-ended question asking for any information participants wanted to share that was not specifically asked (Hays & Singh, 2012; Kress & Shoffner, 2007).

Questions for each group were designed to help fully investigate the topic of parent engagement by seeking to better understand the participants’ experiences. Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994) point out that phenomenological interviews often involve open-ended comments and questions; thus, my questions sought to allow for
discussion and open-ended answers. Questions were designed to elicit information that would provide deeper understanding to answer the research questions. While the questions included in the protocol were what I envisioned using, further probing during the actual focus group or participant request for clarification required minor deviation from the proposed questions.

I served as the moderator for focus groups so that I could interject probing questions that arose as a result of the discussion to extend the information presented. As moderator, I also promoted interaction and engagement, to ensure the discussion remained on topic, and directed the group to ensure a productive process with all participants (Kress & Shoffner, 2007).

Focus groups were held at a convenient location for participants, specifically in a room of the community agency, church, and community center. Focus group locations varied by group, with stakeholders all meeting at community agency offices and parents meeting at locations where it was easiest to assemble. With notification to all participants, the focus group was recorded in its entirety for later transcription. In addition to me as the moderator, a note-taker joined me in two of the six focus groups to collect written notes to supplement the transcription when reviewing for meaning. This note-taker was a silent participant and did not engage in the focus group process in any way except record the notes. Each focus group was scheduled for one hour, and breakfast or lunch was provided for participants during each session.
Phase two data analysis. As data collection continued and analysis began, I collected all of the field notes, audio recordings, transcriptions, analysis documents, notes on communication with participants, and any other documentation to complete an audit trail. A well-detailed collection of the artifacts from the data collection and analysis process provides a trail of the work completed and was essential in establishing credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Creswell, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). All of the data, including documents compiled for the audit trail have remained confidential and stored on an encrypted file on a personal and locked computer. Discussion of the complete analysis process and development of the coding structure are discussed in the section entitled Analysis and Data Coding.

Procedures for Phase Three

Phase three data collection. Seeking to ensure trustworthy and accurate analysis, a third data collection phase was included. A member-checking process began after transcription and initial analysis of data collected during phase two (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). This process allowed for sharing of emerging themes with participants to ensure accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). To enhance credibility, I summarized the emerging themes with descriptions and shared them with stakeholder participants asking for feedback.

Contacting parents to reconvene focus groups proved difficult. With inherent challenges in engaging low income parents, I was initially assisted by community contacts in scheduling focus groups and did not directly contact parents myself to meet.
Given this difficulty, it was problematic to reconvene parent participant groups for member-checking of emerging themes. After several failed attempts, I moved forward on data analysis without member checking the parent groups. However, review of the data found emerging themes were consistent in all parent focus groups. During both stakeholder and parent focus groups, I continuously asked questions to clarify information and confirm the intent of their responses as a way to enhance reliability of the responses. For example during a stakeholder focus group, the following exchange took place.

 Male: – understanding everything like that that they really don’t expect materialistic things any more.

 Moderator: Okay so it kind of moves from a materialistic piece to a more, to a more internal what – yeah what –

 Male: Yeah just like knowledge and just understanding the basic customer. Themajority of our moms, like, they are a little younger.

(Happy Family Center Transcript, p. 5)

This type of member checking assisted in confirming the intent participant answers were clearly recorded.

Analysis

As data collection continued and the analysis process began, I collected all field notes, audio recordings, transcriptions, analysis documents, notes on communication with
participants, and any other documentation to complete an audit trail. A well-detailed collection of artifacts from the data collection and analysis process provided an audit trail of completed work and are essential in establishing credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Creswell, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). All of the data, including documents compiled for the audit trail are kept confidential and are stored by me on an encrypted file on a personal and locked computer.

Data analysis began after the commencement of data collection. The audio file for each focus group was transcribed by a private company that specializes in transcription. A confidentiality agreement was agreed upon prior to sharing of information, and all data was stored on a networked site in a confidential manner. Files were transcribed, and analysis began as the focus groups were completed. With such a large collection of data, I began the transcription and coding process as soon as data was available, rather than waiting until all data were collected.

Once data were transcribed, the written transcription was compared with the audio file to ensure authenticity and reliability of the data. Initial analysis of data started with review of all transcriptions and comparison with audio-tapes, again to ensure authenticity and reliability of each transcript. Each transcription was reviewed at least twice prior to initial coding.

After becoming very familiar with each transcription, I began the process of analyzing data. Since the goal of phenomenological research is to understand the depth and meaning of the experience of participants (Moustakas, 1994), it is important to look
at data to determine emerging themes and cluster those to construct textural description, rather than examine the data in an effort to build a theory (Hays & Singh, 2013). Creswell (2013) and Hays and Singh (2012) suggest that Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of data analysis is the most commonly used in recent research – and the most practical, useful approach. This approach is characterized by using verbatim transcripts to determine relevant statements or passages and grouping them by units of meanings of the experience. Also, known as invariant horizons, these units of meaning are then clustered into themes, synthesizing them into textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). This was the basis for my methodical approach to data analysis.

The first step, prior to analysis, is bracketing for researcher bias and assumption or Epoche as described earlier in the chapter (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The process for bracketing addressing the first step is outlined in the next section. Addressing researcher bias was an ongoing process and while this was happening, data analysis took place concurrently.

**Data Coding**

**Coding Structure Development**

Data collected during the focus group sessions included field notes, written notes during the sessions and audio recordings. Each transcription identified participants as either moderator or participant. Identifying individual voices in focus group settings with background noise was difficult, so individual voices were listed as “participant”. All
stakeholder focus group transcriptions were analyzed first, followed by parent focus groups. I used the Nvivo 10 computer program to assist in data management and analysis, specifically coding and integrating data sets after coding for analysis. The goal of data coding was to aggregate the data from all sources into significant statements and group into meaningful units.

After initial reviews of transcriptions, I determined the best unit of measure within the text for coding my data would be by passage, highlighting a complete thought, event, or idea. In some cases, several sentences and sometimes other speakers' comments were combined to create a passage. Breaking the passages up into smaller bits, as initially attempted, detracted from passage meaning, losing the intensity of the speaker’s comments. An example of a passage follows:

**Female:** I would say like get the why we do things. So I do feel that you, you see them get more confident like she was saying, but, um, once you, you realize that they realize why we’re doing it, why this, this is important because usually sometimes with a lot of families it starts off that they’re just doing it because we’re saying to do it --

**Moderator:** Mm-hmm.

**Female:** -- and they don’t really understand why they need to do what they should do for the child.

(Parenting Partners transcription, p. 3)
Saldaña (2013) supports the use of this type of data unit in his explanation of structural coding, sometimes referred to as utilitarian coding. Noted as appropriate for structural coding for data sets with multiple participants and standardized data-gathering protocols, this coding method provided a procedure for initial categorization of data to identification of commonalities, differences, and relationships (Saldaña, 2013). Further, Saldaña (2013) explains this coding approach helps label or index categories, making it easier to integrate categories across large data sets. Building a combined process of Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of data analysis and Creswell’s (2013) process of horizontalization, in which large domains or categories are identified during coding to begin to categorize and cluster units of meaning, this measure of data unit and initial categorization worked well. Given the large data set gathered from the six focus groups, this coding process allowed for organization and easier data management.

All participant talk in the transcriptions was included for coding. I added a code for moderator talk to code questions and comments that I made during the focus groups. Data that was off-topic or unrelated was coded as other and not used in the analysis. Examples of data coded other included side-talk between participants and other comments not relevant to question, including comments like the following,

I had Nana laughing, we were going home one night from choir rehearsal, my grandson, we went to Roses one day, he knocked down, he was up under the
clothes, and I couldn’t find him, I’m running around the store looking for him, finally he peeps out under the clothes… (Parents Who Care Transcript, p.16).

A secondary process to ensure trustworthiness and validity was conducted after the coding structure was determined. In an effort to ensure validity of data coding and analysis, a doctoral candidate in the Early Childhood Education program was selected to serve as a co-coder because of her expertise and familiarity with the topic at hand. She coded a subset of the data that included a subsection of stakeholder and parent data sets, representing 22% of the data set (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). The reliability coder was provided with the initial codebook including descriptors to assist in the coding process. After inter-coder analysis, an agreement rate of 88% was determined. For the passages where coding differed, a discussion of the passage was held and coder consensus was reached, resulting in 100% coder agreement on the subset (Hays & Singh, 2013; Kress & Shoffner, 2007).

**Stakeholder data coding.** Horizontalization was used in the initial approaches to coding (Creswell, 2013; Hays and Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Using stakeholder data, initial coding of the data started by using a margin-note approach to identify the central idea (unit of meaning) in each passage in two of transcriptions. Using printed copies of the data, I jotted down a word or phrase that represented the idea in each passage in the margin area next to the passage. These words or phrases served as my initial coding attempt. In some passages, more than one idea was identified, thus some
passages had more than one initial code. After reviewing the two transcriptions, an initial list of 74 codes was created.

These initial codes were listed in an Excel spreadsheet for ease of organization. Once listed on the spreadsheet, these codes were clustered into smaller groups and reorganized. In determining the clustering of the codes, I sought to cluster them based on the experience described, moving into categories or themes that emerged through this initial coding (see Appendix J for initial codes and clustered codes).

Once the clustered list of codes was determined, I used NVIVO 10 to assist with coding, organization, and data management. Codes were assigned in NVIVO and description of each code was listed to form a codebook. Once codes were established, I began coding each of the three transcriptions using the new collapsed codes in NVIVO. All three stakeholder focus group transcripts were coded first, followed by the parent focus group transcripts. Passages of text were coded on the computer by reading the transcription, identifying significant statements and then assigning a code. Codes were assigned in an effort to label or organize statements, moving toward determining meaning of statements when grouped together. As coding progressed, additional codes were added as needed. During this round of coding, passages of text from participants were categorized by theme so they could be later grouped, beginning to develop the textural description (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). After completion of each stakeholder transcription, a second review of all transcripts was completed to ensure accuracy of coding and changes were made as deemed appropriate.
**Parent data coding.** After completion of the stakeholder data, I began analysis of the parent data. My initial approach in analyzing parent focus group data was to begin the coding using the same process as the stakeholder data. However, after review of the parent focus group transcriptions, significant similarities in central ideas were apparent. Due to the similarity, an overlay of the stakeholder-clustered codes structure was used as a primary structure for coding parent data, and additional codes were added as deemed appropriate. All three transcriptions of the parent data were analyzed using NVIVO and were coded by theme in the same manner as the stakeholder data. After coding the parent data, the codebook had expanded to 28 codes, with three of the codes having sub-codes assigned to better differentiate themes evident in the passage (See Appendix K for the complete codebook). After coding the parent data, a second review was completed to ensure coding accuracy.

**Combined data set.** Following the parent and stakeholder data set coding, I then analyzed the entire data set, aggregating both stakeholder and parent data. I wanted to examine the data set as a whole, looking for commonalities across both data sets and grouping the passages together. I felt it would offer a more comprehensive picture of the realities combined, given limited depth in some parent data. After examining the data set together, I looked for commonalities in parent focus group transcriptions alone in an attempt to isolate any recurring themes that may represent the perspective of parents.

Using the coding matrix in NVIVO, I explored the coding for all six transcriptions as coded to begin the analysis. Common themes across the data became
evident as I analyzed the transcriptions for most commonly coded themes across all the transcriptions. Specifically, I looked for themes that were most frequently present and represented across four or more transcripts. After identifying the most frequently coded themes, I then reviewed all passages grouped in that code to begin to interpret the meaning of the text. I also reviewed coding for other themes that became apparent through the analysis. Next, a textural and structural description was developed, the first step in illustrating the essence of parent engagement, as presented by parent and stakeholder participants. The textural piece focuses on the what of participant experience and the structural element focuses on the how of the experience. The textural and structural description is fully discussed, providing the basis for the findings section, helping to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of parent engagement. Recurring themes from the data set are presented using narration and highlighting specific quotes.

**The Researcher's Role**

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is inherent to the outcome of the study. Questions of trustworthiness, validity, and credibility arise in discussions about qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). Given the many different disciplines that use qualitative research, as well as the paradigm-specific standards, intentional considerations on the researcher's role and action plan were important.

