

THE IMPORTANCE OF FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE ON
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED RURAL
EUROPEAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

The identification and utilization of community funds of knowledge has been essential in understanding and assisting cultural groups to bridge the achievement gap. The purpose of this study was to examine the community funds of knowledge, the role of the parent, and the partnerships of a rural school in southeastern *Appalachia*, United States. Qualitative research enabled exploration of interactions between parents and teachers, roles parents play in the educational process, and teachers' use of existing funds of knowledge in the provision of educational services to young at-risk children. Two pre-kindergarten teachers and four families were involved in the study from the 2009 -2010 state pre-kindergarten program.

The data from ethnographic semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents were coded, categorized, and identified by themes. Results indicated that the school functioned as connector between the community and its residents. Teachers were cognizant of the community funds of knowledge and utilized this knowledge in their teaching and assessment practices. The teachers gained cultural literacy through participation and observation of school and community events and interactions. As a result of having only one mid-year conference report, there was limited evidence to conclude the teachers' documentation of students' community funds of knowledge within the context of the select community.

Although teachers engaged in practices that strengthened family involvement, the home-school partnerships could be enriched. Families informally partnered by teaching foundational skills at home. The recognized partnership began when the children enrolled in school with

families engaging in volunteering, extending learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the school community.

An added outcome was the relationship between the community and the school. The relationship was reciprocal with positive outcomes for community members, businesses, teachers, and students, and families. This partnership is unique and dates back to the establishment of the community with special emphasis given to the character and values of the local residents.

Additional research can focus on the communication of educational standards prior to entering school and increasing the participation of marginalized populations. Teacher perceptions of student backgrounds can also be reviewed in light of their effect on the quality of school-family partnerships.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the person who inspired me to look for the ring at the end of the yellow brick road.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The process of formal learning includes many factors; among them are the involvement of teachers, parents, administrators, systems, and students. While standards established by politicians, educators, and those who blend the two vocations suggest that all learners can achieve the same results, empirical evidence teaches a different lesson. Many factors that are outside the control of teachers, students, and the students' families significantly impact the grades made by particular students. While countless studies (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Hart & Risley, 1995; Neuman & Celano, 2006; Qi, Kaiser, Milan, & Hancock, 2006; Roberts, Jurgens & Burchinal, 2005; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Stipek & Ryan, 1997) have looked at performance among minority groups, especially African American and Hispanic cultures, very little research has focused on *European Americans* of limited financial means. This population is often classified as being at-risk for entering special education.

Since the institutionalization of education as a formal and structured pursuit aimed at developing the whole person, a tacit acknowledgement of its overriding outcome has been upward social mobility. We are taught that if you take full advantage of the opportunity to learn, you can unlock the door that leads to success. However, study after study (Bempechat, 1992; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Bradley et al., 2001; Evans, 2004; Farah et al., 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008; Stipek & Ryan, 1997) shows that the ability to absorb the lessons we learn in school is directly correlated with the socioeconomic status (SES) and cultural background of the learner's family. America's great commoner, William Jennings Bryan in *The White Man's Burden* (as

cited in Gorski & EdChange, 2009) even deified the school of thought that says education is the right instrument to equalize opportunity across all social strata. He said

Education comes first, and in nothing have the United States and England been more clearly helpful than in the advocacy of universal education. If the designs of God are disclosed by his handiwork, then the creation of the human mind is . . . proof that the Almighty never intended that learning should be monopolized by a few (para.14)

While great strides have been made since Bryan's speech to guarantee access and success in educational opportunities, it is undeniable that there is a marked difference in the achievement of children from monetarily privileged backgrounds than from those of lesser economic means (Farkas & Beron, 2004; Hart & Risley, 1995; Qi, Kaiser, Milan, & Hancock, 2006). Standards are efforts that help us measure each learner in what the learner should know and achieve against the whole body of students (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). However, failure to adapt the standards and teaching methods that for students from widely divergent SES backgrounds will most likely leave another generation of teachers, students, and by extension, communities reeling from the after-effects of expending great personal and institutional effort to gain only meager results (Darder, 1991).

To study how poverty affects a student's ability to learn, it is first necessary to understand childhood development. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model measures children's interaction within four codependent systems. In the microsystem, the individual interacts with his or her immediate environment. The mesosystem measures an individual's reaction with family, school, and peers. When the mesosystem is expanded to include the community and its information outlets, Bronfenbrenner uses the term exosystem to explain the interactions. Finally, these relationships combine with legal, political, social, and economic landscapes that he refers to as the macrosystem. Systemically, children who come from families within a higher SES

class consistently perform better as actors and active learners within Bronfenbrenner's (1977) model.

This is further amplified by the work of Vygotsky (1978) who believed that the foundations of learning are as likely to have been gained in the playpen as at the school desk. Early development in the home environment is the foundation of learning. The development that he believes is essential does not begin on the first day of school. From infancy, a parent acts in the first formal role of teacher. Each new skill and concept that is mastered forms an integral foundation that culminates in the transition from the parent as a teacher to the formal classroom. In fact, the most notable change from the parent as a teacher to the formal classroom is in the way success is measured. Once education becomes formal, the attainment of a learning objective is standardized and evaluation against peers replaces parental approval and affirmation. For this to be an effective transition the influences in a child's micro and mesosystems must fully understand the expectations of a school and their role in helping to achieve these objectives (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

From the first concept a child learns to the end of his or her educational career, it is necessary that the child look to a teacher to introduce new ideas, practice their implementation, and reinforce their utility in real life. Because formal education requires many different actors to play the role of teacher, it becomes even more important for the parent to be engaged in the overall educational experience. Ultimately, the parent will serve in the role of anchoring the lessons learned from the teacher thereby enhancing a child's educational performance, especially if the instruction that the child receives is culturally responsive (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007). In other words, if the parent understands and relates to what the teacher teaches, the chances of educational success are multiplied. The child becomes either a victim or victor of his

or her entire educational environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978). This manner of examining the role of parents in the education of young children goes beyond the traditional ways in which parental participation is understood within the Individualized Educational Plan process.

Statement of the Problem

Traditional American education all too often neglects the *sociocultural* influences that are the foundations of adequate and successful early child development, which constitute important building blocks for future learning and ultimately academic success (Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 1999; Polakow, 1993). Poverty, in cycles and across generations, can neuter the intent of educators to help learners achieve measureable success. Poverty is viewed by those writing the standards as a disease that can be treated by remediation and high stakes assessment. The teacher's knowledge of an *economically disadvantaged* student, often classified as *at-risk*, fails to recognize that arrested academic development skews the ability of a student to relate given academic standards to anything within his or her exosystem (Polakow, 1993). In extreme cases these teacher behaviors dangerously reduce the essential two way communication that is necessary to fill the gap between the divergent world views of teacher and those of the children. Of those children at-risk, poor rural white students have the fewest *best practices* (International Council of Archives, 2008) designed for them. Teachers often fail to absorb the *community funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992) and take advantage of the opportunity presented by a strong bond between the school and the culture of the community it serves. While community funds of knowledge include the traditional resources available through existing community and social networks, typically known as *social capital*, the shared experiences and entire evolutionary development of the caregivers are also part of this concept (Moll et al., 1992; Horvat, Weininger,

& Lareau, 2003; Schlee, Mullis, & Shriner, 2009). Parents may fail to recognize the vital importance of their consistent involvement in the education of their child and its influence on their child's education. These current deficiencies between teacher and parents in terms of the relationships that they form hamper classroom performance for the affected children.

Classroom performance is graded on a set of guidelines established by both federal and state departments of education that are collectively known as standards. The benchmarks that children are expected to meet by a predetermined age and grade level within a structured curriculum defines standards based education (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education (1997) urged that standards for all children should be challenging and clear. Their rationale for a standards approach to education rests on the evidence that students will have a better educational outcome through the improvement in the cohesion of curriculums and instruction. Some scholars believe the logic of this approach is flawed. In addition, the standards guide professionals and systems to establish specific measureable benchmarks and constantly monitor their attainment of these goals. This system helps parents to clearly understand what expectations they should have from their child's school experience. Also, standards allow systems to monitor their results and let the bodies that govern each system intervene if consistent failure is shown on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Standards at the *pre-kindergarten* level have created a tension (Gill & Winters, 2006; Wesley & Buysse, 2003) between teachers and those who write and impose standards. Traditionally, according to Gill and Winters (2006) pre-kindergarten education, where available, was a localized transitional program that relied heavily on system-specific goals for school readiness. With the need for attainment of objectives from the first formal educational experiences, and the cumulative acquisition of new knowledge that could be expected to be

present in every system at specific ages, the necessity of standardizing curriculum and teaching methods at the pre-kindergarten level became essential (Gill & Winters, 2006). Combining concepts from Bronfenbrenner's (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) specific strategic theories for pre-kindergarten programs became part of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB, 2002). Efforts to intensify and formalize these educational experiences were both controversial and, by virtue of their controversy, judged difficult to implement across varying systems. For several generations existing community funds of knowledge and local traditions (Gill & Winters, 2006) were the only widely used tools for curriculum design. NCLB made, through broad powers and expectations (Noguera, 2003), localized instruction at the pre-kindergarten level systemically untenable. While the tension was recognized, rather than the absence of standards at the pre-kindergarten level, curriculum development was carefully based on the premise that certain educational objectives were essential. Age-appropriateness was both assured and proven through successful attainment across many school systems. Teachers, though initially resistant to these standards (Goldstein, 2008), have found that by expanding their existing funds of knowledge to account for and fully integrate these standards in their classrooms, students have benefited from their implementation (Gill & Winters, 2006; Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007).

Standards and best practices (Darder, 1991) are typically measured at the developmental level of the *middle class*. Darder (1991) stated that there is a danger of failure if those writing the standards are out of touch with the students who most need to absorb the curriculum and accumulate specific intellectual skills at different age and grade levels. When development is considered as an integral part of learning, and because we wish to achieve true academic success for all learners, it is essential that community funds of knowledge be examined as the lynch pin

of what educators do (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Recognizing the effect that poverty has on development and learning will not change the motive of education. However, it does require that the means by which it is delivered be altered. Vygotsky (1978) stated that the ideal classroom is a haven where the learner can securely absorb new knowledge and skills in a way that is within the scope of his or her ability to integrate them into his or her lived experiences and social landscape. The reality is that standards must be relevant to the learner before they are attainable.

Purpose of the Study

There is evidence in early childhood development from a standards and research based perspective that there is a disconnect between what children should know coming into school and their actual school readiness. This disconnect places the children at-risk for over identification in special education. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify and analyze existing community funds of knowledge and how they are incorporated into the strategies and methods of educational standards achievement by pre-kindergarten teachers of economically disadvantaged rural European American students in a typical working-class community in the southeastern United States. Additionally, how parents view both their role as the primary educator and their partnership with the teacher and system were analyzed; careful attention was given to the parents' preconceived ideas of the pre-kindergarten program and how those ideas might have changed through the course of the school year. This study was guided by the hypothesis that the true power of an education is found in its ability to bridge the gap between where a child starts and where new knowledge can take him or her. This power can best be harnessed if the educator, the community he or she serves, and the policies that drive systemic performance are all in accord (Goldstein, 2008). Standards that are established are built on a foundation that

recognizes the developmental maturity of the students that these standards will serve. This means that systems and communities must expand both their funds of knowledge while enhancing parents' understanding of standards based education to affect the best outcomes for every student (Buchanan & Burts, 2007; Goldstein, 2008).

The pre-kindergarten student is at the juncture of development as a natural outgrowth of his or her family environment and the introduction of the formal classroom as a new social context for learning. Analysis of the partnership between teachers and parents is imperative because the implementation of standards outside the control of local systems forces the integration of existing community funds of knowledge into a wider set of necessary and mandated standards. This forced implementation dictates that a new and codified set of objectives must be communicated effectively as standardized expectations. The study analyzed the how parents of economically disadvantaged European American rural pre- kindergarten students monitored their own understanding of how the establishment of standards impacted their child's documentable performance and summative progress. Thus, the study begins to fill in the gap in our understanding of the impact of standards on economically disadvantaged rural European American students, their particular challenges and 'best practices' that can be considered alongside those of other groups when designing instruction and implementing standards.

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to explore the problem presented by deficiencies in the partnership between parents, teachers, and communities of economically disadvantaged rural European American students:

1. How do teachers integrate and synthesize existing community funds of knowledge into instructional design for children in this study;
2. What role do parents currently play in formally partnering with teachers and their child's school to enhance educational attainment;
3. In what ways are existing community funds of knowledge reflected in the pre-kindergarten child assessment report on mastery of pre-kindergarten standards; and
4. In what ways are existing community funds of knowledge reflected in the school and community partnership?

Importance of the Study

Much of the current research (Delpit, 2006; Heath, 1983; Kozol, 1991; Moll et al., 1992; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007) has focused almost exclusively on strategies for combating the deficiency of economically disadvantaged minority students. There is, however, little research on understanding the forces detrimental to classroom success of economically disadvantaged rural European American students (Purcell-Gates, 1995). This study will give teachers a tool to expand their integration of how community funds of knowledge can be utilized to enhance the educational opportunities of this group. By strengthening the quality of interactions between parents and teachers, this study will contribute to the literature on the relationship between the community and the school for this particular social group. By closing the gap between parent, teacher, and community additional analysis of community funds of knowledge were extended to include economically disadvantaged rural European American students. This new information will have implications not only for the group under study, but for future researchers this study

adds a new dimension to our understanding of how culture, class, ethnicity, and the integration of community-specific funds of knowledge impact a child's learning.

Scope of the Study

The study involved a school in a rural area in southeastern *Appalachia*, United States. Historically, this region has been characterized by poverty, low educational attainment, economic distress, unemployment, disease, population emmigration, and a lack of cultural diversity (Pollard, 2003). The county in which the community is located has a population of approximately 53,000; 94% are white and of the remaining 6% are Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. These numbers reflect race and not Hispanic origin. Hispanic origin is documented separately. Being a rural area, there are 124 inhabitants per square mile. Forty-eight percent of the students are participants in the *free and reduced lunch program* (United States Census Bureau, 2008). The participants were drawn from parents and teachers of four and five year old boys and girls in a pre-kindergarten program of Title I school.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will be incorporated to ensure consistency and understanding throughout the study.

Appalachia - the region surrounding the Appalachian mountain system, covering thirteen states (New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi) and 410 counties as noted in the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965.

Best Practices - techniques or methodologies that, through experience and research, have proven to lead to desired results (International Council of Archives, 2008).

Community Funds of Knowledge (Funds of Knowledge) – information that the child brings from home, considered essential for household and individual functioning and well-being; derived from shared experiences and evolutionary development of a larger community that the care-givers share (Moll et al., 1992).

Economically Disadvantaged (at-risk)– broad term for poverty, generally referring to a lower *income* background that lacks some of the basic necessities of life; refers to students who qualify to participate in the Free Lunch Program under the National School Lunch Act (Georgia: 2009 EdFacts State Profile, 2009).

European American - Caucasian Americans whose families are of European descent for several generations.

Free and Reduced Lunch Program - a federally mandated program that requires schools to provide nationally balanced meals at a low cost or free of charge depending on need (Federal Register, 2009).

Income - the money received by an individual when considered as a total before any deductions, such as income taxes, Social Security taxes, and / or insurance premiums. Income can include wages, salary, commissions, fees, Social Security payments, dividends, interest, net rental income, public assistance, welfare payments, unemployment compensation, retirement, pensions, net royalties, net income from self-employment, and any other cash income (Federal Register, 2009).

Middle Class - the SES class between the working class and upper class that includes, but is not limited to, professionals, highly skilled workers, and lower and middle management; often measureable by income.

Parent - the person within the microsystem of the child responsible for meeting the basic needs of the child; recognized as the first educator of the child.

Poverty - the threshold below which families or individuals are considered to be lacking the resources to meet the basic needs for healthy living (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Pre-kindergarten (Pre-K, PK) - the first formal academic learning program funded fully or partially by state educational agencies, to provide experiences that will develop cognitive and social skills (Clifford et al., 2005).

Social Capital –the material and immaterial resources that individuals and families are able to access through their social ties including participation in the community, proactivity in a social context, and having feelings of trust/safety (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Onyx & Bullen, 2000)

Sociocultural - in the development of knowledge, the interdependence between an individual and society that involve community funds of knowledge (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Socioeconomic (SES) - measurement of the relationship between economic and social position; items considered are educational level, occupations, and incomes of both parents (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007).

Standards (Performance Standards) - established guidelines meant to provide clear expectations for instruction, assessment, and student work; the guidelines attempt to isolate and identify the skills needed to use knowledge to problem-solve, reason, communicate, and assimilate with information; the guidelines are developed by governing bodies and communicated to schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

Title I - the largest federally funded program for schools in high poverty areas that targets students who are academically behind or at-risk for academically falling behind; all funding is based on the number of low-income students as indicated on the eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program; these funds are a supplement to state and area funds; implementation of Title I was a massive change in the way policy makers viewed the effects of community income on school outcomes (United States General Accounting Office, 2002).

Researcher Positionality

My background and personal experiences have shaped my beliefs, choices, and interpretation of the world around me (Etherington, 2004). I grew up in a middle class European American family with five siblings which afforded me many unique opportunities for life experiences. One experience was religion. My parents involved me in church throughout my formative years. As a young adult, I chose my involvement in religion and my affiliation has been a factor in my decision making process. My belief is there is a plan for me to capitalize on my strengths to benefit others. Watching my parents teach at the local high school and interact with their students peaked my interest in the educational field. My parents' philosophies, values, and ethics influenced and inspired me to enter the field of education. However, I did not follow directly in my parents' footsteps. Instead, I chose to be a different player in the educational process; I chose speech language pathologist.

When I first entered speech language pathology, I viewed the identification of a child as "normal" or "delayed" within the areas of articulation, language, voice, and fluency. As I have gained more experience and knowledge the "normal" or "delayed" identification is now a much intricate and complex process that involves many facets that I had not previously considered. As such, I have increased my ability to consider the whole child as I assess his or her cultural

upbringing and functioning in the educational setting, the home environment, tested skills, and the everyday skills.

At the initiation of this research, I had six years of teaching in rural settings that were comprised largely of European American populations. Of those six years, five years were at the target school. During the research project, I was an active participant in the community by partaking in local events, shopping, dining, and performing many civic duties. Presently, I have relocated to a metropolitan area as a speech language pathologist. My present school system is extremely diverse in culture, language, and ethnicity. With such a varied and assorted school community, I have been able to enhance my skills as a practitioner in speech language pathology and expand and develop my interpretation and assessment of the world around me.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study took place in a region with a universal pre-kindergarten program. The study focused on the families and teachers from Appalachia participating in the universal pre-kindergarten program. Within this population, low-income families were targeted since their children were more likely to be identified as at-risk of not being ready or able to be successful in school when compared to their middle and upper class peers and/or at-risk of being identified for placement in special education (Polakow, 1993).

The willingness of key individuals to actively participate in the study is its major limitation. A second limitation is that all analyses, interpretations, and reporting were completed by the researcher. Marshall and Rossman (2006) specifically caution that when a researcher is both reporting and interpreting, analysis can lead to possible cultural misinterpretation or skewed interpretations. To lessen the impact of this limitation posed by Marshall and Rossman (2006) a

variety of sources, such as archived data and observations within the school and community, were used to validate the analyses and interpretations

Summary

Existing research in the field of pre-kindergarten *standards* overlooks the needs and limitations of economically disadvantaged rural European Americans, most especially in the area of classroom teachers' understanding of how these children's community landscape has affected their development and readiness to transition to a formal classroom. Parents in this community often fail to adequately prepare the child for school because of the disconnect in their perception of their role in teaching the child. This study provides valuable data on communication between economically disadvantaged rural European American parents and their children's teachers in the context of each one's understanding of documentable and summative progress. The areas for enhanced relevancy include helping parents understand how to better prepare their child for success in the classroom. Alternately, it highlights the need for teachers to increase their understanding of the community and familial relationships as an integral factor in the child's ability to learn in the classroom setting. The critical pre-kindergarten to kindergarten is the transition point where these new funds of knowledge and tools for communication increase the likelihood of academic success throughout the child's school years. This foundation can ultimately be incorporated as part of the guidelines for school system improvement planning.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of relevant research relating to home environment, parental involvement, cultural differences, lower SES status, and school success. The underlying theoretical framework is based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of zone of proximal development and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory. Next, research on the relationship of the home environment, school readiness, and future school success is presented. This is followed by barriers to school success for students from economically disadvantaged families. The last area addressed is bridging the cultural differences from the home and school.

The literature review includes an examination of scholarly books, journals, and online documents. Peer-reviewed journals were obtained through a search of electronic databases and then examined. The relevant key words in this review include Appalachia, child development and poverty, community funds of knowledge, cultural responsiveness, ecological systems theory, economically disadvantaged, kindergarten readiness, maternal sensitivity, parent-teacher conferences, school achievement, sociocultural, SES status, standards based education, vocabulary development, parent interaction, and zone of proximal development. The accumulation of these documents provides the basis for this study.

Theoretical Framework

Following Vygotsky's (1978) theory of zone of proximal development to its logical end, there is a natural intersection between his work and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecology systems of human development. It is within these developmental and systemic areas where community funds of knowledge would be born, expanded, and limited for teachers, parents, and students.

For teachers of economically disadvantaged students, the integration of standards applied to their classrooms must first be understood to be written for middle-class European Americans (Darder, 1991). This likelihood brings a new urgency to the task of fully understanding the existing community funds of knowledge and how they might be used as a tool for reaching students, by extension parents, whose micro and mesosystems may not include the same social networks led to these age-appropriate curriculum standards. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories explain the disconnect between home and school cultures. Because the home environment is the foundational educational experience (Vygotsky, 1978), and the introduction of the formal classroom forces a new developmental area, teachers of lower SES students must begin their conversation with these parents at a point that can be clearly understood from the funds of knowledge of the parent.

Zone of Proximal Development

The distance between what the student can perform independently and what the student can perform with adult assistance is Vygotsky (1978) definition of the zone of proximal development.

Ecology of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecology of human development is a multi-level system of interactions within the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

Community Funds of Knowledge

According to Moll et al. (1992) community funds of knowledge is the information that a child brings from home to school and is essential for household and individual functioning and well-being. This vital knowledge is derived from shared experiences and evolutionary development of a larger community that the care-givers share (Moll et al., 1992).

Social capital is a cumulative and ongoing resource wherein financial and existing community resources are limited by the current means of parents and other caregivers (Schlee et al., 2009). In the same light, financial resources, especially as they relate to the acquisition and integration of educational materials and experiences, must be understood by teachers and the professionals writing the standards (Schlee et al., 2009). In lower SES communities, social, financial, and human resources, as they currently exist, become a starting point for the formal introduction of new educational experiences that are written for, and more easily achieved by, those of higher SES. Vygotsky's (1978) theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) systems suggest that teachers begin by understanding the prior educational development and microsystem of lower SES students. Research from Horvat et al. (2003) indicates there is a difference in the social capital or networks of middle class families as compared to that of low-income families. Due to participation in various and assorted activities, middle class families have more connections to social networks and exposure to informal contacts. Informal contacts consist of professionals such as educators. In comparison, low income families social networks are limited to kinship group participation rather than interactions outside the family. Low-income families rely on extended family for support regarding childcare, financial assistance, and transportation. Also, relationships with professionals that could educationally benefit the children of low-income families are less likely to transpire.

In light of the limited resources available to these parents, the need for teachers to establish a reciprocal partnership is important. Teachers gain understanding about a family's funds of knowledge and integrate that into the classroom while recommending culturally appropriate practices (Buchanan & Burts, 2007) that can be implemented within the family's current capital means (Moll et al., 1992).

Ultimately, the difference between the home-school cultures will be explored as well as the current recommended practices for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds for closing the achievement gap will be studied. Practices include increasing community funds of knowledge, integration of teachers into the communities they serve, the addition of liaisons, and recognition that standards must be achieved in spite of these obstacles are important steps toward bridging home and school cultures.

Home Environment

Education begins at birth. From the first sounds that an infant hears to connecting those sounds to objects they signify, learning becomes a life long process. In fact, in the span of a lifetime, the formal instructional time set aside for standardized learning is comparatively short. However, many experts in the field of education agree that there is a direct relationship between development in the early years between birth and school and success in school (Bempechat, 1992; Bergen, 2008; Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001; Davis-Kean, 2005; Mistry, Biesand, Chien, Howes & Benner, 2008). Also, evidence shows that parents below the *poverty* line are less likely to be able to provide the cognitive and social home environment conducive to learning (Bempechat, 1992; Bradley et al., 2001; Evans, 2004; Farah et al., 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008; Stipek & Ryan, 1997). Bradley and Corwyn (2002) found that poor families are not able to provide their children with items, ideas, social connections, and attitudes that would stimulate the ability to absorb academic material.

One of the major deficiencies Ramey and Ramey (2004) and Lott (2001) noted in the economically disadvantaged home is time. Accordingly, it is important for parents to engage one on one with their children. From bedtime stories to watching television, sharing stories about the day's activities, or even household chores, the crucial element in each activity is that parental

time is required (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Mapp, 2009). Very often in low-income homes the parent is working and /or going to school far more hours than in a middle class home. This time constraint results in less involvement by the parent with the child (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Lott, 2001; Weiss et al., 2003). While there is little argument that work is necessary to meet the basic sustenance needs, there is broad agreement that far greater investments of time would need to be made to catch the child up to the appropriate level of cognitive development (Bempechat, 1992; Hart & Risley, 1995, 1999; Nelson, 2004; Ramey & Ramey, 2004).

Along with time, the SES of a family is a determining factor in the kinds of educational experiences to which a pre-schooler is exposed (Farah et al., 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008; Stipek & Ryan, 1997). For toddlers, a trip to the supermarket is important for more reasons than just buying food. The trip presents an opportunity for the toddler to have interaction with the community around them and provides a teachable moment for the parent (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Researchers (Evans, 2004; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Neuman & Celano, 2006; Weiss et al., 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2003) have stated there is a noticeable difference in the richness of interactions between middle class families and lower SES families. Typically, according to Evans (2004) the lower SES interactions are less responsive, less vocalized, and fraught with limited cognitive stimulation. Thereby, these factors tend to result in a loss of interaction for educational purposes in the lower SES families (Evans, 2004).

Socioeconomic status has also shown a marked difference in the maternal sensitivity factor (Evans, 2004). According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Childcare Research Network, 2005) lower SES status, most especially over several generations, leads to less measureable warmth and affection between mother and child. From vocabulary to

numeracy, to the ability to comprehend and retain new information, there is a correlation between the emotional interactions of mothers and children. The more sensitivity shown by the mother (Neuman & Celano, 2006) the more likely the child is to be able to learn concepts, especially those concepts which are harder to master because they require more knowledge and the acquisition of new skills. Harder concepts require more false starts and mistakes. Bradley et al. (2001) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Childcare Research Network (2005) state that maternal sensitivity is a great buffer for the struggle that comes from grappling with difficult academic concepts. Maternal sensitivity (Mistry et al., 2008) is also called maternal supportiveness and it measures three areas that include cognitive stimulation, positive regard, and sensitivity. It can be measured as early as 14 months; however, it begins far earlier than that. Mistry et al. (2008) states the 14-month threshold is used as a measurement because results can be qualified with feedback from the child at this age. To measure sensitivity, the response between parent and child is observed during times when the child is speaking. The measurement is of the interactions between parent and child. According to Mistry et al. (2008), cognitive stimulation is how the parent and child share interaction with toys, objects, and their immediate environment. Using these objects as opportunities for learning, times of explanation and the vocal interaction are observed. Furthermore, Mistry et al. (2008) states positive regard is a measure of the enjoyment that the parent expresses during time spent with his or her child. The praise the parent offers for completed tasks, conversation about new areas of development, and the maternal expression of affection are all considered when measuring positive regard. Maternal sensitivity (Mistry et al., 2008; Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005) is an important; some would say integral, part of the learning process for a child. In all three areas of measurement, mothers with a lower SES were less likely to

effectively use time, objects, and communication to stimulate the development of the child. This means that another critical benchmark is undermined because of a lower SES (Mistry et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2005; Rush, 1999).

Maternal sensitivity is shown to affect almost every area of development. One of the most observable effects is on the vocabulary of the child (Roberts et al., 2005). Where maternal sensitivity is highest, in middle class families, Hart and Risley (1999) observe parents holding the attention of their infants with highly vocalized and overstressed syllables to form simple words. As words begin to be understood, thus becoming learned vocabulary, less stress is placed on each syllable, while more attention is paid to pronunciation and proper usage. Once the child masters the word and its correct pronunciation context is often introduced as a natural progression in the learning process.

There is also, in this middle class group, more responsiveness to the child's attempt to use new vocabulary. Responsiveness, especially positive praise, emboldens the child and makes them willing to use the new vocabulary words in ever-increasing groups that will eventually form rudimentary sentences. Even if the word is mispronounced or misapplied, the child is praised for his or her attempted usage and context while corrected pronunciation is offered by the parent. Along with this correction of context and sound, there are positive responses for the completed task of learning a new word (Hart & Risley, 1999).

This is in direct contrast to the likelihood of the lower SES parent, especially the mother, to engage in this kind of vocabulary building. It is important to note that this sensitivity is missing in all three areas used to measure maternal supportiveness. The cognitive stimulation of relating an object to its name is less likely to occur. Positive regard is not as often observed as a reward and sign of affection when the child attempts to incorporate the new word. The

sensitivity of responding to vocalization, while correcting context and pronunciation, are not as often observed between mother and child in a lower SES family unit (Mistry et al., 2008; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Childcare Research Network, 2005). The reasons for this lack of maternal sensitivity will be examined in light of the larger home and macrosystem environment. However, the effects on development, and by extension school readiness, are measurable and pronounced. The deficiencies created by lower maternal sensitivity are difficult to overcome and a precursor of academic struggles.

Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2004) studied mother-child and father-child interaction during semi-structured free play with low-income families of two and three year-olds. Mothers and fathers had similar scores on various characteristics of parenting (sensitivity, positive regard, and cognitive stimulation, intrusiveness, detachment, and negative regard). Parents displayed higher scores in the areas of sensitivity, positive regard, and cognitive stimulation. Supportive parenting and level of education among mothers and fathers influences language and cognitive development for children. Fathers can have a positive effect on a child's development. This was demonstrated through the quality of the interactions observed during the study.

