Bridging the Transition to School: an Action Research Study

Susan Bates Hill

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BRIDGING THE TRANSITION TO SCHOOL: 
AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to…

The memory of my parents, John and Mary Bates, for your endless love, encouragement, and support. You lived out your Faith in God, and I learned countless life lessons from watching you. Perseverance and resilience were traits you instilled in me. And, Dad, thank you for teaching me to always finish strong.

To my husband, James, and our daughter, Claire, for your love and encouragement. Many challenges have come our way during the past few years. Thank you for your support and patience through these life events and this dissertation journey. I am blessed to be your wife and mother.

To Sarah, our PFLC, for teaching me about the importance of truly listening to others—valuing their stories—and for understanding the importance of creating such a vital pathway to school for our precious children and their parents. You have touched so many lives. Thank you for allowing me access to your world.
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On the way to this dissertation, life happened. I found myself on some unplanned, alternate routes, and recalculating was necessary. There are many people to thank for their unfailing encouragement and support on what became a long and winding road.

I thank my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Peter Moyi, for his support and encouragement during this journey. You expanded my thinking through the questions you posed, and now I view the world from a different perspective. Thank you for walking beside me through this research process. To Dr. Allison Anders, thank you for helping me truly value the stories people have to share. My life has been enriched from the stories of those around me. Next, I would like to thank Dr. Ed Cox and Dr. Rose Ylimaki for their valuable feedback and guidance.

I thank my colleagues and staff for their encouragement through this research process. Yes, this process is a marathon. I am thankful for the willingness of my students’ parents to share their experiences and suggestions. Thank you for entrusting your stories to me. Lastly, I thank my sweet friends in my small group at Fairview Baptist Church. Your support and encouragement have meant so much to me. Thank you for the prayers for endurance --and the sweet treats and snacks. You know my love language.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6 KJV
ABSTRACT

For over 50 years, school readiness has been a concern of educators and policymakers. In 1965, the Head Start program was “conceived as part of the ‘war on poverty’ to provide children from less affluent backgrounds with the kinds of experiences that other children were more likely to receive in the home” (Coley, 2002, p.8). Federal and state legislation continues to be enacted with the hope the inequities will be addressed. Ladson-Billings (2007) asserts the rigor of the standards is intended to appease the middle class. Exploring unique ways to transition a child from home to school should be of primary importance to all educational leaders.

In this action research study the researcher approached the study from the perspective of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) rather than a deficit perspective. The researcher examined the role of the Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC) at one Title I School and analyzed ways to improve the preschool program, Drop In and Play and ways the PFLC might better impact the learning of the preschool children, their transition to the K4 program in a public elementary school, and provide support to the parents/families. This preschool program is designed to assist students on the rigorous path of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2015) and bridge the transition from home to school.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION................................................................................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS................................................................................................................ iv

ABSTRACT....................................................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES............................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.......................................................................................................... 1

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY ....................................................................................................... 4

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .......................................................................................................... 4

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY ............................................................................................. 5

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND INFLUENCE .................................................................. 10

1.5 OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................ 12

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE....................................................................................... 16

2.1 THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: WHAT IS IT? ........................................................................... 16

2.2 THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE SEARCH TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP .................................................................................................................. 19

2.3 EDUCATION DEBT VERSUS DEFICIT ................................................................................ 27

2.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ................................................. 28

2.5 DEFINING SCHOOL READINESS ........................................................................................... 31

2.6 DEFINING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ............................................................................... 37

2.7 DIFFERENCES IN PARENTING STYLES ................................................................................. 40

2.8 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN’S EDUCATION ........................................ 42
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.9 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 PARENT/FAMILY LITERACY COORDINATOR</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 ACTION RESEARCH</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 CONTEXT</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 POSITIONALITY</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 EPISTEMIC ORIENTATION</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 THE PILOT STUDY</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND PROGRAM</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 THE PFLC, HOME VISITS, AND DROP IN AND PLAY</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11 PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12 RISKS AND BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13 DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14 DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.15 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ACTION RESEARCH</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 SALIENT POINTS</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Data Collection Sources.................................................................72
Table 3.2 Participants Selected for Home Visits and Individual Interviews ...........73
Table 3.3 Participants of Focus Group ..............................................................76
Table 5.1 Action Research Plan......................................................................113
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“A society in which every child has a ‘home advantage’ is attainable, if we act to make it so.”

Lareau, (2000, xv.)

In 1965, President Johnson launched his famous “war on poverty” in his inaugural address. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was one of the four areas of legislation upon which his efforts focused (Matthews, 2014). The Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) has been reauthorized throughout the years as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015.

The federal government provides financial assistance, through Title I funds, to schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families. The Title I Program was established to provide support to school districts with a large share of impoverished students. These federal funds are allocated to the State Educational Agencies (SEA) through grants, then the Local Educational Agencies (LEA) submit proposals to the state for the funds (United States Department of Education, 2011). Schools with at least 40% of students from low-income families are eligible to use the funds as a Title I Schoolwide Project and to serve all children in the school.
The Title I project is to be designed using scientifically-based instructional strategies and addressing all of the reform strategies in the Title I plan. All eleven reform strategies will be outlined in Chapter 2. The overarching goal of the Title I program is to equip all children, especially children from low-income families, with the skills needed to meet the rigorous academic standards in core academic subjects - reading and mathematics. (United States Department of Education, n.d.).