Many factors influenced my role as the researcher. First, the notions of reflexivity and subjectivity needed to be addressed. Reflexivity is defined by Hays and Singh (2012) as the active self-reflection of the researcher on the subject, emotional involvement,
perceptions and prejudgments formed by the literature review, and the research process, including interactions with the research participants. In simple terms, reflexivity is where the researcher becomes conscious of and acknowledges the biases, values, and personal experience relating to the research topic. Subjectivity, often addressed in similar ways to reflexivity, is where the researcher acknowledges his or her own understanding of the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Based on the extensive body of research I had reviewed on parent engagement and my previous experiences with the participants in the Play and Learn Together: Infants, Toddlers and Parents grant, I had current perceptions and made assumptions and judgments about why parents voluntarily engage and stay engaged in community parenting programs. In order to develop a true understanding of the reality of parent engagement, a fresh lens without bias or preconceived notions was essential. Careful and intentional efforts by me, the researcher, were required to eliminate the bias and view the material through that fresh lens. As I approached the first step of the analysis, Epoche, provided me with the opportunity to bracket these ideas and preconceived notions out of my thoughts. This happened in several ways. First, Hamill and Sinclair (2010) recommend reflective thinking that is self-critical and self-aware. I accomplished this by taking detailed notes during the sessions and debriefing notes following each focus group session. By reviewing these notes and critically reviewing my analysis process, I ensured my own thoughts and beliefs would not impact my findings. This critical analysis included questioning whether I understood the phenomenon as described by the
participants, approaching this with a curious and quizzical attitude (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). Second, I questioned whether participants and I understood the words/phrases the same way to ensure that true meaning was derived (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). Using a “peer debriefer” allowed me to have reflective discussion about my thoughts and preconceived notions and enhanced my ability to bracket myself out (Hayes & Singh, 2012). Candid conversations with another doctoral student researcher, as well as other colleagues, allowed me to critically think through the process. My own critical analysis included both member checking to ensure stakeholder participants felt I had accurately recorded their thoughts (Hays & Singh, 2012) and checking back with a doctoral student researcher to confirm agreement and consensus (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Hays & Singh, 2012). These steps addressed both reflexivity and subjectivity, while enhancing the trustworthiness of my research. It is important to remember that the processes described here of bracketing, through note taking, critical analysis, and peer debriefing as well as member checking and colleague collaboration for agreement on analysis and themes, were essential in establishing credibility of my study.

Limitations

Limitations of the methodology of this study can be identified in two areas. First, my ongoing professional role with many of the stakeholders may be seen as a limitation. It is also possible to argue that this relationship may have impacted stakeholders’ candor and honesty. I believe, however, that this preexisting relationship and established trust rather enhanced the level of engagement of stakeholders and provided me with an
opportunity to gain a deeper level of response. Second, the use of a convenience sample could be associated with a lower level of quality sample. Given the inherent difficulties in engaging with low-income parents, however, it would have been difficult to gain access to parents that were not recommended or referred (Hays & Singh, 2012). Even with the assistance of community agencies, two parent focus groups had to be rescheduled several times. So, in an effort to explore a topic that depends on the access to participants, using a convenience sample is this situation is justified. While limitations were present, the sound, rigorous methodological design of this study provided an opportunity to provide trustworthy knowledge about parent engagement from a perspective that had not yet been presented in the current body of literature.

Conclusion

This chapter addresses the specific methodological design and processes that were used to collect data to answer the research questions of this study. A rationale for the methodology, specific sampling, data collection, and analysis were presented. An explanation of the data analysis process, including the development of the coding structure was provided. Additionally the important role of the researcher in this methodological design and limitations to methodological design are presented.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Developing a better understanding of the factors that impact or support recruitment, engagement, and retention of parents in parenting programs is central to this research study. This study is built on the basic tenant that the family is the significant social context for the development of the child. Parent education program providers often approach working with parents from a deficit ideology, instead of valuing the cultural capital of families (Bourdieu, 1986). More importantly, program providers should value the cultural wealth of communities (Yosso, 2005) and the knowledge and resources embedded in communities (Mol et al., 1992). Exploration of the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders who provide these services, as well as parents who may participate in programs, is completed through the collection of rich qualitative data that provides valuable insight. These findings uncovered through data analysis are intended to inform program providers about emerging themes by addressing the following research questions:

1. What factors do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

2. What motivations and barriers do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to
impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?

3. What do parents and stakeholders perceive to be effective practices for recruiting, engaging, and retaining low income parents in community parenting programs?

4. In what ways do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) characterize the value of parents’ cultural wealth and knowledge?

In this chapter, I describe the specifics of the relevant findings in my exploration of parent and stakeholder perceptions on parent engagement. Description of the major themes that emerged through data analysis are presented through a phenomenological approach as a composite textural structural description of the essence of parent and stakeholders’ lived experiences in participating in community parenting programs.

Quotes from parents and stakeholders are integrated into the description to represent a universal understanding of the group’s experience as heard through participant voices.

All presented quotes woven throughout this chapter were selected for presentation because they clearly illustrate the themes and present similar thoughts across the data set.

The following table below provides an overview of the participant groups by program name with a description of the program type. Throughout the presentation of the major findings, program names will be used to identify participant groups.
Table 4

*Program Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Programs</th>
<th>Type of Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Partners</td>
<td>Community agency -parenting programs and home visiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Family Center</td>
<td>Community agency-parenting support programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Families</td>
<td>Funders and policy makers from community agencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Programs</th>
<th>Type of Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents Who Care</td>
<td>Church-affiliated program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Parents, Strong Kids</td>
<td>School-affiliated program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place for Children and Families</td>
<td>Neighborhood community parenting program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Major Findings**

Themes reported were found to be collective across all groups of participants, representing both the overlapping perspectives of both parents and stakeholders. Parent and stakeholder data was analyzed in aggregate to represent the depth of the emerging themes. While slight, differences in parent and stakeholder themes that emerged during analysis are briefly addressed at the end of this chapter.

**Community and Social Supports**

The strong sense of community and the important role it plays in the everyday life of these families was a prevalent theme across participant groups. Parents and stakeholders
reported the connection with others in their community as an important piece of daily life. The community plays a strong role in the foundational support and development of strength and knowledge in families. The interconnectedness of the lives of the members within the community create strong social support networks and represent accumulated assets, learned resources, and multiple strengths that translate into many forms of capital within the community.

**Role of the community**

Parent participants explained that the community was an extension of the family, where neighborhood members routinely take care of each other, help find and connect with resources, and help with each other’s children. Further, the idea of intergenerational community knowledge emerged several times. Parents and grandmothers from Parents Who Care, a church-based group of low-income parents and grandmothers, presented several scenarios where a “village” approach to caring for children occurs. Their discussions highlighted a feeling of responsibility to help families in their communities, whether through mentoring, offering care, or helping provide for basic needs.

...She called for a bag, I’m not ashamed to say it, she called down to the church and told me the kids were hungry and she wanted some food. Well, we fixed all this food to take to the house. (Parents Who Care transcript, p. 13)

When a family indicated need, members of the community worked together, networking with other resources (church) to ensure the family’s needs were addressed. Parents also noted times when they helped feed children or walked them home when they needed
help, noting that both community families and others who work in the community work to support one another, children and families. One parent from a neighborhood parenting group, A Place for Children, shared the following description,

So it’s more than just a specific thing, but more that they’re building community I guess. They’re building- that they’re taking care of you and your family, not just about the one child...... (A Place for Children transcript, p. 19).

Likewise, a Happy Family Center stakeholder from a local parenting support program explains how in some areas, the community pulls together to provide for basic needs and transportation, weaving a support system for families. She remarks,

A lot of those families, you know, get together for a ride if they need it, or you know they, they don’t know other Hispanic families in the community so with our Hispanic group and everything they are able to connect with those families and have an actual support system. Um, they just kind of lean on each other for the extra support. (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 15.)

Moreover, the sense of community and family is clear in the way that community members take care of one another. A program provider involved in parenting education and home visiting programs recounts,

I think a sense of community too, because they have you know people they consider like my cousin or my sister and no blood relation. I meet people like that in the hospital all the time. Um, one lady recently, she was staying with her... but she was staying with his [baby’s father’s] aunt or just somebody that’s, that took
her in. And so may not have their own place, but they typically have a cousin or a friend, someone that they can go and sleep on their couch. Or that can give them a ride someplace. I’ve always been amazed about that. Like a cousin, I mean not cousin, but we’ve been around for a long time. “Oh that’s my, no she’s not my cousin,” but that’s what you hear. (Parenting Partners Transcript, p. 22)

The strong bond of caring for one another and the need to be there for one another was a recurring theme. The building of community is summarized,

I don’t want to say all of the community that we serve, but, um, a lot of the community that we serve is a community within a community, because of some of this stuff that, um, go on and have them in survival mode. Like you said, I wouldn’t have been able to—well, I hope I would, but being able to survive some of the stuff that they, you know, conquer… (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 22).

Equally shared by parents and stakeholders was the essential and complex role the community plays in the lives of these families. Whether small resources like food or clothing, to major resources, such as housing or transportation, the community members network and find ways to assist and care for one another.

In talking with parents and stakeholders from public housing areas, the sense of community was expressed as a positive aspect of resident life. Community managers feel a great deal of responsibility for residents in their community, building a cohesive group of community members, including a Tenant Management Committee. This committee of
residents serves as a liaison and builds relationships between management and community members, looking to further a sense of community and belonging.

The community provides a level of support, but can also be a connection for resources for parents. Parents connect with other parents and community programs to learn about and access resources, learning about and sharing the resources in their communities. Happy Family Center shares the strength in their community outreach, noting,

Well we do a lot of community outreach, um, going to, like, health fairs or something like that. Um, we also have other referral sources. Like, for example, the [neighborhood clinic] or something, or I don’t know, a dentist or something: let them know about the program... and continually follow up with the, with that um, community resource and remind them of updates or anything like that in the, the agency. (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 7),

Parents and stakeholders describe the community as a strong connection for resources, reporting that they reach out to others in the community for resource ideas and will share resources within the community. Building on that knowledge, parents gain familial and social capital (Yosso, 2005), which they can share with others in the community. This sharing of knowledge and capital demonstrates a valuable asset. One mother comments, “If I see a woman that needs help.... You know, so I tell them to go to the counseling center and they will help you out with clothes, pampers, wipes, all that stuff” (Strong Parents, Strong Kids Transcript, p.6). These examples illustrate an accumulation of
CCW. Familial and social capital is evident in the networking and resources that families and neighbors combine to take care of one another. In working together to learn to maneuver the resource systems in the community, navigational capital is expended. Not only is the capital wealth of the community confirmed through these examples, but also opportunities for community members to begin to build their own cache of capital in areas they may not have had opportunities to before.

Additionally, intergenerational relationships are discussed as important in the community. This was expressed more frequently by parents; however, the theme was present in stakeholder focus groups as well. A focus group of parents and grandparents validated the respect for the knowledge and for each other. Younger parents referred to the support provided by and the knowledge passed down from grandparents. Grandparents raising grandchildren live in the community with younger parents and work together to create a village for children. Parents in the Parents Who Care program shared their experiences in putting teen mothers and grandparents together to share information and make connections, noting they can learn from each other. Another example provided by this group was how children in the community go to older community members to talk or get information. This is a good example of how familial capital is acquired.

Stakeholders shared that parents and grandparents can learn from one another and can work together in groups. This aspect of the value of intergenerational relationships within the community displays the value of all members in the context of the community.
Social supports

Expanding on the significance of the community in the lives of these families, social support for parents was highlighted as an important piece. Parents and stakeholders similarly described situations where parents entered into relationships with others in the community or in parenting programs in similar situations to provide social support to one another. Parents shared what they learned, built support systems, and gained confidence in their parenting, allowing them to mentor peers in the community. Following the focus group with Strong Parents, Strong Kids, parents were heard discussing locating resources and validating frustrations of another parent about the difficulties in understanding the process for registering a child for kindergarten. Another parent participant from A Place for Children and Families explains,

That’s how you and me met. It is as a matter—yeah. And now when I see her in the community even though I have always seen her in the community when I see her now I’m more apt to be like “Hey girl, how’s it going?” (A Place for Children transcript, p. 22).

Social supports are built within the community and importantly, friendships in which parents develop relationships with one another. These social support systems can be built on to share information and resources, mentor, and build confidence in the abilities to help oneself. Program providers from Parenting Partners depict the development of a supportive friendship between participants in their program where two young teen mothers take a big step in using the city bus together to take their babies to the park.
These two mothers felt confident enough together to venture out on the bus with their babies by themselves and felt such a sense of accomplishment that they called the program provider to share the news... “And I was like, ‘Say that again?’” (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 18). Furthermore, the social supports and sense of success that develop through these programs empower some parents to want to give back to others in the program.

And then some of the parents who have been for a while, they even give back.

Like they’ll turn around and then donate maybe if they have some of the clothes or something else that someone else can use. They turn around and try to help someone else. (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 18).