The interactions between a father and child are influenced by the economic situation of the family. According to Harris and Marmer (1996), paternal involvement among low-income families is lower in comparison to other income levels. When fathers are actively involved, there is emotional interaction. This emotional involvement with the child decreases delinquent behaviors among low-income families. Overall, the father's involvement is related to the emotional well-being of the child.

While the relationship between mother and child, including their measurable interactions, are an integral part of development (Mistry et al., 2008), the home environment is an even larger

microcosm where learning takes place (Neuman & Celano, 2006). The home environment is more than just the physical environment where a child lives although the physical attributes will be shown to affect development; home environment is also the complex and social familial interactions between the child and his family members on an ongoing basis (Melhuish et al., 2008). By extension of family members, one's circle of friends, influences, such as religion and cultural factors, and modes of living are considered part of this environment (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Horvat et al., 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). One of the most important points to remember in discussing the home environment as stated by Bradley et al. (2001) and Neuman and Celano, (2006) is that the home is the first classroom where a child is consistently educated. Melhuish et al. (2008) agrees with these researchers that the creation of a nurturing and stimulative environment for learning is an intentional action taken by the care givers. While it is more commonly associated with middle class homes, families in a lower SES can create an environment conducive to adequate development (Davis-Kean, 2005; Melhuish et al., 2008; Neuman & Celano, 2006).

One of the factors that make the home environment conducive to the learning process is how often a parent reads to a child. SES makes a difference in this activity on at least two measureable levels (Melhuish et al., 2008). First is the means to purchase and own books. Repetitive reading of the same book, owned by the family, is an important part of visualizing and later reading specific words. Remember that many of the new vocabulary words have been related in earlier interactions between parent and child. They have been incorporated, defined, contextualized, and properly pronounced. The range, depth of correction, and number of vocabulary words known to the child have been shown to fluctuate according to SES. The higher the SES status the more vocabulary the child knows (Evans, 2004; Farkas & Beron, 2004;

Hart & Risley, 1995). Experiences with books provide enriching learning experiences. It is an activity that provides high interaction for families and aids in the acquisition of new words and early literacy skills (Rush, 1999). Despite the benefits of owning books, lower SES status undermines this basic academic concept on two levels: the frequency for the working family to read to a child is less and there is a smaller selection of owned books to choose from (Bradley et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 2005).

Pancsofar (2010) observed the contribution of fathers during a picture book session with infants. The fathers' interaction during these sessions at six months of age was related to the children's communication development at fifteen months and thirty-six months. However, it was the fathers' education and vocabulary that impacted the children's communication development. This is consistent with Duursma's (2008) research that the father's education and the frequency of book reading is related to a higher understanding of language.

The other important level of cognitive development where lower SES makes an impact on the number of books available is in trips to a public library (Melhuish et al., 2008). This is an important developmental strategy for exposing children to reading materials. Several factors might contribute to the decreased likelihood of a lower SES family using the resources of a library as a developmental tool: geographical distance, parental time constraints, lack of parental confidence in instructing the child, and insufficient knowledge on the use of resources (Neuman & Celano, 2006). Finally, the lower SES parent, even when time limitations and geographic distance is not a factor, is less likely to be willing to make a trip to the public library (Neuman & Celano, 2006). When circumstances dictate, because of economic necessity, that book ownership is not feasible, using community resources to expose children to literature becomes even more important. One of the most vital areas in which lower SES children fail to develop

literacy skills is aggravated by the combination of fewer books owned and fewer trips to the public library (Bradley et al., 2001; Davis-Kean, 2005; Melhuish et al., 2008; Neuman & Celano, 2006).

Toys have far more value than the simple ability to entertain. Toys stimulate imagination, provide opportunities for parents and children to interact, and if chosen for their academic probity, they become valuable teaching aids. As an example, puzzles teach coordination, memory, relationship, and shapes. Playing with blocks helps with numeracy, basic structural design, and the ability to match like objects. The direct handling of objects (Wesley & Buysse, 2003) along with parental praise (Zellman & Waterman, 1998) and rich interaction all lay the foundation for a child's increasing body of knowledge, physical and motor development, and relational skills (Melhuish et al., 2008; Rush, 1999). It should be noted that according to Bradley et al. (2001) and Neuman and Celano (2006), the number of toys available to children in the lower SES is decidedly lower than for their peers from middle to upper SES.

Lack of time, failure to have a frame of reference for their importance, and a basic misunderstanding of how songs, poems, and rhymes can positively impact their child, can lead lower SES families to spend less time engaging in these important interactions. Songs help with memory, understanding how sounds such as rhymes work together, and add even further context to vocabulary. Poetry affects the same areas. While limited time to spend on these activities is one of the reasons a lower SES family is less likely to sing and read poetry, studies have shown that even when this is not a distraction the activities are not happening (Farah et al., 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Childcare Research Network, 2005). The other part of this dynamic is in the intimacy between parent and child that occurs during times set aside for singing, reciting poetry, and reading

nursery rhymes. This nurturing activity has been shown to help the child remember specific concepts and analyze them from several different directions (Farah et al., 2008).

In middle class families learning the alphabet, numbers, and basic mathematical skills begins very early in childhood (Heath, 1983; Melhuish et al., 2008). Their counterparts in lower SES home environments are less likely to have had the same emphasis placed on these basic academic skills. Like with other environmental deficiencies in lower SES homes, the lack of time to engage in these important developmental tasks is only one reason for the deficiency. The other, and perhaps more telling reason, is a lack of understanding of how learning takes place. Relevant research suggests that learning is a cumulative result of skills, concepts, and ideas presented from birth forward. If learning the alphabet, numbers, and the usage of each is delayed because of home environment, important developmental benchmarks and opportunities for intellectual stimulation are missed (Evans, 2004; Hart & Risley, 1995, 1999; Neuman & Celano, 2006).

The physical environment of a child has been explored as a factor to the learning process. Bradley et al. found in his 2001 study that the homes of poor families, across ethnic groups, were more likely to be dark, monotonous, and cluttered. The homes were not as clean and there were safety concerns with the home environment when compared to nonpoor families. This difference in the physical environment can have negative influences on a child's development due to a lack of enriching experiences.

Certain areas of the home environment are judged to be more conducive to learning. For this discussion, home environment is expanded outside the physical house to be more inclusive of the neighborhood and people who are part of the child's common interactions. Parents generate learning experiences within the community (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). Bradley et al.

(2001) found that there were differences across SES in learning stimulation through outings. Children from low SES families were able to leave the home to go to the grocery store, outings, and museums. However, they engaged in these activities less than children from nonpoor families. Hobbies that a child can enjoy alone or with another family member were less available. Organized sports where adult interaction, coaching, or supervision were available decreased along with the income level of the parents. Special lessons in music, dance, drama, and art were also less frequent in neighborhoods where the parents earn less money. These missing activities and events can prevent children from low SES families from participating in enriching experiences that stimulate learning (Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988; Evans, 2004; Neuman & Celano, 2006).

Warmth, academic stimulation, and the intentional creation of a home environment conducive to learning are all integral parts of educating a child. However, provision must be made for those times when a child's behaviors and attitudes require correction. There is a difference in the types and outcomes of disciplinary actions between middle and lower income families. Spanking, or corporal punishment, is far more likely to be used in the lower income family (Hill, 2001; Pungello, Iruka, Dotterer, Mills-Koonce, & Reznick, 2009). While the correlation between corporal punishment and stunted development is not clear from the available literatures, it can be concluded that the interaction that occurs between parent and child during times of discipline produces different outcomes (Bradley et al., 2001; Hill, 2001; Pungello et al., 2009). In the lower SES home, negative interactions, activities like spanking, and failure to use behavioral correction instruction as a learning tool is more often noted (Melhuish et al., 2008; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Childcare Research Network, 2005).

The home environment of a child plays a critical and unmistakable role in learning to talk and by extension to use language effectively. The effective use of language will culminate in helping a child become a contributing member of society. One of the factors that makes home environment so important in this role is the ability to communicate across culture and SES and compete once education becomes formalized in the classroom. Components of the home environment previously discussed such as toys and reading materials, and how these are incorporated into interactions between parent and child are a determinant factor in the absorption and comprehension of language. Within the earliest years the child's microsystem which is the home environment has a great impact on future readiness for school. The ability to excel, or to stay on par with standards in formalized education will be formed within this microsystem before school age. How these factors relate to one another, the interactions, and the success in teaching, talking, and language, assimilation into the larger community is referred to as the social dance (Hart & Risley, 1999).

The years from birth to three are considered a critical time for the social interactions that will lead to vocabulary, language development, and talking to occur. Ultimately, development within these domains will begin the child's use of language as a social tool with the wider community and for academic success. Initial vocabulary, rudimentary conversations, and contextual use of language are between the parent and family member and the child. It is important for the correct types of stimulation and learning of language to occur. This is vital because the perceptions formed of the child's ability, which are the assessments provided by school and community barometers will set the tone for the critical beginning of formal education. Research in the field indicates that an impoverished environment not only reduces immediate

stimulation, but also hampers the integration of material and resources more widely available in the community (Bergen, 2008).

Hard data on the subject of home environment and its effect on later achievement show a discrepancy between middle and lower SES families. Hart and Risley (1995) observed 42 families for two and half years. These families included professional families, working families, and families receiving welfare. They analyzed the interactions between the parent and child separately. Children from professional families heard an average of 2,150 words per day. Working families' children heard 1,250 words per day and in families receiving welfare benefits 620 words were heard. That means that in one week children from upper income families heard about 60,000 more words than those from lower SES backgrounds. Another stark difference was the amount of words children from different backgrounds used and the rate at which they first learned and later contextualized this vocabulary. Again, the difference was that those from higher SES families were likely to know and understand two times as many words as those from the lower SES income group.

Farkas and Beron (2004) completed a national longitudinal study targeting oral vocabulary knowledge. Their results mirrored other findings concerning the critical years between birth and school age. In fact, the results indicated that a child's vocabulary growth rate was highest between birth and school age. At age three a pronounced gap exists between both different races and families from lower and higher SES groups. Middle income children were far more likely to have advanced vocabulary skills than the children of poor and working families. These results are in keeping with similar studies from other scholars (Pungello et al., 2009; Qi, Kaiser, Milan, & Hancock, 2006)

Zellman and Waterman (1998) indicated that the manner in which parents interact with their children relates to academic outcomes. This parent-child relation was studied for the types of words used and the social situations in which the usage was employed. Most especially, they were interested in the conversations that take place between older family members and children in the early home environment. Rush (1999) discussed environments that had low and high interaction. Watching television and wandering around the home without specific goals were two of the interactions considered to have lower impact. This measurement was given because the caregiver was simply supervising rather than actively engaging with the child. They found that in environments with low interaction resulted in children having lower literacy and vocabulary skills. These children participated in less intellectually stimulating activities like wandering around the home environment, watching television, and engaging in non-interactive play. In environments where the interactions were deemed to be of more value, activities such as structured play and joint reading were typically included. Where these activities were observed, more vocabulary words and greater literacy skills were identified. Roberts et al. (2005) indicated that during book reading certain strategies or behaviors should be present to encourage the development and enhancement of vocabulary. They can provide simple or elaborate descriptions, relate the reading to the real world, encourage the child to make predictions, teach book concepts, letters and sounds, and have them recall or recite the text. A structured environment and caregiver involvement are essential to providing a child with a foundation for language and literacy skills (Davis-Kean, 2005; Roberts et al., 2005; Rush, 1999).

Neuman and Celano (2006) cited specific examples that showed the interaction between a middle class mother and her children within the parameters of a public library varied greatly from the lower income mother and the interaction with her children in the same setting. The

middle class mother sat with her child, read an appropriate age level book, pointed at various objects on the page, asked specific questions, and even asked the child to state what he or she thought the page was saying. In contrast, the lower SES mother chose books that were above the reading level of the child, read a page or two to the child, and after ten minutes the mother consistently laid the book aside. In some instances the mother might choose another book, or simply withdraw into herself, leaving the child to wander around. Often it was noted that lower SES mothers let their children out at the library to fend for themselves, thus making the librarian a babysitter. With the introduction of computers for patrons, middle class moms sat with their child, asked questions, and helped with research or homework projects. The lower SES child simply wanted to play games or even bang on the keyboard, without receiving input or correction from the mother.

School Readiness and Achievement

The home environment that a child has come from is often obvious during initial assessments of school readiness. A ready child is one that has good physical and mental health, effective communication, and is enthusiastic and curious about learning (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Principals and teachers have noted the divergence of academic ability between those children from higher and lower SES families. The children from middle and upper class homes start their formal school experiences with more skills, and a better foundation for integrating new concepts as they are introduced. Those students whose families are of a lower SES have been shown to lack the possessions, experiences, and skills that their peers in the middle and upper income groups have (Stipek & Ryan, 1997; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). This gap in achievement was even noticeable when the pre-kindergarten experience was shared between the two groups (Stipek & Ryan, 1997).

Stipek and Ryan (1997) indicated the program for economically disadvantaged students, Head Start, was not making a sufficient difference in the achievement gap. Children from economically disadvantaged families have further to go academically in comparison to their advantaged peers. Stipek and Ryan (1997) indicated that these children enter kindergarten academically behind despite having preschool experience. The disadvantaged children were a year behind developmentally when measured against their peers on cognitive assessments. Assessments addressed basic reading, number skills, problems solving, creativity, memory, and language skills. Furthermore the researchers indicated that the main factor contributing to the cognitive delay was the parents' income and its' effect on the environment of the child.

Income impacts the available material resources in the home environment. "An income enables families to purchase books, lessons, and stimulating learning materials that engage children in learning about reading and about their worlds . . ." (Neuman and Celano, 2006, p. 180). Without these material resources, children have a lower quality learning environment. They participate in fewer quality interactions, activities, and learning opportunities than their peers from higher SES families.

The Carolina Abecedarian Project (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Ramey & Ramey, 2004) found that early childhood education is effective in regard to cognitive development. Researchers investigated a population of high-risk children and families enrolled in early childhood education starting as early as four months of age. Children enrolled in this program performed better than their low-income peers that did not receive early childhood education. This enhanced academic performance was observed throughout their school career. Results indicated that children from families with the least education received the most cognitive

benefits from this early preschool experience. Pre-kindergarten can be effective in closing the academic gap when the experience begins earlier.

Once economically disadvantaged children begin school behind, they stay behind on academic measures. Walker, Greenwood, Hart, and Carta (1994) extended the study of Hart and Risley (1995). These researchers investigated the relationship between early language use and SES to later measures of language, verbal ability, academic achievement, and schooling in kindergarten students. Walker et al. (1994) studied 29 of the 42 original families seven years after the initial study. They concluded that children from low-income families continued to perform lower than their peers on academic measures throughout elementary school in the areas of language and reading achievement.

Barriers to School Achievement

The home environment prior to schooling explains a portion of the achievement gap while failing to account for all of it. The barriers for economically disadvantaged children to succeed can be categorized into three domains: 1) life circumstance, 2) perceptions, and 3) culture. Separately, each of these domains can have a demonstratively negative impact for the lower SES child. Accordingly, when considered together there is a marked and significant difference in the school readiness of these children.

Poverty places families in difficult positions that constrain their ability to interact with their children. Researchers have identified several barriers that interfere with the parent being able to participate in both home and school activities. Life circumstances such as work schedules, family responsibilities, childcare, transportation, limited knowledge, and lack of education can restrict involvement (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Mapp, 2002; Pena, 2000).

Parents, teachers, and students all have perceptions concerning education. Teachers have preconceived stereotypes about low-income families. In Caspe's (2003) research, teachers indicated that they learn about families through communication and observation. Teachers said that they grow in their understanding of the family values and strengths of their students. However, they admit to holding negative impressions concerning low educational expectations for children from low-income families. Purcell-Gates (1995) observed this effect in the case study of a rural Appalachian male first grade student. The student was taught using the typical grade level curriculum for the school system. The assumption was made that the student possessed a skill set common to his peers. This was not the case since the student's actual academic proficiency was behind the curriculum in use. Due to performance, the perception was created, and believed, that this student was a failure. However, this perception failed to account for the significant progress the observed student had made within his realm of readiness. Social promotion, based on the perception of this student's inability to thrive in the classroom, was the answer that this system used. The teachers' perceptions are based on their experiences and personal beliefs (Caspe, 2003; Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007). As a result, teachers have class-based assumptions. This is consistent with Eberly et al. (2007). Teachers judge families based on lack of parental involvement in their child's education, concluding that families did not care if they were not involved in activities like conferences.

These negative stereotypes are not lost on parents and students (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Lee, 1999). Students indicated that teachers are racist and often discriminate on this basis. They feel that the teachers do not care about them and hold low expectations for their academic performance (Lee, 1999). Low-income parents have specified that teachers do not interact with

them in a professional manner (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). Lawson's study (2003) further states that parents perceived that teachers exhibited little affection toward their children.

For the lower SES child, cultural barriers exist that hamper educational attainment. Families without resources to explore mores, places, and ideas outside their immediate environment are less likely to expose their child to new avenues of cultural exploration. Understanding, even basic different cultural viewpoints, is an opening to learn. Strident cultural experiences within the lower SES family inhibit the intellectual growth by closing the child's mind to different viewpoints. In much the same way that a teacher's perception of a child may be formed by preconceived notions, the lower SES child lacks the ability to appreciate, and thus integrate, alternate cultural references and use them as a launching pad for new ideas (Keller & Helton, 2010; Purcell-Gates, 1995).

Bridging Home and School Cultures

When teachers perceive a deficiency, they attempt to remediate a student's weaknesses. In reality, the problem is not actually within the children. Rather, it is found in the difference between the home and school cultures (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). The concept of cultural differences was addressed by Shirley Brice Heath (1983) in her ethnography focusing on the differences between European Americans and African Americans. Coming to understand and value minority students requires utilizing community funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). As it relates to education, this approach has been suggested by several researchers (Delpit, 2006; Heath, 1983; Kozol, 1991; Moll et al., 1992; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007). Moll et al. (1992) indicates that current classrooms are isolated from the social worlds and realistic resources of the communities they serve. Teachers have to connect with the whole child in order to overcome the barriers that exist between home and school cultures. There must be a

partnership where knowledge about family and school is exchanged by parent and teacher.

Cultural understanding is sometimes formed in a vacuum. The perceptions and mores common to a parent are not necessarily shared by the teachers and school systems who service their children. Because students, according to Vygotsky (1978), begin their education at home, and in light of the necessity of the educational experience as a formal progression through demonstrable standards (Goldstein, 2008; Newman & Roskos, 2005), the culture of their community is an important factor.

Educators gain an understanding of children's outside experiences, cultural history, and linguistic background. Risko and Walker-Dalhouse (2007) refer to this approach as culturally responsive instruction. The creation of culturally responsive instruction requires the inclusion of several factors. These factors must be available across an entire system and effectively integrated into each classroom (Buchanan & Burts, 2007; Phuntsog, N. 2001). One of the factors is the requirement is that the teacher be culturally literate. In order to effectively reach and form a relationship with their parents that is conducive to consistent educational progress, teachers must be aware of the customs, traditions, and mores of the culture they are serving (Phuntsog, 2001). Becoming culturally literate requires, according to Phuntsog (2001), that a teacher analyze his or her attitudes and existing beliefs about the community they serve. Once these beliefs are understood any changes necessary to build trust and compassion with an eye toward classroom inclusiveness for the culture served must be undertaken. This respect for the background and experiences of the community must finally be made part of a curriculum that is transformed by the existing community funds of knowledge. Standards are established outside existing community funds of knowledge; to be achieved they must be integrated into the local culture (Buchanan & Burts, 2007).

An effective partnership between the families and educators is based on clear communication that is understood and culturally relevant. The effectiveness of this partnership becomes the cornerstone of the child's educational experience that connects the school and home cultures to build a sense of community (Graham-Clay, 2005). Through communication, educators identify strengths, weaknesses, resources, learning styles, and supports.

One of the strategies that enhance the partnership is the integration of teachers into the community they serve (Reed, 2009). By becoming part of the mesosystem of their students, two goals are accomplished. First, teachers gain important insights into existing funds of knowledge, and by integration of the human and financial capital of their school, they share resources which leads to understanding the perceptions of families in the community. Additionally, parents feel that the teacher understands and appreciates their culture and community at a deeper level if they are part of it. This enhances the pivotal relationship and strengthens the ability to communicate because of common themes, traditions, and areas of mutual relevance between the two (Reed, 2009). Ultimately, this localization of teachers is an important factor in building effective bonds between schools and the communities they serve.

An additional strategy for improving the partnership between parents and teachers is the utilization of parent-teacher conferences. Conferences can be a routine procedure "that allows parents and teachers to demonstrate their commitment to the child's education" (Minke & Anderson, 2003, p.50). This is positive two-way communication that yields an interactive dialogue (Graham-Clay, 2005). Conferences are an opportunity for parents and teachers to express their concerns about a child's performance, behavior, or academic challenges (Metcalf, 2001; Minke & Anderson, 2003). If the conference is not conducted in a certain manner, the outcome of the conference is poor. This outcome is poor not only for the child, but it also

hampers achievable results of the parent and teacher relationship. Metcalf (2001) indicated that parents could feel like failures as parents and perceive their child's poor performance as a result of this failure.

Conferences can create significant tensions for the parent and the teacher (Minke & Anderson). In a study completed by Minke and Anderson (2003), results indicated that parents have had negative experiences with parent-teacher conferences. Parents felt like the teachers did not listen to them, teachers did not check for understanding of the information provided during the conference, critical information, such as impending retention, was withheld and there was a negative judgment coming from the teacher.

Researchers suggest that successful conferences discuss the whole child, the methods and ideas, and the individual strengths that can be emphasized to enhance the partnership between the parent and the teachers (Graham-Clay, 2005; Metcalf, 2001). When addressing a child's weaknesses, Metcalf (2001) suggested using solution-focused language. Solution-focused language means taking a more positive approach to address a child's weaknesses. For example, instead of a teacher saying the child is failing, they should say the child is not passing at this time. At the pre-kindergarten level, an opportunity is presented to form a solid foundation for the entire educational career.

Parent-teacher conferences can be an effective means of improving student performance, especially for at-risk and struggling learners (Metcalf, 2001). By using rich and interactive dialogue during conferences, teachers improve the two-way communication that leads to successful outcomes (Graham-Clay, 2005), a trusting relationship (Minke & Anderson, 2004), and a better understanding of the school program (Epstein, 1986). Epstein (1986) noted that along with an increased understanding of the school program parents also gain home-learning

activities for their child. According to Minke and Anderson's (2003) research, a family school conference should leave all participants feeling appreciated, invested, positive, and linked to common goals.

Parental involvement is essential to a successful educational partnership. Darch, Miao, and Shippen (2004) indicated that parental involvement begins at the start of the school year. Involvement from the initiation of the school year helps get ahead of problems. There are barriers to successful parental involvement. Parents' work schedules, other commitments, and time limitations can prevent parents' involvement in their child's education. Educators have to be innovative to ensure parental involvement in their child's education. When parents and teachers overcome these obstacles, the child has a greater chance of reaching their fullest potential.

An important component of parental involvement is understanding the community and the families within them (Smith, 2006). Understanding life circumstances and home environments can help teachers connect with families. A positive connection or a relationship between parents and teachers is associated with parental involvement (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009). Nzinga-Johnson et al. (2009) studied the nature of parent-teacher relationships and factors that influence that relationship. The quality of the relationship and the cultural/ethnic and socioeconomic factors impacted parental involvement. Another influence was the difference in SES between the parent and the teacher. This difference can have a negative impact on the quality of parent-teacher interaction as a result of misunderstanding cultural values and lifestyles.

School systems can offer tools to aid in the creation of a successful learning environment. At the critical junction of home to school education, a parent liaison is a valuable resource for

lower SES communities (Sanders, 2008). In these communities, there is often a deficit model perspective among administrators and teachers (Polakow, 1993; Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005). Sanders (2008) noted several roles of a parent liaison including direct services with at-risk families, support for teachers and school partnerships, and program improvement data. The advantage of this position, according to Sanders (2008), offers value across socioeconomic lines; it is especially helpful where there may be communication and resource inadequacy between the parents and the schools. Furthermore, through more careful construction of the relationship between the parent and school specifically aided by parent liaisons, a better school climate is established. This school climate eases the often difficult transition of lower SES students from home to school and offers an important tool for teachers to expand their communities' funds of knowledge (Sanders, 2008).

In addressing the achievement gaps that exist, the use of culturally responsive instruction focuses on the racial and ethnic groups outside middle class European Americans (Fram, Miller-Cribe & Van Horn, 2007). However, racial and ethnic backgrounds do not account for the whole achievement gap. Socioeconomic status (SES) negatively affects achievement for those in the lower social economic class. For students from a lower socioeconomic background, there is a difference in the home and school cultures. Strategies that are applied to those with different racial and ethnic backgrounds can be implemented to alleviate the achievement gap for those from lower SES.

Summary

From the literature reviewed in this chapter the disadvantages for the educational experiences of rural European Americans are known and real. Every available tool must be integrated into their educational experience in order to close the achievement gap.

Increasing community funds of knowledge, integration of teachers into the communities they serve, the addition of liaisons, and recognition that standards must be achieved in spite of these obstacles are important steps toward bridging this gap. Even with these strategies, factors that cannot be changed by the school system, such as the duration of poverty and ingrained parental practices must be considered. When these mitigating circumstances are recognized and every available compensation is taken from theoretical concept to classroom integration, an opportunity for real achievement exists. This study can offer insight into one rural community's use of existing funds of knowledge and how these funds are put to practical use. Through ethnographic interviews and document analysis the funds of knowledge and their integration will be examined. Chapter three presents the research methods used in conducting this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Children from economically disadvantaged families are set on a different life course as a result of their financial status. From birth, children begin a process of learning that is deemed inferior when judged against their middle and upper class peers. As a result of their environment prior to school, children begin their education behind on readiness activities. They continue to perform below their peers throughout the educational process. The problem is not in the performance of children from economically disadvantaged families. It is in the manner in which schools and teachers approach these students. It includes how schools and teachers interact with parents and their attempt to integrate the home and school culture. This study sought to explore the interaction between parents and teachers, the roles parents play in the educational process, and teachers' use of existing community funds of knowledge in the classroom as a tool for bridging the two cultures into a workable educational tool.

Qualitative Methods/Research Design

Given the nature of the issues within the study, I worked within the social constructivist paradigm. I am concerned with the experiences of human beings and the meanings made (Williamson, 2006). In researching these experiences and meanings for this select population, I acknowledge there are multiple realities and that these realities are socially constructed (Willis, 2007). Qualitative research methods were employed to provide evidenced-based knowledge. Qualitative research was undertaken in order to explore the parent-teacher relationship among economically disadvantaged rural European American families. This approach took into account the context and purpose of the research study and was interpretive and naturalistic (Lincoln &

Denzin, 2005). Marshall and Rossman (2006) indicated that a qualitative approach is appropriate since “thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds are involved” (p. 53). In the present study, qualitative design enabled the researcher to identify the perceptions teachers have of families with limited financial means, and to determine the current practices they utilize in bridging the gap between home and school cultures. Through the ethnographic semi-structured interviews of parents and teachers, observation of the interview location selected by the interviewee, and document review, community funds of knowledge and their integration was examined.

Weiss (1994) suggested several valid reasons for conducting a qualitative study. A qualitative study provides detailed descriptions, allows multiple perspectives, and bridges intersubjectives. One method of addressing this topic is to take an ethnographic approach which utilizes interviews and document review. The interview of parents and teachers requires not only data collection, but in its basest sense, interpretation must, of necessity, be coupled with the initial findings. The many structures within the automated interactions that comprise communication with social groups are easily taken for granted when they are first noticed. However, the ethnographic method for data collection and analysis brings to light cultural knowledge that is often overlooked when using other means of data collection. By extrapolating and analyzing inherent, albeit less obvious, factors in the interview process, new areas for analysis are naturally revealed (Geertz, 1973). This method led to what Geertz’s termed a “thick description” (p. 10). An ethnographic study enables the researcher to effectively listen to participants. Listening leads to understanding participants perspectives (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007). By employing ethnographic semi-structured interviews, the in-

person interactions yielded a more complex understanding of the communication that occurred throughout the school year (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

This ethnographic method allowed the researcher to discern how each participant uses his or her experiences, understandings, and expectations of one another to reach accord. Accord, in this instance, is not objective agreement or shared comprehension. Rather it is the ability of the teacher and the parent to use their existing funds of knowledge as a tool for relating and communicating (Creswell, 2007). The focus on these participants as individuals is important because they are considered the most proficient authorities of their own lives (Delpit, 2006). The cornerstone of this interaction is how the culture of each participant is used as a tool for understanding their appropriate role in achieving successful outcomes for the student. Where there is disconnect, or culture clash, analysis focused on how this impediment is overcome or how it constricts effective communication (Keller & Helton, 2010; Rosaldo, 1993). This analysis of the social constructive paradigm offers the best chance for understanding whether or not two conflicting world views can come together to achieve one common outcome (Creswell, 2007). At the level of final analysis, the reflexivity of the researcher must be admitted so that a complete panorama of all the viewpoints expressed by teachers and parents is fully vetted before conclusions are reached (Etherington, 2007).

Research Questions

The research questions in this study included the following:

1. How do teachers integrate and synthesize existing community funds of knowledge into instructional design for children in the study;
2. What role do parents currently play in formally partnering with teachers and their child's school to enhance educational attainment;

3. In what ways are existing community funds of knowledge reflected in the pre-kindergarten child assessment on a child's mastery of pre-kindergarten standards; and
4. In what ways are existing community funds of knowledge reflected in the school and community partnership?