Over 20 years ago, a small school district in a southern state implemented two strategies for all preschool students within the district. First, four-year-old kindergarten (K4) classes were established to serve each of the district’s four elementary schools. Second, the schools employed Parent/Family Literacy Coordinators (PFLCs) to serve each of the district’s elementary schools. These two interventions went above and beyond the implementation of the reform strategies for Title I schools because they were implemented for all of the elementary schools within the district rather than just the schools designated as Title I schools. The allocation of Parent/Family Literacy Coordinators (PFLCs) and K4 classes was differentiated by the school’s enrollment and level of need, defined by the school’s Free/Reduced Lunch population. In the United States’ education system, socioeconomic status (SES) is traditionally defined by a student’s lunch status. Family income is used to establish eligibility for free or reduced lunch prices (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). The two Title I schools received a full-time PFLC and more sessions of K4, while the non-Title I schools received part-time PFLCs and fewer sessions of K4.

As a result of the recession in 2008, and the ensuing economic challenges (Rich, 2013), the district’s level of allocation was reduced at the non-Title I schools (Glancy &
Healy, 2010). By 2009, the district had grown from four elementary schools to six. The allocation of the PFLC position at non-Title I schools was reduced from 2.5 days a week to one day a week. One PFLC served four elementary schools one day a week, while each of the two Title I schools was served by a full-time PFLC. The Title I schools continue to have more sessions of K4 available to their students.

These early interventions initiated by the small school district focused primarily on two of the eleven reform strategies -- increasing parental involvement, such as family literacy services, and assisting preschool children in the transition from early childhood programs to local elementary schools (National Archives and Records Administration, 2002). The umbrella goal for the PFLC in this school district is to empower parents as their children’s first teachers while providing support through family educational and support services. Instructionally, the PFLC focuses on early literacy skills to better prepare the preschool child for the transition to K4 (Appendices A & B). The concept of designating a staff member to serve as a bridge between the home and school is not new. Sanders’ (2008) study of diverse suburban districts identified parent liaison roles to increase parent involvement. The direct services to the family included “academic support, encouragement and moral support, support in connecting with school and community resources, and material support” (p. 291). A recent study by Johns Hopkins University found that “D.C. students who had a home visit had 24% fewer absences and were 1.5 times more likely to read at or above grade level” (Matthews, 2016).

This upstate school district benefits from the support of the local business and educational community. Sewanee Academic Association (SAA) was created through an alliance of the business and educational community. The movement is committed to
increasing the importance that we place on academic achievement from cradle to career”, (Spartanburg Academic Movement, 2016, Forward). SAA noted the change in assessments for K5 students as being indecisive and somewhat a stumbling block for the “‘collaborative action network’ (CAN) which is focused on ‘readiness for kindergarten success,’” (p. 14). The Sewanee Academic Association (2016) defined readiness for school/kindergarten when a child is at “appropriate developmental stages in social and emotional development, fundamental language and literacy skills, cognitive development, physical health, and motor skills”, (p. 25).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how to improve the services of a Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC) and the Drop In and Play Program at a Title I public elementary school in a southern state. I examined the ways the PFLC program might more effectively benefit preschool children and their transition to the K4 program at this Title I public elementary school using an action research design (Mills, 2011). The job qualifications set by the school district and program expectations cited in the contract are included in Appendices A and B. This early intervention program focuses on preschool children from birth to entry into public school K4.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do stakeholders characterize the role of the PFLC?
2. How do stakeholders describe the effectiveness and influence of the PFLC?
3. What do stakeholders identify as areas in need of improvement and the challenges in the PFLC position and Home Visit/ Drop In Program?
4. What do stakeholders identify as successes in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program?

1.3 Significance of the Study

For over 50 years, the concept of school readiness has been a concern of educators and policymakers. In 1965, the Head Start program was “conceived as part of the ‘war on poverty’ to provide children from less affluent backgrounds with the kinds of experiences that other children were more likely to receive in the home” (Coley, R., 2002, p.8). The Head Start program was a part of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) inspired by President Johnson’s “war on poverty” (Matthews, 2014). In 1966, The Equality of Educational Opportunity Study, or Coleman Report as it is better known, documented the academic disparities among students by race and ethnicity (Kane, 2016). One of the most lasting conclusions of the report found the influence of the family background on a child’s academic success, and conversely that the school and its resources did not have the same level of influence. Coleman attempted to correlate student achievement to the family background and school factors. Hoxby (2016) stated “although Coleman’s descriptions of data may be praiseworthy, his analysis and interpretation are wrong”, (p.66). Hoxby noted the Coleman Report could have stated the “family characteristics explain achievement”, (p.67). These characteristics include parenting skills, such as reading to your child; parental choices as to where they live and where the children attend school; even choice of teacher. Coleman’s report focused on the influence of the family on student achievement. In Unequal Childhoods, Lareau’s research (2000) described two specific approaches to parenting that influence a child’s school achievement—the Accomplishment of Natural Growth and Concerted Cultivation.
These theories are elaborated upon in Chapters 2 and 3. Most studies conducted shortly after Coleman’s research also cite the influence of the family background on student success in school rather than the school itself (Gamoran & Long, 2006). Barnum (2016) noted that although the body of new research is great, one finding from Coleman continues to ring true—issues beyond the scope of the school are responsible for impacting and predicting student achievement. In reviewing the summary of the Coleman Report, Camera (2016) shared an insight that resonates with me —

One implication stands out above all: that schools bring little influence to bear on a child’s achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environments are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school (p.24).