In describing one teen mother’s role as a “mentor” and sharing the information she learned,

...but just you know being sort of a mentor to, to other people that they encounter...I think it helps them see the value because you know they’re, they’re getting that information and then they are confident enough to want to pass it on to other people who are you know struggling in some ways. (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 20)

The confidence of a young, low-income, teen mother that compels her to share not only her struggles, but the knowledge that she has gained with another struggling parent is a testimony of the important need to support one another – and the value of cultural wealth.
This significance of community in the lives of families, especially for the low-income families that participated in this study, connects to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979b) idea of the mesosystem and the interplay of family and community on a child’s development. Connecting this idea of community and social supports to the conceptual framework for this study with the knowledge of how communities and lives are derived from the compilation of the lived experiences of the families. This compilation should be valued as the wealth of the community, tying in the significance of Yosso’s (2005) CCW and Moll et al.’s (1992) Funds of Knowledge. More importantly, acknowledging the support, knowledge, and resources embedded in families and supported by the community connections provides a cornerstone on which to build new understanding of the realities of parent engagement in the lives of low-income families. When examining the current literature on parent engagement, it is evident that it fails to include the important influence of community and the substantial role it plays in the lives of low-income families. More commonly, the body of literature examines motivations and barriers with no account for ecological factors that are important in the lives of families, like the sense of community. Acknowledging this significant role is important in the quest to develop a deeper understanding of factors that impact parent engagement.

**Connecting with Families**

The topic of connecting with families appears in the data set frequently, represented in both parent and stakeholder data. Connection is defined in this context as some type of association or relationship between parents and program providers.
Expanding on the importance of the community’s role, examples and ideas for connecting with and recruiting parents appeared consistently in both parent and stakeholder data. More important than focusing on connecting or recruiting families is the idea of making an emotional or personal connection where families feel important, valued and respected. Conversely, stakeholders report that when program providers come into neighborhoods and “drop” a program into the neighborhood, versus weaving the needs of the families and the communities into program design, parent engagement is negatively impacted. These relationships and connections need to be based in the belief that families are competent and have knowledge to be shared, a foundational piece of Gonzalez et al.’s (2005) Funds of Knowledge work. Linking program recruitment with people and programs already established in the community, where parents may already be connected, helps bridge the relationship between programs and parents.

**Emotional Connection**

Making emotional or personal connections with families where they are valued and heard appears to be crucial for successful parent engagement as identified in similar ways by both parents and stakeholders. When parents get to know program providers and there is some sort of relationship, parents explain that they are much more likely to want to participate in programs and continue to do so. One parent notes, “It’s all about relationships, building proper relationships with people” (A Place for Children transcript, p. 9). These personal connections can take many forms. An approach where parents and
providers connect as equals was described by a policy-making stakeholder from Center for Families, referring to her initial interactions with parents,

When we first met I approached you as a woman to woman, not that I’m an educator of that and we talked about children, we talked about family, we talked about your concerns—but I wanted to develop a relationship with—I can remember, we were standing right outside this building and it was a long, long conversation (Center for Families Transcript, p. 9).

This parent felt very comfortable connecting with this provider on personal level, rather than one of power or superiority.

When other community members connect, they are more likely to participate in a program when there is a community link. A stakeholder from Parenting Partners describes,

...they enjoy the socialization with each other and so we can foster that community within the group and allow them to, to make bonds with each other and feel connected .... (Parenting Partners Transcription, p. 18)

The connection between members in their parenting program allows for development of relationships and friendships, which help keeps families engaged in programming. When there is a relationship or friendship, a sense of accountability may help keep parents connected. Noting that the connection with others in community is an important factor in participation in parenting programs, a parent describes,
People find a friend... like you wouldn’t imagine. These girls, they stay there right after the meeting and [remain]. They literally there from the meeting till it’s time to get your baby. Then you find out what’s going on and then they start talking and find out what’s going on in the other person’s home. Next thing I know, I see Miss Valerie doing Malana’s hair, you know what I’m saying? I’m serious that’s the links I see (Place for Children transcript, p 14).

During attendance, participants looked forward to visiting with each other and developed friendships and bonds that helped them support one another and provided access to peer interactions with other parents that might be in similar situations. Emotional connections between providers and parents are important, but fostering connections and supports between parent participants is equally valuable.

Parents who may feel intimidated or feel undervalued note that building relationships based in a person-to-person approach, instead of a model where providers are perceived as having power over the parent, is more likely to bring them into programs and keep them engaged. A Place for Children parent shares,

Like we’ve been saying, you have to come at us as regular people also and you have to make sure that you do not make us feel intimidated or in any way dumb us down to our children. I think the biggest—not just in this community but in all communities especially the low income, poverty communities (p. 34).

A program provider stakeholder from Parenting Partners agrees,
The first time, I think, is really important. You need to be able to take your time, allow them to kind of see your personality and build that trust and rapport and connect with them and you know don’t be immediately ready to you know shoot out solutions, but you know just really listen and you know maybe, ah, a little bit of self-disclosure helps you know for them to know that, “Hey, you know this worker isn’t you know above me or you know now coming in here thinking she knows more than I do” (p. 31).

The idea of building relationships first, based on mutual respect, where parents feel valued, provides a strong foundation for continued parent engagement. Parents that feel they have been listened to begin building a rapport with program providers. This is a theme readily expressed in other quotes by parents and stakeholders to the same extent.

In the current literature, one noted barrier to participation is lack of support from family and friends. Sometimes, participants are discouraged from participating by family and friends who do not see the value of the program. When participants build social networks and support systems with other participants, all participants are likely to be invested in the program, which may lead to increased participation. Finding ways to make emotional connections between program staff and parents can set the tone for more engaged parent participation in parenting programs.

**Community Connection**

Parents were more likely to become interested or participate in a program where there was a preexisting connection to the community. Both parents and stakeholders
asserted that a recommendation or referral to a program by a friend, community member, or other trusted person in the community was a more effective way to build parenting program participation. Parents in one focus group referred to this as a “middle-man.” Another focus group with parents reported that one of the community organization hired an outgoing, personable, and well-connected community resident to share information with other residents to support engagement in several new family initiatives. Parents explained, “Sylvia has more community links to the community. So she—her rapport is completely different...Sylvia, but Sylvia will be able to get through to them a different way” (A Place for Children transcript, p. 33). Another community resident was hired by a parenting program as Community Outreach and Recruitment Planner because of her high level of participation in community programs in the past. She shared,

That’s what I do; I go and I knock on doors. Not just knock on doors, I stand in the front office [of the housing community]; not just stand in the front office but I also reach out in my own element. My own element is that I have children that go here. So a lot of times when I’m talking to parent, it’s just like “Yeah, hey girl, who did your hair?” ...You know where I’m at on Wednesday mornings? And that’s how I kick my little spiel on them. I can reach them better than Mrs. Smith [program provider] can reach them. I’m gonna tell you why; I’m in my own element. I’m in—I’m not in professional clothing, I don’t have the fancy earrings (A Place for Parents transcript, p. 30).
Opportunities to use parents well-connected within the community can provide communication opportunities with parents that providers coming into the community for the first time cannot access. Extending the community resource person ideas, the public housing management teams also shared their willingness to introduce programs and residents, acting as a liaison of trust.

A lot of people come into the community and they want to do things, they want to have a program or whatever, but they never introduce themselves to the— to the um, residents … they go into the managers, the caseworker, whoever, and say hey, this is the program we’re gonna bring and you bring it in and bam, there it is (Center for Families transcript, p. 16).

Rather, she suggests, come in and talk with housing staff about the program and they will help you connect with residents by endorsing the program. She expands, “I think you know, kind of going back to the relationships of trust, that’s an introduction and you, as the person that they already know and trust are kind of that connection piece”. Having a trusted person to make the introduction and sharing information about the program builds on an established trust on which to build a relationship.

New parenting programs should seek to work with established or known entities in the community. Residents get to know the names of recognized programs and trust in their work in the communities. A policy-making stakeholder from Center for Families shares, So now they know you. So when they see you, know you—you know, what this organization brings … The way I would articulate it, after watching different kinds
of programs over the years, is those that are successful, like the XXXX model, have a presence in the community (Center for Families transcript, p. 19).

Another adds, "That's right, a presence. Those that fail visit the community" (Center for Families transcript, p.19). Stand-alone, short-term programs are perceived as “drop-in programs” where program providers come in to the community, drop-in short term programs, and then leave. Stakeholders explain that in some communities, programs come and go.

When the session is over.… 9, 12 weeks, everybody is gone and nobody cares about what the people are going through now, you know, the success, or you know, what—whatever is going on, they just leave the program and nobody comes back (Center For Families transcript, p.3)

Programs that end abruptly and leave the perception of abandonment undermine the efforts of future programs in the community. The idea that nobody cares once the program is completed will likely keep participants from becoming involved in future programs.

Connection is at the core of parent engagement and retention in parenting programs. While the current literature contains recommendations for building relationships with participants (Axford et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2012), these findings on the significance of emotional and community connections expound on the body of knowledge for connecting with families. Moreover, support for approaching connections with low-income parents in a manner that values their worth, knowledge and
capital emerges from the data. Additionally, this spotlight on the voices of practitioners and participants about the experiences connecting with low-income families to engage them in parenting programs is missing in the current literature.

**Valuing the Capital Families Possess**

Ideas presented in the findings on emotional connection and relationship building stands in stark contrast to the deficit approach presented in Chapter Two. The deficit approach begins with judgmental values and a belief that these families do not possess knowledge or value. Both the Funds of Knowledge (González et al., 2005) and CCW theories (Yosso, 2005) are based on the acknowledgement of the knowledge, value, and strength families build and possess within the context of the community. In the findings of this study, the data detailed many examples of knowledge, strength, and family resources. Parents demonstrated caches of capital in different ways. More important was that stakeholders expressed the value of that knowledge more than parents did, demonstrating an understanding of the worth of this valuable capital. Not accounted within this definition of capital, is the idea that effort and resiliency could be considered different types of capital. Examples of the capital and knowledge of parents was not communicated directly in some cases, but was evident in their actions and indirectly in their comments. Stakeholders, on the other hand, were quick to share examples of them.

**Judgment and Denigration**

Parents in low-income communities do not want their worth to be judged based on socio-economic status. A deficit approach in which the beliefs and values of the white
middle class are often used as the standard or expectation does little to promote relationships, buy-in, or interest in parenting programs. Both parents and stakeholders share examples of programs that focus on the deficit or shortcomings of the parent, instead of building on the capital they have already acquired. Often, a sense of denigration is thrust on low-income parents. One parent states, “I just feel sometimes that you don’t judge a book by the cover and they just look at you and feel as if you’re uneducated and you’re poor and you don’t know anything” (A Place for Children transcript, p. 34). Another parent shares,

I just feel like, we said before, you don’t judge a book by its cover and I just feel as if they look at the area...it is predominately African American, that they just look at it and say, Oh well, it’s—they don’t care and the kids aren’t trying and—I don’t like that. (A Place for Children transcript, p. 23)

Denigration is divisive and automatically alienates parents. In several focus groups, parents used the same terminology, “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” furthering the idea that judgments are readily communicated by stakeholders aiming to assist.

Continuing on this line of thinking, stakeholders reveal thoughts from other parenting program experience, “Because you live in the public housing area, you must be a drug addict, you must be an alcoholic, nobody works for education...We have plenty of people that work in our communities, plenty” (Center for Families transcript, p. 22). Another repeats, “If you’re in public housing, then, you know, you have eight babies by eight different fathers, you’re a crack cocaine addict, and your pimp’s arriving at 10:00 at
night, you know (Center for Families transcript, p. 23). It is not surprising that parents may not want to participate in programs when these types of beliefs are present. "When groups come in and try to communicate with parents and residents, there's always this inherent, it's unstated but it's there, that everybody here is a failure. And the failure is evident because you are here" (Center for Families transcript, p. 25). Judgments and assumptions made about families living in low-income communities show a lack of understanding of individual differences and situations that may be present in these families. Comparing this to the philosophies of Payne's (2005) framework based on stereotypic ideals, this definition of deficit is based on values and expectations of the middle class, not those living the realities of everyday life. Although this theme was not directly present in the parent data set, it coincides with the notion of judgment described previously.

To further this deficit, program providers themselves may convey indirect messages about their feelings of people living in public housing or low-income communities. Their fear and misunderstanding of the community communicates judgment about the families living in the community.

I've seen it in some of the communities, is that you'll have someone do a session and then I always like to step outside and watch them run to their car, clutching their purse, waiting for the gunfire to start... And to me, it's always this awkward kind of moment that gives off these vibes to everybody around them... Yeah,
basically you’re saying this is how I feel about where you live (Center for Families transcript, p.21).

Actions described here communicate clearly what providers feel about a neighborhood. If providers are too scared to come into the neighborhood, the message of judgment is stated. The communication of these fears and thoughts undermine any connection that program providers have worked to build with parents. “There’s not respect or dignity given to wherever they are...And you know, it’s that whole subconscious, and sometimes it’s conscious, they tend to objectify people” (Center for Families transcript, p. 22).

Judgments made by program providers are reported to be barriers to engaging parents at times. Providers’ fear or disdain of living conditions or housing conditions are easily noticed by potential participants and can erect roadblocks for recruitment.