Participants

The participating institution was categorized as a Title I elementary school. At the initiation of the study, the total enrollment for the school was approximately 350 children from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. There were two classrooms in the pre-kindergarten section with 20 children per class. This was in keeping with the existing state standards for class size. Participants were rural European American families from lower and middle socioeconomic strata. Families had children participating in a high-quality universal pre-kindergarten program in the southeast during the 2009-2010 school year (Barnett, Epstein, Friedmand, Boyd, & Hustedt, 2008). Four families and two teachers were identified through purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) and snowball sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The criterion for the families was having a child enrolled in pre-kindergarten and being identified as economically disadvantaged. Thirty-two out of forty families were invited to participate in the study. The remaining eight families were no longer attending the select school and information could not be obtained to locate them. Four families responded when the first flyer was sent home with the students. Three families indicated that they were interested in participating. When the second flyer was sent in February, two additional families indicated an interest in participating. One family withdrew prior to the interview. Out of the four families interviewed, one family met the criteria of being from a low SES. However, none of the families identified as being from a low

SES but all were living in an area known for the low-income. The criterion for teachers was that they taught pre-kindergarten at the selected school for the 2009-2010 school year. In this study, snowball sampling was going to be employed to allow elected teachers to help identify students that meet the criteria to provide information rich cases. However, due to the small response, this method was not utilized. The four families that demonstrated interest were selected to participate in the study.

Specific demographic information concerning families and teachers was collected during the interview. Participants were from European American families since ninety-three percent of the students in the target school were European American families and 100% of the faculty was European American. Both the parents and teachers who participated were of various ages. Participating teachers were female and the gender of parents was female. The likelihood of having economically and educationally disadvantaged people in the sample was high because more than 48% of the students in the target school receive free and reduced lunch and that is the target population for this study (United States Census Bureau, 2009). However, the income of the families was unknown, and only their perceived social class was obtained. Three of the families classified themselves as middle class, and one classified itself as lower middle class.

Sampling Frame

Purposeful sampling was utilized to ensure information rich cases. Purposeful sampling was used for site and participant selection. Creswell (2007) indicates that this approach allows for informing the research problem. The site was selected on the grounds of specific criteria. Marshall and Rossman (2006) recommend that a site should be selected for easy entry, ability to develop truthful relationships, and a high probability of rich cases. The selected site permitted me to have easy entry since I had been a part of the faculty serving children in that school as the

speech language pathologist. In addition, I had established relationships with parents and the community in the selected region. Specifically, invitational flyers (see Appendix A) describing the research study was sent home to parents of all pre-kindergarten students at the elementary school. The flyer included a portion to accept the invitation to participate in the study for the parents to sign and return to school. The teachers in the pre-kindergarten program in the selected school were asked to participate in the interviews and provide access to Pre-K child assessments for the participating families. Access to the pre-kindergarten child assessments could not be attained from the teachers since the information was sent home with the families and a copy was not kept on file in accordance with IRB confidentiality requirements. An informed consent form (see Appendix B) was obtained at the initiation of the interview with teachers. A compilation of parents interested in participating was developed. The criteria included a school with a predominantly European American enrollment, location within the Appalachian region, and a significant population of children from economically disadvantage backgrounds. Participants met the criteria of having a child enrolled in the pre-kindergarten program and been identified as being from an economically disadvantaged area. A great deal can be learned about issues of central importance by using purposeful sampling to target information rich cases (Patton, 1990). Teachers taking part in the study were to help the researcher identify information rich cases from the families that consented to participate in the study but a limited number of families responded which prohibited identification of rich cases. Instead, I opted to use the four families who consented to participate in the study. These families were targeted for interviews to gain an understanding of parent-teacher relationships, teacher use of community funds of knowledge, and parental roles in the educational process.

Study Procedures

Once permission was obtained from the central office for the local school's participation, the pre-kindergarten teachers at the selected site were given a description of the study as well as an informed consent forms requesting their participation in the study. The ethnographer spoke with the pre-kindergarten teachers informing them about the study and asked if they were interested in participating. The two teachers indicated an interest and a time to review the informed consent and complete the interview was scheduled for a later time. After the teachers' consent was obtained, an invitational flyer was sent home with all the students enrolled in the pre-kindergarten program for the 2009-2010 in October 2010. The invitational flyer briefly described the study and asked about their interest in participating.

Out of forty families, thirty-two families were living in the community and had children that transitioned from pre-kindergarten into kindergarten. The decrease in families was related to children going to out of zone schools or relocating to other areas within the county or out-of-state. Families willing to participate returned the flyer to me or to their classroom teacher with their names and a way to contact them. After the invitational flyers were sent in October, five families responded. Three families responded that they were interested in participating. Two families responded that they were not interested. One family pulled out of the study and decided not to participate due to a change in family circumstance. Due to the low response, the invitational flyer was sent again to the families that had not responded in February. An additional two families responded that they were interested in participating.

If parents indicated an interest in participating in the study, I called and spoke with them. I provided more information about the study and scheduled a time for an interview. At the beginning of the interview, the parent was provided the informed consent statement. I reviewed

the statement with the parent, answered any questions about the study, obtained their signed consent and determined that they understood the study and their role and were capable of participation per IRB informed consent document.

Additionally, I explained my role as a researcher versus a faculty member. Participants, both parents and teachers, were told that data would be collected but names would not be used to identify the families or faculty members involved. Any information that was obtained in connection with this study that could be identified with the participants would remain confidential. Participant identities were kept confidential by giving each interview an identification number and by using pseudonyms to refer to each participant, thereby ensuring anonymity of participants. Real names did not appear on any study document with the exception of informed consent paperwork. No one had access to the data except for me and my dissertation advisor and committee, as needed. The primary investigator kept the data, including write-ups, memos, and analysis in a locked filing cabinet.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher played the role of a participant observer. A participant observer is one that has involvement in the social world (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As I am not actively involved in the education of the pre-kindergarten students on a day-to-day basis, I am able to obtain a “first hand, up close view to social life as a process” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). At the initiation of the research study, I was viewed as a part of the community due to my socializing in the local area at places such as the grocery store, gas station, soda fountain, post office, or dentist. Furthermore, I was part of the school community. The children and families were familiar with me as a result of my duties and the small size of the school. If families dropped off or pick up their children, I was the one greeting them, letting the children out of or

into their vehicle. Beyond this, I provided services stipulated in the children's individualized education plans (IEP) and intervention plans in the areas of speech and language to children throughout the school. As primary investigator my relationship with the school should be noted. I had been the school-based speech-language pathologist for five years. I served about 20-30 students with speech-language difficulties in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade as well as an additional 20 students who received intervening services during my last year of employment with the county. Some of the targeted families may have had a pre-kindergarten student receiving speech-language services; however, the percentage was small. I provided consultative and collaborative services that allowed me to be seen as part of the classroom. My involvement at the school and community level increased my awareness and understanding of the families that are part of this community. Furthermore, as Delpit (2006) indicated, teachers are able to attend to parents due to their role in the educational setting. Throughout the observations and interviews, I took field notes. The notations within the fieldnotes had a more personal approach to include a first-person account of what I had witnessed (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

Data Sources

Data was obtained from individual parent and teacher interviews. Originally, data was supposed to come from the pre-kindergarten child assessment utilized by the select universal pre-kindergarten program however, this was not possible since the involved families did not keep the portfolio assessments. Additionally, the school system did not have a copy of the information. The first source of data was semi-structured interviews. The parents and teachers were interviewed during the 2010-2011 school year at a location designated by them. There was a standard set of questions for the teachers (see Appendix D) that addressed demographic information, experiences, practices, and expectations. For the parents, there was a standard set

of questions (see Appendix E) regarding demographics, their pre-kindergarten child, and the school experience. The questions were developed from current research literature concerning demographic factors that influence school achievement, systems of learning, as well as community and communication. The weaknesses of this approach were that it required personal interaction and cooperation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Through countless meetings, I have developed my personal interaction skills such as listening and being able to question in a manner that is helpful without being intrusive.

A second source of data was the pre-kindergarten child assessment. This assessment was a mandated component of the universal pre-kindergarten program. While not an objective grade, in the traditional sense, it included specified checklists, progress reports, portfolios, and matrixes. Also, it featured a teacher-initiated document that affirmed the child's attainment of predetermined standards. When this document was presented to the parent it requested their feedback about the experience they had with the program and the perception of their child's progress (local State Department of Early Care and Learning, 2009). These documents and reports culminated with an in-person conference between the parent and teacher and all aspects of the pre-kindergarten program and its relationship to school readiness.

Data Collection

Data were collected throughout the research study beginning in June of 2010. Archived data and observations of the community were completed throughout the study. Semi-structured interviews took place once the school year was completed in order for parents and teachers to reflect on the experiences from the school year. The interviews were conducted in the home or community environment depending upon the wishes of the participants. The interviews took approximately thirty minutes to one hour and were audio recorded with the consent of the

participant. Parents and teachers were interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of their cultures and teaching practices in addition to clarification of events and meanings taken from the parent-teacher conferences. Interview questions covered demographic information questions generated from the interview with the parents and teachers.

Interviews were documented through audio recordings and field notes. I used comprehensive note taking (Wolfinger, 2002) that was organized temporally (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) from the beginning to the end of the interview. This approach aided in the recalling of details when the researcher reviewed the notes (Mulhall, 2003; Wolfinger, 2002).

Descriptions of the setting, people, and dialogue were taken (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Mulhall, 2003). After the interview, audio recordings were transcribed and field notes were written up with special emphasis given to remembering the interviews, elaborating on what transpired, filling in gaps, and commenting on what took place (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

During the interviews, participating families were asked about their child's pre-kindergarten child assessment. This assessment was provided to the families during the mid-year and final conferences. One family kept the pre-kindergarten assessment document and provided the document for the study. The document was reviewed for teacher comments across the developmental domains and parents comments concerning their child's pre-kindergarten experience and their perception of their child's progress. The document supported data from the interview and assisted in additional questions for teachers and parents.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were finished, the recordings transcribed and field notes written, the in-process analysis was completed. This analysis included asides, commentaries, and in-process memos (Emerson et al., 1995). Transcripts from the interviews underwent an in-process analysis

as well. Asides were short reflections meant to clarify, explain, interpret, or raise questions. I responded to the field notes as I processed, both personally and theoretically. Commentaries elaborated on the reflections. In-process memos addressed similarities across the documents and completed interviews (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

Field notes taken during the interviews were analyzed line-by-line in two phases to identify community funds of knowledge, culture characteristics, teacher perceptions, existing practices, and other themes as determined by the data. This approach was based on Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) guidelines. The first phase was open coding to determine the initial themes. Written memos were completed to focus on analysis. I identified core themes to undergo further analysis. The second phase focused coding to determine the subcodes of the uncovered themes. Relationships between the themes were revealed and analyzed. Integrative memos were written to help determine the relationships between the various observations and interviews for the themes.

Verification

To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, member checking and triangulation, were conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Member checking allowed participants an opportunity to review transcripts. They were able to clarify or confirm the views and perceptions expressed during the observation and interviews. Following the interview, the parents reviewed the transcript to confirm or clarify the data. The participations did not request any changes to be made to the transcripts.

Triangulation was conducted to improve the interpretation from the analysis and reduce inherent biases that result from the use of multiple sources (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007). In the present study, there was data from the parent and

teacher interviews as well as the pre-kindergarten child assessment. Data gained from these sources supported the role parents' play, the interaction between the parents and teachers, and the community funds of knowledge that were exchanged between the two. In addition, having several different parents and teachers participating allowed for multiple perspectives. Areas of commonality in perceptions among both parent and teacher participants were confirmed to draw conclusions about the integration of community funds of knowledge in the pre-kindergarten program.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality of data and subject identities, as well as not putting participants at-risk or harm for their participation. Participants were not forced into participation. It was voluntary because they had the right to refuse or withdraw at any time. Their consent was required before any observation or interview took place. Data and participant names remained confidential throughout the process. Identifiers were known only to the primary investigator. To maintain confidentiality, names were not used to identify individual participants or their families. A pseudonym was used in lieu of real names. Any information that was obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with participants was kept confidential and would only be disclosed with participant permission or as required by law. Participant identities were kept confidential by giving each interview an identification number and changing the using pseudonyms. Names did not appear on any study document aside from the consent form. No one had access to the data except the investigator and advisors. The primary investigator kept the data such as the write-ups, memos, and analysis in a locked filing cabinet. Another consideration was that participants were not put at risk or harm for physical or psychological effects. I was aware of and sensitive to cultural

differences. My experience with the selected school has provided me with an understanding of the culture of the people in the region.

Summary

The current research study targeted parent-teacher relationships and the culture of one community. Communication can be an effective means of bridging the gap of student performance for economically disadvantaged children. Teachers have the ability to form of two-way communications with rich interactive dialogue with families whose children they serve. When teachers become innovative and encourage interactive dialogue, the outcomes for the economically disadvantaged child are improved. The following chapter presents the findings.

CHAPTER IV:

FINDINGS

This study was designed to provide an enhanced understanding of community funds of knowledge. Presented in this chapter are interviews findings based upon interviews with four families and two teachers of pre-kindergarten children, archival data, data from participant observations, and the researcher's experiences within the school and community environments. All data were analyzed by a comparative technique which encouraged a line-by-line evaluation of all information. Through this detailed analysis and triangulation the data were coded, categorized, and identified by themes based on guidelines from Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995). In the final analysis, it was evident that the transcribed interviews, field notes, and other significant documents yielded valuable findings regarding teachers' use of existing funds of knowledge in their implementation of pre-kindergarten education and their interactions with families of pre-kindergarten children.

The data analysis, comparisons, contrasts, and coding found within this chapter provides a vastly detailed description of the community and the studied participants in the study. The interview questions were designed to provide data on the specific individuals, the community at large and the role of the community, along with the role of each individual participant within the school and community environment. Throughout the research project, knowledge of the various facets of the community increased and it became evident that the dynamics of the school and the community were intricately interlaced and essential for the success of the educational process and the community at large.

To ensure substantive validity of the study, it was necessary to execute an extensive archival investigation about the community itself. The various archived materials established a solid foundation for community funds of knowledge. Through the archival investigation it became apparent there was a strong link between the original community's funds of knowledge and the present day community's funds of knowledge. The reality of this linkage enabled a more complete understanding of the values and characteristics that are evident in the present day community.

In this chapter, results are organized by sections and subsections as related to the themes that evolved throughout the evaluation of interviews, observations, and documents. The framework for the results of this study was based on: the community, past and present; the participants; and the findings. The community analysis section, among other items, identified the community origin, values, partnerships between and among organizations and businesses, and the landscape. In the participants' section, emphasis was placed on: the participants' parental role in education as examined from the both parent and teacher perspectives; the documentation and use of community funds of knowledge; and the role of both the school community and the town community. The final section of the analysis addressed the findings as related to the three specific research questions with an additional segment incorporated as to the importance of the local community. Documentation of reciprocating support between community and school was also discussed.

Upon the initial approval and commencement of this research project, it was pledged that the name of any human subject, school, school district, county, or state would remain confidential at all times (see Confidentiality Clause of Appendices B and C). The promise of confidentiality proved to be an area of discord. Many hours were consumed trying to follow the

citation and reference directives of the APA Journal Manual and at the same time adhere to the promise of confidentiality. Ultimately, it became clear that citations and references versus confidentiality was a major problem. The lack of compatibility between these two items was confirmed by Ms. J.Hume-Pratuch, editorial supervisor of APA Journals 2012. According to Hume-Pratuch:

The goal of the reference list entry is to give your reader enough information to retrieve the same source you used. However, the goal of removing the school district's name [or any identifying element] from your thesis is to prevent your readers from knowing the source you used. *Subject privacy trumps accuracy of citation* (see APA Publication Manual, 6th ed., "Rights and Confidentiality of Research Participants," pp.16 – 17). Therefore, leave the document out of your reference list. Instead, it can be described in the narrative of the text. (J. Hume-Pratuch, personal communication, March 12, 2012)

With explicit clarification and directive by the APA Style Expert all identifying factors were deleted. It should be noted that vital research information was gathered from a multitude of identifying archived documents, newspaper articles, county heritage items, school district newsletters, and other literature provided by the public library and various individuals. A large portion of the newspaper clippings, especially the older articles, were missing partial or no identifying information such as titles, authors, section letters, or page numbers. On some articles identifying information was handwritten along the side of the clipping while at other times it might have been on the back of the clipping. Also, within the same article there was often conflicting citation information. The issue of reliable archived identifying citations along with confidentiality led me to seek a method for validity of sources. For authenticity purposes, each article used in this project was photocopied and maintained with the transcribed interviews in a secure locked system as noted in the confidentiality clause.

Origins of a Big Hearted Community

In the foothills of Appalachia, a town and its surrounding community, steeped in traditions that have transcended generations, clings to an identity of a caring community that is intimately involved in the lives of its citizens. January 2, 1788 was the official founding date of this community. Prior to the land lottery in 1832, according to information provided by the Historical Society in 1999, the Cherokee Indians and a few white people were the only settlers in the area. Shortly thereafter white settlers from Alabama and South Carolina moved into the area and, due to pressure and fear, the Indians moved away. During this same period there was an added influx of 15 families from Virginia and it was their influence and sheer numbers that led the area to be nicknamed “Little Virginia Colony.” Though the name of the town name was taken from the settlers’ land of origin, it was also a name that was associated with the fact that “some of the first best people in the world resided in this town” (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). To substantiate the ‘best families’ claim, on July 2, 1896, a newspaper article penned that many of these Virginia families descended from families who belonged to the King’s Council during the 1600s and 1700s.

The new settlers showed great pride in the actual land of their community as they emphasized it was:

...a beautiful, little village containing 200 inhabitants...situated at the foot of the... mountain. This mountain rises majestically in the back-ground of a picture which is composed of beautiful field’s (*sic*) stretching for miles around the homes of the active farmers who enjoy their daily bread by honest labor. You may look in one direction and see beautiful fertile fields clothed in golden grain waiting for the reapers. And again you may cast your eyes in another direction and behold large fields wrapped in green . . . [the land] seems to smile at the rising and setting of the sun, to the beauties of nature, which the great God of the universe has so abundantly thrown around it [we] ... liberty loving people have not forgotten the one to whom ... [we] owe all ..[of our] happiness. (local archived newspaper clipping, July 2,1896)

Community Values

Religion and God in addition to service and benevolence were the all-encompassing elements and driving forces in the lives of the early settlers. A local resident said that amongst the community's early settlers one young lady declared, "[my parents]... gave me guidance and religion and a proper perspective on values. They taught me about love, church, school and work" (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 81). Though this statement was proclaimed years ago, these same values are still prominent in the present day residents' funds of knowledge. The foundation of the stable, upright, and giving community that started years ago is still evident today as one of the local businesses affirmed, "We have an ongoing relationship . . . with . . . various service type projects . . . 'adopting' local families in need . . . gifts for . . . children . . . and food for the [families]" (J. Thompson, personal communication, February 6, 2012).

In the late 1960s, a resident began exploring the local archives looking for interesting stories. The resident found that in the early stages of the settlement a traveling preacher visited the people and asked to speak to the newly founded religious congregation (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). As the preacher spoke, he vigorously lambasted the congregation with every sin he could think of and then he accused everyone in the congregation of being guilty of each and every sin. At this time, the regular preacher, though only part-time, quickly responded, "God, don't you believe anything he says. Some of the best people in the world are here" (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). As the years passed by, the phrase "having the best people" slowly became a colloquial saying that is often embedded in advertisements and conversations today (W. Burton, personal observation, 2005 – 2010). A local resident told the newspaper:

God has held true through the years...Now, God, you believe it. Some of the best people in the world still live in 'city.' Regrettably, there is not space to include them all in this

story but they are busy, living from day to day, making history. (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969)

Having the ‘best people’ sometimes referred to the simple act of a neighbor taking care of another neighbor in the community (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 82). An age old story that was passed around referred to one of the community’s leaders who had lived his entire life on the same plot of land until one day he abruptly decided to move his family to the big city. He said he moved away because he thought the big city had more to offer than his small town. However, life in the big city lasted only a short period of time as he felt compelled to return to his hometown and serve the people. “I believe it was the Lord’s will that I return here and do everything I can for ... people” (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 83). His belief was strong as he often told others, “the Lord has something in mind for me” (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 83). And apparently, this man’s belief was true. As hard times hit, many small communities disappeared, but not this small community. With his strong religious background and his entrepreneurial foresight, this man was able to provide jobs, supply food, and see to the needs of the town and community (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 84).

Selflessness, as shown by the above mentioned resident, was an attitude shared by many in the community. It was not unusual to hear the phrase, “I give my service to the people . . . ” (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 84). Showing a big heart towards others was a constant attribute and shared thread that bound the community together. Each member of the community was more than willing to make a contribution in whatever capacity was needed. It was through contributions that the town maintained its philanthropic and benevolent character (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 81). These two concepts became a way of life for the community and have been passed down generation after generation and are now an innate part of the community’s funds of knowledge.

Another yarn that has been retold many times tells that one of the new settlers traveled with his family back to North Carolina for a short visit. It was along the trail that he learned that all communities were not as benevolent as his. Upon his return to the beautiful valley where he lived, he told others his only memory of his trip was that no one along the route would give his family a place to sleep. It was then that he vowed, “We’ll never turn anyone away” (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). Whether the young man was referring to himself or the community, his statement rang true for years to come as it was known throughout the area that his family always invited travelers in and treated them kindly (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). When the young man grew older and built his own home, he made sure to build a special annex that served as a travelers’ rest spot. Following the young man’s charitable example, a pattern of kindness developed when the town created an inn for the passengers on the stage coach and for the many herdsmen who passed through moving livestock to other states. Travelers quickly learned this was the only community along the well-trodden road with a community catered to all those who passed through (local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969).

These simple acts of kindness were talked about throughout the new land and were even referenced in a speech given at Vanderbilt University in 1886. Eloquently the crowd was told:

O, the old, dear, sweet, desolate South, it is the home that haunts our imaginations . . . song was born in the South, it died there, it arose from the sepulcher there, it went over the world from there...My dream of the south is of the old plantation homes. Do you remember it? It was a power in itself (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969)

This small community with its warm and giving people fashioned their plantations after those of their Virginia heritage (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). Today, some of the original plantation homes remain intact and display the characteristics evident of the

Virginia style chimneys, rounded window frames, and quarter moldings of times long past. The landscape of the homes is equally reminiscent as yards are filled with some of the original cedar trees, boxwoods, and pecan trees. All of these sightings are remnants of the days gone by (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969).

The original plantation patrons were instrumental in the nurturing of businesses for the community. One of the wealthiest men in town praised his mother as he often told others, “She loved people and has tried to give a ‘missionary’ interest in all human concerns. She was ambitious and encouraged . . . almost drove . . . us children to do our best” (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). Apparently, this message was taken to heart as later in life this man donated 30 acres of land for the railroad to bring its tracks through the town in hopes that the town would grow in both population and business endeavors. The railroad was given the land on the west side of the tracks while the town and businesses got 50 acres of land on the east side of the tracks. Rather than just donating the land, this generous man made sure a town square was created and that it was bounded by roads on all four sides. On three of the roadsides, the kindhearted patron divided the land into equal plots, roughly 50 feet by 50 feet, for a variety of stores. At no cost to the proprietors, established businesses were moved into the new plots and the town began to grow (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969).

Other individuals and groups made additional contributions to the community. With public support a Baptist Church was built in 1836, but quickly outgrew its structure and an addition had to be built in 1872. Once the railroad tracks were laid in 1905 even more people moved to the area and once again the Baptist Church needed a larger structure (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 14; local archived newspaper clipping, June 21, 1951; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991). With the church being the center

of many community activities, people often spoke of faith as a precious and living influence in their lives. The people relied on their faith daily and believed it enriched their lives (local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929). The solidity of their faith never wavered as was illustrated when one resident stated that her faith influenced her to make a personal sacrifice. The sacrifice she made to her community congregation was that of her childhood home. Her donation became an integral part of the church as it became the education building and the home of the church (local archived newspaper clipping, June 21, 1951).

As the above story illustrated the Baptist Church had a strong influence in the lives of the community members. It should be noted there was also a Methodist Church within the community. Though the archived newspaper clippings and the written historical accounts elaborated more on the Baptist congregation, there was evidence that the Methodist Church also had a strong presence. The members of the Methodist Church focused much of their attention on higher education. It was through the Methodist ministry that money, materials, and labor ensured the construction of a college in the late 1800s. Originally, the college had only one building with four teachers however as attendance grew another building was donated by a local family (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991). The college was accredited by the State Methodist Conference and flourished throughout the 1800s. It was especially prominent during the 1890s as it was labeled “one of the leading institutions” in the state (local archived newspaper clipping, October 5, 1911). The community felt they exhibited an educational advantage, nice people, beautiful surroundings, a moral community, and were a beacon of light to the rest of the country (local archived newspaper clipping, June 18, 1908). It was evident that religion and education were major factors in the lives of the community members.

One thing that was such a credit to the people ... in the first half of the century [1900s] was that almost everybody sent their children to college. The idea of a good education was a dominant one. Parents stressed good character and high moral integrity...It is [our] heritage. (local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929)

Community Organizations and Businesses

As the years passed by, the town like the rest of the nation felt the effects of the Depression. Due to the ingrained funds of knowledge (helping others, being of service to the community, having faith in God, and placing the needs of others before one's own needs) this community wanted work not charity. A local newsman reported:

Not 'charity,' the 'breadline,' 'soup kitchen' nor 'dole.' Honest work for honest folks..... Well, she was a hard teacher, Madam Depression: but we've learned our lesson! We quit living so high and fast. We stayed at home more, went to church and Sunday school oftener, visited our neighbors and found they were all real good neighbors... But we'd neglected to remember all the good, dependable folks who live on country roads, lanes and byways. These folks go and come to town, school and church as often, get sick and need a doctor as often, as highwayside(*sic*) dwellers. We knew of no remedy till the CWA came to the rescue. (local archived newspaper clipping, February 8, 1934)

It was with pride and gratitude to the CWA [Civil Works Administration, part of the New Deal by President Roosevelt] that the residents of the town improved their situation. The community worked together and downed trees that allowed the roads to dry, made bridges to go over waterways, straightened curves in the roads, and drained ditches. By the courtesy of farm labor and machinery and the county's donation of gravel, the community found its way back to a brighter future (local archived newspaper clipping, February 8, 1934).

The attitude displayed by the community during the Depression was the same attitude exhibited before the Depression and yet again, after the Depression. Many daily trials and tribulations were eased with the activism of the early civic groups, such as the American Legion, Ruritan Club, Masons, Odd Fellows, Women's Club, Junior Chamber of Commerce, and Jaycees (local archived newspaper clipping, October 6, 1949; local archived newspaper clipping,

February 22, 1951; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969; Bicentennial History, Historical Society, 1976, p. 464). With the help of these organizations numerous community projects were completed. Efforts by these groups provided a new Masonic Lodge, a new health clinic with the latest medical equipment, waterworks and sewage systems for the residents, paved streets throughout the entire city, and a dial up telephone system (local archived newspaper clipping, June 18, 1908; local archived newspaper clipping, October 6, 1949; local archived newspaper clipping, February 22, 1951; Bicentennial History, Historical Society, 1976, p. 463). Throughout most of the projects labor was donated, money was made by cake sales, architects offered free designs, and residents donated many hours of their time. The city newspaper stated that “each of the [city’s] 500 citizens has contributed in some way” to these endeavors (local archived newspaper clipping, October 6, 1949).

Even today, the community displays an unwavering commitment to help others. According to mayor, for the past 52 years the community has helped a local mental health facility at Christmas time. All segments of the community work together to collect clothes, snacks, toiletries, and money for those in the hospital. It is customary to collect the needed items over the duration of a month with the culminating activity, The Mayor’s Motorcade, bringing an air of excitement and anticipation to the patients of the hospital. Each year as the truckload of clothes and supplies are given to the hospital and distributed to the patients, the community members sing Christmas carols. Reaching out to others is important but the mayor also added that within our community, “We want to help those in need. Some families aren’t able to provide for them[selves]” (local school district news, December 21, 2010). Many residents reinforced the Mayor’s charitable attitude and stated, “We give back to our community and it’s important to do that when you are blessed” (local county school district news, December 21,

2010). Being able to extend blessings to others was an everyday event and not something any resident expected to be recognized for. However, one of these gifts to those in need was witnessed by the entire nation during an episode of ABC's "Extreme Makeover." Through the combined effort of the local brick company and the community, a much needed home for a war veteran with special needs was made possible (local archived newspaper clipping, September 28, 2005).

Being a caring community has brought great pride and rewards to the local residents. Residents of both long ago and today consider themselves cultured, contented, sufficient unto themselves and state they live together like a happy family (History of the County, 1934, p. 359). These residents believed the community was a great place to work, live, and play and that the many successful endeavors of the community were linked to the openness of communication between residents, businesses, civic organizations, religious congregations, public offices, and the school (local archived newspaper clipping, February 22, 1951; local archived newspaper clipping, June 3, 2003 1A; local archived newspaper clipping, May 5, 2004; local archived newspaper clipping, February 26, 2005; local school district news on foundation, 2005 - present). The above listed various groups in the community constantly and openly communicated with the residents by many different means. One constant method of communication and disseminating information was the school (W. Burton, personal observation, 2005-2009). Many times announcements were broadcast; flyers or informational packets were sent home, phone calls were made, or announcements were placed on the outside on the local marque. Since the residents shared overall feelings of oneness, acceptance, encouragement, success, cooperation, and loyalty announcements and information about community were welcomed (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, pp. 24, 285).

As the principal of the school bragged about his students, it was obvious that the ingrained funds of knowledge played a great part in the school's accomplishments:

We have a lot of good things to offer. We have [a] fine community and fine climate and an excellent teacher parent relationship . . . we have fewer youth problems than in larger school systems . . . and we have better communication and relationships between the teachers and the youths themselves. (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 83)

Landscape Transformation

In this community's quest to reconcile its sense of self, the residents have had to face the reality of increasingly globalized economies, changes in the cultural landscapes, homogenization of cultures, and standardized education. The influence of a globalized economy was easily depicted as the local landscape changed upon the arrival of each new business. In the 1960s a local business endeavor began that placed this small but unique community in homes of such dignitaries as President and Mrs. Gerald Ford, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Hope, Perry Como, Guy Lombardo, Andy Williams, along with presence in the L. B. J. Johnson Library, the Georgia Senate Chambers, luxury hotels, country clubs, aircrafts, embassies throughout the world, State houses, cruise ships, yachts, and offices (local archived newspaper clipping, July 2, 1978; local archived newspaper clipping, February 28, 1979; archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 81-82).