The concept of school readiness prompts much discussion and often leads to the topic of inequality. All children are eager to discover and explore their environment. As part of the natural curiosity that children possess; it is something that schools need to build upon (Engel, 2011; Rosen & Jaruszewicz, 2009). Children entering kindergarten bring a variety of preschool and home experiences with them. They enter school at different places academically, emotionally, and physically. These experiences influence whether a child is deemed ready for school or not. The concept of school readiness is a construct of the dominant education establishment and refers to a child’s academic and social skills in context of age/grade-level expectations (Lewitt & Baker, 1995). Google Scholar lists 944,000 results for school readiness, indicating much interest in the concept.
The diversity of student backgrounds deserves consideration when assessing student readiness and developing programs and policies for our pre-school students. The values and existing funds of knowledge within their homes should also be respected (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

The creation of common, rigorous instructional standards was the result of the movement to address inequities in education from state to state (McClure, 2005). The implementation of the Common Core Standards in 2010 created much debate among the public and among educators. Yatvin (2013) went so far to warn that the English-Language Arts standards of the Common Core may actually be harmful to children because they disregarded established learning and developmental theory. Yatvin stated that the standards assumed that all students enter school with strong literacy backgrounds and argued that some standards are “blind to the diversity” (p.43) that exists in today’s classrooms across America.

In June 2014, the Republican Governor of South Carolina signed Act 200 which revoked the adoption of the Common Core Standards for this state’s schools. In a move away from perceived federal control, Act 200 required the State Department of Education to create new College and Career Ready instructional standards (South Carolina Department of Education, 2014). On March 11, 2015, new College and Career Ready Instructional Standards were adopted by the state. While the English Language Arts document included what the authors consider innovations—research-based practices and processes, the expectation for kindergarten students (SC-CCRS, K-R1.13.2) included being able to read independently (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). The state’s instructional standards’ writing team first created a portrait of a high school
graduate. This concept was used as the foundation for the standards (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015).

Readiness assessments for students in public K4 and K5 programs were mandated by “First Steps to School Readiness” Initiative (H.3428.R295), Read to Succeed Act (A284), and Proviso 1A.77 (South Carolina Department of Education, 2014). Three formative assessments for K4 were chosen by the State Department of Education, and then each district selected one of the assessments to administer to each child prior to the forty-fifth day of school and again during the last forty-five days of the school year. The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) was administered to K4 students in this school district. The State Department selected the assessment that was to be administered to K5 students. Three different assessments have been selected and administered over the past four years. During the 2014-2015 school year, the mCLASS; CIRCLE, an early education assessment from Amplify Education, Inc., was administered to K5 students. The State Department of Education selected another assessment for the 2015-2016 school year (Spearman, 2015). In 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, the Developmental Reading Assessment, 2nd edition PLUS (DRA2PLUS) was administered to K5 students prior to the forty-fifth day of school and before the last forty-five days of the school year. In the fall of 2017, the state legislature approved the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) as the assessment for K5 students in the 2017-2018 school year (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017).

Thomas and Brady (2005) examined the effects of the 40 years of federal involvement in public education. Congress amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) four times between 1965 and 1980 to clarify the target student
population and provide explicit instructions for fiscal management. Through the years since then, educators have seen increased academic rigor and expectations for students, as well as for teachers. The findings of national studies, such as National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), have indicated very little success in addressing disparities among diverse racial and ethnic student populations. Thomas and Brady (2005) argued that the accountability requirements under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) were “developed from a theoretical perspective and lacked an understanding of the complex issues involved in serving disadvantaged children” (p. 51). This review of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) at 40 underscored the fact that we do not fully realize the best way in which to address the educational needs of our traditionally disadvantaged students.

The achievement gap discussion in education has gone on for decades (United States Department of Education, n.d., p.1; United States Department of Education, 1991; United States Department of Education Archives, 1999; Paige, 2003). Garcia and Guerra (2004) posited that real education reform has not occurred because educators often place the blame for low student achievement on the students and families, while state/federal officials place the blame within the school. The first step in deconstructing the deficit thinking is to accept the responsibility that the issue is a systemic one that has roots in history hundreds of years ago.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006, p. 5) explains that this ever-present challenge has been created by the “historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions that characterize our society.” She termed this education disparity--the education debt. In her 2006 presidential address to the American Educational Researcher Association (AERA),
Gloria Ladson-Billings likened the disparities in student achievement to the national debt. The disparities represent a debt that has accumulated over the years. Reframing the way in which we view these academic differences from a deficit perspective to an education debt shifts the responsibility from the student and family to the educational community. Ladson-Billings’ concept of education debt will be addressed at length in Chapter 2.