I say respect their communities, you know, respect their homes. Don’t go in with your nose turned up just because it’s the, um, just because you see a little bug crawling, little roach or something. Don’t be all animated and stuff like that.

‘Cause respect their home, ‘cause they see it just like you see it and some of them will say ‘Oh my bad, we’ll kill that’ (Happy Family Center transcript, p.26)

Reactions like these convey clear messages to parents. In cases like this, the family’s lack of engagement may not be the issue. More likely, the program provider sets up the barrier.

Lastly, assumptions and judgments about the needs of families by program providers can lead to programs that are inappropriate and ineffective for parents. Basing
program curriculum on perceived needs of parents, founded on experiences of the middle class can be a turn-off to participants. When providers have a misunderstanding of the realities of daily lives for families, they may alienate parents because they feel judged and misunderstood. A parent reflects, “Quite often people present to us, present based upon where they are” (A Place for Children transcript, p. 6). Another participant chimes in, “Intentional or not…that person doesn’t understand their audience to whom they’re talking to make it relevant to your needs…you close off your ears, you stop listening” (A Place for Children transcript, p. 7). Without an understanding of the needs or a commitment to the community’s needs, programs are designed to meet the program provider’s needs and not that of the families it is intended to assist. Perception of the un-invested program approach is shared, “Someone is coming in to do something to us….as opposed to someone that’s going to be involved” (Center for Families, p. 35). Another stakeholder expands that idea, “Going in and dropping a program and saying this would be good for you” (Center for Families transcript, p. 45). Program providers may have preconceived ideas about what a program should entail, but without the investment from participants, it does not meet their needs. Secondly, it is important to understand that every community has differences and a one-size fits all approach is not respectful to the individual difference or culture of a community.

Effort and Resiliency

Program providers are generally looking for specific goals or outcomes to measure success in their programs. However, they often fail to take into account two
very significant factors that effect the accomplishment of their goals—effort and resiliency. One characteristic for some families living in poverty is crisis and instability. It is difficult for parents dealing with crisis to move beyond dealing with those immediate basic necessities to prioritize attaining other goals. While parents may agree that education is important for their child, putting a roof over their head and feeding them may be more of an immediate need. One stakeholder explains, “Crisis. Parents who are in a deep crisis; whether financially, you know, housing or something like that. They are more focused on that then just getting the education piece of—that’s not their main goal at the time” (Happy Family Center Transcript, p. 11). Further explained,

...they’re like in survival mode you know. And not necessarily in engagement mode you know. So yeah, that’s a really good point and once all those things are stabilized…and we can connect them with resources, then we can engage the parent in the parent/child engagement stuff (Parenting Partners transcript, p.6).

When dealing with such crisis and stressful events, effort to prevail and resiliency may not be recognized as important traits, but in the lives of those in crisis, they are critical. A story was shared about a woman who wanted to participate in a community program, but faced many barriers in the home. The program provider supported her by recognizing the small steps she made, realizing that the level of effort for this parent was much greater than for other participants. From the outside perspective, many would have thought that this mother was not invested or eager to participate; however, the providers’ inside perspective showed a much different picture. The effort of this mother demonstrated a
strong will to participate in this program. Additionally, the emotional connection between provider and parent allowed this mother to be supported and stay engaged.

I think, um, sometimes, we don’t recognize effort as strength. And all of our parents show good effort. They’ve called, they’ve come by. They try to schedule an appointment. They may lack some of the follow-up but they put forth the initial effort and that’s great strength, because it means they care and they want to change. (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 23).

In the midst of crisis, effort to make a change should be capitalized upon. A parent who puts forth effort has a desire for change. Desire for change may be the catalyst that moves parents forward toward new goals.

Stakeholders noted the need to recognize the successes parents do accomplish. While full program goals are not met, the efforts that are put forth and the successes that are accomplished, albeit small, should be viewed as success. A stakeholder describes a parent’s tribulation after working the evening shift, “Last night, I worked the 11:00 to 7:00 shift and I got two buses home to be home in time to get my kid breakfast and get ‘em out to school on time (Center for Families transcript, p. xx). Another chimes in,

That’s right, that’s right, because a lot of times, um, you really don’t know how hard it is to even get somebody to get out the door...And that is success, and we sit in our meetings all the time, case managers, as we say if they only knew what it takes to just go through—through the door. And then people think it’s nothing. (Center for Families transcript, p. 25).
These quotes explain the need for an additional gauge for success in programs.

Success is measured by how difficult a task may be; however, tasks may be more difficult for some people than others. A stakeholder explains,

Those are individual successes that are very important to that person, not this group of—not this group. [Belief that] Everybody is a failure because they live in public housing...People like XXX and XXX recognize this and they capitalize on this, that’s their success. They understand the individual person and the individual success, they build upon it. (Center for Families transcript, p.26.

For many people, getting your child up and out the door may be an easy task, for others, it is much more difficult. Success in these two cases may be measured differently. Success, when measured through effort, is different for different people.

When looking to engage parents, understanding and appreciating the way each parent views success and effort may impact levels of engagement and is a key piece to understanding how parents choose to engage. When examining these attributes in the context of CCW, effort and resiliency are examples of aspirational and resistant capital. Liou et al. (2009) suggests that the types of capital associated with CCW (Yosso, 2005) are historically undervalued. Developing ideals that include effort and resiliency will bring a new sense of value to two important forms of capital.

In current literature, there is little focus on the resiliency that many of these parents demonstrate. With crisis or adversity, some parents have an acute ability to move past this situation. In explaining the level of resiliency, a stakeholder explains,
Like how can you still, you know, live with the person, see this person after what
the person has done to them? But they’re moving on. They have to move past
that, they have too much on their plate to focus on the past. They’re just trying to
move on and take care of their family (Parenting Partners transcript, p.21).

Another adds, “Resiliency…Um, some of our parents had gone through so much and I
think some of the rest of us would be in the nuthouse!” (Parenting Partners transcript,
p.20). This level of crisis, followed by effort and resiliency to recover and move forward
is an essential piece of the parent engagement discussion, yet one that is not prevalent in
the literature. In the literature, the idea of resiliency is not separately addressed.
Generally, resiliency is combined with the discussion on crisis and is presented as a
barrier to engagement (Brookes, Summers, Thornburg, Ispa & Lane, 2006; Kemp,
Marcenko, Hoagwood, & Vesneski, 2009). From the standpoint of valuing the capital
wealth of parents, markers of resiliency are also indicators of an accumulation of
aspirational capital, wherein a person uses motivation to move forward and achieve
dreams in spite of the difficulties (Yosso, 2005). The effort of a participant to engage in
activities in the midst of crisis is not addressed at all. Data in this study reshapes the
notion of crisis as a strengthening process where effort and resiliency must be valued, and
included in the dialogue about recruiting, engaging, and retaining low-income parents in
community parenting programs.

The discussion about effort and resiliency was clearly articulated by stakeholders,
using those two words specifically. Parents did not use those terms in their discussion,
but did include conversations about working through crisis and overcoming challenge. One parent participant had a baby in the neo-natal intensive care during the time of the focus group. She indicated the difficulty in balancing her other children and time at the hospital. She did not have transportation and was having difficulty getting to the hospital in time to meet with the doctors. When she did meet with the doctors, she reported feeling they did not listen to her when she asked questions. She put forth a great deal of effort to navigate this crisis and meet the needs of her family. She did not directly state her effort and resiliency, but provided one example of how effort and resiliency should be valued as capital.

**Knowledge and Capital**

The need to value the knowledge and capital of parents to engage and retain them in community programs is at the heart of the parent engagement issue. From a deficit approach, contributions of the low-income parents are not valued, suggesting a belief they themselves are to blame (García & Guerra, 2011; Ryan, 1970). Although, these findings indicate parents clearly demonstrated their knowledge of the needs of both their families and their communities.

In one of the parent focus groups, it was difficult for parents to really address questions about how parents may choose to engage. The discussion continually moved toward appropriate topics and content for parent education programs. I coded a large percentage of that focus group as “topic/content parenting programs” and originally thought it was not applicable to the study. After more thorough analysis, however, it
became apparent these parents had a great deal of knowledge about the needs of their community. These conversations shared a wide variety of topics about what families in their community needed education-wise. Topics ranged widely including activities for young children, such as age-appropriate activities, school readiness, technology training, parenting, and sex education. Through this discussion, parents shared suggestions and ideas they believed would help solve problems in their communities. These ideas were important to them and clearly demonstrated their knowledge of their needs and community.

Parents have knowledge of their children, hopes and dreams for their children and know more about their children than program providers do. One stakeholder expressed, “I think it’s definitely important to listen to, um, like the parents’ wants and needs for the children and not just projecting all of our knowledge, you know, onto them” (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 17). Another notes, “They’re a parent. They’ve—they know their child more than we do and by them tell[ing] us how their child is, [it] helps us help them” (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 20).

A parent summarizes the knowledge that needs to be valued,

To seek out the talents and the skills that exist in the community. Kinda goes back to what you just said; you got to find out you can’t just make an assumption but what—there are lots of parents who have talents and skills and a knowledge base that’s not acknowledged by people simply because where you live. So first of all
seeking out what the neighborhood has to offer to the program you want to build

(A Place for Children transcription, p. 22).

A stakeholder characterizes parents’ knowledge,

They have the knowledge about their situation and that’s, that’s the you know the
most important thing is, is where they’re at and they’re the expert on helping us to
understand where they are and how we can meet them. You know, the needs with
where they’re at right how. (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 23).

These are very clear indicators of what parents know about their children. This valuable
familial capital affords parents opportunities to share this knowledge about their children,
empowering them to bring valuable assets to the table (of collaboration) in parenting
programs.

In recognizing parents’ knowledge, it’s important to utilize that knowledge to
inform programming and make sure parent goals align with program goals. A
stakeholder clarifies, “I think that if we were to switch how we address—what we bring
to them and listen to what they want, and we begin to infiltrate in their goals, ours
[goals]” (Center for Families transcript, p.13). Parents will be more likely to engage when
they have a level of investment or buy-in on the topics and goals. Recommended by a
stakeholder, “Their ideas. They want buy-in. You need to ask them that…Right, ask them
and find out what they want” (Center for Families transcript, p. 42).

Parents also possess valuable social capital, based on their knowledge of the
community, social aspects, and networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005). Parents can
help providers navigate the community more effectively with the knowledge they possess about their communities. With the parent’s understanding of community happenings, program providers can find ways to better connect and plan offerings that meet the community needs. Providers need to learn from the people in the community about that community and its needs. A stakeholder shares the value of parents’ knowledge of the community.

They know what is going on in the community without even watching the news... They know just because they, they[are] living there. They hear it and everything like that so you get a good report. They tell you which areas to watch out for and what’s the good times to come, when not to come (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 25).

The understanding of the communities and the distinctions between communities is vital information for program providers. This valuable information, garnered from parents, validates the importance of the significant contributions they can make. A parent summarizes,

To seek out the talents and the skills that exist in the community... You got to find out you can’t just make an assumption ‘bout what—there’s lots of parents who have talents and skills and a knowledge base that’s not acknowledged by people simply because of where you live. So first of all, seeking out what the neighborhood has to offer the program you want to build (A Place for Children transcript, p. 23).
One interesting theme that emerged from the data was the difficulty parents sometimes have in clearly articulating their needs or knowledge. Articulation of their needs was noted as difficult by stakeholders. Further, in review of the parent focus group transcriptions, when asked about what they felt they could contribute to parenting programs, answers were difficult and superficial in nature. When asked about strengths they possessed that program providers should know about, parents were unable to fully answer. A follow-up question of “What can you tell me that would help program providers better understand your perspective” (Parent Focus Group Protocol) failed to provide more in-depth responses. Additionally, the difficulty in one focus group with answering the questions and not focusing on topics demonstrated the difficulty in articulating needs and knowledge. This is also illustrated by the higher level of off-topic comments from parents. Stakeholders characterized the difficulties in articulating need by saying, “I think many of them actually know what their needs are, they just don’t know how to, um, get them met or ever how to, um, how to even go through the process of, um, taking care of everything” (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 21). “They just know, ‘I know what the problem is, I just don’t know how to fix it.’ They don’t even know the right questions to ask” (Parenting Partners, p.21). When asked if families could articulate their needs or wants, another stakeholder commented, “Some families will say ‘Oh, I need resources for this’ or a member of a family may say, ‘I just need help.’ It just depends on the family.” (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 5).
While parents have the knowledge and capital, it may be difficult for them to articulate that knowledge. Whether the emotional connection is lacking or parents are lacking the linguistic capital to articulate or convey this knowledge, does not mean it is not present. Whether or not parents can articulate their needs, knowledge, desires, or dreams about their child, program stakeholders still need to understand that it is still a key piece in engaging parents. Finding ways to help parents articulate this knowledge, especially in the early years, prior to school enrollment, may also help facilitate engagement with their children's future educational experiences.