Great notoriety descended upon the community as the direct result of a longtime resident changing her rug-making production from synthetic commercial rugs to custom designed rugs. The rugs were made 100% with New Zealand finest wool or they were a blend of silk and New Zealand wool. The uniqueness of the fiber was accompanied by a new production technique that placed a cotton base fabric with a secondary base underlying the custom designed wool (local archived newspaper clipping, February 28, 1979).

As the owner described her new business to others, she stated she located it “at the foot of the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains” because she knew the “artistic and creative ability among the local people....a large percentage [who] had been part of our work family for more than twenty years” (local archived newspaper clipping, February 28, 1979). The original building structure for these new rugs was 36 feet x 70 feet, or 2,520 square feet. As the company gained exposure in the home of the rich and famous, the demand for the rugs grew and eventually the building structure was expanded to 90,000 square feet. The building facility hosted a full staff that encompassed every stage of production and then dispensed its wares to various showrooms throughout the United States (local archived newspaper clipping, n.d).

During the 1970s one of the wealthiest families in the United States had a 14 foot by 28 foot rug custom designed. This was the largest rug ever made for an individual and eventually this family had six more rugs made. Not only was there a demand for the custom made rugs by the ‘rich and famous’ but the company also got requests for some very unique designs. Some of the designs requested included family crests, a copy of a Rousseau painting, and an image of the Chase Manhattan Bank. At one point, even the White House had the business submit a drawing and images for consideration (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 81–82; local archived newspaper clipping, July 2, 1978; local archived newspaper clipping, February 28, 1979; local archived newspaper clipping, n.d.).

Another landmark boom to business took place in 2002 as the nation’s largest supplier of clay pavers broke ground for a new plant in this community. The original plant structure was a “275,000 square foot building that rested among 900 acres of rolling hills,” produced 75 million bricks a year, and stored seven to eight million more bricks (local archived newspaper clipping, May 31, 2003). This particular location was chosen for many reasons, including the abundance

of minerals within the 900 acres, a positive reception by the community, the offer of a free training location, and the optimistic prospect of growth by both the community and the company (local archived newspaper clipping, June 9, 2003).

One particular product made at this location is a rumbled paver that looks centuries old and has been in high demand as many cities across the nation have tried to recapture the charm of Historical Main Street USA (local archived newspaper clipping, October 1, 2003). In 2004, the brick plant expanded its facility by installing a second kiln and adding more square footage. The expansion increased productivity to 120 million bricks per year along and also added an additional 20 jobs (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 81 – 82; local archived newspaper clipping, July 2, 1978; local archived newspaper clipping, February 28, 1979; local archived newspaper clipping, n.d.).

As the plant expanded by square footage and jobs, it was also expanding its knowledge and understanding of the community's core values as essential to the community's funds of knowledge (local archived newspaper clipping, May 5, 2004). With the realization that service, charity, and helping one another were the foundation of the community, the company became more actively involved in all aspects of the community's life. To show their appreciation for the warm reception and supportive community, the brick company gave the local Board of Education a 'discount for a decade' on any bricks the school system might need to expand or repair its educational structures (local archived newspaper clipping, June 9, 2003). The company was not only generous with materials but also generous with their time and labor. The brick company joined forces with the 'big-hearted community' and built a house with special accommodations for a handicapped person that was unable to afford such modifications (local archived newspaper clipping, September 28, 2003).

Another environmental transformation took place in late 2003 as a mineral processing plant opened its doors for business. This community was selected as the plant site for several reasons: minerals were abundant; a knowledgeable labor force was available; both company and community believed in being environmentally sensitive; and the company appreciated the fundamental values and way of life exhibited by the community.

Working closely with their employees, the company quickly gained an understanding of the overall community and knew that ‘oneness’ and ‘big-heartedness’ were the terms most often associated with this community. Sincerely believing in the community and its’ values enabled the company to integrate itself extensively and solidly into the lives of the residents (J. Thompson, personal communication, February 6 – 7, 2012). Random acts of kindness, plus organized activities by the company, allowed the community members multiple opportunities to become acquainted with the ‘new’ business in town (local archived newspaper clipping, May June 3, 2003, 1A; local archived newspaper clipping, October 1, 2003; local archived newspaper clipping, May 5, 2004; local archived newspaper clipping, May 13, 2004; local archived newspaper clipping, February 26, 2006). The company’s present human resource manager indicated the company has:

an ongoing relationship with the school by doing various community service type projects through the school, as well as “adopting” local families in need (as identified by the school) and purchasing Christmas gifts for the children and food for the family holiday meals. . . We [the company] also encourage education internally through Educational Reimbursement benefits for all full time employees, and each employee has “development/learning goals” attached to their performance appraisals. We also have employees who volunteer as “readers” at the school and we have donated sports/fitness equipment to the school to encourage physical health. (J. Thompson, personal communication, February 6–7, 2012)

As the relationship between the community and business grew, the company became more vocal concerning the high standards it expected of both employees and the overall

company. The company stated it expected “ethical behavior by meeting broader and higher standards than merely complying with laws, rules and regulations” (local mineral company overview website, 1996 - 2012). The company wanted to be the best it could be but wanted to achieve that goal in a highly ethical manner. Knowing the company’s view of high standards, ethics, and personal values was the impetus to strengthen the bond between the community and company. No one was surprised when the company placed an advertisement in the local paper that stated their company was going to “grow... with [the] local county” (local archived newspaper clipping, February 26, 2003). And grow is exactly what happened since both the community and the company shared a common vision along with a set of mutual values.

The local residents that were employed to extract and process minerals were amazed when they realized they were part of a globalized industry. The minerals were used to gel, thicken, texturize, and stabilize other products with business locations, partners, and distribution centers all over the world. When the workers and community understood the magnitude of the company they began to comprehend the meaning of globalization and a global economy. Many common products that are part of our daily lives benefit from this company, such as: energy drinks, fruit smoothies, yogurt, coffee, syrup, alcoholic spirits, lotions, mascara, body wash, toothpaste, after shave liquids, cement, concrete, carpet backing, animal feed, flooring, fire retardant materials and even oil drilling fluids (local mineral company overview website, 1996 - 2012).

Institute of Education

Though businesses brought a more worldly air to the community, the community believed in order to be citizens of the world, it had to first instill a certain virtue of “place” in the education of its youth. The meaningful and close relationship between the children and their

community at large was instilled in the children from infancy through adulthood. The parents took an active role in the community and they expected the school to do the same. The teachers were part of this by virtue of their position and they were expected to absorb the spirit of service and lead. The sense of place and the default role that community members played in one another's lives becomes a formalized way for teachers to use existing funds of knowledge to tailor formal educational experiences to a world that students related to.

The earliest settlers showed initiative and resourcefulness as the community built their first school in the 1860s (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 8). Upon completion, the school was a simple log construction with only one room, one chimney, one opening for a window, and one door (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). This coincided nicely with one principal, one teacher, and one mission. The educational mission sought by parents was that they wanted their children instructed so the children would have a better way of life than their parents. Academics were seen as means to achieve a better life but the parents and community felt there was more to be included into the daily lives of the children. Parents emphasized good character, high morals, a 'missionary' interest in others, and many other religious and ethical qualities. Children were expected to display all of these character qualities in every aspect of their lives. Community, church, and education all went hand in hand each and every day (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 8; local archived newspaper article, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969).

The area flourished as time went by and the population steadily grew each year. Looking ahead to future needs of the community, the residents were the first in the county to vote successfully on a local tax (History of the County, 1934, p. 104). As new residents

continued to move to the community there were many infrastructural developments that needed to be met. One of the most immediate needs of the community was a larger schoolhouse for the ever growing number of children. The community, proud of its self-sufficiency was able to build a new school building with ten rooms without any outside funding or labor. It was felt by the community that maintaining a good school would attract and keep better citizens (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 8; History of the County, 1934, pp. 106, 118).

Each student was encouraged to do his or her personal best academically and to take pride in their achievements (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 24). To accomplish successes, a student's best behavior was not only necessary but expected. The values and morals of the community were an innate part of each child's upbringing and therein laid the foundation for a successful educational program (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 285; local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, June 21, 1951). When values, morals, and good behavior were exhibited: academic success was more likely, the relationship between teacher-parent was excellent, the relationship between student-teacher was excellent, and there were fewer problems with students (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 85). Amusingly though, while parents stressed good character along with proper and respectable behavior; it was not unusual for parents to hear their children refer to the teacher as a 'mean old maid' (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). The parents knew the 'mean teacher' was simply trying to instill the educational and personal values of the community into the children. The underlying premise was that residents saw schools and churches as important, interwoven, and strong influences in the community (local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991).

In the early days of the ‘mean old maid’ should a student dare not follow the teacher’s rules, a swift ‘whack on the back’ generally encouraged attentiveness and good behavior (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). The close relationship that developed between the parents, students, teacher, and community led many to say their community was cohesive or exhibited ‘oneness’ (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 24). The ‘mean old maid’ changed numerous times as the years went by; however, the sense of belonging and the emotional feelings of ‘oneness’ never wavered.

A strong unspoken bond was established between the residents, the various private, public and secular organizations, and the small school. Pride was evident as the community openly stated and displayed the saying, “A small school with a BIG heart” (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 24). Though proud of their smallness, the county school system had other ideas as it began to consolidate all of the small schools in order to be more cost effective and efficient (History of the County, 1934, p. 106). Wanting to remain unchanged and in opposition to consolidation, the small community and its tiny school withdrew from the county school system (History of the County, 1934, p. 108). Pride prevented the larger surrounding schools from engulfing their small community school (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, pp. 8, 24; local archived newspaper clipping, 1991; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969).

By 1923 the school increased in size as a tuition free high school was added. With the high school addition state accreditation was granted (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 24). The newly acquired accreditation brought standardization measures that the state believed were the key to improving education. Standardization affected:

license requirements of teachers, school calendar, curriculum, textbooks, and testing. The purpose of standardized testing was not about the students but about the weaknesses of teachers. Low test scores by students meant remediation for the teacher and in turn, states began to place a much greater emphasis on employing better trained teachers. Better trained teachers meant that teachers had to have two years of college or normal work experience to be hired. As teacher requirements increased, the length of the school year was lengthened to 160 days ((History of the County, 1934, p. 111- 115).

By 1932, the school expanded as a result of busing students in from the outlying communities (Bicentennial History, Historical Society, 1976, p. 463; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991). The growth in student enrollment encouraged the building of ten new classrooms plus an assembly hall. In the new assembly hall students who completed the state standardized requirements received their ‘uniform and free’ diplomas. With a strong push by the parents of the community many students attended the local accredited Methodist college (History of the County, 1933, p. 119); local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969; local archived newspaper clipping, 1991; archived county personalities, 1973, p. 83 – 84).

Standardization never went away and continued to go through cycles in the history of education. During the 1970s standardization was once again in the spotlight. The principal of this local school stated that while he understood that a certain amount of standardization was necessary, there were some negative aspects:

The paper work in running a school has magnified about 10 times what it used to be. There are innumerable forms to complete and because the city, county, state and federal government all give us funds, we have to fill out their individual forms. It really has grown out of all proportion but it is essential and necessary so of course we comply (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 85-86)

Though more negative than positive the principal addressed what he saw as the positives of standardization by stating, “We have inaugurated many new courses...business administration, agriculture, driver’s education, an advanced science course and ...home economics” (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 85 - 86). Furthermore, the principal saw the formation of the school’s first official competitive school football team and a new recreational field as positive results of standardization. The standardization demands came from the state education department but the new football team, uniforms, and recreation field came from the community. Without the established and caring bond between the school and community the football and its needs would not have been met. The principal proudly thanked the community and leaders as said, “We are indebted . . .” (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 85 -86).

In the research of this community historical records indicated a common foundation of funds of knowledge:

The success [of the community and school] is the point of emphasis. Students are thoughtfully encouraged to perform at the highest levels regardless of what their ‘best’ encompasses. The success of [the school] is attributed to the cooperative efforts of parents, teacher, administrators, and students. Since the population of the community and school is sparse, the students all know one another on a personal plane. There is a prevalent sense of acceptance among peers. The students exhibit a genuine pride in their accomplishments and loyalty among themselves. (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p.28)

The Place of Religion

Throughout the history of the town, residents and organizations have played a pivotal role in developing and maintaining a small community that cares for others. During the land lottery in the 1830s, one resident saw the need for community spiritual values and therefore organized a Baptist congregation. His concern about spiritual values was so strong that he deeded one acre of land plus access to a nearby spring to be used for a Baptist church (local archived newspaper

clipping, June 21, 1951). Records indicated the church was started in 1832, completed in 1836, and was known for being the oldest church in the county and surrounding areas (Bicentennial History, Historical Society, 1976, p. 464; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 14). Since its inception the church has:

continued to prosper... [added] a large frame building, [held] a Revival every July with many baptized, [had] Sunday School Classes [that] gathered provisions for the Orphan's Home, [maintained] an active Women's Missionary Society, and showed continuing involvement in the County Baptist Association. (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 14)

Simpson and King's (1999) research stated Appalachian mountain religion had such strong ties that it encompassed all socioeconomic groups. Regardless of economic standing, parents stressed good character, high moral integrity, spiritual values, personal sacrifice, prayer, dedication, serving, and tradition. The community was known to be a "nice class of people with moral commitment and no disorder" (local archived newspaper clipping, June 18, 1908; local archived newspaper article, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, June 21, 1951). Religion was based on land, people, and history and therefore, in order to understand the people, one had to understand the partnership of the lives of the community members with their religion (Simpson and King, 1999). This community's members believed that

While in all secular matters segregation was widely practiced in those early days, the two races making up the population seemed to realize that God was Father of all . . . persons. In all things spiritual white and colored met on a more common ground and, in this section at least, master and slave worshipped in close proximity without racial discrimination. (local archived newspaper clipping, June 21, 1951)

The dogma of the religion centered on helping and giving to others and those beliefs carried over into their everyday lives, thus cementing the partnership of life and religion according to Simpson and King (1999). The partnership between life and religion stressed

service to one another. A good example of this was demonstrated in the fulfillment of the various government, political, and civic offices throughout the area. As one resident stated, there were never any elections in the early days of the community because the people of the community just took office to serve (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 81-86; Bicentennial History, Historical Society, 1976, p. 465; local archived newspaper clipping, June 18, 1908).

The commitment made by some members of the early community far outweighed their own personal needs. With the church's forever increasing population growth it became vital to find additional space, buildings, or simply, just another location. "The strength of a church is not in its changes of location or buildings but in the daily commitment of its people to live for Christ" (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 14). With the emphasis placed on commitment, one member came forward and donated her childhood home. According to the locals, ". . . one can only guess at the heartache, personal sacrifice and earnest prayer that finally made a glorious dream possible (local archived newspaper clippings, June 21, 1951).

Commitment and faith remained closely intertwined in the people of the small community as the years progressed. The community and the church remained the basis of the lives of the people. An article in the local newspaper (local archived newspaper clipping, June 21, 1951) stated, "Today the community is rich in history, rich in tradition, rich in service . . . and great faith." This great faith has been a constant cornerstone in the lives of the congregation and community members as they often expressed their thankfulness for their many blessings. It was often said, "These liberty loving people have not forgotten the one to whom they owe all of their happiness, the beauties of nature and its abundance . . . They owe it to the great God of the Universe (local archived newspaper clipping, July 2, 1896).

The partnership between religion and life led to the establishment of strong civic or service oriented group organizations that have been responsible for numerous improvements within the community throughout the years. Early in the community's history, a clinic was built with little cost to the town. The people of the community worked together to provide all of the essential labor and materials and created the vitally needed structure. Once completed, the doctor who maintained the clinic never had to pay rent on the building because the community felt the 'no rent' gesture would retain the skilled doctor for the town's medical needs. The residents and the civic groups furthermore enhanced the usefulness and the appearance of the infrastructure of the town by assisting with the repaving of various roads. Along with the clinic and road improvements, civic groups played a critical part in the overall progress and development of the community as they expanded their projects to include the school's various needs and wants (local archived newspaper clipping, February 22, 1951).

The traditions and history surrounding the partnership of community life and religion, though established years ago, still runs deep today. This partnership formed a very significant platform from which the community's overall funds of knowledge were based. The children of the community, both past and present, have ingrained upon them a common plane for their funds of knowledge. These children, as their parents and all the generations before them, understood the meaning of personal sacrifice, spiritual values, moral commitments, good character, and a dedication to serve others. Additionally, there was an appreciation of personal blessings and the abundance of the land, personal integrity, and a loving faith that laid the foundation for their funds of knowledge (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 81-86; Burton, personal observation, 2005-2010; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 8, 14, 24; local archived newspaper clipping, July 2, 1896; local archived newspaper clipping, June 18,

1908; local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991).

The Community Square

In order to fully comprehend the community and its people, the layout of the land, businesses, and infrastructure had to be understood. From the center of the historical downtown square, layers of history were thinly veiled, even to the naked eye. Beginning on the west end of the town square, there was an average sized vacant lot that was very similar to the size of all the other land lots surrounding the square. Most of the land lots have housed various activities or businesses at one time or another throughout history. Though the first lot mentioned was vacant, the lot next to it once housed the city offices. When the city offices were relocated next to the fire station, the old city office building became a small library with limited hours and an even more limited volunteer staff. It was understood by the residents that resources for continuing the presence of a community library must come from within the community. A poster tacked to the door of this building plainly revealed that the library relied heavily on donations and donated books. As one would expect, the book donations, often by various residents, resulted in a strange mix of literature within the stacks of materials the library house.

Though I could not venture into the closed library, just standing at the door it was clearly evident that the staff wanted only specific donated materials for use in this small public library. By means of a very large sign posted outside the library ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ materials were listed. Acceptable materials included the following: fiction books published between 2000 and the present or classical fiction, exemplified in the signage, “.....Steinbeck, Hemingway, etc.” (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010); Children books’, and non-fiction works between 2000 and the present. There was also a prominently displayed sign that listed

items that would not be used or accepted by the library. The list of unacceptable materials included: magazines, including the National Geographic [*sic*], Reader's Digest Condensed Books, encyclopedias or any other multi-volume books, children's coloring or activity books, and the library did not want textbooks or home schooling books.

Due to the unique mix of reading materials, during the spring of each year, an annual book sale was initiated and all redundant titles and donations that did not meet the standards of the volunteer staff were placed for sale. Throughout the book sale, bargains were found in a price range that varied in increments of \$0.25 to \$2.00. Any funds raised were used for the perpetuation of the media center (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010).

The library's hours followed the constraints of the volunteers who staffed this small space. Only on Mondays was the community served for a full day; Friday and Saturday offered a mere two hours; and Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday were limited to no more than four hours. Though the library was small and often observed by some as behind the times, the community members had access to five Internet-ready computers (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010), and in a throwback to the small town past, the services of a notary were always readily available, inherently in the person of the volunteer librarian. All of these services were noted by the signage displayed on the one large window and the single entrance door (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010).

Unfortunately, during 2010, mold damage threatened the stacks of books and materials in this small library. Hundreds of books had to be removed and were slated for disposal. Surprisingly and gratefully, a local couple decided to make a large tree trunk art project from the spines and covers of the more than 1900 damaged books. The couple asked the community to help name this pop art creation, and ultimately, the "Story Willow" became one of the most

noticeable features in the otherwise bare-bones library (local archived newspaper clipping, July 19, 2010). In fact, to the outside observer accustomed to the glitzy world of high tech media centers where architecture and the imposing façade creates as much a part of the building's utility as its stacks and electronic wizardry, this quaint and dusty small space seemed to stop short of even being a library. However, in this community, the pride of ownership and sense of another's shared space was vastly important to both the users and the volunteers.

Around the corner on the north end of the town square sat a cedar sided building that housed a family-style restaurant that had seemingly changed owners, themes, menus, and success rates with unending regularity. During the past six years, this restaurant changed owners three times. Regardless of ownership or theme, the community did its best to support the restaurant. Fortunately, some residents lived locally and were self-employed and there were other residents who were employed by the local school and surrounding businesses. Though these workers were only a small percentage of the community population they continued to support the restaurant on a daily basis.

During my five years as a resident and teacher in this community, it was customary on teacher workdays that the faculty and staff ate at one of the four local restaurants. This particular restaurant on the square was one of the preferred choices because of the dining room size and daily specials. This restaurant had a loyal following, as did the local pharmacy, which also housed an even smaller sit-down restaurant. Though most customers preferred to dine in, both of these restaurants had a drive-through window for customers limited on time. The drive-through window allowed individuals to pre-order, drive up, grab their order, and quickly be on their way. On regular workdays, various groups of teachers pre-ordered lunch and had it picked up by a fellow employee or had it delivered to the school.

The majority of the community residents that were employed worked outside the community in the surrounding larger towns and cities. Therefore, due to geography and mileage distance, it was impossible for these workers to return to the local restaurants and still be time effective and efficient at their jobs. The most recent American Community Survey 2005-2009 revealed that residents in this community drove an average of 34 miles to work and back each day. Fast food chain restaurants became a way of life for those working outside the community. While fast food was plentiful in the surrounding towns and cities, this community had none of the large commercially advertised chains. Though the drive to work became a complacent part of daily living, preserving the local way of life, by not moving away and supporting locally, entrenched merchants had not suffered. Life dictated that some workers eat in a different town during the day but at night time their loyalty returned to the local merchants.

The aromas of the restaurant flowed easily to a shotgun house painted in a traditional light green that sat in the next lot. It was a business that sold used furniture and curio items. No sign existed to tell potential customers the name of the business or hours of operation but interestingly, a hand printed poster encouraged shoppers to make an offer on a fair price for the goods available. Within the outer area of this establishment, a customer could easily view old churns, water-ringed bird baths, various laminate items, hardware with missing pieces, and pitiful looking yard gnomes. The only apparent security for this business was a plastic waist-high picket fence that had a combination lock through the slide mechanism to make the gate inoperable. Oddly, and even humorously, only one section of the fence was actually installed, thus virtually rendering the locked gate useless as a deterrent to anyone wanting to view, buy, or borrow an item.

A true relic of the past to small town life sat next door to the green shotgun house. This remnant of the past was a hardware store that showed no-frills but served as the hub where the necessities of a formerly agricultural and rural lifestyle could still be purchased. Local citizens showed their continual support throughout the years as planting supplies were purchased in the spring, feed supplies were a daily need, and long forgotten hardware was still available as needed. Local support was especially evident when a rare snowstorm besieged the area and wreaked great havoc on a town that seldom saw snow. This local hardware business was one of the few places where salt could be purchased to clear walkways and driveways. As was the custom, the hardware store showed its support for the town people by allowing notices to virtually wallpaper the plate glass front of the store's beige brick building. Often goods inside the store were blocked from view by the handwritten, home-printed, and professionally lithographed flyers announcing topics as varied as a political tea party group having a meeting, or the local Christmas light committee selling smoked Boston butt hams to raise money for the 'poles that we missed last year.' The Church of God of the Union Assembly whose local congregation was having a revival service used their sign to remind residents that 'the wages of sin is Hell.' Another sign made reference to a vague health problem for a named individual along with information concerning a benefit motorcycle ride. The sign asked all concerned residents to take part regardless of their status as motorcycle owners. One more handwritten sign offered the rental of a home while next to it was a professionally printed poster that encouraged participation in a nearby blue grass jamboree. Many of the same posters that formed the hardware store's window collage were placed in the windows of other retail and civic buildings in the same scatter-shot method (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010).

Adding to the relationship and field of trust between this hardware store and this community was the presence of the inventory for sale. With no apparent worry of pilfering or thieving, pallets of terra cotta flower pots, picnic tables, wheel barrows, and large bags of mulch were displayed outside without any apparent means of security. At the time of this observation the store was closed but a note on the door encouraged residents who wanted to make after hour purchases to simply call the proprietor at home.

Beyond the hardware store was a vacant corner lot that had been used by someone as a garden. The rugged and dried remains of plants and corn stalks competed for space with the litter that passing cars tossed aside as they drove by on the main highway that bordered this lot. After my visit, the community decided to use an insurance company's National Community Service Day to beautify and improve this garden lot. Together the residents installed terraces and borders, built five raised beds filled completely with top soil, and secured the commitments of volunteers to assist in maintenance of the area. The purpose of the raised beds was to encourage use of the garden by senior citizens. A volunteer who coordinated the project stated that raising the beds made it easier physically for senior citizens to enjoy gardening and in turn, encouraged them socially to come out and enjoy one another's company (local archived newspaper clipping, May, 30, 2011; W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010).

Across the highway that connected this community to the larger towns around it stood the remnants of a large building that was divided into four separate store units. During my observation, two units were vacant. One unit was filled by a store front style Pentecostal-Evangelical church. This church was pastored by a local real estate broker. His church shared space with his real estate office. Listings for numerous local properties that were for sale took up one window while a hand-made Styrofoam cross, wrapped in strands of Christmas lights was

prominent in the other. Services, according to the window with the cross, were held Monday and Friday nights from “7:30 P.M. until ???” In both the real estate and church windows, some dead flowers shared space in plastic vases with faded silk flowers and significant quantities of dead house flies were in evidence. The church pulpit was a clear acrylic stand with a lighted cross adhered to the side facing the congregation. Seating for about 30 worshippers consisted of mismatched folding chairs in various stages of repair. Large Peavey™ speakers that gave the impression of overwhelming loudness for such a small space were placed throughout the sanctuary. A Hammond B3 organ was the only keyboard and it sat opposite an incredibly big drum set. A box of tambourines was at the door with a handwritten sign encouraging all worshippers to take one and use it when they were, “led by the spirit” (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010). The most eye-catching adornments were three large word sculptures that read “Peace, Love, and Faith” placed respectively in the real estate window above the door, and in the window of the lighted cross. Each of the sculptures still contained the \$8.00 price tag from the Dollar General local.

There was a detached building on the east-end of the square that had long been the home of a local pharmacy. While many modern businesses attempted a retro style, the drugstore did not need to try. They had succeeded. Their lunch counter retained traditional soda fountain fare and was one of the most popular gathering spots in the entire community. Prescriptions were filled quickly in spite of a relatively small staff, and in-store charge accounts had assured customer loyalty from the store’s beginning. In Briesacher and Corey’s research (1997) of the satisfaction level and perceived confidence of a pharmacist and his or her support staff, drugstores like the outlet observed here were more than twice as likely to be positively viewed by consumers. The deep bonds between this particular store and the customers it served had

insulated the community from the arrival of a large drug chain. The customers had traded the ready availability of less common prescriptions for the seemingly direct healthcare intervention of the pharmacist/owner. During my visits, the same customers dropped off prescriptions very early, had breakfast at the soda fountain, and picked their prescription medication up during a return visit for lunch. Each day featured a different lunch special that could be eaten within the facility or picked up through the same window that dispensed prescriptions. If the bell that alerted the attendant that you were at the window was not working (as frequently was the case), a permanent sign told patrons to honk their horns for service (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010). Many times I was in the drive-through line honking my horn for a sausage biscuit at 6:30 in the morning. Once they came to the window, they knew what I wanted, including the package of mustard and large sweet tea. The woman working the grill leaned back into the view of the window to say hello and ask how things were going.

A large cork bulletin board in the drugstore read like a small town phone book. From the “Gone Too Far Tea Party” rally flyer to the slightly faded poster for in-home supply delivery for Medicare Diabetes patients, every cause was considered on the large drugstore bulletin board (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010). Whether offering copies of a local high school newspaper or six free puppies that were three quarters Heeler and one quarter Catahoula, a wide cross-section of rural Appalachia was on full and colorful display. A wall of thumb tacked business cards offered a plethora of tradesmen, though in no discernible formatted order: locksmith, cosmetic consultant, cosmetologist, housepainter, and orthodontist. Observation revealed that every socioeconomic and age group came together in the melting pot that was the local drug store. It was a unique experience to observe the pharmacist and his staff greet such a wide swath and comparatively large number of customers and interact with them in an almost

familial way. The store's physical plan was a retail establishment with only one central aisle interrupted by the soda fountain on one side and four restaurant tables on the other. This meant that a customer who needed lice shampoo, lip balm, or a hot water bottle had to ask his neighbor to scoot his chair back so they could reach it. No one seemed bothered by this minor inconvenience (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010). In conflict with the prevailing theory of big box retailers offering widely varied products, this store had honed its mission to mainly personal products, locally cooked foods, and prescription drugs. Not many things happened in the span of a day in the life of this community that was not reported and discussed within the confines of the drugstore.

The pharmacist, from his perch at the back of his store, looked across the park to another institution that made this Appalachian community unique. This community has had, since 1950, its own local telephone company. At the time of the company's founding, it was the first direct dial telephone system infrastructure in the state (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 6; local archived newspaper clipping, June 18, 2003). The telephone company was founded by a prominent family and remained locally owned and a consistent point of local pride (local archived newspaper clipping, June 18, 2003). While updates in technology rendered most small telephone companies obsolete because the expense of upgrade forced consolidations, this company made the needed investments without selling out to a larger group. A local telephone directory complete with a yellow page advising section was still published annually and distributed free to all users (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p.6; W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010).

Also facing the square was an auto parts store. Like the drug store this was an independent dealer tied to a national brand of parts rather than a corporate owned store. In the

window the same mix of handwritten and home printed signs covered the religious, civic, and cultural events that were available to the community's residents. While there was evidence of some professionally printed signs advertising specials available within the store, the most prominent advertising was a home printed special on five quarts of motor oil and a filter for \$15.00. To streamline this offering, tax was figured for potential buyers. The most noticeable sign was a large rendering of the Ten Commandments within an American flag (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010).

Adjacent to the auto parts retailer was another family business, a local furniture store that had served several generations of local residents. Besides selling furniture, the owner often made appliance repair house calls for the local community members. Each day before the business opened the owner dropped off his granddaughter at the elementary school. One morning as I was working the car rider line (the line where caregivers dropped off children for school); I opened the car door to let his granddaughter out and a staff member came over to the truck to tell him about her refrigerator. She provided him with the address, the problem, and also informed him that the house was unlocked and to "just go on in" (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010). During the scope of the study this store closed as a result of the founder's death.