I contend that educators play a major role in addressing this accumulative education debt. We should assume responsibility for respecting the child and all that they bring to school, as well as exploring options to meet their needs and grow them as learners. The conversation about growth versus proficiency (Barnum, 2017; Chingos, 2017) continues to rise to the surface most recently during the confirmation hearing of Betsy DeVos for U.S. Superintendent of Education. Educational policy is pivotal in addressing educational debt due to the correlation between poverty and low proficiency rate (Barnum, 2017). Educators and policymakers are called upon to create programming for all children to celebrate their diversity while engaging them as learners. This challenge has existed for educators for over 50 years, and it still exists today. This study would generate an avenue of research not adequately explored. It is essential to reframe the perspective from one of deficit to education debt

1.4 Theoretical Framework and Influence

According to Stringer (2014):

one of the strengths of action research is that it accepts the diverse perspectives of different stakeholders—the “theory” each will hold to explain how and why events occur as they do—and find ways of incorporating them into mutually acceptable ways of understanding events
that enable them to work toward a resolution of the problem investigated.

(p.38-39)

My study is emic, therefore my research is not framed by theory. The following theories have influenced my beliefs about my role as a school principal and an advocate for all children, as well as my choice of my research topic (Glesne, 2011).


Lareau found that the way in which parents raise their children influences how they achieve in school. In *Home Advantage*, Lareau (2000) argued that the social class of parents directly impacts students’ progress in school due to the parents’ cultural and social capital. Concerted cultivation is an approach that many middle class parents utilize to engage their children in organized activities to nurture and develop their talents (Lareau, 2000, 2011). The increased rigor of the state instructional standards, South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards or SC-CCRS (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015) poses even more of a challenge. I believe that as educators, we need to help our parents understand how to access services for their children and to navigate the educational system.


In Chapter 2, I will define and describe several types of gaps/deficits. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006, 2007, 2013) defined the education debt as the cumulative effects of inequities. These inequities have existed for many years, and short-term solutions have not effectively addressed the concerns. Systemic changes are necessary to fully address the inequities once and for all. Rather than playing the blame game, I believe it is public education’s responsibility to intentionally step outside its comfort zone and seek
ways in which to better meet all students’ learning needs. Ladson-Billings’ concept of education debt resonates with me. I embrace the challenges that are presented each day and wonder, how we can reach each student? How can we access the potential that lies within the student?

3. Kenneth Gergen’s *Relational Theory*

In *Relational Beings*, Gergen (2009) proposed that relationships influence our mental discourse, as well as our response to others’ words. Gergen (2009) wrote that “All meaning is generated within a process of co-action” (p. 96). He intentionally attempts to “blur the commonly accepted boundaries between self and other, and to underscore the constructed character of bounded being” (p. 31). In 2016, Gergen referred to his own work on relational being as being “specifically designed to stimulate new practices of collaboration” (p. 10). Bryk and Schneider’s (2003) study of elementary schools in the Chicago area led them to conclude that relational trust was an essential component of authentic school reform.

1.5 Overview of Methodology

According to Mills (2011), the main goal of action research is to “enhance the lives of children”, (p. 8). As the principal of a Title I elementary school, it is my charge to solicit input and design a school-wide program that best meets the needs of my students. Action research is the method that best suits my research because I am a practitioner seeking ways to effect change within my field and improve the lives of my students (Mills, 2011; Stringer, 2014). Peshkin (1993, p.25) writes, “The assumption behind the story of any particular life is that there is something worth learning.” Examining the intricacies of the influence, relationships, and interactions of the Parent/Family Literacy
Coordinator (PFLC) and the parents that she serves is an integral part of this story. Gathering information about all aspects of this topic is critical to understanding the story of the PFLC, and exploring the origins of the PFLC’s position which will provide historical context to the study. Soliciting the perceptions of the parents and K4 teachers regarding the influence of the PFLC will be best represented with their own words.

As a K-12 public school practitioner, the search to determine the most effective strategies to meet my students’ needs requires ongoing effort and attention. Education ends up so often in the midst of political campaigns and games of tug of war where no one wins. Everyone must realize that children are at the heart of this issue—mine and yours—and a collaborative, bi-partisan effort should be the path that we follow to address the inequities that have existed for far too long. As the principal of this school, I am responsible for affecting change in my world. My interactions with those who have lived this experience will provide multiple perspectives that may assist me in understanding the depth and breadth of this intervention. Including all stakeholders will lend itself to a co-created programming of the Parent/Family Literacy Program. For this reason, I selected the action research methodology for this study.

The role of elementary school principal can be quite challenging when the rigor of the academic expectations in educational legislation is contrary to developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). Often, the challenge is how to reach a balance between the two perspectives. For example, the South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards (SC-CCRS) expect that kindergarten students are to “read independently for sustained periods of time to build stamina” per K-RL.13.2 (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). The position statement of the National Association for the Education of
Young Children (NAEYC) focused on developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) with a strong emphasis on learning through play (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). In 2009, the Alliance for Childhood argued that meaningful play should be reestablished as a valued part of kindergarten curriculum. The benefits of play included:

Children who engage in complex forms of socio-dramatic play have greater language skill than nonplayers, better social skills, more empathy, more imagination, and more of the subtle capacity to know what others mean. They are less aggressive and show more self-control and higher levels of thinking. (p.7)

The authors of this report were very intentional in distinguishing meaningful play from an unstructured, chaotic-type play. Creating a kindergarten curriculum that includes a balance of meaningful make-believe play with high quality teacher-directed learning is the ideal early childhood programming (Miller & Almon, 2009). Literacy-rich activities and materials that help to link home and school bring relevance and purpose for students. Student engagement facilities the construction of knowledge for children, yet direct teaching is also needed (Trehearne, 2011).