Parents possess many types of capital. These accumulated assets are a combination of the lived experiences of both individuals and members of the community. Clear examples of aspirational, familial, social, linguistic, and navigational capital, combined to form the community cultural wealth, emerged from the combined data set. The current research on parent engagement and retention does not address this perspective. While a larger body of literature addresses Bourdieu's (1986) theory on social and cultural capital and Yosso’s (2005) concept of CCW, there has been little examination of the knowledge and capital parents possess and the interplay of these forms of capital and engagement of parents in community parenting programs for very young children.

Motivations and Outcomes

Research on parent engagement frequently examines parents' motivation on their decision to participate. The literature review for this study addresses motivation, noting
both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have been reported to impact participations.

While the theme of motivation appeared in this data set, the discussion moved away from specific motivations to more about what parental expectations might be for participating. Looking at these expectations of participation as a source of motivation in a parenting program is important as providers think about designing programs.

When specifically asked what could be done to encourage parents to attend, parents and program providers mentioned extrinsic motivations which is consistent with current literature. Recommendations to provide food for participants, transportation, and door prizes were made. Parents mentioned experiences with accumulating points for attendance that could be used to purchase baby items, like clothes, strollers, and toys. “You get things, it’s called the XXX store, and you get like little—you pick things and then you get [stuff]. I like that part about it…You get helpful stuff” (Strong Parents, Strong Kids transcript, p. 2). Additionally, stakeholders explain that experiential activities are sometimes offered as motivators, noting that fun, novel ideas are enjoyed by participants. “Make it enjoyable! Enjoyable, fun. It’s got to be entertaining…they will come back. And they’ll bring a friend if they have fun” (Center for Families transcript, p. 51). Another adds, “Something that’s also, um, developmentally focused but also something fun and out of the ordinary” (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 10). Trips to the zoo, children’s museum, local farm with petting zoo were examples shared.

The idea of intrinsic motivation was brought into the discussion more frequently. Parents and stakeholders alike shared that engagement was more likely to happen when
parents were intrinsically motivated, rather than by material incentives. A Center for Families stakeholder explains, "So once they see, like, the child really getting it—understanding everything like that they really don’t expect materialistic things anymore" (p. 5). This was consistent with existing literature; however, delving further into intrinsic motivation showed the quest for knowledge was more of a motivator. Additionally, another outcome of participating is the confidence gained, which also was believed to provide motivation for participation.

**Seeking Knowledge and Gaining Confidence**

Looking further than motivation, I wanted to understand what parents might expect to gain or did gain from participating in programs. When asked why participants might choose to voluntarily attend community parenting programs, participants and stakeholders explained that most people wanted to learn something new or gain new knowledge. One parent shared, “Information” (A Place for Children transcript, p. 3). Another explained “They don’t have enough skills for parenting or they wanna learn more about parenting” (Strong Parents, Strong Kids transcript, p. 2). Stakeholders supported that parents would be more likely to participate if they were looking for new knowledge or a change for their child. “You are really doing this to help, you really want to help. That really is an incentive in itself without, um, something to—without it being so tangible” (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 9). Another program provider suggested, …If you have friends or relatives that in the neighborhood if, if their family changes, why wouldn’t I want my family to change too? …I think that would be
a great motivator for, um, families in a community that if I can see how it affected or how they helped reach goals and get on track a little bit better than I can see that benefit me in my life as well. (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 16)

While current literature shows the most common motivation for parents is desire to make a difference for their child, these findings suggest that not only are parents looking for change, but that this effect is magnified by seeing the successes of others in the community. When another family demonstrates a noticeable change, parents who witness that change may be more motivated to want that change for their child. The interplay of family and community is once again demonstrated with these findings.

In addition to acquiring new knowledge, the suggestion that the confidence that parents gain from participating is a motivation for continued participation was made. Stakeholders from two different focus groups described situations where parents gained confidence and the different ways they demonstrated that confidence. Confidence appeared to be both developed in the parents’ new skills and in themselves. “I like to see the confidence of the parents. Yeah, confidence in, in the new skills that they’re learning in what we’re teaching them and what we’re modeling for them” reported a Happy Family Center stakeholder (p.2-3). One stakeholder gave an example of young mothers who began to mentor some of other newer mothers sharing baby items and ideas. “I think it helps them see the value because you know they’re, they’re getting that information and then they’re confident enough to want to pass it on to other people who are, you know, struggling in some ways. (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 20). It was speculated
that this new confidence, gained in their parenting skills, transferred into other areas of their lives. A provider speaks of a teen mother,

I think for some of my girls, um, as they begin to develop their confidence in parenting and they’re staying in school and sometimes getting a job…They start to really succeed on their own…they have just kind of taken off and met their goals (Parenting Partners transcript, p.14).

Although this idea of confidence was not universally discussed across the data, the concept of confidence as a motivator is an interesting finding. I believe it bears weight in the discussion of how parents engage and stay engaged in programing, given the connection to the community. As discussed earlier in the findings section, the importance of community is clearly relative to all areas of recruiting, engaging, and retaining low-income parents in community parenting programs.

**Barriers**

Identifying potential barriers to parents’ willingness to engage and stay engaged in programs was not clear cut. In the current body of research, structural and perceptual barriers are addressed as presented in my literature review. When seeking to identify barriers, I asked, “In your opinion, what things make it difficult for parents to attend parenting programs like these? What things get in the way for parents like you to participate in these parenting programs?” Answers to the questions were very limited: time, transportation, job constraints, and location. Stakeholders were asked a version of the same question. Conversely, their answers were more in depth and focused solely on
perceptual barriers, including fear, mistrust, or lack of relationship. More specifically, other barriers mentioned included family and home barriers, rather than structural barriers, many of which align with perceptual barriers as described in the literature review.

In my coding, family and home barriers are defined as those barriers that are put in place by the family, social work, or community. A lack of support or disapproval by the family or other social network was reported to keep parents from participating.

Fear, um, thinking that you’re there to be in their business and that you’re social services, you’re going to take away their kid; you’re going to judge them,...being in their business really. And trying to get past that, there’s a major mom or grandmother in the home who really is the head of the household and if they’re not going to go for it then you’re going to have a hard time! (Parenting Partners transcript, p. 12).

Another provider adds,

I once had someone say, whose parents say she didn’t have prenatal care so you know right away, so why should her daughter? We know why but that’s—and this is the major mom so how can you combat that? (Parenting Partners transcript, p.12).

Lack of understanding or support from families and peer network for parenting program participation can create arduous barriers to engagement that are difficult for providers to combat. Also noted, is the fear of what others in the community may think if they knew
that a parent was participating in some kind of self-help program. "The stigma of a program coming into your home is like indicative of you needing some type of help. You know, people have pride, and um, you know, they want to be respected." (Happy Family Center transcript, p.13). Another stakeholder adds,

...Because there are parents in our program who are, who are doing pretty well; they're able to pay their bills on time, they're meeting goals, they're going to school, um, and they—someone else looking from the outside might say, "Oh, they don't need a program" (Happy Family Center transcript, p. 14).

This exemplifies a situation in which the family or community has the ability to negatively impact parent engagement, a fact that is contrary to the positive connections of community and family on this topic. While these topics are mentioned in the current literature, the link between the importance of building relationships and making connections and parent engagement is not clearly illustrated. However, this appears to reinforce this link and make the case for personal connection and the importance of community as foundational in engaging low income parents.

**Differences in Parent and Stakeholder Findings**

As part of the analysis, I examined the coding frequency by participant groups, comparing codes from the parent focus group and stakeholder focus group transactions. One major issue, as previously noted, was that parents had difficulty articulating some of their needs and thoughts about the value of their capital. The most common codes presented by parents were: community and social supports, connections, emotional
connections, and valuing what they bring. There was an overlap in the commonly occurring themes; however, stakeholders more fully discussed some topics, which led to higher numbers of coded items by stakeholders than parents. From the stakeholder data, the additional theme of judgment and devaluing emerged, based on the larger number of codes. There were only a few examples of judgment and devaluing in the parent data. Parents shared information that touched the surface of the judgment piece, but did not clearly communicate this theme, using the same verbiage as stakeholders. This illustrates some of the difficulties parents may have with clearly articulating their thoughts. The demonstration of the overlap in the commonly occurring themes adds validity to this research. In qualitative exploration, it is important to compile a data set with the depth for saturation of themes (Hays and Singh, 2012).

In the research design, I purposefully conducted stakeholder focus groups by stakeholder role (provider or funder/policymaker) to elicit perceptions from stakeholders with different roles in providing parenting programs. There were no differences in responses provided by providers and policymakers. When comparing coding for those two groups, commonly presented themes matched and were exhaustive.

Summary

Findings in this study align closely with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two. Notably, parents' value of the knowledge about their families and communities and strength of the community as presented in the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and in CCW (Yosso, 200) literature surfaced as a key tenant by
both stakeholders and parents. Significance of an emotional connection with participants also emerged, with the idea of building on community connections and existing relationships. The need to value the efforts and knowledge of parents without judging or devaluing low-income families also emerged as crucial findings. Reframing the approach from a deficit model to one that appreciates the knowledge, effort, and resources that low-income families bring to community parenting programs is supported. Additionally, it was found that parents had difficulty articulating their needs or thoughts. This noted difficulty is significant in developing an understanding of how parents engage in community programs. These reoccurring themes pose new questions for consideration when developing or implementing community parenting programs. Other findings related to structural barriers, extrinsic motivators, and difficulties related to the challenges of living in poverty, such as lack of home stability, supported common findings in the current literature.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This dissertation began with the quest to develop an understanding of the realities of engagement of low-income parents in community parenting programs, specifically seeking to identify factors, motivations, barriers, and effective practices as reported by parents and stakeholders of community parenting programs. Furthering the understanding from these basic components of parent engagement meant seeking insight on how the cultural wealth and knowledge of these families is valued and what role it plays in the parent engagement discussion. Building upon previous work in the field, I employed a qualitative lens to account for the voice of parents and stakeholders, voices not generally heard in the current body of literature, yet are central to developing this understanding. The phenomenological approach for this study laid the groundwork for an understanding based on the lived realities of participants, derived by looking at both the individual and collective human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). By examining this topic through the shared experiences of parent participants and stakeholders, a universal essence of the experience was developed.

Chapter One examined and explained difficulties in engaging low-income parents, noting that personal experience opened the door for the idea for this study. Illustrating the lifelong effects of poverty on the lives of young children, the assertion that supportive parenting practices can lead to more a more positive trajectory for these children is made.
Community parenting programs, too, mitigate some effects of poverty. But many low-income families fail to engage in such programs. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of factors, barriers, motivations, and practices that impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs in the early childhood years, prior to attendance in formal schooling. To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, four research questions were posed:

1. What factors do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?
2. What motivations and barriers do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) perceive to impact parent recruitment, engagement, and retention in community parenting programs?
3. What do parents and stakeholders perceive to be effective practices for recruiting, engaging, and retaining low income parents in community parenting programs?
4. In what ways do low-income parents and stakeholders (policy makers, funders, program directors, program implementation staff) characterize the value of parents’ cultural wealth and knowledge?

Chapter Two explores the current body of literature about engaging low-income parents in parenting programs and provides a theoretical framework on which this study is built. While this topic is not widely researched, the current body of literature contains a
large gap, specifically looking at this topic from a qualitative perspective. Much of the current literature addresses parent engagement from the school perspective, but overlooks engagement from the very early years. The theoretical framework begins with Bronfenbrenner’s idea that humans develop within a system of relationships, including the overlap of community and family. Building from that, the idea is presented that a deficit ideology is the common approach in dealing with low-income families, wherein judgment, stereotypes and misunderstanding of poverty based on middle class values are foundational in their approach. Contrary to the deficit ideology, is an approach that acknowledges all families acquire cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and that there is value to this capital is a more appropriate approach to family engagement. Additionally, the value of the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities, including CCW forms of capital (Yosso, 2005) and the Funds of Knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) are embedded in the community and must be valued and recognized as a critical piece of engaging families.

The research design and methodology are outlined in Chapter Three. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, I bracketed myself out, laying my previous ideas and experiences aside to view the topic with a fresh perspective. Through this approach, I was able to develop an essence of the participant’s experiences, not mine as the researcher. Data was collected through a series of focus groups with low-income parents raising a child under five and a series and stakeholders who work with programming that targets at-risk populations. Using a traditional qualitative approach,
data was analyzed through a series of coding, identifying emerging themes and
developing a textual description.

Chapter Four presents the coding process and findings of the study. The coding
process was completed first with stakeholder data and secondly with parent data.
Through an overlay of the commonly emerged themes between both parent and
stakeholder data sets, common themes surfaced. While some themes currently in the
literature surfaced, new themes about parent engagement became more apparent in this
qualitative data set. The major findings based on the emerged themes presented are the
role of community and social support, connections between parents and stakeholders,
valuing the capital families possess, and motivations and barriers.