While bisected by the highway that was a major thoroughfare, the downtown area was anchored by a well-manicured central park. The park was the most carefully maintained vignette in the community. Its existence predated most of the buildings in the area (local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969; local archived newspaper clipping, February 24, 1999). In 2006, this area was remodeled, carefully landscaped, and, "dedicated to the citizens of [city] for their recreational and leisurely enjoyment" (local archived newspaper article, October 11, 2006; W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010). The park served as a gathering spot for several formal

events each year. These included: a Memorial Day celebration, Fourth of July activities, a street fair, homecoming, a Christmas parade, a car club gathering, and various concerts that often benefited local families in need. All of the festivals typically followed a similar pattern of speakers, bicycle races, three legged races, greasy pigs and poles, and music (local archived newspaper clipping, January 6, 1969). The customary booths brought local churches, area craftsmen, singing groups, and school service groups together to offer food, games, and crafts. The speakers were usually local civic and political leaders who spoke briefly to recognize some facet of the community or to commend some resident for his deeds. In some instances this resulted in the addition of a permanent monument within the park itself. Veterans were recognized with a permanent memorial and the political leaders who oversaw the park's renovation were memorialized on the reviewing stand. Most of these celebrations were an outgrowth of several local groups involving themselves in both the planning and dividing the duties required. However, during this study an exception was a Memorial Day celebration which was a joint venture between the city and the United Way charity. This event was larger in scope than many of the indigenous festivals; however the offerings while more numerous, followed the same patterns of games, foods, and activities. Rather than the usual ad hoc committee of local residents, this event utilized an outside event planner (W. Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010).

In 2011, I returned to the community for a visit and I participated in the Fourth of July downtown celebration. The celebration followed the usual format for festivities. Many former students, coworkers, and families greeted me as I entered the celebratory area. I purchased a bracelet to in order to participate in all of the festivities, including a raffle.

The town supplied inflatable playground activities that drew large crowds and squeals of delight from the children. The most popular activity had a climbing stairway that led to the top of a slide which in turn included a pool of water at the bottom of the slide.

Watching the slide it was interesting to note that the younger children were constantly being helped and guided by the older children. The older children displayed the attitude of caretakers as little ones would try to climb the rope incline ladder to make their way to the top. When any of the younger children displayed fear or even remotely started to cry, the older children always stepped in. With the slide activity as the big event of the day, there was a lot of water displaced as the kids splashed and frolicked freely in the pool at the bottom of the slide. With the need for constant replenishment of water, the town's fire trucks volunteered to supply more water. With their children on the slide, parents were encouraged to try their pitching arms as local personalities sat on a dunking bench taunting them (W. Burton, field notes, July 3, 2011).

Outside the city center, business have been transient and changed offerings with consistency. The town's first convenience store was still in operation in spite of numerous changes in both the ownership and the branding. Noticeably missing from the business life of this community were the nationally recognized chains that offer products and services in most towns today.

Localized Approach

By maintaining a localized approach to self-reliance, and by resisting the introduction of typical (e.g. Wal-Mart, Kroger, McDonalds) retailers, the community has kept an identity that was noticeably different from otherwise similar communities in the area. This resistance limited the depth of rationalized cultural immersion; however, the residents had alternative sources for

the products and services needed. There were a medical practice, two dentists, beauty parlors, barbers, a funeral provider, and an assortment of craftsmen who met the service needs of the residents. In a community otherwise not infiltrated by chain providers, there was a Dollar General store which served as a small scale big box retailer. During my field work I observed that the localized approach of this community was a point of particular pride among its residents.

Staying in line with the localized approach, local authors and artisans shared their talents with the students. A local craftsman made a banner by hand that depicted the school as it looked years ago when he attended there. The craftsman embedded 25,540 beads along with 300 yards of nylon as he labored 185 hours to make this unique banner for the school. When asked why he undertook such an arduous task, he replied he, “just wanted to give something back to the school” (local county school district news, May 4, 2011). After giving the school the banner, he returned many times to share his skills with the students. The craftsman stated “this is his payback for growing up and belonging to this close knit community” (local county school district news, May 4, 2011).

Community and School Partnerships

In this study nowhere was civic pride, hope for the future, and involvement of the wider community more readily visible than at the local elementary school. The school facilities once housed every grade from kindergarten to high school. Changing demographic and educational trends turned the facility into an elementary school in the early part of the 1990s. The change in ages served by the school had a less discernible impact than the changes wrought by the most recent idea of standardizing educational experiences across every strata of society stemming from No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed by Congress in 2001. This act of Congress (United States Department of Education, n.d.) was passed to ensure that federally funded public

schools were held accountable by means of standards based education. Each federally funded school had to adhere to state mandated standards that were tested by set measureable goals. Specific elements of NCLB included: set high standards for each grade level, administer the same tests under the same conditions annually at the same time, and set Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) standards. AYP meant that each year the students in the same grade had to perform higher than the previous set of students. Another facet required that each teacher had to be highly qualified according to the individual state's requirements and definition of highly qualified. According to the United States Department of Education (n.d.) and Congress, NCLB required accountability and improved performance by both teachers and students each year.

The introduction of these standards was answered in many systems by lessening the influence and involvement of community members. With pressure for teachers and students to perform on a standard-based level many schools felt there was no time for outsiders (United States Department of Education, n.d.). In this community, I observed the opposite. Educators, parents and citizens, whose heritages were tied up in the school's identity worked diligently to improve the performance of students by embracing standardization, while augmenting its requirements with a healthy dose of civic and community specific pride. A rather unique instance involved an older resident of the community who frequently visited the pre-kindergarten students. When the resident visited the pre-kindergarten program he read stories to the students and also imbedded stories about the community from his childhood. A local artisan, a wood-carver, learned of the older, disabled man's volunteer reading and decided to carve a cane for him. The woodcarver visited the pre-kindergarten students and asked for their help in designing the cane. Once finished, the cane included pictures, symbols, words, names, and phrases of importance from the story reader's life. Etched into the wood of the cane were symbols of his

church, military service and rank, the Masons, and the Boy Scouts. Words and phrases written around the cane included the names of all the children in the classroom he had been reading to, the names of the storyteller's children, and the names of his grandchildren (local county school district news, May 12, 2011).

The above story illustrates the emotional connection members of the community had with the school. At the commencement of this study, the physical structures that comprised the school were a mixture of buildings that once housed a comprehensive kindergarten through twelfth grade campus. The original campus was built in in the 1930s and additional buildings were added as needed throughout the next few decades. With the passage of time, the campus was enlarged and remodeled several times. As a result of the various building projects, what remained was an odd conglomeration of buildings with wide variance in architectural styles and classroom sizes, along with a variety of classroom accommodations. One aspect of the original campus, the sports and service facility, remained as it was. As the traditions of the school stood strong in this community, it was with pride that these facilities were still available for use by both the school and the community. Though not as pristine or showy as it once was, the original gymnasium was used by the elementary school as needed. For the residents of this community, especially those who actually attended the school when it was a comprehensive school, any mention of the gymnasium and 'the school that was' brought an overwhelming display of loyalty and pride. According to a local historical book (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p.14, 24), "There [was] a prevalent feeling of 'oneness' between the community and [school] . . . because the majority of the students' parents also attended this institution . . . the phrase 'Small School with a Big Heart' adequately surmises the intent of the [school]."

Furthermore, the clipping affirmed:

The population of the school and community is sparse . . . [but everyone] is known to one another on a personal plane. There is a prevalent sense of acceptance... whatever the needs of circumstances... [everyone] exhibit[s] a genuine pride in their accomplishments and loyalty among themselves. There exists no crime, violence, racial problems or drug problems within the [community] or school. (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p .28)

With strong feelings of oneness, pride, and loyalty, no one ever hesitated to ask for the use of the gymnasium for school or community projects. Some projects, held annually and simply considered tradition, were always held in the gymnasium, such as the Fall Festival, the springtime Foundation fundraiser, various Award Programs, chorus performances, and monthly PTA meetings (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Burton, field notes, May 23, 2010).

To anyone passing by, the buildings mirrored the architectural landscape of the larger community in the mix of older and newer plants in various states of repair and usefulness. In total, five main buildings and the attendant storage sheds made up the elementary school. Though efforts had been made to update both the technological and physical resources within the facility, meshing several buildings constructed in different eras and for divergent educational purposes was an ongoing challenge. Renovations were planned as early as 2005 and would have greatly enhanced the physical facilities; however, unforeseen economic hardships postponed all intended projects. Time, however, took its toll on the original building and it was closed before the 2010 – 2011 school year. Without the use of the original building, the remaining campus absorbed the students. To preserve the strong emotional and personal ties felt by many, the architectural façade of the original building was accepted as the permanent logo for the school (W. Burton, personal observation, 2010).

Transportation to and from school was free and available to all students by means of the public school bus transportation department. Though many students used the school bus system, a large number of parents provided private transportation, since many of these parents functioned as their children's primary caregivers and did not use day care services. Taking their children to school each day provided an avenue for teachers to remain in close contact with the community and families on a near daily basis. Though these social interactions and encounters were generally brief, they provided teachers a peek into the child's life. Seeing and interacting with family members; whether for an exchange of information, a word of encouragement, an expression of concern, or just a daily update, allowed the teacher a glimpse into the family life of the child. These momentary exchanges with family were an extension of the student's home life and were of substantial benefit to the faculty members, especially in increasing their community funds of knowledge.

The events held by the school, and the responses they received, far overtaxed the available physical resources. When several generations of a student's family showed for an event, both parking spaces and seating were extreme logistical challenges. Regardless of these infrastructure challenges, those attending never seemed to mind. Families and friends parked on-campus around the gymnasium as well as at nearby locations such as the Baptist church, the park, the community center, and along the roadside. The largest crowd appeared on the first day of school, awards ceremonies, festivals, and benefits.

While the physical structures that comprised the school were less than ideal, they consistently met the educational needs. Though the school had not received some of the resources or renovations the other elementary schools in the county had received, the long term presence of the campus in the community created a space that was well known to the adults and

children of the area. The comfort that the community felt with the school facility nurtured the relationship between the educators and the community they served. Like the drugstore and the family-style restaurant, this local school served as an information hub for community news. Because of the relatively small geographic area served, the strong relationship between the school staff and community, and the multigenerational ties that many area families had to one another, the teachers found it easier to know how the families of an individual student functioned.

When viewed through a clinical lens, the professional staff of this school met and exceeded the minimum requirements established by the state governing authority. There was a diverse mix of educational experiences and an average number of the faculty members had attained advanced degrees. There was an observable cohesion around the goals of the school's administration. The interactions among staff members were professional, courteous and warm. The genuine care exhibited to one another was extended to the student body and in many instances their families. The ratio of students to teachers followed the state guidelines. At the pre-kindergarten level there were 20 students in a class resulting in a ratio of 1:10. The administrative and support staff interacted closely and effectively. The environment created by an engaged faculty, capable administration, adequate supporting roles and involved community all combined to create an atmosphere conducive to a positive learning environment for the students served.

The positive environment established by the school proved essential to the well-being of the school and community as changes took place due to budget cuts and the addition of a new school that was only ten miles away. In past years, each grade level of the school, based upon need, had occupied two or three classrooms. When the original school building was shut down,

the student body moved into the two newer buildings. With less space available logistical decisions were made and it was the pre-kindergarten program that felt the brunt of the decisions. Beginning with the 2011–2012 school year, there was only one pre-kindergarten class and it was limited to 20 students. Along with the reduction in classes and students, the number of school days was also reduced for pre-kindergarten program. In past years the pre-kindergarten school year was 180 days, but the local school system chose to reduce the number of school days to 160. According to the state deputy superintendent another option available was half day classes. These options were offered to school system due to budget reductions (local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 2011; local archived newspaper clipping, May 12, 2011; W. Burton, observation, 2011).

The pre-kindergarten classes were an essential part of the school's all-encompassing philosophy of "oneness" along with the adage of a "small school with a big heart" (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 14). Prior to the budget constraints, the pre-kindergarten teachers engaged students in many exciting and education-based activities throughout the school year. The pre-kindergarten students participated in many off campus field trips to locations such as the city arts center, a dairy, and a pumpkin patch. A multitude of in-house field trips took the students to various areas of the school building for learning experiences. Such activities included a trip to the library to enjoy the Polar Express train, to an upper grade classroom to see Mrs. P. and her milk snake, and to the cafeteria for Muffins with Mom (local county school district news, May 5, 2010). The pre-kindergarten teachers also engaged the students in a Beach Day during the last week of school. Beach Day demonstrated the tight bond between school, community, and parents. During this particular activity I observed at least 18 volunteers that came to help. Many of these volunteers joined in the fun as the

children played on a playground beach behind the school (W. Burton, personal observation, May 18, 2010).

It was customary on the last day of school that a school-wide award ceremony be hosted in the gymnasium with parents, relatives, friends, and community invited for the presentation of awards, honorary mentions, certificates, and recognition of outstanding actions (W. Burton, personal observation, May, 20, 2010). Though the program was noted as school-wide, the pre-kindergarten classrooms opted to have their own presentation ceremonies in their respective classrooms. The pre-kindergarten ceremonies included a variety of entertainment including dance and song. The grand finale of graduation day was the presentation of the coveted pre-kindergarten diplomas followed shortly thereafter by an ice cream party. As the researcher, I attended the graduation activities in one of the pre-kindergarten classes. In this particular classroom, 20 students were on the class roll and all were present. The classroom was also filled with a mixture of 27 parents, siblings, grandparents, and other interested community members (W. Burton, observation, May 20, 2010).

As described throughout this research, there were no shortages of interactions between the community and its elementary school. In fact, the familial culture of the neighborhood served a relatively small geographic area where interactions occurred in professional, educational, social, and business settings. These interactions with consistent regularity increased not just the acquisition of, but the utility of community funds of knowledge in the classroom setting. As previously noted in the field research, information was freely exchanged and because so many of the exchanges related to the shared cultural life of the larger community, there was less risk of divergent perspective on the events and specific needs that could impact the educational experiences of a child.

The smaller retail and service spaces increased the likelihood that a teacher would run into the families of the students she taught in non-school contexts. The culture of the community established the appropriateness of pausing for a moment of conversation with even casual acquaintances. Because so many of the faculty members lived and shopped in the community where they worked, the frequency of interactions increased between faculty members and many of their students' families within a school year. Though these social by-chance interactions were casual, planned school interactions were somewhat different. As part of the standardization of education, many interactions, such as conferences and written communication had been codified. Thus there was a healthy mix of formatted communication that tracked educational progress and social communication that fostered a holistic approach to teacher/student/parent involvement.

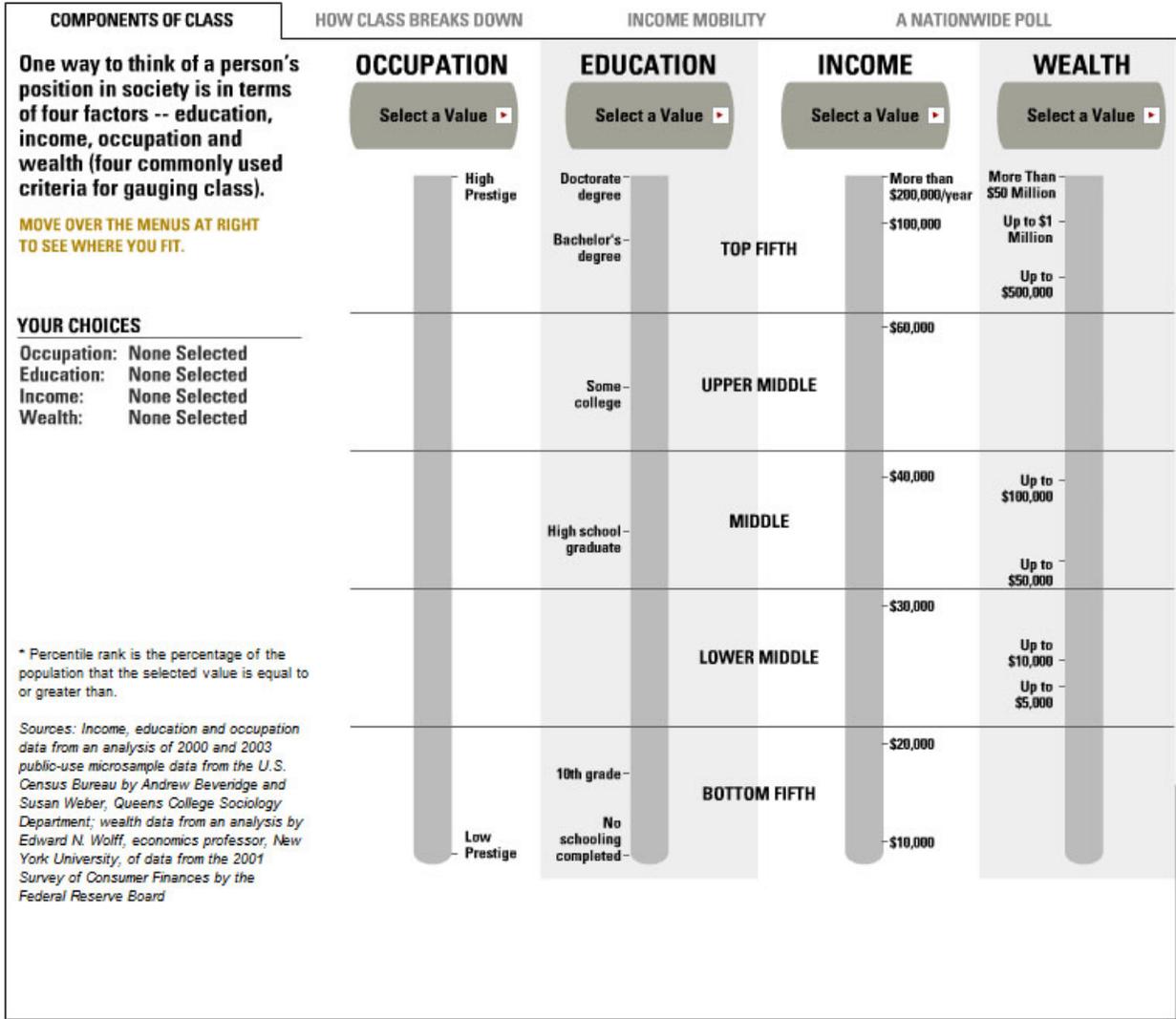
The Community Participants

As stated earlier in the study, the participants of this study included four families with children in the pre-kindergarten program and two pre-kindergarten teachers. For added depth and relevance to the study it was important to understand the SES of those involved. However, it must be noted that none of the participants in this research project stated or based their SES on any research grounded data. Each participant of this study self-identified SES based on his/her own preconceived thoughts (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Data describing a person's position in society or SES in society was located in a chart presented by *The New York Times* (2005). According to *The New York Times* (2005), a person's position in society or his/her SES in society depended upon a combination of four factors:

education, occupation, income, and wealth and no one factor carried any more significance than another factor. The U.S. Census Bureau and the Federal Reserve Board furnished the actual data from surveys done in 2001 and 2003 to the Queens College Sociology Department and to a professor in the economics department at New York University. Researchers Andrew Beveridge and Susan Weber from Queens College collaborated with researcher Edward Wolff from New York University and created an interactive chart that demonstrated SES. The replicated chart, shown below, allowed an individual to enter personal data and then by means of interactive technology, a SES was determined (*The New York Times*, 2005). This research, representative of the United States population at that time, was featured and illustrated in a special edition of *The New York Times* (2005). All data was automatically immersed with the four integrated factors. The chart designated the SES of a person based on how prestigious their present job was, the highest level of education or educational degree completed by the individual, the actual dollar amount of income earned yearly by the individual, and the individual's net worth or wealth (*New York Times*, 2005). As information was entered into the chart, each answer fell into one of the five categories. A percentile was given to illustrate an individual's statistics in comparison to the overall United States statistics.

Once information was entered it fell into one of the following five categories: lower SES; lower middle SES; middle SES; upper middle SES; upper SES (*The New York Times*, 2005). Shown below is a replica of the collaborated research. Click the image for a hyperlink to the original interactive *The New York Times* (2005) chart.



Archie Tse and Ben Werschkul/The New York Times

Figure 1. New York Times Chart of SES Status

The participants were not given statistical parameters or guidelines concerning placement within any specific socioeconomic strata at any time during the interviews or research.

Ultimately, each participant self-identified his/her SES and never asked for an explanation or guideline to determine SES structure.

Interviews for the research included two pre-kindergarten teachers and four families from a low-income rural Appalachian community. All of the interviewed participants were female and European American. Throughout the dissertation study, the following labels were used for

the participants: Parent 1 represented Family 1, Parent 2 represented Family 2, Parent 3 represented Family 3, and Parent 4 represented Family 4. Teachers were labeled as Teacher 1 and Teacher 2.

During the study all family participants perceived themselves/families as having a middle class or lower middle class SES. The family participants provided only the label of 'middle class,' whereas teachers provided a label and description of their circumstances growing up. One participating teacher specifically noted that while growing up she was of lower economic status; the other teacher stated she had lower middle class background. During the teacher interviews, SES was discussed:

Researcher: How would you describe the social class of your family growing up?

Teacher 1: We were lower economic. Yeah, Dad was a carpet worker and mom was a paraprofessional. (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Teacher 2: I would say lower middle class. I mean we weren't poor but we didn't have everything. We were right . . . You know, we had the things we needed. (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Parent 1

Parent 1 stated that her family had lived in the community for thirty years. She classified her family as being middle class when she was growing up. She believed her own family today was still representative of being a middle class family. Parent 1 attended college at a local state university but did not graduate from the university. She was married and had two children. The oldest child participated in the pre-kindergarten program. Currently, this parent was a homemaker; however, prior to the birth of her first born, she worked at the community grocery store (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010).

Parent 2

The second family, represented by Parent 2, had lived in and around the community for seventeen years. Parent 2 classified her family as lower middle class from her childhood to present day. This parent attended some post-secondary schooling at the local technical and vocational schools. Parent 2 was not married; however, the parents cohabitated. At the commencement of the study, Parent 2 was employed at a hospital twenty-five miles away; however, shortly after this interview, she became unemployed. Parent 2 had two children and the youngest child participated in the pre-kindergarten program in an earlier year (Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010).

Parent 3

The third family, represented by Parent 3, stated her family had lived in the community for the past 14 years. Prior to having her own family and settling down in this community, Parent 3 had lived in several of the surrounding communities during her childhood. Parent 3 stated her SES was middle class. She was divorced, but shared custody. This parent stated that she worked for a local industry and had only one child (Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

Parent 4

The fourth family, Parent 4, lived in the immediate area for eight years. Prior to living in this community, the family lived close by in a neighboring area. Parent 4 believed she grew up within the parameters of a middle class family and that she had maintained this status for her own family throughout the years. Parent 4 was married and had two children and the oldest child participated in the pre-kindergarten program two years prior to his younger brother's participation. This parent was employed in area of food service with a nearby hospital (Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

All the parents interviewed were mothers. This difference may be attributed to the traditional roles parents play. The United States Department of Education (1998) reported that fathers of two-parent families are less likely to be highly involved in school related activities. Activities included attending meetings, parent-teacher conference, school or class event, or volunteering at the school. Twenty-seven percent of fathers had high involvement, meaning the fathers participated in three or four activities. Twenty-five percent had moderate involvement with participation in two events. Forty-eight percent participated in zero or one school related activity.

Teacher 1

The first teacher, Teacher 1, was from the local area that surrounded the school. As Teacher 1 grew up within the boundaries of the research community, she stated, by self-identification, that her family fit the guidelines for low socioeconomic class status. Despite her socioeconomic background, Teacher 1 obtained an undergraduate degree at a local college. She later continued her education and received a graduate degree in education. Teacher 1 stated her educational achievements and career goals were based on her philosophical need to help others. Teacher 1 attributed her educational success to the many friendships she had nurtured within the community and her solid religious background. When asked how she decided on the educational field as a job opportunity, she replied

It kind of chose me. . . it seemed like everybody I met in class that I started having like friendships with, that's what their major was. It's like education, education, education. So I was like, okay, is God trying to tell me to go that route? So really, it kind of chose me. (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Teacher 1 was married without children and taught in the research community for over eighteen years and was considered by many as an integral of part of both the school and the community (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Teacher 2

Teacher 2 was from the southeast region of the United States. Teacher 2 had an undergraduate degree in education and taught pre-kindergarten for sixteen years. She stated that her decision to major in education was an easy decision since she was from a family of educators. When Teacher 2 was asked of her SES, she referred to her younger days growing up and stated, “I would say lower middle class . . . we had the things we needed”. Teacher 2 was married with two children that had previously attended the select elementary school (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Finding 1: From Knowledge to Design

Knowledge to design was an essential and foundational part of the research. During the phase of teaching, the teacher actively examined knowledge she had gained from and about each student and purposely incorporated that knowledge into her classroom lessons. Lessons based on this type of knowledge were invaluable to the enhancement of each child’s learning experiences.

Accessing/tapping Knowledge

Teachers noted that they gained insight into a child when they listened to the information that a parent told them directly. Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) considered the parents an invaluable resource since parents knew their children better than anyone else. Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) stressed the importance of an effective partnership with parents. When a working relationship and an ongoing partnership existed between the teacher and parent, according to Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011), the academic pursuits did not end at the end of the day or on the last day of school. Teacher 2 acknowledged:

I think that I you know they’re the ones that know their children the best and I look, I go through, I look at the parents as a resource to help me be able to deal more effectively

with their, with their, child and you can't, you know it's much better if we're both working together we're going to see and plus if they're not supporting what I'm doing over the summer the kids lose so much of it if you know kind of keeping what we've gone over in the kid's mind you know. (Teacher 2, personal interview, February 7, 2011)

Implementing Knowledge

The teachers (Teacher1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011) both recognized they had the available resources, ideas, and strategies that helped families prepare their children for successful educational experiences. The teachers employed these resources throughout the year. The professional but relaxed parent-teacher relationship helped with the immediate needs of the child and fostered a relationship of trust and understanding between the family, student, and teacher (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Researcher: Overall, how would you say your partnership, how would you describe your partnership with families?

Teacher 1: I feel like I'm more of a supporter for most of them . . . when they have questions about things and need help with stuff. Just trying to kind of guide them through things you know, because this is their first schooling experience and some of them really don't know, so they kind of have a lot of questions and about what really to expect. (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

As part of the overall classroom experience, Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) used her understanding of community funds of knowledge to give relevance to experiences that a child had and then used those experiences as a basis for learning activities. Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) had "photographs of ... things that the student constructed and then [had the student] tell something about it so we can add it to the photograph." Also, in utilizing community funds of knowledge, Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) acknowledged she had to:

teach too and that's where the paraprofessional really is helpful too, to have an extra set of eyes and ears and hands in there because if one of us is teaching and the other one can record at least. We are getting kind of broader sample of what's going on." (personal communication, February 7, 2011)

All of the information gathered, whether by verbal or graphic, helped the teacher increase her community funds of knowledge (Burton, personal observation, 2009-2010).

Teacher 1 was quite emphatic when it came to supporting the families of her students. She acknowledged, "I think it's probably helped me more because I know where they are really coming from" (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011). Having identified herself as coming from a lower socioeconomic background, she admitted to relating to things like medical issues and time constraints that had been shown to hamper intellectual interaction with adults. Referring back to her own background, Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) saw herself as a guide who helped ease the transition from home to classroom for families when it was time for their children to enter the educational realm. Having spent nearly two decades working in this community, Teacher 1 had increased her funds of knowledge surrounding the students' home life, community constraints, and social networks that impacted classroom performance. During the teacher interview, identifying skills and giving needed help was discussed:

Teacher 1: Well, I try to focus on skill that are lacking in, so like if they are having problems with letter recognition, we'll just first off, start off with the letters in their name, trying to get them to focus on their name and all those and then try to incorporate like their friends' names.

Researcher: What about Math . . .if they are lacking in that?

Teacher 1: We try to break that down into more rudimentary steps for them so maybe what we would if we are working on patterns, we would start just you know, simple ABABAB patterns and work them on that until they master that first. (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Teacher 2 not only utilized her knowledge about families during conferences and meetings, but she also tried to gain more knowledge. For example, during a typical conference for a student with an IEP:

Teacher 2: [stated she] sent home, as far as like sending home work for the parents. I may suggest things you know like if I have a conference I may say . . . you might want to you might want to play . . . putting the letters up, you know kind of talk about whose name starts with things . . . you might want to . . . [to] do some counting on some things or talk about what colors your child's putting on but as far as like something . . . that would be like a packet of worksheets [that was provided by the coordinator]. You have to look at where they're coming from to realize, to understand the things that they need and understand like at the beginning of the year, kids that try to get up and wander off they've never had that experience. So they don't understand that you need to sit still and listen because they've never had the experience of doing that . . .

Researcher: What do you do to bring them back?

Teacher 2: Redirect them you know, say come on we try to get them interested in what it is. Look at this page. What's on it? Look at This Page, do you see, have you seen this before? What do you think is going to happen? We try to provide them some one-on-one, you know, individual help. We'll either pull them over during centers or try to push them towards thing they, you know, give them opportunities to do thing that they really need to be working with in the areas that are skills that they need to develop. (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Constraints Lead to Tools

Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 (personal communications, February 7, 2011) recognized that some of the families had constraints placed on them. According to Teacher 1:

I know that there's outside things that can interfere sometimes . . . there are medical issues in the family members life (*sic*) that keeps them from having as much as what they could be having. . . . *interaction with adults* [emphasis added] . . . [And in] turn, as a result of these restraints, the parents have relied on television and video games as a substitute for direct interaction between parent and child. (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Both teachers also relayed concerns about having to backtrack because of lack of exposure to anything other than their home. "Some and the majority of them [students and parents] really

don't get [it]. They don't get that going out learning about things will help them" (personal communication, February 7, 2011). It was evident in the teacher interviews that there was a learning disconnect between home and school. From the researcher's notes (personal communication, February 7, 2011):

Researcher: How would you describe the disconnect between the two environments?

Teacher 1: At home, there's generally a lot of outside influences . . . television used a lot. I can tell with some of those families and not a whole lot of interaction on some . . . just kinds of put them in there with their video games.

Teacher 2: I would say the types of things children have to work with you home. A lot of times, is you know, a lot of times, it's want them to sit in front of the television and they want them to be quiet and stay out of the way, whereas, at school there's, you know, we want them to be interacting, we want them to be looking at books or working with materials and exposing them to things and a lot [of them] kind of broaden their horizons.

Despite the disconnect, teachers gained information from families to partner and overcome these differences in environments.

Researcher: How do you solicit information from families?

Teacher 2: Notes, conferences, phone calls, try talk if we have a special event. I try to talk to them about you know things I've seen or ask them about, you know, comments their children have made.