Elkind (2009) writes that rather than doing what we know is good pedagogy in education, “in practice, educational policy is determined by political, economic, cultural, and personal ego concerns”, (p.9). My professional experiences have taught me that “disadvantaged and neglected” students are not less intelligent than other students. Mere numbers, represented by state assessment scores, do not begin to adequately represent what my students, or any students, know. These realities underscore my primary role as advocate for my students so that their voices can be heard.
Just where do we begin to meet the expectations set for our students while doing what is best for them developmentally? First, a classroom environment which Goodlad (as cited in Pierce, 1994), defines as “encompasses the physical, emotional, and aesthetic characteristics of the classroom” (p. 37) should be established. It is essential that a learning environment that provides a “safe haven” for our students is established. In addition to the threat of failure being diminished (Pierce, 1994), students’ very basic safety needs are addressed (Maslow, 1970). When we honor the knowledge that children bring with them from their homes, they feel respected and valued (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Students are more confident to step out and take risks with their learning and demonstrate what they know (Marzano, 2003).

In studying culturally relevant teachers, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) find that “failure is not accepted but the teachers begin where students are and work hard to help them succeed,” (p.78). Children enter school at different places academically. My expectation is that we meet each child where he/she is and “grow” them at least one year. The rigor of the SC-CCRS is a reality for our students. Preschool programs should be designed to meet our students’ needs, bridge the transition to school, and assist them on the rigorous path of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2015). As Mills (2011) described action research as “research done by teachers for themselves; it is not imposed on them by someone else” (p.5). The first step in this process is to identify an area of need which is empowering in itself. Collecting data in a variety of ways (delineated in Chapter 3), analyzing the data that is collected, and interpreting the data lead to the development of an action plan for our early intervention program led by our Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The organization of this literature review is based upon the following concepts:

- The Achievement Gap: What is it?
- The Historical Perspective of the Search to Close the Achievement Gap
- Education Debt versus Deficit
- The Importance of Early Childhood Education
- Defining School Readiness
- Defining Parental Involvement
- Differences in Parent Styles
- Parent Involvement in their Children’s Education
- Perceptions about Parent Involvement in School
- Benefits of Parental Involvement in School
- Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator

2.1 The Achievement Gap: What is it?

There are over two million citations for “achievement gap” on Google Scholar.

The achievement gap is most often defined as the disparities and inequities in academic achievement (standardized-test scores) between groups of students (Kane, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). There are multiple types of the achievement gap.
1. Racial/Ethnicity Achievement Gap

Over 50 years ago, James Coleman and his colleagues first documented the racial gaps in student achievement (Kane, 2016). Camera’s (2016) analysis of student achievement found the achievement gaps between black children and white children have not closed compared to the data from Coleman’s findings. Barnum (2016) stated although the body of research has increased greatly since the Coleman Report, one issue holds true—increasing and predicting student achievement cannot fall solely within the realm of the school. There are too many variables existing outside the scope of the school. He also argued racial desegregation is only slightly better than it was in Coleman’s times (Barnum, 2016).

Minority students are often the recipients of more frequent and severe school discipline. This creates a “trust gap” within the racial/ethnicity achievement gap. Blad (2017) wrote the “relationships between students and educators are key to interrupting the cycle or stopping it from beginning in the first place” (p. 1).

2. Income Achievement Gap

Stanford Professor Sean Reardon (2013) studied the relationship between student achievement and family income. He found the black/white achievement gap was far greater than the income achievement gap for students born between 1950-1969. For students born in the 1970s and up, however the income achievement gap is significantly greater than the racial achievement gap. Secondly, Reardon (2013) found the income achievement gap is large when children enter kindergarten, however it does not grow once the child is in school. In the last 30-40 years, income inequity has grown tremendously. Children from high-income families have access to more resources, as well as benefits from social mobility. In 2014 an Annie E. Casey Foundation blog
reported “economic inequality in the United States was at its highest level in nearly a century.”

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) reported the age of a child living in poverty, as well as the length of time, has a significant impact on children. Children born into poverty may be born early and of low birthweight. Their mothers may not have had quality prenatal care. Chronic health issues could also be an issue for them—creating what might be considered health achievement gaps.

A report commissioned by the Bainum Family Foundation supported the relevance of this issue for educators. The findings of this study, set in Washington, D.C., indicated the achievement gap starts in infancy with tremendous differences of children born in the poorest neighborhoods as compared to those born in the wealthiest neighborhoods. The District of Columbia invests heavily in universal preschool K4 programs as a result of these findings (Chandler, 2015).

3. Expectation Achievement Gap

One of the questions answered by the Coleman Report was the determination of racial segregation’s influence on student achievement. Coleman found a student’s achievement was impacted by the peers with whom they attended school (Rivkin, 2016). Fifty years after Coleman, racial segregation remains a concern along with lower learning expectations for black students (Camera, 2015).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2007) suggested that different expectations are a result of the income achievement gap and cultural deficit theories from the past. Teachers are so sympathetic to students’ situations they unconsciously grant their students permission to fail. This perspective can be perpetuated when parents ‘academically redshirt’ (Graue and DePerna, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 319) their children by holding them back
from starting kindergarten. The benefit of redshirting students provides an additional year of formal school for their children. When this occurs, the issue of school readiness becomes even more relevant a point of discussion.