This chapter provides a summary of the study and presents major findings drawn
from the data analysis in Chapter Four. These findings generate a discussion of the
implications and recommendations for future research are made. Implications for practice
for stakeholders aiming to provide community parenting programming for low income
parents are presented, followed by concluding thoughts about this study.

**Presentation of Major Findings**

The theoretical framework of this study is deeply rooted in the crucial role that
community plays across the lives of low-income parents. Understanding that the
development of the child occurs within the family, and more importantly, that the cultural
capital and knowledge found within the community affords parents opportunities to
acquire new knowledge and capital. Further, the community surrounding low income families provides for the crucial social networks and community supports that families need. Appreciating that all families possess different types of cultural capital and knowledge and that the value of that capital must be measured not from the deficit ideology, but from the value it brings to each family and community. It is with that understanding that is vital in connecting with parents in ways that will keep them engaged and involved in programming. Recognition of the social and cultural capital and valuing the capital is essential in the connection between parents and program providers. In the discussion that follows, I present major findings including, the role of community and social supports; emotional and community connections for individuals; valuing the capital families possess; motivations and outcomes; and barriers.

**Role of Community and Social Support**

The major findings in this study aligned with the theoretical framework. Most importantly, validation of the significant and complex role of the community in daily lives of low income families emerged. Parents and stakeholders reported that the community was often seen as an extension of the family. The importance of community was clearly articulated by both parent and stakeholder contributions, noting that an accumulation of wealth, knowledge, and resources are built within the community context.

In the neighborhoods in which this study was conducted, community provides strong bonds and a networked system of support, helping members to take care of one
another and building interconnectedness between the lives of members. Many examples of the different ways in which community members help care for one another were given in the focus groups from parents and stakeholders. In particular, the village approach arose as significant, where families help care for those in need by assisting in the provision of food or other household resources, transportation, or even a place to live. The belief that, often in low-income neighborhoods, small communities are built within communities and help sustain members and weather crises is a crucial piece of the understandings of the lived realities of low-income families with young children.

Also significant is the notion that intergenerational relationships act as a conduit for support and sharing of knowledge. Parents and stakeholders both reported that intergenerational relationships are important and valuable in the village approach to parenting and understanding the community’s emphasis on intergenerational relationships should be considered when planning parenting programs. Both parents and stakeholders suggested that sharing of cultural wealth intergenerationally was bidirectional with opportunities for both parents and grandparents to learn from one another. Younger parents receive support and gain confidence when grandparents share information, parenting ideas, and knowledge about the family. Grandparents, especially those raising grandchildren, receive information about the culture of today’s youth as well as updated knowledge about policies and regulations, like car seats and immunizations.

Connecting resources between community members is a key element in the role that community plays in the lives of these families. Parents connect with each other to
seek out resources or share resources with others they find in need. The community also appears to provide a layer of comfort for families, which contributes to their willingness to engage in parenting programs. This layer of comfort, borne of the social networks and supports that are constructed within the community, is an important piece for parents and families. Parents reported building support systems, gaining confidence, even mentoring peers as part of the social networking system within the community. Supportive friendships often appear as part of community parenting programs, leading to confidence that can empower participants to mentor or give back to others in the program. This level of comfort and confidence is important in the continued engagement and retention in community parenting programs.

**Connections: Emotional and Community**

In the analysis of parent and stakeholder voice, connections between parents and program providers are significant factors in the parent engagement discussion. Both parents and stakeholders presented this idea, sharing that relationships were critical and that attention to this should be focused at the beginning of programs, not as a result of programs. Emotional or personal connections between participant and program providers were considered to be foundational in programs that effectively engaged parents. Without emotional connections, parents noted they would be less likely to volunteer or continue to attend programing. Critical in the initial stages or program planning is the building of these emotional connections. Connections where families feel important, valued, and respected are important in engagement. Furthermore, these relationships should be rooted
in the belief that families are competent and have knowledge to be shared about their families. An approach to relationship building based on a person-to-person approach is effective in helping parents to feel valued. Establishment of a rapport based on equality and not power, also is likely to welcome parents in a way that fosters continued engagement. When parents feel intimidated or undervalued, a person-to-person approach was reported by stakeholders to be more effective than one that conveys the program provider has power over the parent.

Closely connected to the important role of the community plays in the support of parents and families, communities also can play a role in connecting with parents. While it is postulated that building a person-to-person relationship between participant and provider is vital, the community may be a strong mechanism to foster these connections. Finding ways to tie a new program to an existing community program is an effective way to gain attention from parents. Parents may feel an automatic connection to a program that has a reputation in the community for providing resources or help, giving a significant boost to the establishment of a connection. New programs perceived as short-term resources, not invested in the community, are likely to fail without the benefit of a community anchor. Public housing or other similar staff may help connect program providers and participants by endorsing a program, or assisting with access to community members. Additionally, parents and stakeholders alike reported the use of a trusted member of the community as a "middle-man" between community members and program providers was perceived to be an effective method of building participation.
Building connections that value the knowledge entrenched in the community, where the combined experiences of its members are viewed as the cultural wealth of the community, need to be developed. Relationships alone are not enough; relationships need to be based on the understanding that families have knowledge and capital to invest in parenting programs. Without the ability to invest their own capital, parents will not be fully invested in the program. Connections defined in this way, where knowledge and capital wealth embedded in the community are recognized, align with the funds of knowledge (Mol et al., 1992) and Yosso's (2005) CCW theory.

Valuing the Capital that Families Possess

Parents demonstrate caches of social and cultural capital in different ways, ranging from knowledge of their families, knowledge of resources, understanding the ways to navigate the community, and knowledge of the needs of their communities. Valuing the capital that families possess is a sharp contrast to the deficit ideology presented in Chapter Two. When capital is valued, parents feel respected for the knowledge they already possess, not criticized for the knowledge they are perceived to be missing. Although parents have difficulty clearly articulating, this knowledge they communicate this knowledge indirectly in their comments and actions. Stakeholders more readily express the value of the knowledge that parents possess.

Clearly, judgment and denigration negatively impact program participation; however, often these feelings are communicated indirectly. Stereotypical ideas and assumptions about all members in low-income neighborhoods alienate participants and
undermine recruitment efforts. Parents relate they often feel judged by the people who bring programs designed to help them. Program providers may come in with a predetermined agenda based on the perceived needs of the community, rather than what meets the needs of a particular set of parents in a particular community. Further, unintentionally conveyed messages about fear of neighborhoods or disdain of living conditions likewise alienate parents and discourage participation.

The notion that the attributes of effort and resiliency are strengths for many low-income families is presented. In connecting this idea back to CCW (Yosso, 2005), these attributes are examples of aspirational and resistant capital. Aspirational capital relates to achieving goals and dreams and resistant capital is built through experiences with challenges. It is important that these types of capital are recognized and valued. Overlooked as important in the current literature (Liou et al., 2009), these qualities demonstrate motivation and desire to move forward and although additional supports may be needed to reach a predetermined goal, effort and resiliency should be valued as a crucial form of capital. While program providers are likely to measure parents’ success by accomplishment of program goals, small steps may be needed before a parent can even begin to participate. Program providers should value the effort and accomplishment of smaller goals, which may be precursor to parents being able to fully and actively participate in a parenting program.

Lastly, it is evident in this study that every parent has knowledge to contribute during parenting programs. Beginning to understand, acknowledge, and moreover, to
value the cultural capital and knowledge that parents possess is critical. Parents know more about their children, their families, and their hopes and dreams for their children. Parents were also aware that they needed help to solve a problem, even if they were unable to articulate what resources they needed. Parents demonstrated their knowledge about their communities by sharing ideas for parenting education programs and what they felt their communities needed. Clearly, by virtue of their sharing of information with me during the focus groups, it is evident that they possess cultural capital about their community that is at the heart of this study.

Equally important as acknowledgement of social and cultural wealth, is providing parents with opportunities to expend the capital they have acquired. Consideration for methods that encourage this type of expenditure and allow parents a personal investment in programming needs to be central in the design of community parenting programs. The role of the community, social supports provided and emotional and community connections tie directly to the accumulation of cultural and social capital, as well as the compilation of CCW (Yosso, 2005).

Motivations, Barriers, and Outcomes

When exploring parent motivation for participating in and staying engaged, motivations were most commonly based on their desire to gain new information or make a change. When parents were extrinsically motivated by incentives or giveaways, engagement was short-term. Reported outcomes of parenting programs were most typically knowledge and confidence. The confidence that parents gained often connected
back to the importance of the community, notably in their actions to give back to others in the community through sharing information and mentoring other parents. This is an example of how communities build systems where members help take care of one another. The discussion of barriers did not provide clear cut findings. More, barriers were considered from a lack of emotional or personal connection, judgmental providers, or lack of community, all of which negatively impacted programming. Additionally, fears, mistrust, and lack of support by family were also noted as barriers.

**Implications**

Implications for the major findings in this study are broad. The body of literature with studies on voluntary low-income parent engagement in the infant, toddler and preschool years is largely nonexistent. Where literature does exist, it does not address the importance of community, connection or valued capital. The major findings from this study have implications both for future research and practice.

**Implications for Research**

The existing body of literature often examines effectiveness of a specific program and not recruitment, engagement, and retention of participants for which the program was designed. Major findings of this study bring forth some themes not currently addressed in this literature.

First, the critical connection between community and parent engagement is not specifically discussed. The community plays a tremendous role in supporting families,
but also in the development of trust that families need in order to voluntarily engage in a parenting program. Second, the notion that connections and relationships are the underpinnings of effective engagement and retention is not readily discussed. More often, programs used an evidence-based model that provides specific goals and procedures for program implementation, but neglect to account for the need to develop relationships and connection at the beginning in order to more fully engage parents. The literature on parent engagement does not delve deeply into the real issue of the deficit ideology in engaging parents. While a larger body of literature exists on deficit ideology, it is not specifically tied to this ideology in relationship to parenting programs. With works like those of Payne (2005), assertions about working with low-income families are made, albeit stereotypic and inappropriate, this body of work is not focused on approaches and methods for connecting with families. Lastly, this research study draws attention to the various ways in which parental cultural capital and wealth are valued, an idea that is completely absent from the current body of research on engaging low-income parents in community parenting programs. CCW and Funds of Knowledge work provide the foundation for acknowledging the presence of this knowledge, but there is no connection between the parent capital, knowledge, and wealth of communities in the literature on voluntary parent engagement in the years prior to formal K-12 schooling.

Future research on low-income parent engagement should be focused on the critical role of the community, examining the foundational role the community plays in how low-income parents are likely to engage and remain engaged in parenting programs.
Given the interwoven themes of community, connection, and valuing the capital that families possess, research that examines the interplay of these factors is warranted. Additionally, research that focuses on the connection between parent engagement in the infant, toddler and preschool years and later school engagement that considers the community and the importance of valuing capital should be considered.

Given the complex nature of parent engagement and the humanistic factors that impact this topic, additional research based in qualitative traditions is needed. Development of a true and deep understanding of the multifaceted topic of parent engagement requires a research approach that allows for the parent voice to be heard and provides a research design that seeks to fully explore the topic. What’s more, qualitative research requires a connection with participants, often intimate and relational in nature, sharing details of the lived experience. Based on the strong need for connection with participants described throughout the findings section, qualitative research agendas in which researchers develop relationships with participants will help to ascertain data that will more clearly illustrate the realities of parent engagement. A true depiction and understanding of this knowledge would not be captured in a quantitative study, as the rich, textural description that illustrates the understanding of the lived experiences simply cannot be made without the voices of parents and stakeholders.

**Implications for Practice**

These findings contain information that should inform program providers in all phases of programing: planning, implementation and evaluation. Several key points
emerged that impact the overall experience of parent engagement. While findings are reported as separate themes, it is imperative that the overlap of these findings be considered. Community, connections and relationships, and the way in which capital and knowledge are valued are all interrelated.

When planning and designing programs, providers must develop an understanding of the importance of community and the role it plays in lives of low-income families. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979b) ecological model of human development illustrates the nested environments in which human development occurs: families, communities, and schools. Without consideration of how a community supports and provides resources for families, impacting the development of the child, parenting programs will miss the mark. Not only is it important to develop an understanding of the role that communities play, it is essential that program providers seek to gain understanding of the specific community they plan to engage. A one-size-fits-all approach to communities demonstrates a disregard for the value of the individuals, their experiences, their challenges and strengths, and more importantly, the value of the wealth from within a particular community. Program providers need to seek knowledge about the communities they would like to work with, learning about specific strengths, challenges, resources, and the families within. More than seeking knowledge, it is important to do so by not simply looking into the community, but becoming a part of it, weaving a place within the community. Providers can work together to blend programs and community initiatives, and begin building relationships with people within the community before program
implementation begins. Using community connections to bridge relationships between members of the community and program staff is recommended. If an existing program currently has effective relationships, working to build on those relationships may be helpful. For example, if there is a home visiting program that has been successful in working with families in a particular community, programs should consider working with the home visiting program to make connections and introduce the new program to the community and build on the standing success of an established program. The idea of a community anchor is a way in which new programs may make a connection with the community.