Researcher: And then describe how you partner with families to improve achievement for students.

Teacher 2: Through parent-teacher conference, write notes to parents. I try to if there is something encouraging happening with their child, I write them you know something to show you know write them a notes about something their child did really well to kind of encourage them to look at their child as someone that can succeed and can do well so they'll be more invested working with them.

Teacher 1: reiterated that newsletters, notes sent home, and consistent communication were all tools that helped gain parent involvement and improved academic outcomes. Teacher 2 concurred as she explained, "I think there's a lot of concern and sometimes, I see them, you know, sometimes I see them really

trying to do some of suggest, take the suggestions that . . . and use them at home. It varies.” (personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Family Advocate

In 1996, funds were allotted for a school student service team that included a counselor, a nurse, and a family advocate (local school district home page, 2011). The family advocate position was designed to provide a link between the home and the school that was less intimidating than the normal school to home relationship. The advocate provided a direct line for communication and resources especially for families in need. As families came forward directly or were identified by others, needs were assessed, goals were set, and strategies were developed to help these families. The family advocate’s job was to ensure that any barriers were eliminated that would impede a child’s educational success. Also, the advocate intervened when school attendance became a chronic problem since that too would impede educational success (local school district home page, 2011).

Regarding the position of the family advocate, Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) stated that one time she had approached the school’s family advocate to seek assistance on a utility bill. The advocate only provided her with an informational flyer. The advocate did not follow up with her to see if she received any help. Having asked for help and being given a piece of paper, led Parent 2 to state that having had this experience, she felt that she did not receive any real assistance from the family advocate.

During interviews, Parent 1, Parent 3, and Parent 4 all stated that they were aware that the family advocate’s position existed but had not needed to ask for any type of assistance. Therefore, for these three families there were only limited interactions with the family advocate (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011). Parent 1 (personal

communication, November 12, 2010) was not even sure of the family advocate's role. When Parent 3 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) was asked if she had ever had any contact with the family advocate she replied, "No, not other than we always go to pick a kid for Christmas you know."

To be effective and efficient, the role of the family advocate was not limited to just parental communication but also involved communication and interaction with the faculty. Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) consistently sought help from the family advocate with attendance issues in her classroom. Besides attendance issues, Teacher 1 asked the family advocate to coordinate resources for a family whose house had burned (personal communication, February 7, 2011). Teacher 2, also benefited from the assistance of the family advocate as she utilized the advocate's services "for home visits and for supplying basic clothing for the kids that needed them" (personal communication, February 7, 2011).

During the winter months, the family advocate worked especially hard with the school and the community to provide winter coats to the students who needed them (W. Burton, personal observation, 2009). In fulfilling the basic needs of students, Teacher 2, affirmed the role of the family advocate as, "They send, they send home the backpack buddies which is food for the kids we're not sure if they're going to have food for the weekend" (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). "Backpack-Buddies," referred to by Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011), was a program coordinated by the family advocate that revolved around fulfilling the nutritional needs of students. The program was especially designed to send home weekend food for families who needed extra help meeting the dietary needs of their children. This program was based on the age old community values of interdependency, a missionary interest in others, serving others, and a prevalent feeling of oneness (archived county

personalities, 1973, pp. 81-86; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 24; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). Tending to the immediate survival needs of the students was the top priority of the family advocate; but in situation involving less dire need, the advocate had another project that she felt was important. The advocate with the help of parents, teachers, and administrators tried to ensure that each student also had proper school supplies. The project was simple but it once again demonstrated the important values of the community, those of; showing a combined effort and commitment to education, emphasizing education as a means to improve one's life, being benevolent and compassionate, being sensitive to the needs of others, caring about others, demonstrating a missionary interest in all humans, taking responsibility for those less fortunate and giving to those in need, (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 81-86; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, pp. 8, 14, 24; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991; Local school district news, September 6, 2011).

The family advocate, though the designated organizer and distributor of resources within the school, was not the only person who reached out to help families. Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) was quick to mention that her child's teacher assisted her with support and contact information concerning a food bank. Parent 2 also added that the teacher gave her educational information and websites to use when she was working with her child:

Researcher: Did she [the teacher] provide you with any resources?

Parent 2: Yeah, there is a couple of times, that I think, we were given a number for . . . [a local identifying organization] for something and . . .

Researcher: [a local identifying organization], electric thing?

Parent 2: I think so.

Researcher: That's where . . .

Parent 2: They also have a food bank as well, she also, I've also been given web addresses for different things that may or may not . . .

Researcher: Web addresses for what?

Parent 2: For different, like things, websites, that would you know, where I could print off things to help him. (Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010)

Depending on the situation and request, the role of the family advocate was not solely confined to the four walls of the school building. There were situations that could not be handled solely by the school in spite of the intense efforts of the school personnel and the advocate. Being the designated representative, the family advocate sometimes appealed to local community members, organizations, businesses, and religious institutions when a need was urgent, overwhelming, or required greater financial aid than the school could provide. Unfortunately, over the years the school had experienced occasions where extreme help was needed, such as a family's home burning down, a tornado destroying an area of the community, deaths, disease, or wrecks (local archived newspaper clipping, September 28, 2005; local school district news, foundation, 2005 – present; W. Burton, personal observation, 2005-2010).

Teacher Resources

Teacher 1 took the opportunistic approach as she involved other departments and specialists within the school's setting and used these individuals to help with academic challenges. For example, Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) stated, "If they're [students] lagging behind . . . well, if its speech, we always get our speech person involved." Likewise, Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) often employed the school nurse as a resource, especially, since the nurse fully supported and enjoyed such opportunities. The nurse discussed general topics like germs, hand washing, and head lice;

however, when the opportunity presented itself she utilized the moment to address specific health concerns that affected children within a particular classroom. If the classroom had a child with diabetes, the nurse developed a lesson on the basic management of diabetes (W. Burton, personal observation, 2005-2010).

Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011), by the same token, utilized the school counselor to aid her students who needed help understanding proper methods of social interactions. This teacher also used the counselor to help students improve their behavior as related to inappropriate reactions within the classroom setting. However, the school counselor and pre-kindergarten teachers understandably knew, regardless of any situation or time of year, the counselor was most important to all during the first week of school each year. From years of experience, it was understood that some pre-kindergarten students suffered separation anxiety. During this particular week of school, the skills of the school counselor were expected to be utilized immensely (Burton, personal observation, August, 2009; Teacher 1 personal communication, February 7, 2011).

During the 2010 school year, Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) stated she used the counselor “quite a bit . . . I’ve had some girls this year that have been real mouthy towards one another so we’ve had to have her [the counselor] come in and work with them.” Also during her interview, Teacher 1 expressed her sincere appreciation for the school advocate when she stated she had used her for “a variety of things this year . . . we’ve had one [student] that was already absent for about thirty days so we had to have a conference time with our advocate and the parent and we’ve use her [the advocate] in the past whenever we’ve had children whose houses have burned down. She [the advocate] helped coordinate, got resources for them” (personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Another resource for the pre-kindergarten teachers was the pre-kindergarten coordinator. Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) stated that when she had a special needs student or needed a referral or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the pre-kindergarten coordinator helped with the required paperwork. Teacher 2 also knew the coordinator provided families with intervention support materials.

The pre-kindergarten coordinator was most often involved with paperwork and administrative tasks. However, when there was a specific issue or need relating to a particular child involving academics, behavior modifications, or attendance problems the coordinator was readily available. During an intervention meeting for a student with academic and speech concerns, the coordinator intervened and provided needed materials once the child was identified. In another instance, the coordinator provided special materials and books to a family whose child had a developmental delay along with a speech and language impairment (Burton, personal observation, 2009).

In addition to the coordinator, there was an intervention team that was composed of: the classroom teacher, speech language pathologist, an administrator, and the preschool special education teacher. All of these staff members provided activities that involved the family and encouraged development of skills. Some suggested activities involved providing items as simple as sidewalk chalk. Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) commented that the classroom teachers were often limited in what they, as teachers, could send home due to program guidelines. However, Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011), within the guidelines, often gave activity suggestions to parents such as play with letters, talk about what letters their given name started with or what letters were in their names, and/or even suggested counting or identifying the colors in the child's clothing.

The administrative staff was supportive of both families and students. Traditionally, at the end of the school year, all of the school parking lots were filled to the brim with cars of visitors. Immediate families, extended family members, and interested community members were welcomed by the assistant principal/future principal. The assistant principal took a moment and reported personal community losses, told how these residents had impacted the community and school, and then asked for a minute of silence in their honor. This small moment of silence was a confirmation of the school's proud tradition of being a 'small school with a big heart' (Burton, field notes, May 20, 2010).

The Awards Ceremony proceeded as students were recognized throughout the various grade levels with numerous honors, distinctions, and acknowledgements. Near the end of the program the assistant principal emphasized that the school was thankful to the parents for allowing the school to be part of their children's lives. The assistant principal also expressed gratitude to the parents for the vital role they played each and every day as they encouraged, supported, and helped their children, the teachers, and the school, achieve academic success (Burton, field notes, May 20, 2010).

Finding 2: The Formal Role of Parents

The holistic approach to education began with the introduction of a student to a formal classroom. Prior to the first day of school, with a brief exchange during registration excepted, it was left to the parents to discern what skills and proficiencies were necessary as a basis for becoming a formal student. Once class commenced, there were ample opportunities for parents to participate in the formal education of their child and interact with the educators on a regular basis.

Parent Perspective

Before children arrived at the schoolhouse doors, parents built an educational foundation within the home environment that would not only prepare their children for their pre-kindergarten school year but also for a decade or more of learning. Parents were queried about the skills they perceived as important for each child to master before beginning school. In the first years of life all of the families engaged in teaching skills, or the “fundamental stuff,” as Parent 4 referred to these items (Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011). The fundamentals included number recognition, alphabet recognition, colors and shape identification, and the ability to write their names. In addition to these fundamentals, Parent 3 thought knowing the presidents an important skill needed before beginning school (Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

However, Parent 1 placed social skills, character values, as well as academic knowledge as being important. Parent 1 specified

Well, I wanted them I worked with them on sharing and stuff. But as far as like [my child], we worked on writing his name. He could write his name before he went. It was all in capital letters that it was easier for him to write. But uh, he, uh, he could that and he knew all of his abc's, he knew all his colors most of you know the basics and stuff some of the basic shapes and I think that's pretty much and we worked on counting too like and you know just I talked to him and explained about how school was and just that he can't be up running around and stuff. (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010)

Deeming academic skills fundamental for learning, Families 1, 2, and 3 also placed social skills as a priority. The significance of social skills was evident through the parents' verbalizations and the activities the children engaged in. Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) stated, “Social skills were important because they [children] were home kept. They were never in child care.” This parent also indicated that her children were not exposed to anyone other than family and friends for outside care. Teacher 1 (personal

communication, February 7, 2011) agreed that families in general had limited social interactions as a result of most families' childcare situations and she further noted there was a real need for social skills in pre-kindergarten.

Parent 3 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) enriched her child's social skills with church activities and community events hosted at the town square. Parent 3 also made it a point to drive forty-five minutes to Chuck E Cheese, a children's arcade and restaurant, for further social skills practice. This parent felt the climate and activities of the restaurant encouraged interactions among children and adults. The structure and activities at the Chuck E Cheese restaurant reinforced social skills such as, taking turns, sharing, patience while waiting in line, personal space, walking inside the building, and taking turns within conversations.

Parent 1 (personal communication, November 12, 2010) acknowledged that she purposely worked with her child on social behavior. She wanted her child to understand the acceptable rules of social skills and rules of behavior that were required in a formal educational setting. Parent 1 specifically taught her son that he was not allowed to "run around at will". Furthermore, she stressed to her child that appropriate behavior included obeying any directions or commands by any authority figures outside the familial circle.

Regarding educational and social skills, Parent 4 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) stated she had the advantage of understanding school readiness because her older child had already moved through the pre-kindergarten program successfully. Parent 4 concurred with Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) when Teacher 1 noted that she observed more, "first day readiness" when a parent already had experience with an older child in this first formal classroom setting.

In order to acquire the “fundamental skills,” families used a variety of means and methods to reach the goals they saw as important to the educational foundation of learning. Each parent attempted to teach colors, shapes, letters, and counting numbers from one to ten in sequential order. Home teaching methods varied from memory based teaching strategies to comprehensive learning tactics. All of the parents used a variety of combinations of recall, word patterns, questions and answers, comprehension, flashcards, educational videos, communication skills, reading, and experiencing (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

Each of the parents interviewed in the study had preconceived expectations of the pre-kindergarten program. The four parents agreed that their expectations of the program were satisfied (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2012; Parent 3, person communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication March 12, 2011). Parent 1 and Parent 2 directly referenced that the purpose of the pre-kindergarten program was to prepare their children for kindergarten (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010). There was, however, a difference in parental expectations of skills learned and the actual skills acquired through the pre-kindergarten program.

Two parents agreed with the local State Department of Education (2012, p.7) that “social and interpersonal skills” were a component of school readiness. Parent 1 stated, “I wanted him to really, you know, kind of develop social skills with kids his own age and to learn what all he needs to know to go into kindergarten, you know, and whatever else” (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010). Parent 2 agreed with this line of thinking when she stated,

“Social skills were important because they [her children] were home kept, they were never in childcare.” Furthermore, Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) noted that pre-kindergarten should “get my children ready for kindergarten to give, you know, help, give them the skills they need because kindergarten [has] changed a lot since we were all there.” The grandmother of Family 2 (mother-in-law of Parent 2) also attended the conference and injected an indiscernible remark under her breath which lead in turn to Parent 2, responding, “Oh yeah, that's right, you didn't go to kindergarten.”

Teacher Perspective

Teacher 2 stated the worst case scenario for lower socioeconomic students was a lack of access to educational materials, limited cultural learning opportunities, and poor language development. Teacher 2 believed these factors greatly hampered any child's school readiness. Teacher 2 additionally stated that a lack of stability in familial relationships and/or a transitory nature of physical locations also undermined school preparedness (personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Both teachers in the study stated the community was aware of the limiting factors for some of the local students and therefore, the community consistently attempted to offset the limitations of these specific children with various community sponsored activities. At times the community was faced with financial constraints that limited some of their endeavors (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). Regarding the social aspects of the school and community, Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) agreed with the teachers' assessments that more socially in-depth experiences were needed and that socio-cultural influences from non-familial sources were extremely limited. Parent 2 also concurred with the teachers that the community tried

extremely hard to offset these limitations by means of various community activities. However, Parent 2 understood the financial constraints but she also felt that the small size of the community sometimes caused limitations (personal communication, November 13, 2010).

Arrival Skills

Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) both noted that the children from the community arrived on the first day of school with a diverse range of skills. Both teachers observed that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds often found their strengths in gross motor skills and self-help skills (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). With regards to self-help skills, Teacher 2 clearly acknowledged that to some of the low socioeconomic students “self-help was simply survival” (personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Teacher 2 also recognized:

They have, they, they, they're very, they've learned a lot of . . . They know, most of them know how to survive in the environment that they're in. They know what you know, what, what the rules are for the type of situation that they've been living in. So you know, they know how to kind of protect themselves, you know, and [it] may not be how they need to do it at school but they know what [to do]. (personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Upon the acknowledgement that students descended upon the school with a wide variety of skills, both teachers specified that the previous experiences of the children were directly related to their readiness skills (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) indicated that some outside interactions, such as the Head Start Program or even a smaller event, such as vacation bible school, helped children with appropriate classroom functioning skills. Teacher 1 was an ardent believer that music and learning went hand in hand, as each complemented the other and enhanced the learning process. When Teacher 1 spoke of bible

school, she stated that “exposure to music during bible school was a worthwhile aid in learning” and that there was a definitive learning relationship between music and rhyming (personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) added that some low SES children found their areas of strength in activities that involved athletics. Nonetheless, regardless of athletic ability, Teacher 1 felt that these children had a limited world view, which impacted their overall school readiness, since:

Other than athletics, it kind of depends on the kids really, like I said, some of them have been like to church and stuff so they’ve learned some songs so they’ve kind of got they rhythm and rhyme thing going on already which helps them with their language skills. Some of them have had some, you know, so parents that will kind of say S-T-O-P, kind of do little things like that with them to help them know how to spell stop and stuff. I mean it’s just different for each kid. So, some of them come in and have gotten some exposure already to skills and things like that. Some, and the majority of them, really, being don’t get that. They don’t get that kind of going out learning about things and they’ll come and I’ll try to talk to them about something and they have no background knowledge on it, so then, we kind of have to, you know, backtrack and go back and say this would be a limited world view. (personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Teacher 2 agreed with Teacher 1:

. . . that some children have a limited world view. I would say, I mean, a lot of them have never been read to; [they] need a lot of work with language development. We get kids that haven’t been talked to, haven’t been, they don’t have a lot of experience with, with, outside their, you know, immediate home, you know, their world view is very small. (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Role of the Parent at the School Level

To this community the word support meant involvement, and involvement meant volunteering. Presence at school activities, volunteer assistance in classroom academic endeavors, attendance at conferences, and engagement in activities that extended beyond the learning process at school were all types of support shown by parents and various community members. Parent 1 (personal communication, November 12, 2010), though not actively involved

in the day to day activities of the classroom, stated that she engaged in informal conversations with her child's teacher when she dropped him off each morning before class. Parent 1 was not available on a daily basis to help in the classroom, but she was vigorously involved in many of the fundraising activities. Parent 1 supported the school through various beneficial activities such as the Box Tops for Education program (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010). In this fundraiser program, consumers collected the required proofs of purchase from a variety of household goods and submitted the proofs of purchase to the local school. The individual box tops were worth \$.10 each and once turned in to the company, a check was issued to the school. During the 2011 school year, the school received 10,026 box tops for Box Tops for Education and in return, the school received a check in the amount of \$1026. The school stated that each year these funds enabled the Physical Education department to purchase new equipment (local school district news, February 4, 2011).

Another opportunity that allowed parents to be involved with the school was the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The purpose of the PTA was to join the school and its families together in projects that improved academic performance, infrastructure, and community-school relationships (local school district news, December 11, 2009; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; W. Burton, personal observation, 2009). Only Parent 3 acknowledged participation in the PTA (personal communication, March 12, 2011). The PTA also provided an opportunity for increased communication between teachers and parents. Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) noted that pre-kindergarten events within the PTA were very limited and the majority of PTA programs and activities were for older students and their parents. The structure of the PTA programs limited the number of opportunities for interaction between pre-kindergarten teachers and pre-kindergarten parents; however, there were many

activities outside of the formal meetings that allowed opportunities for communication (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; W. Burton, personal observation, 2005-2010).

When the PTA was referenced, Parent 1 (personal communication, November 12, 2010) reported that she was not involved in the program and was not at all certain of the organization's function. Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) stated that when time permitted she volunteered in her child's classroom but that she did not have time in her schedule to take part in the PTA meetings. Though Parent 2 stated she did not participate in the PTA meetings, she did take part in other activities such as family night at the seasonal book fair and fundraisers for various school and community endeavors (personal communication, November 13, 2010).

Though Parent 1, Parent 2, and Parent 4 stated they had not participated in the PTA program, there were events they had taken part in that were associated with the PTA. There were school activities, such as a home goods sale, Donuts for Dads, Muffins for Mom, and the Fall Festival that the PTA either sponsored or helped with (local school district news, October 14, 2009; local school district news, March 2010 and March 20, 2011; local school district news, May, 2010 and May 6, 2011; W. Burton, personal observation, 2009, 2010). There were occasions where sponsored activities transpired on school grounds during the school day. Since the events were coordinated by the faculty and staff; often events were assumed to be solely school activities, which was not always the case.

Specific activities sponsored yearly by the PTA included Santa's Workshop, Family Night Book Fair Night, and Grandparents' Day (local school district news, September 9, 2009; local school district news, October 7, 2009; local school district news, December 7, 2009). Many PTA events were slated to entice family members, extended family members, and

members of community to become more involved with the school. Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) saw the benefits of the PTA as she believed that the more opportunities in which the teacher saw family interaction, the more the teacher understood the family, and that in itself increased the teacher's community funds of knowledge (W. Burton, personal observation, 2009).

Role of the Parent at Home During the School Year

All of the families involved in this research felt they demonstrated support by their attendance and participation in conferences and educational activities at home. During the school year, Parent 1 specifically sought out needed skills for her son to work on. Each day as she walked her child into the classroom, she asked the teacher if there was anything she needed to work on with her child. Parent 1 appreciated the teacher's input and assessment and she distinctly recalled that during the end of the year conference the teacher recommended that her child needed to work on writing (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010).

Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) recalled that numerous activities were sent home for her child to work on. One home activity required the child to collect items from around his house that would be used at a later time to decorate a pumpkin. As the researcher interviewed Parent 2, the grandmother interrupted the interview process and stated:

Grandmother: You had to get stuff outside.

Parent 2: Well no, it was anything around the house you could use, anything at home

Grandmother: You used okra pods.

Parent 2: I use[d] those purple butter peas and Christmas limas.

Grandmother: Yeah, Christmas limas, yeah.

When Parent 3 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) was asked about support from the teacher she did not recall any specific instances or activities but she felt sure something probably had been sent home in her daughter's backpack. Parent 4 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) remembered that literacy packets were sent home monthly and she specifically recalled a particular packet on hand washing that had been sent home at some point during the school year. All of the parents interviewed recognized and appreciated that the teachers had taken the time to put together skill specific packets that could be used during the summer break (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

When parents were asked how they were involved in their children's education at home now that they were in their kindergarten school year, the parents discussed participating in the carry-over activities sent home by the teacher. Parent 1 recalled receiving a little sheet that told "all the stuff he has to know before his little nine weeks is up" (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010). Parent 1 stated she particularly participated in the homework on Monday nights when her son had to cut or draw pictures for the letter of the week. This parent also picked a skill from the paper, such as counting backwards, and she had her child practice the skill (personal communication, November 12, 2010).

In addition to the list of skills that had to be learned by the end of the nine weeks, a vocabulary sheet was sent home weekly for the children to learn. Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) practiced the words with her son and allowed him to watch educational videos. Additionally, Parent 2 enrolled her son in private speech therapy to supplement the school based services he received (personal communication, November 13,

2010). Parent 3 participated in homework, vocabulary words, or “whatever she needs.” Parent 3 noted that her daughter had learned a lot of words such as huge, enormous, and communicates. Parent 3 stated that they “even have some that are like creak, c-r-e-a-k, so we have to learn to spell those also” (Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011). Parent 3 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) indicated that they also practiced reading the little reader books that were sent home. Parent 4, like Parent 3, also engaged in homework as well as reading books (Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

Teacher Perception of School Involvement

When asked to define the word ‘involvement,’ each of the pre-kindergarten teachers had a different definition. Teacher 1 fielded a broad definition of involvement that included participation in classroom celebrations, fieldtrips, and conferences at the classroom level. When asked to further explain involvement, the following dialogue commenced:

Teacher1: [It] varies, but for this area it’s [involvement] pretty good really. We have a lot of parents that are concerned and they want to help their kids.

Researcher: What about for the parties or the celebrations?

Teacher1: Celebrations.

Researcher: Sorry celebrations, two a year?

Teacher1: No actually we can get away with more than that.

Researcher: Can you now?

Teacher1: Yes, because that’s part of our parent involvement.
(Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Teacher 1 also stated there was a varied range of incidents of parental academic involvement (personal communication, February 7, 2011). While Teacher 1 saw that parents were concerned and were eager to give help, she noted that these parents did not know how to give help, nor did

they know what role they should play in giving help. All of Teacher 1's communications with parents received fairly immediate responses and she felt was an encouraging sign. However, Teacher 1 noted that parents often saw their roles concerning involvement differently than she did (personal communication, February 7, 2011). In order to be involved directly and help in the classroom on a somewhat regular basis, parents were required to complete a training course before they could participate in the classroom. The number of parents willing to take the training was small. However, if involvement meant simply joining in the more joyous and celebratory activities in the classroom, then the number of parents willing to participate increased (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) agreed that families eagerly participated in social events. However, these same families viewed their involvement as willingness to come to conferences; interest in supporting their children academically was less enthusiastic. Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) specified, "Parental involvement . . . Okay, I was thinking, like they're willing to come to conferences then you know." When Teacher 2 was asked to describe low-income parental involvement, she replied:

It's hard, a lot of them. Some of them because of work situations can't get involved or they don't know how to get involved or they, they, just some of them are limited in themselves in knowing what how to help their children and they don't have a lot of the resources that to work with they may not have books at home. They may not have you know crayons or things like that, or they just don't or they don't, sometimes they, they don't understand what it is their child needs. (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Teacher 2 added to the comments above that many parents did not realize the importance of art supplies and intellectually stimulating toys and games (personal communication, February 7, 2011). If more events, other than conferences, were scheduled then perhaps by means of involvement a better understanding of the need for resources would evolve. This involvement

could be beneficial to the teacher as well since Parent 2 indicated that the more opportunities in which the teacher saw family interaction, the more the teacher understood the family, and that in itself increased the teacher's community funds of knowledge (Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; W. Burton, personal observation, 2009).

Another avenue, parental participation in classroom field trips and activities, allowed the teachers to observe a child's community funds of knowledge. Both Parent 1 and Parent 2 participated in the pre-kindergarten field trips and activities, including the Fall Festival, Beach Day and the end of the year awards ceremony (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010). Both teachers (personal communication, February 7, 2011) noted that field trips, while limited in number, usually involved several parents. The teachers stated that school sanctioned events, seasonal festivals, holiday celebrations, and charity-themed fundraisers usually attracted the attendance of not only the parents but members of the extended family. These experiences permitted the teachers to establish a more global perspective of their students and allowed for greater understanding of home circumstances and situations, thereby increasing their community funds of knowledge.

Finding 3: Documentation of Knowledge

In order to document the knowledge of students, both teachers (personal communications, February 7, 2011) used individual portfolios that exhibited each student's work. The portfolios displayed progress, deficiencies, and were used to keep the parents apprised of any specific areas that needed the parents' individual attention and/ or encouragement. Having the opportunity to directly view their child's work, pictures, and anecdotal notes often resulted in more direct parental involvement (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Both of the teachers acknowledged that student achievement recognition, whether in a public forum or a private communication, helped build an effective partnership with each student's family (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). Teacher 2 proceeded to state that most of her student's parents:

wanted their children to do better than they have, you know, they see those that haven't graduated from high school, see what's happening, you know, and they want their child to have a better future . . . [they had] a desire to see their children obtain a better education than they did. (personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Furthermore, Teacher 2 believed:

through parent-teacher conferences [and by written] notes to the parents... I try to see if there is something encouraging happening with their child, I write them, you know something to show, you know, write them a note about something their child did really well to kind of encourage them to look at their child as someone that can succeed and can do well so they'll be more invested working with them. (personal communication, February 7, 2011)

During conferences, the teachers presented parents with a matrix that showed objective assessments of achieved results and explained any possible deficiencies the child had. The completed matrix allowed the parents to see what their child had accomplished in each area of school readiness. The matrix and assessment made it easier for parents to understand the logistics of readiness and gave the parents documentation for future reference (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). However, Parent 1, Parent 3, and Parent 4 stated they did not keep the written documents provided to them or else they could not remember where the documents had been placed (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011). Parent 2 was the only parent that provided any type of documentation and that document was from the mid-year conference. In

Parent 2's documentation, the teacher indicated within each domain whether her child's skills were "as expected" or "needs development." The documentation of each domain also allowed for comments, and in this section the teacher wrote:

[Child] fits in with routines of the classroom and understands classroom rules. He makes friends and interacts appropriately with adults.

[Child] knows all the letters in his name and almost all the upper and lowercase letters. He can identify and rhyme words. He shows good book handling skills and responds appropriately to stories read aloud.

[Child] can count to 10 and knows numbers 1 – 10. He can copy, extend, and make his own ab pattern. He knows all basic shapes except square. He shows an understanding of positional words.

[Child] uses a magnifying glass correctly. He enjoys exploring natural materials and is very curious. He is aware of seasonal changes.

[Child] can describe the job of various community helpers. He enjoys having a classroom job and takes his responsibilities seriously.

[Child] makes creative structures during centers and participates in imaginative play. He enjoys using different materials in art and enjoys watching programs at the art center.

[Child] runs, jumps, and climbs as expected for his age. He can hop on two feet and can balance on a narrow beam.

(Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010)

Finding 4: Role of the Community

Support by the community was the all-encompassing and binding factor for the success of this small community and its school. The foundational and character values of the past were the same values that I found in the present day community. These values, passed from generation to generation, included, but were not limited to, faith, a missionary interest in all humans, service to others, benevolent attitudes, trust, loyalty, and acceptance of one another. Many of the values centered on the resident's religion and faith in God (archived county

personalities, 1973, p. 81- 86; local archived newspaper clipping, June 18, 1908; local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929).

The values, a long ago accepted and expected part of raising children, led to the establishment of a strong and united community. This particular community survived over many decades while many other small communities did not. Survival of the community was a direct result of continuingly dedicated and committed members. The residents of the community were actively involved in all aspects of community life. Through the various outreach programs of the community such as, civic organizations, businesses, and the churches a benevolent hand was always been readily available. It was not unusual for individual local residents, the school, the churches, or civic groups, such as the Masons, Kiwanis Club, American Legion, Lion's Club, Women's Club, Jaycees, and Ruritans to provide assistance to families of the community or to assist with community projects (Bicentennial History, Historical Society, 1976, p. 464; local archived newspaper clipping, October 6, 1949; local archived newspaper clipping, February 22, 1951; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969). Overall, there were activities provided by the various community components on an almost daily basis. A few of the civic activities included holiday celebrations, fingerprinting identification for children, eyewear assistance for children whose families could not afford such extras, and food or medical supplies for those in need (local school news, August 12, 2010; local school district news, October 2009 A; local school district news, October 2009 B; local school district news, December 2009; W. Burton, personal observation, October 9, 2009).

The bonds that existed between the community organizations, school, and families were similar to a two-way street. The organizations helped the school and community but likewise the school and community gave back to the organizations. When any organization needed special

help with a project, supplies, or volunteers the favor was returned by those who had been constantly on the receiving end of the many generous donations and benefits. The school helped the fire department in their can drive each year, students and parents rallied to the aid of the Red Cross and United Way. And when there were times that individuals needed a helping hand, the strong ties among the residents led to families supporting other families in their times of need (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 81-86; local archived newspaper clipping, February 26, 2003; local archived newspaper clipping, September 28, 2005; local archived newspaper clipping, August 6, 2010; Local school district news, February 24, 2009 local archived newspaper clipping, May 30, 2011; Local school district news, March 10, 2009; Local school district news, July, 2009; Local school district news, February 16, 2011; Local school district news, December 6, 2011).