4. Language/Word Achievement Gap

Many school districts invest in preschool programs to address the effects often seen from student learning differences. Dana Suskind is head of the Pediatric Cochlear Implantation Program at the University of Chicago and director of the Thirty Million Word Initiative. She argues learning begins on day one of life rather than the first day of school. Suskind contends this is demonstrated by the 30 million word gap between 4-year-old children living in poverty with the exposure to 13 million spoken words and those living in homes of professional parents with the exposure to 45 million spoken words (Suskind, as cited in Pierce, 2016). Psychologists at the University of Kansas, (Hart and Riley, as cited in Rothschild, 2016) first coined the term ‘word gap’ in 1995. Their work is well-respected and cited in thousands of professional publications. In 2013, the Clinton Foundation’s, “Too Small to Fail” initiative cited their work as well. Recently, Rothschild (2016) reported that linguistic anthropologists question the validity of the word gap. In addition to oversimplifying the issue, they contend this perspective diminishes respect for different cultures and languages. The introduction of this perspective presents an interesting nuance to the discussion.

2.2 The Historical Perspective of the Search to Close the Achievement Gap

As addressed in Chapter 1, Title I programs were established as a result of President Johnson’s “war on poverty” and the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 (Matthews, 2014). A Title I Schoolwide Project is
required to address 11 reform strategies. (United States Department of Education, n.d.; South Carolina Department of Education, 2013). Particular emphasis is placed on the academic performance of students who have historically not performed well as measured by standardized tests. The 11 reform strategies include:

1. Provide opportunities for all children to meet the State’s proficient and advanced levels of student academic achievement.

2. Use effective methods and instructional strategies that are based on scientifically based research that (a) strengthen the core academic program in the school; (b) increase the amount and quality of learning time, such as providing an extended school year and before and after-school and summer programs and opportunities, and help provide an enriched and accelerated curriculum; and (c) include strategies for meeting the educational needs of historically underserved populations.

3. Include strategies to address the needs of all children in the school, but particularly the needs of low-achieving children and those at risk of not meeting the State student academic achievement standards who are members of the target population of any program that is included in the Schoolwide program (which may include counseling, pupil services, mentoring, college and career awareness/preparation, personal finance education, innovative teaching methods, integration of vocational and technical education programs) AND address how the school will determine if such needs have been met and are consistent with, and are designed to implement, the State and local improvement plan, if any.

4. Instruction provided by highly qualified teachers.
5. In accordance with Section 1119 and Subsection (a) (4), high-quality and ongoing professional development for teachers, principals, and paraprofessionals and, if appropriate, pupil services personnel, parents, and other staff to enable all children in the school to meet the State’s student academic achievement standards.

6. Strategies to attract high-quality, highly qualified teachers to high-need schools.

7. Strategies to increase parental involvement in accordance with Section 1118, such as family literacy services.

8. Plans for assisting preschool children in the transition from early childhood programs, such as Head Start, Even Start, Early Reading First, or a State-run preschool program, to local elementary school programs.

9. Measures to include teachers in the decisions regarding the use of academic assessments described in Section 1111(b) (3) in order to provide information on, and to improve, the achievement of individual students and the overall instructional program.

10. Activities to ensure that students who experience difficulty mastering the proficient or advanced levels of academic achievement standards required by Section 111(b) shall be provided with effective, timely additional assistance which shall include measures to ensure that students’ difficulties are identified on a timely basis and to provide sufficient information on which to base effective assistance.
11. Coordination and integration of Federal, State, and local services and programs, including programs supported under this Act, violence prevention programs, nutrition programs, housing programs, Head Start, adult education, vocational and technical education, and job training (National Archives and Records Administration, 2002).

With the reauthorization of ESEA in 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed by Congress. One of the goals of NCLB was to encourage parents of disadvantaged or underachieving students to get involved in their children’s education (Hoffman & Jorgensen, 2003). Increasing parental involvement and assisting preschool children in the transition from early childhood programs to local elementary schools are two of the eleven strategies required by federal law to be included in the School-wide Project that every Title I School develops for their school (National Archives and Records Administration, 2002). Each state was required to present an accountability plan to the U.S. Department of Education which followed the expectations set by the federal legislation. South Carolina’s plan was approved in 2003 (United States Department of Education, 2003).

The pursuit to close the achievement gap has continued even in the face of difficult financial challenges experienced by our nation. During the recession of 2008, as state revenue declined, many states and local school districts were unable to fully fund education. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provided over $21 million to South Carolina schools over the course of three years with almost $18 million designated for Title I programs. These funds were commonly referred to as
stimulus funds. Schools around the nation received approximately $100 billion through this act (United States Department of Education, 2009).

Almost 20 years after the passage of Goals 2000, another educational initiative was led by our nation’s governors. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practice and the Council of Chief State School Officers led the initiative to create Common Core Instructional Standards. In 2010, the Common Core Standards were released, and by late 2010 thirty-six states and the District of Columbia adopted these instructional standards. These academic standards for students represented common expectations across the states and created an environment that is conducive to competition with other national and international educational institutions (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011).