Program planners and providers should include intentional efforts centered on connecting and building relationships with families at the beginning of the program. While many evidence-based programs may focus on goals and program outcomes, consideration of ways to connect with parents on a person-to-person level provides a foundation on which to build parenting programs. Approaching parents in a way that communicates respect and value, not judgment or deficits, should be a primary goal and is essential before other program goals can be achieved. Attention to building connections can occur in many ways, but grounding those efforts within the context of the community is recommended. Finding a trusted person in the community to assist with introductions, advertising, and endorsement is helpful in recruiting parents.

In program planning, even with evidence-based programs with predetermined goals, it is important to incorporate opportunities for parent input and feedback. It is clear
that all parents have accumulated various types of capital. Not only must this capital be valued by program providers, it is imperative that parents be provided opportunities to expend this capital. When given this opportunity, Parents will have more buy-in, be invested, and feel valued. Validating contributions of parents and building on their knowledge of their families and their communities demonstrates providers’ belief in the social and cultural wealth embedded within. Parents feel valued and empowered to better articulate their needs and have a voice in programs designed to support them. Programs that are provided in partnership with parents are more effective than programs designed to be “done” to parents. Equally important is for a program to recognize that every family brings capital to the table; however, the ways in which capital is expended may be different for different families and the ways in which the capital is measured should be individualized. Consideration of the individual challenges and situations of families should help drive individual goals, knowing that for one family, continued attendance may be easy and for another that simply getting out the door to the program may have been a more monumental task.

When planning for evaluation of programing effectiveness, stakeholders should incorporate assessment mechanisms that account for the achievement of smaller individual goals for families. Gauging effort to engage is a factor worth considering. Looking at the capital that families bring and how they utilize that capital may provide information that would assist in developing future programs. Continuous engagement for families may look different in various settings. Evaluation that does not include these
factors may be missing valuable information that impacts engagement and retention in programs.

Although parents demonstrated many examples of the capital they possessed, they appeared to lack a unifying voice which made it difficult to openly articulate their needs. Discussions with parents about resources needed and their perceptions of motivations, barriers, and strengths were more superficial in nature and really just scratched the surface of the topic. However, examples provided, demonstrated a deeper-level understanding of their needs, as indicated by the sharing of information about specific topics that would benefit the community. With this in mind, stakeholders planning parent education programs must not just quickly survey to assess community needs. Development of an emotional connection, built on respectful relationships will allow for deeper examination and opportunities to better assess the community needs. Relational interactions where providers get to know parents with a more meaningful connection will assist stakeholders in understanding the needs of the community as well as the capital families possess. Building further on relationships, utilizing an approach rooted in the community, and acknowledging the village concept of community where the members of the village are valued for their knowledge and beliefs will assist stakeholders in getting to know parents at a level that will allow for more accurate assessment of the needs of parents and families.

Many significant factors impacting parent engagement have emerged from this study, including presentation of recommendations for consideration by stakeholders.
Policy makers, funders, and program providers, however, should not take these as the only suggestions for practice. Given differing program models that vary in format, duration, and goals, stakeholders should utilize the findings on community, connection, and valuing of capital in ways that meet individual needs of their own parenting programs. There is no one-size-fits-all model for programming. Parenting programs need to be built on foundations that incorporate this important knowledge about communities, connection, and valuing family capital. How this translates into practice will look different depending on the community, its members, its needs, resources currently available, and program parameters.

**Conclusion**

Understanding how parents from low-income neighborhoods choose to engage in community parenting programs and whether they remain engaged is indeed complex and impacted by a myriad of factors. This study sought to explore factors that impact parent engagement, identify motivations and barriers for parents, and recognize effective practices for program providers. Further, the study also developed an understanding of how social and cultural capital was characterized by parents and stakeholders. Major findings indicate the community plays an extensive role in the lives of low-income families and is a significant factor in how parents engage. The sense of connection or rapport between parent and stakeholder was perceived to be critical to bringing parents together in a way in which they are drawn to engage and remain engaged in programing. The key piece to this understanding is that all of the major themes are interrelated and
woven together into a unique fabric. Each piece, when considered individually, may impact parent engagement. The role of the community is central and a foundation on which to build relationships. Members within the community work together to care for one another and network to develop support systems. These support systems are based on emotional connections and rapport, often grown out of the community and the way in which families are shaped by the community. Making connections between parents and stakeholders is vital. These relationships, rooted in trust and respect, often grow out of the community. Furthermore, the community can actually serve as a conduit for developing relationships. Important in these relationships is the understanding and acknowledgement of the social and cultural capital that parents possess. This capital is deeply embedded in the knowledge and culture of the community. All of the factors—community, connection and valued capital—are interlaced and work together to support parent engagement. One without the others is weak, but when woven together, provides a powerful foundation on which to build community parenting programs.
REFERENCES


Magdaleno, K. (2013). Recognizing the cultural value students bring to school. Retrieved from: 


APPENDIX A

STAKEHOLDER PHONE/E-MAIL SCRIPT

My name is Jane Glasgow and I am a doctoral student at ODU. I am trying to learn more parent participation in community parenting programs. I am really interested in having the opportunity to talk with people who are instrumental in planning or providing a community parenting program. I was hoping to get some recommendations for folks in your organization that have had a role in ______________program that you offer. I would like to include them in a focus group with others who have been involved in similar programming. I would like to have input from funders, policymakers, and the people who implement the programming. Can you share some names with me? I will also need e-mail addresses or a way to send them a written follow-up letter.

Thank you so much for helping me to make identify people who can help me with this.
Dear ________________________,

My name is Jane Glasgow and I am a doctoral student at ODU. I am trying to learn more parent participation in community parenting programs. I am really interested in having the opportunity to talk with people who are instrumental in planning or providing a community parenting program. I would like you to hear your thoughts and get your input.

I will be holding a focus group meeting at ___________ (address) ___________________ at ___(time)____ for about an hour. There will be 5-6 others there and we will talk in a group. I hope you will be able to join us.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 683-3081.

Thank you for your willingness to help me. I look forward to hearing your thoughts!
APPENDIX C

PARENT PHONE/E-MAIL SCRIPT

Phone:

Hi, my name is Jane Glasgow. I was given your name by __________________________. I am working on a project that will help me learn more about parent engagement in community parenting programs. I would like to see if you might be willing to help me. I am going to be meeting with a group of parents who have young children and have participated in some type of parenting program. We will be meeting for about an hour. I am planning on meeting at ______(time)____ and ___(location)________. Do you think you might be able to join us?

I'll send you (or drop off) a letter with all the details for you. I will also give you a reminder call the day before.

I really appreciate your time and willingness to work with me. If you need to reach me before you get the letter, my phone number is 683-3081.

E-mail:

Hello—

My name is Jane Glasgow. I was given your name by __________________________. I am working on a project that will help me learn more about parent engagement in community parenting programs. I would like to see if you might be willing to help me. I am going to be meeting with a group of parents who have young children and have participated in some type of parenting program. We will be meeting for about an hour. I am planning on meeting at______(time)____ and ____ (location)________. I will send you a written letter as well as a reminder. Please let me know if you will be able to join us.

I really appreciate your time and help with this project.
Dear ____________________,

My name is Jane Glasgow and we spoke over the phone about meeting to talk. I wanted to follow up with you in writing.

I would like to meet with parents, like you, to learn more about parent participation in community parenting programs. You were referred to me by __________________ who mentioned that you might be willing to meet. I am really interested in having the opportunity to talk with parents in the community like you to hear what you have to say.

I will be holding a group meeting at _____________ (address) _____________ at ______(time)____ for about an hour. There will be 5-6 other parents there and we will talk in a group. I hope you will be able to join us. I will have some snacks and drinks at the meeting.

If you have any questions, please give me a call at 683-3081. I will give you a reminder call the day before the meeting!

Thank you for your willingness to help me.

Jane Glasgow
APPENDIX E

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION LETTER

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. My name is Jane Glasgow and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I am trying to learn more about parent participation in community parenting programs. You have been invited today because of your experiences with these kinds of programs. We will be meeting and talking in a small group for this focus group. It is important to me to have the opportunity to talk with stakeholders in the community like you.

The focus group should last about an hour. I will audio record the session so I can listen to it again. After I review the notes from our first meeting, I would like to meet again to go over what we discussed. I’ll contact you again to schedule the second meeting at a time that works for the group.

I will not use your name in any way in the study results. I may use direct quotes from the sessions to make a point, but no real names will be used. Participants are not receiving any benefit from participating in the study. There are no risks in participating and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

My contact information is listed below. You can contact me if you have any other questions or concerns.

Jane Glasgow  jglasgow@odu.edu  683-3081

You can also contact:

Angela Eckhoff  aechhoff@odu.edu  683-6263
APPENDIX F

PARENT FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION LETTER

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. My name is Jane Glasgow and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I am trying to learn more about parent participation in community parenting programs. We will be meeting and talking in a small group for this focus group. It is important to me to have the opportunity to talk with parents in the community like you to hear what they have to say.

The focus group should last about an hour. I will audio record the session so I can listen to it again. After I review the notes from our first meeting, I would like to meet again to go over what we discussed. I’ll contact you again to schedule the second meeting at a time that works for the group.

I will not use your name in any way in the study results. I may use direct quotes from the sessions to make a point, but no real names will be used. Participants are not receiving any benefit from participating in the study. There are no risks in participating and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

My contact information is listed below. You can contact me if you have any other questions or concerns.

Jane Glasgow  jglasgow@odu.edu  683-3081

You can also contact:

Angela Eckhoff  aeckhoff@odu.edu  683-6362
APPENDIX G

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

Moderator introductions

A. You may already know me, but if you don’t, my name is Jane Glasgow. I am a doctoral student at ODU. This is my friend, ________________, who has come to help me by taking notes. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me to talk about parents you may have worked with through your agency or group. I am going to give you an informational letter about this process and my contact information in case you need to contact me later. (TURN ON RECORDER). I would like to audio-record this session so I can make sure to capture all of the valuable comments. Is that OK with you all? All recordings will be kept confidential and only the research team will have access to the tapes. The recording will only be used for analysis of the conversations. No names will be used when the recording is transcribed and no individuals will be identified. We will use direct quotes to emphasize a particular point, but won’t associate names with them.

B. The purpose of this focus group is to gather information from stakeholders that are involved in presenting or hosting some type of community parenting program for parents of children under the age of 5 from low-income areas. This discussion will be used to gather information about parent engagement for a study for my dissertation. Your input and perspectives will help me investigate this experience for parents and allow me to build on the current body of knowledge on parent engagement. Today we will meet and discuss your thoughts on some questions I have to ask you. We will meet again in a few weeks to review the information I collected and ensure I have captured your thoughts and ideas correctly. I really appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group and help me by providing your perspectives.

II. Group Guidelines

A. I want to share the group guidelines with you so we all know what to expect.
1. My job is to ask the questions, I want you to answer them. I will not be doing much of the talking and want to hear from you!
2. While I am talking and listening, ______________ will help by taking notes to help with the review. No names will be recorded.
3. I really want to hear from all the participants and hope that everyone will contribute.
4. Discussion and thoughtful responses are encouraged. Not everyone will agree on every point. That is fine. There is no need for consensus. There are not right or wrong opinions, just different viewpoints.
5. Please only speak one person at a time. Side conversations make it very difficult to capture the main conversation on the recorder.
6. Please be open and honest about your ideas, attitudes, opinions and experiences—we want to hear it all.
7. Lastly, I ask that you respect the confidentiality of all the participants by not discussing, quoting, or sharing comments with anyone outside of the group.

B. Does anyone have any questions about the process? If not, let’s get started!

**Stakeholder Focus Group Questions**

Begin by reading the instructions on the Stakeholder Focus Group Protocol sheet.

**Be sure the recorder is turned on!**

1. You may have been involved in or have heard about community parenting programs like those run by a community agency, church group, or other similar programs. What are the expectations or outcomes you would hope to see by presenting a program like this?

2. As stakeholders for these programs, what do you believe parents might expect to get from attending this type of program? What are the parent expectations or goals in participating in the program?
a. In what ways do you believe that parents benefit from these types of programs?

3. What things do you think would be effective in recruiting parent participants?

4. What motivators or incentives do you think would help encourage participation?

5. In your opinion, what barriers exist in getting parents to participate in these parenting programs?
   a. Are there other factors that you think might keep them from staying engaged and continuing to attend the programs?