Regardless of the circumstance- fire, tornado, illness, job loss, or any other unforeseeable incident- the people and organizations of the community were passionate in both their moral and monetary support. A noble example of genuine concern and generosity shown by the community involved a kidney transplant for local resident (local archived newspaper clipping, August 6, 2010). The transplant recipient had suffered many years with his illness before he received the transplant. His illness had taken its toll on his body, his mind, his relationship with his family, and his economic status. The community was grateful and excited for the recipient when the operation finally took place. The small town knew of the many burdens faced by the family and the many obstacles that still had to be faced. Though the family never asked for help, the community actively and aggressively organized a motorcycle ride to raise money to relieve some of the pressure the family was under. The motorcycle ride raised the emotional hopes of the

family, relieved some of the stress they had been under, and helped them get back on their feet amidst all of the expenses (local archived newspaper clipping, August 6, 2010).

This was not the end of the story on the generosity of the community. After the first motorcycle ride for the kidney transplant recipient; the wife, along with other residents, continued the motorcycle fundraiser each year, not for her husband or family, but for others who faced similar situations. Eventually, due to complications, the original recipient of the motorcycle run passed away. Upon his passing, his wife made a commitment to herself and the community as she organized an official foundation. The foundation was established to help residents with medical problems, especially those in need of organ transplants. Since its inception, the annual motorcycle run has grown in the number of riders, sponsors, and activities surrounding the event (local archived newspaper clipping, August 6, 2010).

Community Supporting the School

Support for students was community-driven by civic organizations, churches, businesses, and wealthier individual residents. Churches, along with the civic clubs, readily gave a helping hand. Some of the more active organizations in the community included: the Masons, Kiwanis, American Legion, Lions Club, and American Heart Association (local archived newspaper clipping, October 6, 1949; local archived newspaper clipping, February, 22, 1951; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969; Bicentennial History, Historical Society, 1976, p. 463-465; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 6; local school district news, December 2009; local school district news, December 2011). Each of these organizations had a set agenda, activities, and goals. All organizations have an established working relationship with the school. Through the years it had become a Christmas tradition that several of the organizations joined together and gave all of the students a school themed t-shirt. The shirt was

as a concerted effort by the community organizations to instill everlasting school pride (local school districts news, December 2009, local school district news, February 2011; local school district news, September 2011).

There were times that the organizations joined together for projects, like the t-shirt; but, it was far more common that each organization created their own direct effort to positively impact the school. The Masons were a constant and supportive organization that had numerous ongoing projects. For several years the Masons provided bicycles during Christmas season to one boy and girl from each classroom. If there were any extra bicycles the Masons gave them to children who did not have one (W. Burton, personal observation, 2005-2010).

In 2010, the Masons participated in a one-time gift program that was very unique. The donation was orchestrated by an elderly lady who had grown up in the community under very humble circumstances. When the lady was a child, she had always wanted a Barbie doll but her family was simply too poor to afford one. As she grew older and her financial circumstances changed, she began her own collection of Barbie dolls. Now, at a rather elderly age, instead of selling her collection, which would have benefited only herself, she decided she wanted to donate the dolls to others. With the Masons by her side, she donated the entire collection of dolls to the girls in the third grade (local archived newspaper clipping, December 22, 2010; W. Burton, personal observation, 2010).

This particular donation program was unique and meaningful on many levels. The dolls were collected by someone locally who understood what it meant to be less fortunate; and, the dolls were given in with the intent to give joy to others. The benefactor was inspired by the various local programs and clubs in the community. She also was encouraged by the generosity of individual residents who helped one another. She believed the generous spirits she had

witnessed in others was “contagious” and she wanted to be part of that spirit (local archived newspaper clipping, December 22, 2010).

Many of the above mentioned organizations provided donations that addressed the physical needs of families within the community. The Masons assisted annually with a proactive child safety and fingerprint identification program called Ident-A-Kid. As each school year started, parents were offered the opportunity for an “e-kid ID” at no cost . The ID not only had the child’s fingerprints but it also included other vital information about the child (local school district news, March 2010; local school district news, August 2010).

Some organizations and individuals were consistent supporters of the school. The Kiwanis Club planned a yearly project that directly supported the teachers and their needs for their classrooms. Teacher 1 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) was especially appreciative of the Kiwanis Club since they asked her specifically what she needed in her classroom to help her meet the goals for her students. In 2011, the Kiwanis Club also supplied the school with a wheelchair, and other medical supplies necessary for the well-being of the school. Sun Trust Bank and the United Way donated school supplies to the students. One of the local churches showed their appreciation to the school as they provided a surprise breakfast buffet for everyone on the faculty and staff of the school (local school district news, February 2011; local school district news, October 2011; local school district news, July 2009; Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Another service-based organization that was active in the community was the Lions Club International. The overall mission of the Lions Club (local archived newspaper clipping, 1969; Lion’s Club International, 2012) was to improve the health of children. Throughout the years in this community, the Lions Club was very generous as they obtained vision screenings and

glasses for students whose families could not afford them (local archived newspaper clipping, 1969). On a personal note and as the researcher I observed one of my students struggling daily due to a vision problem. When brought to their attention, the Lions Club realized the difficulties the student was having and the family financial situation. Within a very short time the student had a vision screening and a pair of glasses. With his new glasses, the student made steady progress in all areas of his schoolwork (W. Burton, personal observation, 2009-2010).

As mentioned earlier there was a local organization that helped provide an affordable rate for electricity for low-income families. Community residents who needed help with their electric bill had to complete a formal application and have their income verified. Many residents applied for assistance and many were helped. First priority was given to senior citizens and then if the organization had additional funds, assistance was then given to families with children (2009-2010 Annual Report of county low income families).

In addition to the above recognized civic organizations, businesses, churches, and codified agencies not specifically chartered for educational services provided support and interactions to the school. These interactions enhanced the citizenship and safety of the student body and community. The local fire department and the railroad organization visited the school on many occasions and presented a variety programs. The fire department taught a lesson called “Operation Lifesaver” that placed emphasis on the basics of fire safety. The railroad company presented “Look, Listen, and Live” and discussed the importance of safety at railroad crossings. This was an especially significant lesson for the students since many railroad crossings in the area only have signs and not the fancy bars and blinking lights that larger cities have. Along with the visits by various agencies, many local dignitaries often spoke to the students. It was not unusual for the city mayor, city police chief, county sheriff, the police DARE group, or the fire

chief to drop by the school for an impromptu visit. Sometimes these same dignitaries scheduled official visits so they could teach a safety class or talk about a community issue (local school district news, March 2011).

It was not just local dignitaries that visited the school. There were numerous occasions when the school hosted state dignitaries such as: upper staff from the Governor's office, State Congressman, the State Agricultural Commissioner, and presidents of many state organizations, The Governor's office awarded the school the 2011 Platinum Status Award for being one of only 46 schools in the state that improved their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) scores for three years in a row. On another occasion, the Governor's office presented the school with the Title 1 Distinguished School Award. On a different occasion, a state representative from Congress bestowed the President's Volunteer Service Award to various students for exceptional volunteerism. The state Pest Control agency presented the school with an educational program and award called "Bugateers;" and another time the State Agricultural Commissioner recognized several students for their farming efforts. The recognition of students was followed by the Agricultural Commissioner reading the book, *Farming*, by Gail Gibbons. The Commissioner later autographed the book and then donated it to the school library (local school district news, December 2009; local school district news, November 2011; local school district news, February 2011).

School Supporting the Community

On the surface, it appeared as though the school was always on the receiving end of the community's donations, assistance, and money. However, there were numerous occasions when the school, students, and parents gave back to the community. The school and parents, sharing a common 'community funds of knowledge,' wanted the children to grow up and be committed to

helping others. These parents and teachers wanted the students to understand benevolence, service, and giving back to others. Giving back to others was an essential element within this school and this community (local school district news December 2009; local archived newspaper clipping, December 21, 2010; local archived newspaper clipping, December 22, 2010; local school district news, February 2011).

The school helped the students understand what ‘giving back’ meant as they honored the community’s veterans with a luncheon each year and invited the veterans to share stories with them (local school district news, November 2009). The students and faculty also raised money for the Relay for Life, Haiti Relief, Samaritan’s Purse, American Heart Association, United Way, and the March of Dimes (local school district news, February 2009; local school district news, March 2009; local school district news, November 2009; local school district news, January 2010; local school district news, February 2010; local school district news, February 2011).

The children helped the fire department with a local food drive challenge and also helped the Mayor with his annual Christmas Motorcade. The Mayor’s Annual Motorcade helped patients at a regional hospital. The students helped the mayor as they brought articles of clothing, snacks, toiletries, and other items to aid the patients (local school district news, October 2009; local school district news, December 2011). The students also wrote letters to U.S. troops expressing their appreciation for keeping our nation safe (local school district news, October 2011).

The parents always knew when there were unmet needs of other families within the school. Parent 3 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) “adopted” a child for Christmas and bought presents for a local boy or girl. Parent 1 (personal communication, November 12, 2010)

became involved in supporting her community after she and her husband completed a questionnaire that was sent home:

I was answering it [survey] and my husband was appalled. He's like, 'they're asking you if you live in like a tent, for real? Is there really people living in tents?' . . . See, I mean, he was asking me. He said, 'Is that for real?' and I said, 'Yes, it is. There is people like that.' 'Well, I would like to talk to somebody because I'd be glad to help out if I could, you know, people with kids with no electricity.' (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010)

The school and the community regularly went well beyond helping families with their unmet day-to-day needs. In memory of a local student who passed away, the school and community joined together yearly and supported a local foundation in his honor. The foundation was established to aid local families that had child with a serious or life-threatening disease. Individuals, organizations, churches, civic groups, and businesses have assisted in raising money for this foundation. Parent 3 stated that she and her daughter "hosted a lemonade and cake stand . . . [and] donated the proceeds to the foundation" (Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

Over the years, the support for the foundation grew and eventually the entire county became involved. As the proceeds increased each year, the foundation helped more families. Throughout the years, the foundation recognized that families not only had physical and monetary needs, but they also had emotional needs. Once the emotional aspect was acknowledged as an important part of accepting death, the foundation began to send children to various camps that specialized in different illness. With some of the more urgent and extreme cases, entire families were sent on an end-of-life retreat to help them cope with the inevitable. Ultimately, the overwhelming support to this foundation has made it a prominent part of the community's identity (local child Foundation, 2005 – 2010, W. Burton, personal observation, 2005-2010).

Overarching Outcomes

Though there were many occasions for interactions between the community, parents, and school, ultimately the issue of understanding community funds of knowledge fell back on sheer communication. In 1977, musical group called 10cc noted in their song, *The Things We Do for Love*, that “Communication is the problem to the answer” (Gouldman, Stewart, & Burgess, 1977, side 1, song 2; accessed January 23, 2012). The song’s theme, noted in both teacher and parent interviews, illustrated the importance of working closely as a team to produce better educational outcomes (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

There were numerous communication opportunities for teachers and parents. There were formal conferences, specific-in-point phone calls, and informal conversations at the beginning and end of school days. Socially, there were numerous opportunities of shared experiences within the small community stores, activities, social events, and at school sanctioned events. With improved technology, communication became a cross-media way of life for some.

All four parents involved in this study acknowledged that there was a direct line of communication by various means between families and teachers. Furthermore, the parents did not feel they experienced any negativity concerning communications or interaction with the classroom teachers (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011). Overall, parents and teachers participated in a mixture of written, spoken, social, and formal conversations, and each believed that contact had

enhanced the opportunity for a good educational outcome (W. Burton, personal observation, 2005-2010).

All parents took part in some 'old fashioned' direct communication while some parents embraced newer ways to get information from the school (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011). The school system used "Parent Link." Parent Link left blanket messages on the telephone using phone numbers supplied by the parent at the beginning of the school year. Parent 1 (personal communication, November 12, 2010) specifically mentioned her comfort with the use of phone delivered messages:

Parent1: I never really had talk to anybody but I mean as far as the little parent link things where they call your phone and tell you those are very helpful because there are times that I forgot things.

Researcher: you said you communicate through parent link, newsletters and just talking this there are preference for what you have.

Parent1: I think I like the parent link the call, I mean you know unless if it's something to do specifically with D I want I would rather do face-to-face but if it's of the whole just like picture day reminder or events that's going on at school that I like the little parent link but if it's specifically to D/him I like it to be face-to-face.

All school-wide phone calls left messages for the general school population as opposed to an individual message. The value of the telephone system was two-fold: there was greater consistency in the information delivered to parents and there was less room for error in a teacher forgetting to send information to parents. However, because it was a wide network, Parent Link was only helpful for general announcements and reminders and was not used for child specific information. The system was not able to replace direct interaction when critical information had to be delivered (W. Burton, personal observation, 2005 – 2010).

The old fashioned method of ‘a note from the teacher’ for communicating specific information was appreciated by every parent in the study. Parents 2, Parent 3, and Parent 4 relied primarily on these notes for communication. Parent 3 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) was even more engaged with communicating since she felt completely comfortable and appreciative of text messages sent by her child’s teacher aide to her cell phone. The text messages were obviously child specific and helped establish a closer relationship between the classroom and the parent. Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) had no preference of means of communication; Parent 3 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) preferred notes for communication; and, Parent 4 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) thought notes were the fastest means for transmission of information from teacher to parent or vice-versa.

Though written communications were valued, Parent 1, Parent 2, and Parent 4 were able to supplement their written communication experiences with a series of informal face-to-face interactions when they transported their child to and from school (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011). Parent 1 (personal communication, November 12, 2010) acknowledged that these intermittent meetings created a quick way to deal with immediate issues and gave an instant means to share pertinent information. Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) acknowledged that she asked her child’s teacher about his classroom progress or if there were any areas of study that needed her attention. Parent 4 viewed these ongoing conversations as a necessary and relevant way to bridge any home or school issues. Parent 4 considered brief face-to-face moments of contact as a means to ward off potential problems (Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

Parent 3 (personal communication, March 12, 2011), comfortable with newer forms of technology, engaged in the earlier mentioned text messaging with the teacher's aide and also used Facebook to gain information about her daughter. Parent 3 preferred communication with the classroom aide rather than the classroom teacher as she acknowledged that the aide's reports were a helpful modality of communication. Parent 3 also relied on the classroom aide to share information with the classroom teacher about her family (personal communication, March 12, 2011).

Parents concluded the informal communication and ongoing interaction between teachers and parents was of great value (Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010; Parent 2, personal communication, November 13, 2010; Parent 3, personal communication, March 12, 2011; Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011). Families viewed the informal, but in-person interactions as a means for teachers to gain an understanding of their families. Parent 1 (personal communication, November 12, 2010) noted the teacher engaged in daily conversations and on field trips the teacher made it a point to converse with all of the parents present on the trip. Parent 2 (personal communication, November 13, 2010) indicated that the teacher often observed her family, asked questions, and verbally stated appreciation of her child's personality. Parent 3 displayed a different attitude and said she could not recall the classroom teacher ever interacting with her to learn about or understand her family. Parent 3 noted the aide was more involved in communicating with her and that she relied on the aide to pass information to the teacher. Parent 3 hoped that through the aide's communication the teacher gained an understanding of her child and her family (personal communication, March 12, 2011). Parent 4 observed that her child's teacher gained information about her child's likes and

dislikes by observation and then used the information to improve his morning routine (personal communication, March 12, 2011).

Within the school, formalized conferences were required at mid-year and at the end of the year. These conferences were considered a required and essential part of the standardized pre-kindergarten program. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) asserted the conferences were of great value and were pleased with the amount of parental involvement. Overwhelmingly, and despite scheduling difficulties, all the parents involved in the research study attended the conferences. During these formal conferences, objective information about a student's progress was delivered to the parent. Student development was discussed concerning all areas taught within the classroom. Physical development, along with social and emotional development, was also discussed (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

The atmosphere of the formal conference was professional and allowed discussion and written documentation of specific objectives, goals, and accomplishments. Some identified skills included: understanding and following classroom rules; counting to 10; and knowing the letters in the child's name. With the atmosphere professional, the teacher purposely engaged the parent in all aspects of the child's growth (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011; Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). Teacher 1 thought the conferences allowed a satisfying two-way conversation. She also believed that with astute observation on her part, important familial information was gathered that provided her a better understanding of the student, and increased her community funds of knowledge about that child (Teacher 1, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Likewise, Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) noted that the conferences gave her the opportunity to observe the members of each family as they interacted with one another. In this small community it was not unusual for a parent to bring siblings and extended family members to conferences. Teacher 2 (personal communication, February 7, 2011) had the opportunity to view the interpersonal-relationships and communications that were an everyday part of each student's home life. These observations increased the community funds of knowledge for Teacher 2 and thereby enabled her to be more effective and understanding when she dealt with the students in her classroom (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Parents were universally pleased with the formal conferences with their child's teacher. Parent 4 (personal communication, March 12, 2011) was delighted that the year-end conference gave her a framework for understanding the skills her child needed to work on before kindergarten. The teacher supplied actual academic resources that could be used by this parent during the summer break. The supplies acted as an extension of the classroom, which Parent 4 felt that it was important to continue throughout the summer (Parent 4, personal communication, March 12, 2011).

This study relied on the adage, "Working together works." Nowhere was this more profound than in the partnership that was essential between the parent, teacher, and child. These intricate partnerships were enhanced by the social interactions that took place within the community and were augmented by the consistent efforts of the school's personnel. The school consistently welcomed community residents, governmental dignitaries and agencies, civic organizations, and citizens into the school building for the many events and occasions that took

place on a daily basis. It was the combination of these interactions and the strong efforts of the teacher which broadened the teacher's ever-growing community funds of knowledge.

This chapter documented the funds of knowledge of a small rural Appalachian community. Documentation was organized by themes starting with the background of the community and community's characteristics. Themes were presented as related to the research questions. Through extensive review of a multitude of various current and archived documents the role of the community was clearly identified and explored in terms of relationships. Data from historical sources, interviews, newspapers, newsletters, and observations of the community and school revealed valuable information about the: role parents played in partnering with teachers, teachers' use of community funds of knowledge in planning and implementing instruction, and documentation of the community funds of knowledge in the pre-kindergarten assessment report.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and analyze existing community funds of knowledge and how they were incorporated into the strategies and methods of educational standards achievement by pre-kindergarten teachers of economically disadvantaged rural European American students in a typical working-class community in the southeastern United States. Also, the parents view of both their role as the primary educator and their partnership with the teacher and system was examined.

The organizational framework was guided by the four research questions. First, the integration of community funds of knowledge on instructional practices by pre-kindergarten teachers was presented. Next, the active partnership between parents and the educational system were explored. This section was followed by community partnerships. Additionally, the chapter formally ends with a conclusion, directions for future research, and a researcher note.

This study used ethnographic interviews as the means to gain knowledge on the research topic. Participants in the study included two pre-kindergarten teachers and four families. All participants were intimately involved in the 2009 -2010 state pre-kindergarten program.

The data were coded, categorized, and identified by themes. Several themes became evident through analysis of interviews, observations, and documents. For the community analysis, the themes of community origins, values, partnerships, and the landscape of the community were identified. In addition, the themes of the parental role in education from the

parent and teacher perspectives, the documentation and use of community funds of knowledge, as well as the role of the school community and the community of the town were revealed.

The study was based on the following three research questions:

1. How do teachers integrate and synthesize existing community funds of knowledge into instructional design for children in the study;
2. What role do parents currently play in formally partnering with teachers and their child's school to enhance educational attainment;
3. In what ways are existing community funds of knowledge reflected in the pre-kindergarten child assessment report on a child's mastery of pre-kindergarten standards; and
4. In what ways are existing community funds of knowledge reflected in the school and community partnership?

Each research question became an analytic category or a group of themes identified from the interviews and field notes of similar concepts and ideas. Themes were identified by the repetition of subjects and ideas (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The interviews and field notes were cut and sorted for cross comparison for the identification of similarities and differences between subjects (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Analysis was charted by identifying five areas using a modified framework suggested by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008). In the first area, information was identified according to individual categories. Secondly, information was charted by means of interviews, historical archives, business and news related documents, as well as field observations in the school and community. Third, information was assessed by how I, the researcher, interpreted the meaning.

Fourth, information was charted by importance; and lastly, the fifth area used related literature to identify comparisons and contrasts.

Integration of Community Funds of Knowledge

Referencing the first question, “How do teachers integrate and synthesize existing community funds of knowledge into instructional design for children in the study?” the foundation was laid concerning the role of the teacher in relation to community funds of knowledge. This question sought to determine the knowledge teachers gained about their students within the selected community and how these teachers incorporated that knowledge into their teaching and assessment practices. In the selected community, teachers gained knowledge about their students through partnerships with families, community participation, and classroom interactions. These actions, supported Gallimore and Goldenberg’s (2001) research, stated that teachers’ responsibilities extend outside of the walls the classroom. By active participation in the school community, the teachers gained valuable information about the families of their students. Other information regarding community funds of knowledge was gained by both formal and informal interactions. The knowledge acquired through the various means of communication gave guidance to the teacher in understanding the home environment of the students. The interactions and exchanges of information between teachers, parents, and community were consistent with Caspe’s (2003) research that stated learning about families occurs through communication and observation. These communications and observations often came as a direct result of parents transporting their child to and from school, attending conferences, participating in technologies such as Facebook, and/ or joining in community, business, and school sponsored activities and events.

By the above mentioned means, the teachers built partnerships and relationships with all the students in their classrooms. For the purpose of this study special emphasis and direction were placed on the four families that were interviewed. Due to the significant amount of teacher involvement in the community and school activities, the teacher, student, and parent relationship was enhanced (Reed, 2009). As a result of the involvement and relationship enhancement, the funds of knowledge were more readily evident.

Also, parent-teacher conferences allowed more evidence and understanding of the community funds of knowledge. During the two conferences, mid-year and end-of-the-year, parents and teachers engaged in two-way communication that proved beneficial to both parties. Parents gained informative knowledge about the needed skills for kindergarten along with assessments regarding their child and the expected skills in pre-kindergarten program. Parents asked for areas that could be improved upon and the teacher provided task oriented activities for the family to engage in that encouraged the development of select skills. During the conferences, teachers gained knowledge about the dynamics of the family through the two-way communication and the observation of communication among the family members that were present. The teachers demonstrated an understanding of the uniqueness of each family by providing appropriate activities. One teacher noted that the conference was a time to use the parents as a resource while the other teacher indicated it was a good time to support the family.

Earlier research in this area stated that students from low-income families were stereotyped (Casper, 2003; Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007). When Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 referenced their worst case scenarios, they agreed that those particular cases were consistent with previous research. Teacher 2, in a statement regarding such a scenario, reported there was uncertainty for these children and unstable home relationships. Furthermore she added,

I would say, mean, I lot of them have never been read to, need a lot of work with language development. We get kids that haven't been talked to, haven't been, they don't have a lot of experience with with outside their you know, immediate home, you know, their world view is very small.

Both teachers participating in this study acknowledged that the families and children in the research community did not fit the proposed stereotypes. The teachers had preconceived class-based assumptions; however, the teachers did not indicate nor generalize these assumptions to the students and families. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 disclosed that children and families vary in both needs and abilities. The teachers also noted that most families within the community had similar life experiences.

Teachers took a holistic approach when teaching and assessing children. Students were viewed as individuals with diverse skills, needs, and backgrounds. One teacher noted that she utilized the parents as a resource, whereas, the other teacher saw herself as a supporter for the families. Both teachers, understanding the family dynamics, engaged in practices that strengthened family involvement and extended the learning process to the home environment (Knopf & Swick, 2008). Smith (2006) strengthened this idea by stating that an important element of parental involvement is to understand the community and the families within it. Smith (2006) also believed that teachers needed to understand the life circumstances and home environments of their students in order to connect with their families. The teachers in this study agreed with Smith's previous statements. Both teachers indicated important knowledge was gained from informal and formal conversations with families. The teachers felt this knowledge enabled them to better understand the families and their home environment.

In the selected school, the teachers were culturally literate and sensitive to students and families because of their similar upbringing and years of experience with the community and students from low-incomes. The teachers became culturally literate through their participation

and observation of the community members in events, festivals, and fundraisers. The teachers gained insight into community funds of knowledge through the fleeting interactions at the beginning and ending of school as well as the interactions that took place during field trips, events, and conferences. Due to the familiarity of the community, the teachers engaged in culturally responsive teaching and practices. It was important for teachers to build trust so they could become culturally literate by knowing the students' interactional learning styles as well as the student's values. By learning this, teachers engaged in a wide range of instructional strategies and effective answering techniques. Teachers also provided effective feedback and established valuable home-school partnerships (Jackson, 1993/1994). Similar research by Phuntsog (2001) validated as he stated in his study that "children learn better when teachers are sensitive to home and school cultural differences" (p. 58).

In this research community, the teachers were keen in their observation of students and their skills. The teachers examined the knowledge gained from the many observations and tailored their instruction to meet the individual student's needs. The teachers also knew and understood each individual's personal background and their projected sequence of development for pre-kindergarten skills. Through the teaching process and observations, the teachers regularly updated and related new instruction to the child's background. Teacher 1 targeted missing skills by starting with the prerequisite skills or sometimes she did a breakdown of the skill into more rudimentary steps. Teacher 2, as a result of her many years of experience, used strategies to re-engage a child if he/she was off-task. Teacher 2 re-engaged or redirected by gaining the child's interest, asking questions, and making "it as interesting as possible to catch their attention" (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). Teacher 2, also when

needed, provided one-on-one instruction to provide additional opportunities to develop needed skills.

Being sensitive to a child's needs often required the teachers to provide individualized activities that could be easily incorporated into the everyday routines of the child's family. To encourage participation, activities provided by the teacher needed to accommodate the family's financial, material, and time demands (Knopf & Swick, 2008). According to Knopf and Swick (2008), by participating in the teacher provided activities family involvement was strengthened.

Within each teacher's classroom, the teachers engaged in developmentally appropriate assessments; such as, authentic performance assessments. This type of assessments enabled children to demonstrate their knowledge and skills across the developmental domains (Meisels, Liaw, Dorfman, & Nelson, 1995). Assessments were necessary for the teachers to determine the correct development and acquisition of early learning skills. Assessment practices for the state's pre-kindergarten program were developmentally appropriate assessments across the developmental domains. Results of assessments were used as guidelines for the teachers in their future teaching practices and according to Grubb and Courtney (1996), those same practices should be embedded into the climate of the classroom at all times. In this research it was not possible to conclude if these practices were embedded in the climate of the classroom since observations of the classroom were not designate as a part of the study. Furthermore, there was limited evidence of the stated assessment practices since none of the participating families retained their child's portfolios or conference reports. However, in regards to the teachers and based on information provided by the teachers during their interview, knowledge from individual assessments played a valuable part in the classroom as each teacher built on the child's existing skills.

Teachers embedded activities into the classroom with the assistance of monthly newsletters and trainings. In this study, the teachers used photographs and anecdotal records for documentation rather than standardized assessment. In order to avoid any biases, all documentation was reflective and analytic. Assessment measures considered a student's strengths and uniqueness. Assessment measures also allowed teachers to identify the operational skills a student had mastered and thereby allowed them to sequentially build upon them. It is important for teachers to authenticate their finding as research has repeatedly shown that teachers have a responsibility to document progress on the state's mandated standards (Meisels, Liaw, Dorfman, & Nelson, 1995; Meisels, Xue, Bickel, Nicholson, & Atkins-Burnett, 2001; Southern Early Childhood Association, 2000).

The selected pre-kindergarten program documented the early learning standards through authentic performance assessments. This particular school utilized a work sampling system that documented a child's skills, knowledge, and behaviors within the context of the classroom routines and activities (Meisels, Liaw, Dorfman, & Nelson, 1995). A work sampling system was also employed that included developmental guidelines provided by the selected state, portfolios, and summary reports (Meisels, Liaw, Dorfman, & Nelson 1995).

In contrast to traditional school measures, this school provided photos with a caption or description, the date, and the domain of the skill observed. The caption stated what the child did or said without bias from the teacher (local State Department of Education newsletter, 2009). Both teachers in the study noted their use of portfolios, work samples, photos, and anecdotal notes. On the other hand, none of the families maintained the portfolios or conference reports so no analysis of the use of community funds of knowledge in the various pre-kindergarten documents was made.

Through the pre-kindergarten program, the teachers were provided with trainings and resources regarding the sequence of skill development. The teachers also received a monthly newsletter with suggested activities that could be used as authentic data in documenting each child's skills with the sampling system. Both of the teachers had a firm understanding of the sequence of development across the developmental domains. With this understanding the teachers took child's present level of performance and determined the next skill progression. With the teachers' knowledge and resources, students gained a solid foundation for kindergarten readiness.

Active Partnerships

In this study, the second research question: "What role do parents currently play in formally partnering with teachers and their child's school to enhance educational attainment?" pursued the formal role parents played in partnering with teachers. If Epstein's (1995; 2001) six areas: parenting, communicating, volunteering, activity learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration, were used as the rule for determining the formality of the parent teacher partnership; then, the partnership began at birth since this is when parental involvement begins. According to Epstein (1995; 2001), the parents are the child's first teachers in his or her microsystem and as a child grows and develops, so do the influences and opportunities for teaching. Therefore, it should be noted that the informal partnership, according to Epstein (2001) began before mandated schooling and continued through the student's school career.

In the community where the research was completed, it was a common practice for the child to stay at home with daycare provided by the parents or someone close to the family. The individuals who provided the daycare also became informal teachers. In this study the children of three of the research families were cared for by a parent, grandparent, or close family friend.

The fourth family enrolled their children in a formal daycare program during the day but still utilized relatives and friends at other times. The interactions that took place in the children's early years with their informal teachers were not points of focus in this study.