In 2010 President Barack Obama signed into law the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Affordable Care Act; P.L. 111-148). The comprehensive health care act includes the creation of the Affordable Care Act Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program which addresses the diverse needs of at-risk children and families. An effective, evidence-based home visit program, which supports the early childhood education, was the goal of this component of the law (Clasp, 2010). On June 1, 2011 the Home Visitation Accountability Act of 2012 was referred to Committee in the South Carolina General Assembly. The purpose of this bill was to ensure the home visitation programs funded through the state would be evidenced-based programs conducted by nurses, social workers, and other early childhood professionals. The visits’ goals include strengthening parenting practices, improving the health of the family, and
enhancing the social-emotional and cognitive development of children (South Carolina General Assembly, 2011).

A joint report published by Defending the Early Years (DEY) and Alliance for Childhood (2015) expressed specific concerns about the Common Core Language Arts standards for kindergarten students. The Common Core standards placed a strong emphasis on print literacy with the expectation by the end of kindergarten that students will “read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding” (p.2). This instructional expectation is contrary to the original 1987 position statement published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Quick, 1998) or the second edition of the position statement (National Association for Education of Young Children, 2009) whose focus is on developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) with an emphasis on learning through play.

The reauthorization process of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) encountered difficulty at each turn. In March 2010, the administration’s “Blueprint for Reform” was released. This “blueprint” proposed changes to No Child Left Behind and the approach to leading the world in college completion. Included in this “blueprint” was the plan for the federal government’s role in education (United States Department of Education, 2010). In the fall of 2011, the federal government implemented a process where states could apply for flexibility and request waivers of the current provisions of ESEA while meeting principles relative to the provisions. On February 28, 2012, State Superintendent of Education Dr. Mick Zais submitted South Carolina’s request for ESEA Flexibility (and waiver.) On July 10, 2012, the United States Department of Education (2014) approved South Carolina’s request.
One of the major changes of this waiver impacted Title I Schools. Rather than an all or nothing proficiency standard based on student test scores, schools would be recognized for the growth of their students. This growth was to be determined by matched student data from one year to the next (Barnum, 2017). The state recognized schools as:

1. **Priority**-bottom 5% of Title I schools
2. **Focus**-10% of Title I schools with the largest gap between student subgroups
3. **Reward**-top 15% of Title I schools

Priority and Focus schools are required to develop plans for school improvement with input from parents, community members, their local school district, and their state department of education (South Carolina Department of Education, 2012). A second major change for South Carolina schools as a result of this waiver was the use of educator evaluation ratings to guide personnel decisions. One of the major components of this evaluation system was based on individual student learning objectives/growth (United States Department of Education, 2014).

Legislative changes pertinent to education continued to occur in South Carolina. In March, 2013, the Read to Succeed Act was first introduced and read in the South Carolina Senate. Governor Nikki Haley signed the act into law on June 11, 2014. The South Carolina Read to Succeed Act, or R2S, was enacted to ensure all students in the state are provided with a comprehensive and strategic approach to reading to ensure reading proficiency with the long-term goal of increased high school graduation. At the elementary school level, students performing substantially below grade level in the third grade are the focus of supports cited in R2S. These supports include supplemental
professional support and summer camp/programs. Retention in third grade is also a possibility for students who do not demonstrate grade-level proficiency in reading (South Carolina General Assembly, 2013-2014).

Professional development of teachers is a major focus of R2S so teachers acquire and demonstrate literacy proficiencies or competencies that are based upon the 2010 standards developed by the International Reading Association (2012). Funding of the Reading Coach position in schools was intended to provide support for professional development at the school level and coaching support for teachers as individuals. Professional Development Reading Plans are developed at the state, district, and school levels (South Carolina General Assembly, 2014).

In addition to the focus on reading instruction in SC schools, the adoption of the Common Core Standards was revoked in June 2014. Act 200 required new Career and College-Ready Standards be written and implemented in SC’s schools for the 2015-2016 school year (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013-2014). South Carolina was the second state to part ways with the Common Core Standards. Indiana was the first to revoke the adoption of these instructional standards, and Oklahoma’s governor signed the law to end the implementation of Common Core Standards’ instruction shortly after SC (Strauss, 2014). The Superintendent of Education reiterated the importance of local state control of education in January, 2015, when she stood with the U.S. Congressman representing SC in support of his proposed “The Local Control of Education Act.” The congressman’s new bill supported his native state’s Act 200 recently passed in 2014 (Logue, 2015). The College and Career-Ready Standards of SC were unanimously
adopted by the State Board of Education on March 11, 2015 (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015).

The challenge of closing the achievement gap is a much more complex issue than our federal and state legislators realized as evidenced by a *New York Times*’ article by Tavernise (2012). Tavernise cited two studies which indicated the gap is continuing to widen. Since the 1960’s, the gap between students of differing socioeconomic statuses has increased about 40%; since the 1980’s the gap has increased by 50%. If the mere passage of federal and state legislation could close the achievement gap, then this discussion would no longer be pertinent.