6. From your experiences, what things should programs do to foster parent engagement?
   a. What practices do you think are effective in engaging parents?

7. What strengths or skills do you think parents can bring with them that need to be acknowledged in program design?
   a. What knowledge do parents bring with them? Why is that important?

8. What do you think we can learn from these parents that might help us with recruiting, engaging, and retaining parent participation in these programs?

   Is there anything I haven’t asked about that you would like to share with me about this topic?
APPENDIX H

PARENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

III. Introduction (5 minutes)

Moderator introductions

C. My name is Jane Glasgow. I am a doctoral student at ODU. This is my friend, ____________________, who has come to help me by taking notes. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me to talk about a topic I am working on learning more about. I would like to learn more about your thoughts and ideas on how and why parents of young children might decide to participate in parenting programs. Before we start, I will give you this informational letter that tells you more about my project and gives you my contact information. (Pass out letters).

D. (TURN ON RECORDER). I would like to audio-record this session so I can make sure to capture all of the valuable comments. Is that OK with you all? (this will record consent). All recordings will be kept confidential and only the research team will have access to the tapes. The recording will only be used for analysis of the conversations. No names will be used when the recording is transcribed and no individuals will be identified. I might use direct quotes to emphasize a particular point, but won’t associate names with them.

E. The purpose of this focus group is to gather information directly from parents on parent engagement in parenting programs. Specifically, I am looking at how and why parents decide to voluntarily participate in parenting program and what might impact their participation and continuing to stay involved. Your input and perspectives will help me investigate this experience for parents and allow me to build on what we already know. Today we will meet and discuss your thoughts on some questions I have to ask you. I would like meet again in a few weeks to review the information I collected and make sure I have correctly captured your thoughts and ideas. I really appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group and help me by providing your perspectives. Please help yourself to the water and snacks!

IV. Group Guidelines
C. I want to share the group guidelines with you so we all know what to expect.

8. My job is to ask the questions, I want you to answer them. I will not be doing much of the talking and want to hear from you!

9. While I am talking and listening, ______________ will help by taking notes to help with the review. No names will be recorded.

10. I really want to hear from all the participants and hope that everyone will contribute.

11. Any answer you have to share is important. Don’t worry about whether someone else will agree with you. There are not right or wrong opinions, just different viewpoints. Please be open—I really want to hear all of your ideas.

12. Please turn toward the recorder when you are talking so we make sure we can hear everyone’s comments.

13. Please only speak one person at a time. It’s really hard to hear the conversation on the recorder when there are others talking in the background.

14. Lastly, I ask that you not discuss, talk about or share what we’ve talked about with anyone outside of the group. This will help everyone to feel comfortable and will keep the information confidential.

D. Does anyone have any questions about the process? If not, let’s get started!

Parent Focus Group Questions

Begin by reading the instructions on the Parent Focus Group Protocol sheet.

**Be sure the recorder is turned on!!

1. You may have been involved in or have heard about community parenting programs like those run by a community agency, church group, or other programs. What would your goal or someone else’s goal be in attending this type of program?
2. What do you think the people who put on these programs expect that parents will get out of the programs? What do they think parents will get out of attending?

   a. How do you believe they will they benefit?

3. Why do you think that parents would volunteer to participate in such a program?

4. What ideas do you have that would help us recruit families? How do you think other families like you with young children could be reached to find out about the program?

5. What kinds of things do you think would help encourage participation? What could programs do to make it more likely that you would attend a parenting program?

6. In your opinion, what things make it difficult to attend programs like these? What things get in the way for parents like you?

   a. Are there other factors that you think keep you from staying engaged and continuing to attend the programs?

7. From your experiences, what things should programs do to help parents want to attend? What have other programs done that made you want to attend?

   a. What did they do to make you not want to continue attending?
8. Can you think of a time that you chose not to attend a parenting program? What kept you from choosing to attend?

9. As a parent, what strengths do you bring to the table that it would be important for program providers to know about? What can you tell me that would help providers better understand your perspective?

   a. Why is that important?

10. What do you think we can learn from you as the parent that might help us with recruiting, engaging, and retaining parent participation in these programs?

   Is there anything I haven’t asked about that you would like to share with me about this topic?
APPENDIX I

TRANSCRIPTION LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Participant Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center for Families</td>
<td>Stakeholders- Policy Makers, Funders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Family Center</td>
<td>Stakeholders- Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Partners</td>
<td>Stakeholders- Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Who Care</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Place for Children</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Parents, Strong Kids</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX J

### INITIAL CODING STRUCTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Code</th>
<th>Collapsed Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer support/mentoring</td>
<td>Community/Social Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from one another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization/Friendship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community/family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take care of one another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community partnerships/events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend Connection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing and outreach</td>
<td>Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandated Attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early connection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media/technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate needs</td>
<td>Crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis mode/trauma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providers connect resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis/Survival Mode</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Transition from crisis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retain</td>
<td>Effective Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence in recruiting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td>Emotional Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant buy-in/involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real conversations/listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build rapport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage parents/connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program participation limits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material incentives: food, materials,</td>
<td>Extrinsic Motivators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Giveaways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family/home barriers</th>
<th>Family/Home Barriers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support networks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novel opportunity</th>
<th>Intrinsic Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instability</th>
<th>Lifestyle of Poverty</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone instability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing instability/transient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence</th>
<th>Outcomes: Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to be good parent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent as first teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service vs. participatory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life becomes easier</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receptive</th>
<th>Outcomes: Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand the benefit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of parenting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New skills/ strengthen skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage/connect with children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic not valued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t visualize the future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fear, mistrust</th>
<th>Psychological Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Structural Supports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Childcare
Program location
Assistance to attend

Resiliency/strength
Knowledge of their own needs
Understand the problem
Don’t know what to ask for
Efforts not valued
Effort as a strength
Effort in varying levels
Knowledge about their children
Meet them where they are

Valuing What They Bring
## APPENDIX K

### CODEBOOK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of Coded Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Services</td>
<td>Services and resources available in the community</td>
<td>So when it comes to the tangible resources they’re, they’re hard to find at some areas as opposed to other areas. Um, and the way that we deliver services may be – we, we do it all the same –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Factors that negatively impact program participation</td>
<td>Location, too, depending on where is it held –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of</td>
<td>Characteristics of factors that frequently impact low-income</td>
<td>They may not technically be homeless, but they don’t have their own place, they’re staying from place-to-place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impoverished lifestyle</td>
<td>families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/Social Support</td>
<td>The community, the sense of community, role the community</td>
<td>But that’s not what we’re about. You know it’s just anyone from any background as far as your financial situation or socio-economic status it doesn’t’ matter, we all need some help as far as if you’re raising a child it takes, like, you know an old, um, African proverb “It takes a village…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Introduction to families, meeting families, and sharing</td>
<td>Even the simplified version can’t be read so what have to do is I have to physically go and touch you. That’s what I do; I go and I knock on doors. Not just knock on doors, I stand in that front office; not just stand in that front office but I also reach out in my own element.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>information about programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td>Differing Expectations Providers &amp; Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis or situation that has an immediate need</td>
<td>Providers and parents expectations do not align</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Um, some families will say “Oh I need resources for this” or member of the family might say “I just need help.” They’re in a crisis situation or “I just need help.”</td>
<td>We're doing it with you. It's got to meet their need not mine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>Motivation that comes from within the individual without external rewards</td>
<td>So once they see, like, the, the child really getting it — understanding everything like that that they really don’t expect materialistic things any more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment and Devaluing</td>
<td>Opinions of parents, communities, and needs that pass judgment or fails to acknowledge worth or knowledge</td>
<td>Whereas it may be I'm here because of horrendous divorce, I've got my Master's Degree in social work. [Crosstalk.] And I'm working over at social services, right. You know, I mean —. Or, a more typical one is I'm working the night shift at 7/11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator Talk</td>
<td>Questions and comments made by moderator during focus group management</td>
<td>My first question is you may or may not have been involved or heard about community parenting programs like some that are run by different community agencies, by church group or other programs. Have any of you all ever participated in community — any type of community parenting program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Comments that did not relate to the question, side talk, or other information unrelated to the study</td>
<td>But also we're talking about the children. Like I said my oldest, he's 18, and I remember when he was younger he had some ADHD issues and I fought it for the longest time. I was just oh he's just a boy, he'll outgrow it. I went to school and I would watch him and it's like oh he does need some help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes: Confidence</td>
<td>An acquisition of confidence about themselves, parenting skills, or other skills</td>
<td>Right. And it worked so well. They didn't even have to bring the treats. They started using their food stamps to bring the treats...They started owning it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes: Emotional</td>
<td>Outcomes related to the emotion of the participant</td>
<td>I've learned that, um, when dealing with, um, the parents that it's once you get them engaged I mean you see that they just want to be good parents to their kids and they didn't know how.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes: Knowledge</td>
<td>An acquisition of knowledge or new information</td>
<td>A lot of them might want to learn more and so they can help better their life a little bit more and so once they have their child and they teaching that child how to become responsible as an adult and everything, they want the child to be able to take what the parent has learned and put it, focus into their life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Methods</td>
<td>The format of presentation methods</td>
<td>So it's not just like me coming in and saying – I mean if I came in and said okay I'm gonna teach you about blah-blah-blah-blah-blah and I'm gonna lecture you for an hour –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider Knowledge of the Community</td>
<td>Provider’s understanding of the needs of the community and realities of the daily life for families</td>
<td>Exactly and I mean it is hard. Some of us grow up with single parent where it’s the mother or the father and you just can’t make ends meet, especially if one of the parents is not pulling their weight like they should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Barriers</td>
<td>Barriers to participation based on emotional or internal factors with participants</td>
<td>The stigma of a program coming into your home is like indicative of you needing some type of help. You know, people have pride and, um, you know, they want to be respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting the Community</td>
<td>Provider’s respect for the community and members in community</td>
<td>I say respect their communities, you know, respect their homes. Don’t have your nose turned up just because it’s the, um, just because you see a little bug crawling, little roach or something, don’t be all animated and stuff like that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Supports</td>
<td>External factors that support engagement</td>
<td>Transportation is huge, huge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic and Content for Parenting Programs</td>
<td>Suggestions for program topics or content</td>
<td>Not only that, but we’re living in a world of technology. Just going back to the basics with the building blocks and construction paper and Play-Doh and things like that is something that’s very important especially with developing motor skills and independence with the children as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing What They Bring</td>
<td>Acknowledging the worth of information, capital, or ideas that parents possess</td>
<td>Exactly. Intentional or not, and most of the time it’s not, but it means that that person does not understand their audience to whom they’re talking to make it relevant to your needs. As you said that person getting a job had a different reason that your needing to get a job so it makes it look like well I don’t fit in to this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
because –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valuing What They Bring:</th>
<th>Acknowledging the value of the efforts to overcome adversity, crisis, and trauma</th>
<th>Here's the one thing I've learned in my work is this with parents, every parent wants exactly the same thing, whether or not it's Bill Gates' wife or whether or not it's someone who lives in XXX. The difference is the barriers and challenges they face to get there. And so the dreams and desires, you know, that you just articulated, it's the same, there's nothing changes.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>Acknowledging the value of the effort expended to meet goals or participate in new activities</td>
<td>That's right, that's right, because a lot of times, um, you really don't know how hard it is to even get somebody to get out of the door.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing What They Bring:</td>
<td>Acknowledging the individual differences and needs of parents</td>
<td>No I'm not just saying that – I mean like what I'm saying is like when you go to a program – for example my daughter's in fifth-grade. If I go to a program I'm not really looking for information about how to help and deal with and parent –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Individual Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

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EDUCATION

2014 Doctorate of Philosophy, Early Childhood Education
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

1993 Master of Science in Early Childhood Education
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

1988 Bachelor of Science, Elementary Education (NK-4) and Special Education (ED)
Longwood University, Farmville, VA

EXPERIENCE

2009- Present Director, Children’s Learning and Research Center
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

2007-2009 Director, Child Development Lab
Tidewater Community College, Virginia Beach, VA

2007-2009 Adjunct Instructor, Early Childhood Development
Tidewater Community College, Virginia Beach, VA

1988-1998 Early Childhood Classroom Teacher
Chesapeake Public Schools, Chesapeake, VA
Pre-K Express, Kindergarten, Developmental First and First Grade

Presentations


Glasgow, J. E. & Snyder, J.D. (April, 2011). Surviving the first year as a director. National Coalition for Campus Children’s Centers Conference. La Jolla, CA.


Glasgow, J. E. (March, 2009). From worthless worksheets to marvelous manipulatives. Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education State Conference. Richmond, VA.


Grants


Glasgow, J. E. (PI) & Eckhoff, A. E. (Co-PI). (10/1/12- 10/1/13). Hampton Roads Community