The origins of the formal partnership must be considered. The formal partnership between families and the teachers began with the recognized pre-kindergarten enrollment procedure and contract. When paperwork from the enrollment process was completed, parents were given an authorized school handbook. The signed papers along with the handbook served as the official but unspoken contract with the teachers and pre-kindergarten program. The handbook received by the parents itemized the stringent expectations and content standards of the pre-kindergarten program as set by the local State Department of Education (2011). Additional information included in the handbook was the specific school expectations and guidelines concerning family involvement in the pre-kindergarten program (local State Department of Education, 2011; W. Burton personal observation, 2010).

The research families and caregivers in this study engaged in a variety of purposeful learning activities to prepare their children for school. The families in this study taught what they believed were the foundational skills needed for pre-kindergarten, such as the alphabet, numbers, colors, shapes, and writing. Videos, flashcards, verbal communication, reading, and other learning experiences were used by parents as teaching methods. Activities such as these were backed by researchers Bronfenbrenner (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) when they stated that learning begins in the home and a child's immediate environment, the child's micro and mesosystem. Information from Epstein's (2001) study also substantiated the results of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) and Vygotsky's (1978) studies.

The above mentioned teaching methods were consistent with the teaching methods of middle class families (Heath, 1983; Melhuish et al., 2008). However with the families involved in the study, there was a breakdown in the transfer of information at the level of the exosystem and macrosystem as evidenced in the skills that the families targeted and prioritized. Parents were not provided with the content standards of the pre-kindergarten program until they had enrolled their child in the program (local State Department of Education, 2011). At this point information was exchanged about the learning standards and expectations of the pre-kindergarten program. This breakdown related to the collaboration of teachers and the community, as well as the partnership between the community and the school. From birth until enrollment in the pre-kindergarten program, it was left to the parents to determine the foundational skills and the best tactics for their children to learn the targeted skills.

Each of the research families taught what they considered foundational skills for academic learning. However, before any actual academic skills were taught, the parents specifically taught what they considered the communal funds of knowledge to their children. This communal knowledge consisted of values and character qualities that were exhibited on a daily basis in all aspects of community life. The children learned by numerous means such as examples, discussions, participation, and organized activities. These values and qualities were considered generational knowledge that had been passed down and ingrained in all member of the community since its inceptions. The members of the community felt a deep commitment to pass along, generation by generation, the shared funds of knowledge that began in the early 1800s when the first settlers arrived in this area.

Throughout the years, the school, churches, businesses, community members, civic associations, public administrations, and parents, all continued to dedicate time and effort to

teaching and instilling the fundamental values or the communal funds of knowledge, to the children of the community. The community realized it was their communal funds of knowledge that made them a unique community. Members of community believed the community's survival was sustained over the years by the shared funds of knowledge that were based on the values and character qualities of the early settlers. This community's unique funds of knowledge was the foundation of their past and is the hope and guidance for future generations.

Families of the community began exposing these values and qualities to the children once they were born. Therefore, it was understandable that the parents took an instrumental and active role in the life of their children concerning all aspects of the family, home, school, and community. As stated throughout the research, the community's 'prevalent feeling of oneness,' 'missionary interest in all humans,' and a 'sense of place' was shared by each individual in the community. These feelings and actions originated with the first settlers, continued through the years, and were still evident in the present day community. Examples of these values and character qualities were noted as acts of helping, serving, protecting, mentoring, and being charitable and benevolent to others. Parents believed these characteristics to be essential and foundational for all members of the community. This foundational knowledge became the basic knowledge for all children and thereby was the common funds of knowledge for the present day children and members of the community.

Knowing and comprehending the concept of 'oneness' was just one of the major milestones of learning since it was an essential element of knowledge in this community's foundational community funds of knowledge. The feeling of oneness has always been embedded in the minds of every child and community individual. The phrase has always been one of the most often heard sayings in the community. The concept of oneness was a valuable instructional

tool and asset to teachers as lessons, strategies, and learning experiences were planned. Besides just utilizing the concept of oneness, teachers also incorporated and utilized the ‘common but deep-seated character ideals and values’ from the foundational funds of knowledge. The values and character traits that parents instilled into the funds of knowledge allowed teacher to develop lessons that encouraged academic growth and unique learning experiences.

Parents were and are today a pivotal and essential part of the educational process. From the moment the child was born the parent began teaching values. As children formally entered school, parents took an active and prominent role in a partnership with their teacher and their education. The parent participants had their own education based on the commonality of the community funds of knowledge and they expected their children to do the same. In this community, all of the children entered school with the same base of community funds of knowledge. This was not to say that once the foundational elements, values, and character traits were ingrained in the children that additional and individualistic funds of knowledge were not also present. Each participating child was unique as was their family. This uniqueness led to individualized knowledge that was gained by experiences, teaching, and organized activities by the family. With values as the community’s common ‘community funds of knowledge’ any additional skills and cultural experiences acquired by a child were simply added to a child’s overall increasing and budding funds of knowledge.

Each family, just as their family before them, saw the core values of the community; religion, service, respectfulness, obedience, along with various other character qualities as an essential part of their child’s life that was needed for personal and education growth. This community fund of knowledge was vital for the survival of the community. That being said and looking back to research question two; all parents played a part in formally partnering with

teachers and their child's school to enhance educational attainment. Parents volunteered to help with festivals, participated in book fairs, attended conferences, incorporated teacher suggestions, helped less fortunate families, helped with projects in the community and served both the school and community through various means and activities.

In summary of research question two, the partnership began when the child crossed the school door threshold for enrollment. The parents engaged in a contract with the pre-kindergarten program by enrolling their children. This contract made the relationship formal. The formal partnership between the parent and school included the exchange of the family handbook for the program and communication that provided the school to home connection (local State Department of Education, 2011). Such connections included conferences and the follow through suggested activities. This formal partnership also included volunteering, activity learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995). All of the parents that engaged in the research study participated in parenting, communicating, activity learning at home, and collaboration with the community. One parent was involved with decision making by having membership in the parent-teacher organization. All parents became involved in the social and academic components of school. All the children enrolled in prekindergarten had parents or a parent that participated in the two conferences, as well as frequent conversations to touch base with the teacher concerning their child's progress. The parents were also active in field trips and various social events that set the foundation for a positive partnership.

It should be noted that one of the teachers that participated in the study voiced that she did not perceive participation in the social events as parental involvement. To this particular teacher, parental involvement was limited to only academic achievement.

Documentation of Community Funds of Knowledge

Documentation of community funds of knowledge referenced research question three: In what ways are existing community funds of knowledge reflected in the pre-kindergarten child assessment report on a child's mastery of pre-kindergarten standards? This question required families to submit documents issued by the pre-kindergarten organization detailing their child's acquisition of the early learning standards. One piece of evidence was obtained. This piece of evidence was a mid-year conference report. Across the developmental domains, the teacher documented strengths and skills the child possessed. The intent of the researcher was to obtain the portfolios, mid-year and end-of-year conference reports; however, the families misplaced them, lost them, or were simply unable to locate these items.

By the design of the program, the work sampling system enabled the teachers to document students individually. The work sampling system is a developmentally appropriate assessment that enables the teacher to consider a child's community funds of knowledge. In addition, the state organization urged that reports be "defined within the context of families and how they live as well as defined within the context of communities and the services they provide. The report must be defined with the context of schools and their readiness for children" (local State Department of Education, 2012). As a result of having only one mid-year conference report, there was limited evidence to conclude the teachers' documentation of students' community funds of knowledge within the context of the select community. However, from the interviews it was evident that teachers understood the funds of knowledge of the children. This understanding came from their participation in the community as well as their engagement in developmentally appropriate assessments.

Community Partnerships

Community was of significant importance since members have a shared identity and interests (Liu & Besser, 1993). The parameters of the community were the cornerstones of the community funds of knowledge. Community partnerships were evident throughout this research study and were revealed as a staunch power in all activities throughout the community and school atmospheres in this rural community. From the earliest days of this community, the values of the residents have been an integral part of the community and in sustaining the community. Residents from the earliest days to present day have demonstrated the values of religion and God, benevolence, and service (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 81-86; local archived newspaper clipping, July 2, 1896; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969; J. Thompson, personal communication, February 6-7, 2012). These values were the cornerstone of the earliest community and have continued to live and thrive with each new generation. Based on these values, there has been and continues to be a local identity and common purpose among the community (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). For this community, the school is a culmination of the identity for the community. The school's long living motto "a small school with a big heart" reinforces the values of service and benevolence (Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, pp. 8, 14, 24).

As defined earlier in the research, community funds of knowledge is the knowledge a child brings with them to school. It is important for a teacher to recognize and utilize a child's funds of knowledge. No two children are the same so it is to the teacher's advantage to develop a repertoire with the student, parents, and family that will enhance her knowledge of the student's level of knowledge and skills along with knowing the student's family background (local school district news, October 7, 2009 B; local school district news, October 14, 2009; local

school district news, March, 2010; local school district news, March 18, 2010). Generally, when speaking of funds of knowledge most teachers will only refer to specific educational skills, such as writing, saying the ABCs or knowing how to count to 10. However, after doing my research, I realized that in this particular community there is another aspect of community funds of knowledge that must be recognized, character traits and values (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 81-86; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 24; local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991).

From the earliest settlers to the residents of the community today, it is evident that there are community traits and traditions that have been passed down generation after generation. The pre-kindergarten children who enter this community school share common socio-cultural community funds of knowledge. In this community and school the cultural aspect of community funds of knowledge far outweigh the skill aspect of community funds of knowledge. The people of this community have lived in the area for many generations. Since the community's inception, the character values of service, benevolence and a missionary interest in others along with trust, faith, and honesty have been the backbone of this unique and solidified community (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 81-86; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 24; local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 1991). It is through these engrained values that this community has survived when numerous other small communities have not (archived county personalities, 1973, pp. 83-84)

Each child in this community eagerly shows up on the first day of school already instilled with a deep rooted pride for the school and the community (local school district news, October 7, 2009; local school district news, February 4, 2011; local school district news, February 16, 2011; Parent 1, personal communication, November 12, 2010). These same children also display a

giving and generous attitude as they go out of the way to help one another. These children know how to share, care, or nurture others; from infancy to the first day of school these children have been actively involved with a community that shares these traits. These children learned from their parents and their parents learned from their parents. So, generation after generation the values of being sensitive to the needs of others and helping others has been the way of life in this community (archived county personalities, 1973, p. 81-86; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, pp. 8, 14, 24; local archived newspaper clipping, June 18, 1908; local archived newspaper clipping, January 29, 1929; local archived newspaper clipping, June 21, 1951; local archived newspaper clipping, January 8, 1969; local archived newspaper clipping, August 6, 2010; local archived newspaper clipping, November 22, 2010; local archived newspaper clipping, December 21, 2010; J. Thompson, personal communication, February 6-7, 2012).

Within the academic realm, the socio-cultural community funds of knowledge were evident as soon as the children began any group activity. Whether an activity required the student to listen, act, or lead, the students of this community were prepared for the task. The ability to participate in an unstructured activity or an activity that allowed them to use their creativity and imagination was always successful. These children learned participation skills each time they participated in family and community activities. From infancy to elderly, this community is all encompassing when any event is planned. It is through the numerous community opportunities that these children acquired working, sharing, and participation skills. Being part of an active community through numerous planned events, such as food drives, motorcades, celebrations, Red Cross events, United Way activities; along with a multitude of spontaneous affairs, such as writing letters to troops, was the way of life for their parents (local archived newspaper clipping,

August 6, 2010; local archived newspaper clipping, December 21, 2010; local archived newspaper clipping, May 30, 2011; local school district news, October 7, 2009; local school district news, February 4, 2011; local school district news, February 16, 2011; local school district news, October 12, 2011; local school district news, December 6, 2011; local school district news, foundation, 2005 – present). The children in the study, following in their parents' footsteps, were being raised in the same manner. It was important that the teachers in the study recognized the research children, through their active participation in the community, had already acquired skills as joiners, participators, and potential leaders.

As mentioned earlier, normally, when community funds of knowledge are cited, teachers generally think of a student and specific math, reading, identifying, and storytelling skills they have as they enter school. In this community, the pre-kindergarten teachers, just like thousands of other teachers throughout the state, look for these academic skills and the level at which each child enters her classroom. However, the research teachers, being intricately involved with the families and community and knowing the socio-cultural background, were identifying and contemplating ways to utilize the generational socio-cultural skills that had been passed down through the years since the origination of the community. Once the teachers acknowledged the unique socio-cultural traits ingrained in their students, they used the knowledge to augment the teaching of state required skills. This was evidenced when Teacher 2 redirected the child back to the carpet during story time and engaged him with the pictures by relating to his world experiences (Teacher 2, personal communication, February 7, 2011). By knowing the socio-cultural traits unique to this community, the relational bond between teacher, student and parent was more easily established. The relational bonding between the parent, child, and teacher helped create an atmosphere of classroom acceptance and the prevalent feeling of "oneness" so

often mentioned throughout the study. The teaching of skills became a simple matter of planning for the teachers once the classroom atmosphere was conducive and a favorable relationship was established.

“Oneness” was a common phrase throughout the study but a “sense of place” was also revealed to be important for this study. For this particular study, “sense of place” referred to the beneficial relationship between the community and the residents as each had their needs and wants filled (Bauch, 2001; Heritage of the County, Heritage Book Committee, 1999, p. 8, 14, 24; Thompson, personal communication, February 6 -7, 2012). This continuous and interdependent relationship fulfilled the needs and wants of each and resulted in a number of successes. Nowhere was this relationship more evident than in the relationship of the school (local archived newspaper clipping, December 21, 2010; local archived newspaper clipping, December 22, 2010; local archived newspaper clipping, May 30, 2011; local school district news, February 24, 2009; local school district news, October 7, 2009; local school district news, December 4, 2009; local school district news, August 8, 2010; local school district news, February 4, 2011; local school district news, March 3, 2011; local school district news, October 6, 2011; Thompson, personal communication, February 6 -7, 2012). There was mutual dependency between the school and the community (local archived newspaper clipping, November 22, 2010; local school district news, December 16, 2009; local school district news, December 16, 2011; Harmon & Schafft, 2009). The presence of this relationship boosted the classroom experiences of the students (local archived newspaper clipping, November 22, 2010; local school district news, October 7, 2009; Local school district news, December 4, 2009; local school district news, March 3, 2011; local school district news, October 12, 2011).

The teachers regularly took part in the social life of the community, and saw the parents on a regular basis. The teachers also self-identified as sharing many of the cultural and socio-economic traits of the families they served since they too were raised in the area or in areas similar to this community. The recognized community funds of knowledge were both accurate and helpful to the teachers.

By numerous actions the community demonstrated pride in the school and a commitment to improve the personal and academic life of the student body. The community, within its financial means, was dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for each student. The school through the family advocate connected families in need with a variety of organizations in the community (local school districts news, September 2010; local school district news, September 2011). The family advocate, with organizational help, identified students who were not receiving adequate meals at home and discretely gave them a ‘backpack’ each Friday as they left school. The ‘backpack’ supplied children with food for the weekend (local archived newspaper article, May 2010). The ‘backpacks’ were donated by local churches and civic organizations throughout the county. The community regularly provided for families during unexpected or extreme times of need and supported teachers with specific needs in their classrooms (local school district news, October, 2010). Civic organizations like the Masons, Kiwanis, American Legion, Lions Club, and American Heart Association provided an assortment of services such as, eyeglasses, spirit wear, and even fingerprinting (local school district news, August 2010). Additionally, specific individuals from the community shared both their time and unique skills with the students. Some community members volunteered to read stories to the students (May 2011); other members of the community presented gifts like the beaded banner (local school district news, May 2011). Public service organizations repeatedly assisted the schools and

students as they prepared programs to increase student knowledge regarding fire and railroad safety (local school district news, March 2011; Teacher 1 personal communication, February 7, 2011). Also, the PTA consistently stepped forward and assisted with the relationships within the school and the community.

Parents, as expected, were equally dedicated to improving all aspects of their children's lives. Academically, parents were confident that the teachers had the best interest of every student at heart and this assertion encouraged purposeful relationships between parents and teachers. Through the development of mutually trusting and constructive relationships, parents integrated teacher advice and resource strategies within their home environments. This action was important in the overall enhancement of each child's educational progress.

Conclusions

Schools serve many purposes as they allow students to socialize and at the same time, according to Miller (1993), schools strengthen the values of the family and the community. Research by Miller (1993) indicated that schools liberated children from the limitations of the parent, and opened up new horizons that make a bigger and better world. Harmon and Schafft (2009) stated that schools functioned as centers of community activity while nurturing public participation in civic and community affairs. For this community, the school genuinely functioned as connector between the community and its residents.

In the past, many rural schools have often served as symbols of a community's vitality and identity. As a matter of practicality, some schools provided physical spaces that allowed the community members to come together. These meetings gave an identity and attachment to a physical setting which resulted in social outcomes (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). Bauch (2001), like Harmon & Schafft (2009) felt that schools gave a sense of place that was valued as they

offered a unique set of conditions for building the social capital that was important for helping students succeed. Furthermore, Bauch (2001) stated, residents of a community are connected by their rootedness as related to their particular community. During this study, the research school developed bonding social capital which, according to Onyx and Bullen (2000), is consistent among rural communities. The research school and community also demonstrated high levels of support through parental involvement, volunteerism, and participation of local businesses and civic organizations, which also followed Onyx and Bullen's (2000) theory that rural communities have strong support with high levels of community participation.

In this study, there was no shortage of will or desire on the family, community, or teachers to improve the educational achievement of every student as evidenced by the state standards (local State Department of Education, 2012). However, due to stretched assets, resources were challenged (local archived newspaper clipping, May 05, 2011). As a result, community members and civic organizations have strived to fill in the gaps (local school district news, 2009; 2010; 2011). As a money saving tactic, the state has shortened the school day for pre-kindergarten (local archived newspaper clipping, February 27, 2011).

Teachers were fully cognizant of the community funds of knowledge and utilized this knowledge in their teaching and assessment practices for Rural European Americans. There were sound foundations for partnerships. Communication was a daily occurrence between parents and teachers. Communication may be more frequent for some families than others depending on the families' mode of transportation and participation in social events sponsored by the school. Communication is essential to an effective partnership. Partnerships existed between families, school and the community but could be strengthened. Although the teachers engaged in practices that strengthened family involvement, teachers and the school need to

expand their idea of parent involvement (Mapp, 2002) to encompass parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein's (2001) research states the best approach for educating students in rural America is through partnerships between schools, the communities, and the businesses. The strength of these partnerships allows the student access to more resources, support, guidance, and encouragement. In any partnership, the student is the integral ingredient since the student links the members of all groups together. Whether at school, home, or in the community, the student is a learner, contributor, communicator, and the essential element to all successful partnerships (Epstein, 2001).

Directions for Further Research

An outgrowth of this study revealed several areas that could be researched further to enhance the educational experience of pre-kindergarten children. Beginning at birth, parents are given a relatively healthy amount of data, available resources, and advice from the professional community on the developmental milestones that their child should meet physically and emotionally. Gross motor skills and basic cognitive development are reinforced and measured against peer groups by medical practitioners. Educational television, literacy programs, and commercial products for education are all available in abundance. However, the symbiosis of this information and its reportage as a unified skill set that is necessary in light of the codified standardization of "school readiness" is not readily accessible.

One area of future research could be to determine if making academic objectives into a standardized body of information communicated through appropriate resource partners prior to the introduction of a child into the formal classroom alters the foundational skills targeted prior

to school. This could be studied in light of the impact it has to offset the effects of the previously mentioned detriments and deficiencies to the lower SES students.

Future researchers may also wish to note that asking a family to self-identify as lower SES is an uncomfortable position. The development of a methodology for making this identification without the restriction of self-definition by the participants could augment the number of families willing to take part and increase the chances that meaningful strategies will be illuminated.

Teachers and their perceptions of the backgrounds and cultural lives of their students can also be reviewed especially in light of how they affect the structure and quality of teacher-family relationships. Tracking the careers and perceptual changes of teachers as their funds of knowledge increase and become fully integrated into teaching strategies can offer revelatory information on how relationships improve as understanding replaces preconception in the mind of an educator.

Researcher's Note

As previously mentioned, there were several limitations to the present study. An important limitation that should be duly noted was the participant pool. Due to the relocation of the researcher, the researcher was thus removed from the immediate mesosystem and exosystem of potential families. The researcher had limited contact with the families outside of the interviews. Families and teachers could not be actively observed within the school and community. This negatively impacted the researcher's ability to observe the families and teachers to gain information about their values and ways of life. If the researcher had been a participant observer in the school and community, more information could have been obtained about the families, teachers, and the people of the community. In addition, the scope of the

interview questions and the researcher's experience restricted the amount of information obtained about the families and teachers. The researcher could have probed more into the demographics of the whole family as well as their everyday routines. Little information was given about spouses for both the teachers and families. This information would have added to the dynamics of the participants.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMATIONAL FLYER

Dear Pre-kindergarten Parents,

The end of the school year is almost here. You may be preparing to have a parent-teacher conference to review your child's year in pre-kindergarten. I am conducting a research study through the University of Alabama to learn about the relationship between families and teachers. I would like to interview you after the completion of the school year. In addition, I would like to review your child's pre-kindergarten assessment completed by his or her teacher. If you are interested in participating or have questions about the research study, please contact me. Results from the research study can help teachers better understand and serve the families of this community.

Whitney Burton, Speech-Language Pathologist
130 Peachtree Street
Fairmount, GA 30139
(706) 337-5321

Please indicate your choice below. Return all forms to Ms. Burton at Fairmount Elementary School.

Yes, I am interested in participating in the research study.

No, I am not interested in participating in the research study.

I would like more information about the research study.

Contact Information:

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

INFORMED CONSENT FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is called “The Importance of Funds of Knowledge on Economically Disadvantaged Rural European American Students.” The study is being done by Whitney Burton. She is a doctoral student in the department of Special Education/Multiple Abilities at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about?

When a child begins school, there can be a difference in their home and school learning environments. This difference can impact a child’s readiness for school and academic success. This study is seeking to gain knowledge about parent-teacher partnerships. Specifically, the funds of knowledge families bring into the classroom and how teachers recognize and integrate these funds in helping children achieve the pre-kindergarten standards. You will be asked about your experience in teaching and partnering with families involved in the pre-kindergarten program.

Why is this study important?

Findings will help provide valuable data on the communication between families and their children’s teachers. In addition, it will improve current practices and policies regarding the education of young children.

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to take part in the present study since you teach pre-kindergarten children at the selected site.

How many other people will be in this study?

The investigator hopes to interview the pre-kindergarten teachers and 10-15 families with children enrolled in pre-kindergarten.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, Ms. Burton will interview you in your home or a place of your own choosing about your partnerships with families. The interviewer would like to audiotape the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes. In addition, you will be asked to provide the pre-kindergarten child assessment for families that consent to be involved.

How much time will I spend being in the study?

The interview should last about 45-60 minutes, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share. If needed, there will be follow-up interviews which should last less than 30 minutes.

Will the study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

You will not be compensated financially for your participation in the study. However, your participation will be appreciated.

What are the risks (problems or dangers) from being in this study?

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this study. If you find the discussion to be uncomfortable you can control this by not being in the study or by refusing to answer a particular question. Also, I can recommend a counselor if you seem upset by the discussion. Seeing the counselor would be at your own expense.

What are the benefits of being in the study?

There are no direct benefits to you unless you find it pleasant or helpful to discuss your experiences in partnering with families to bridge the home and school cultures. Also, you may feel good about knowing that you have helped

How will my privacy be protected?

You are free to decide where I will visit you so we can talk without being overheard. I will visit you in the privacy of your home or in another place that is convenient for you.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

The only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in Ms. Burton's office, which is locked when she is not there. Any personal information that is obtained from you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Also, subject identities will be confidential as each interview will only be identified by a number rather than a name. Under no circumstances will families, towns, or counties be identified. Interviews will be audiotaped. When the audiotape is typed, the data file on the audiotape will be deleted. This should occur within one month of the completion of the study. You may refuse to be audio taped, in which case the interviewer will take handwritten notes. Names on the pre-kindergarten assessment will be converted to match the interviewee's number so the documents will not be identified to a certain child.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?

The alternative is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant?

Being in this study is totally voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at all. IF you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on you relationships with your child’s school or the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call Whitney Burton at 770-548-2711. If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer at 205-348-5152.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html . After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for a research participant that is online there, or you may ask Ms. Burton for a copy of it. You may also email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

Signature of Participant

Date

Whitney Burton _____
Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is called “the importance of funds of knowledge of economically disadvantaged”. The study is being done by Whitney Burton. She is a doctoral student in the department of Special Education/Multiple Abilities at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about?

When a child begins school, there can be a difference in their home and school learning environments. This difference can impact a child’s readiness for school and academic success. This study is seeking to gain knowledge about parent-teacher partnerships. Specifically, the funds of knowledge families bring into the classroom and how teachers recognize and integrate these funds in helping children achieve the pre-kindergarten standards. You will be asked about your experiences with the pre-kindergarten program and partnering with teachers to improve your child’s educational experience.

Why is this study important?

Findings will help provide valuable data on the communication between families and their children’s teachers. In addition, it will improve current practices and policies regarding the education of young children.

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to take part in the present study since your child is enrolled in the universal pre-kindergarten program at the selected site.

How many other people will be in this study?

The investigator hopes to interview the pre-kindergarten teachers and 10-15 families with children enrolled in pre-kindergarten.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, Ms. Burton will interview you in your home or a place of your own choosing about your partnerships with families. The interviewer would like to audiotape the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes. In addition, you will be asked to provide consent to access your child’s pre-kindergarten child assessment.

How much time will I spend being in the study?

The interview should last about 45-60 minutes, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share. If needed, there will be follow-up interviews which should last less than 30 minutes.

Will the study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

You will not be compensated financially for your participation in the study. However, your participation will be appreciated.

What are the risks (problems or dangers) from being in this study?

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this study. If you find the discussion to be uncomfortable you can control this by not being in the study or by refusing to answer a particular question. Also, I can recommend a counselor if you seem upset by the discussion. Seeing the counselor would be at your own expense.

What are the benefits of being in the study?

There are no direct benefits to you unless you find it pleasant or helpful to discuss your experiences in partnering with families to bridge the home and school cultures. Also, you may feel good about knowing that you have helped

How will my privacy be protected?

You are free to decide where I will visit you so we can talk without being overheard. I will visit you in the privacy of your home or in another place that is convenient for you.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

The only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in Ms. Burton's office, which is locked when she is not there. Any personal information that is obtained from you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Also, subject identities will be confidential as each interview will only be identified by a number rather than a name. Under no circumstances will families, towns, or counties be identified. Interviews will be audiotaped. When the audiotape is typed, the data file on the audiotape will be deleted. This should occur within one month of the completion of the study. You may refuse to be audiotaped, in which case the interviewer will take handwritten notes. Names on the pre-kindergarten assessment will be converted to match the interviewee's number so the documents will not be identified to a certain child.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?

The alternative is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant?

Being in this study is totally voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at all. IF you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on you relationships with your child’s school or the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call Whitney Burton at 770-548-2711. If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer at 205-348-5152.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html . After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for a research participant that is online there, or you may ask Ms. Burton for a copy of it. You may also email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

Signature of Participant

Date

Whitney Burton _____
Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. How did you decide on a career in education?
2. Where did you receive your education?
3. What is your experience with pre-kindergarten?
4. How long have you been at the present school?
5. How would you describe the social class of your family growing up?
6. How would you describe the children that attend pre-kindergarten? How do children here differ from other places you have taught?
7. How would you describe a child from a low-income family? What characteristics do children and families have?
8. What percentage of the children you teach are from low-income families?
9. What educational skills do children from low-income backgrounds possess at the beginning of the school year? End of the school year?
10. How do you assess and document the skills and standards? What kind of evidence is used?
11. What strategies do you use to help a child who is not meeting the early learning standards?
12. How would you describe the parental involvement from low-income families?
13. How would you describe the home life of children from low-income families?
14. Is there a difference between the home learning environment and school? Describe the disconnect between the home learning environment and the school learning environment for children from low-income families?

15. How do you use your understanding of the home to help you teach and connect with children from low-income families?
16. What type of training have you received to connect the two environments?
17. Describe how you partner with families to improve achievement for students.
18. How would you describe the parent-teacher conferences that you engage in? How are the conferences helpful in learning about families? Are the families receptive to the information given?
19. Describe parent participation in conferences, the classroom, the school, and children's achievement.
20. What role do parents play in supporting their child's educational success?
21. What information do families need to become actively involved in their child's education?
22. How do you solicit information from families?
23. Discuss the knowledge and skills that children bring into the classroom? How do you use this information to your advantage?
24. How are you involved in the local community? Discuss past encounters you have had with families in the local community.
25. What resources do you have to connect with families?
26. How do you utilize the family advocate? How is the family advocate involved in your classroom?
27. How would you describe your partnership with children's families?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. How long have you lived in the area?
2. Where did you receive your education?
3. How would you describe the social class of your family growing up? Presently?
4. Tell me about your child/children.
5. Who does your child see on a regular basis outside of school? What places in the community do you go to regularly?
6. Where are you employed? Were you employed or did you stay home with your children before they were enrolled in school?
7. What skills did you feel like were important for your child to have at the beginning of school? Did your child possess those skills when they started school? How did you prepare your child with these skills?
8. What kinds of activities did you involve your child in before the school experience?
9. Is this your first experience with the pre-kindergarten program? What expectations did you have for the program? How were your expectations met?
10. Did you experience any misunderstandings or negative experiences with the pre-kindergarten program?
11. In what ways did the teacher communicate with you about your child?
12. Did you feel like the teacher assessed your child's skills appropriately? Were there any skills you felt like your child had that he/she did not demonstrate at school?

13. Did the teacher ask questions about activities or materials you have in the home? Did she recommend activities that you understood and had the materials to implement? What were some of the activities that were recommended?
14. What kinds of resources did the teacher provide you with?
15. In what ways, did your child's teacher come to understand your family?
16. How are you involved in your child's education at home? School?
17. How would you describe your partnership with your child's teacher? School?
18. Discuss your ability of your child's teacher to teach your child?
19. What is your opinion concerning the school's family advocate? Have you worked with the family advocate? Discuss your experience?
20. Tell about the last parent-teacher conference you attended? Were you pleased with
21. How do you communicate with your child's teacher? Do you prefer
22. Discuss a time when the teacher contacted you to gain information about your child?
23. Is your teacher involved in the community outside of school? Have you seen your teacher in the community? How did you interact with her?