### 2.3 Education Debt versus Deficit

As stated in Chapter 1, Ladson-Billings (2006, 2007, 2013) argued the term education debt should be used rather than achievement gap, when discussions about the disparities in student achievement between students of different race/ethnicity occur. As student achievement is not static, the target to close the gap is a moving one. Ladson-Billings (2007) likened the education debt to the national debt, and articulated specific debts that are owed to students past and present:

1. **The Historical Debt**

   A study of the history of education demonstrated inequities in education have existed for centuries. Legislation was enacted to actually exclude Native Americans in 1864 and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) protected the segregation that was practiced in the South (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ensuring equal educational opportunities exist for all children remains a challenge for us today in the 21st century.

2. **The Economic Debt**

   The school funding difference is readily identified between suburban schools and
urban schools - $10,000 (Ladson-Billings, 2007). In her 2006 address to the AERA, Ladson-Billings (2006) explained “while the income gap more closely resembles the achievement gap, the wealth disparity better reflects the education debt that I am attempting to describe” (p. 7). Gardner (2007) described the funding of schools “as if all populations faced the same problems and had the same needs is an ineffective means of addressing the achievement gap” (p. 543).

3. The Sociopolitical Debt

In the United States, exercising the right and responsibility to vote is one of the greatest freedoms. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), the Voting Rights Act of 1965 represented “a proactive attempt to eradicate the sociopolitical debt that had been accumulating since the founding of the union” (p. 7). While the gap between registered black and white voters in South Caroling has closed significantly from 38.4 to 5.1 (p.7), this issue continues to be a point of concern.

4. The Moral Debt

Ladson-Billings (2006) defined the moral debt as “the disparity between what we know is right and what we actually do” (p.8). While possible solution to this disparity might appear simple, it is actually a very complicated issue.

2.4 The Importance of Early Childhood Education

The National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published their first position statement in 1987. This position statement, which represents the concept of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), focused on three challenges: reducing learning gaps and increasing achievement of all children; creating improved and better connected education for preschool and elementary children; and recognizing teacher knowledge and decision making as vital to educational effectiveness (National
Association of the Education of Young Children, 2009; Quick, 1998). With the heightened awareness of the importance of early childhood education, a flurry of legislation at the state and federal levels occurred. In 1989, President Bush and the state governors established *America 2000*, which included six goals for education. The first goal was “by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn” (United States Department of Education, 1991).

In 1998 the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) collaborated with the International Reading Association (IRA) to craft a position statement, *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children* (Casbergue, 2010/2011; Quick, 1998). This position statement addressed the complexity of the concept of school readiness, while making clear the natural curiosity of children and their desire to learn. “Every child, except in extreme instances of abuse, neglect, or disability, enters school ready to learn” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, November, 1990). The accumulating debt from the years of inequity in education and in healthcare are manifest by gaps between being ready to learn and being ready for school. Ladson-Billings (2007) suggested that the rigor of the standards is created to satisfy the parents of middle class students. She argued “we may be setting unrealistic developmental timelines for what children can or should do at age 5”, (p. 319).

Children who enter school deemed “not ready” perform worse over the course of their school career. With a “27% gap in school readiness between children of poor and moderate-or high-income families” (Gaynor, 2015, p. 31), poor children begin their school career already at a disadvantage. Allington and Cunningham (1996) recommended
providing young children with up to 1,000 hours of informal literacy activities to build a strong foundation for learning. International literacy expert, Mem Fox (2001) explained the more language experiences a child has the more advantages they will receive—socially and educationally. Fox (2001) stated “Reading problems are difficult to fix but very easy to prevent. Prevention happens long before a child starts school. In fact, the first day of school is almost too late for a child to begin to learn to read” (p. 13).

Educators often focus on children being ready for school. Grace and Brandt (2005) discuss the 10 characteristics of ready schools as first proposed by the National Educational Goals Panel. A smooth transition from home to school or from childcare to school is emphasized. Schools were to consider the diversity and inequities of opportunities that their children brought with them to school. Rather than expecting children to fit into a prescribed curriculum, the “ready school” was expected to respond appropriately to their children’s needs (Grace & Brandt, 2005).

In considering the implementation of effective interventions for young children, the challenges existing due to living in poverty must be acknowledged. Substandard living conditions, lack of adequate health care, and poor dietary practices result in unfulfilled basics needs (Prince & Howard, 2002). Maslow (1970) described how needs were prioritized, “if all needs are unsatisfied, and the organism is then dominated by the physiological needs, all other needs may become simply nonexistent or be pushed into the background,” (p. 16). Taberski (2001) reminds us that children learn from birth and are motivated by curiosity. Learning once they arrive to school requires the same curiosity to engage them. Avoiding the assembly line approach to reading instruction is to be avoided at all costs (Taberski, 2000).
The 2016 Education Commission of the States conducted research on full-day kindergarten. This research asserts that a “high-quality, full-day kindergarten experience is a crucial component to setting students up for ongoing academic success” (p.1). In 2016, only 14 states required a full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds. In another 14 states, a full-day kindergarten is optional. Twenty-eight states’ full-day program is equal to the length of the first grade day. South Carolina is one of the 14 states that require a full-day kindergarten. Cook (2016) expressed her surprise children today do not have access to free, full-day kindergarten. She stated children have greater opportunity to “build the developmental and academic skills needed for later grades and beyond” (p.1) and supported providing access to full-day pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) programs (Cook, 2016).

According to Samuels (2018), two years later, only 17 states plus the District of Columbia required students to attend kindergarten. Thirteen states plus the District of Columbia offered full-day kindergarten. There was no increase of states requiring full-day kindergarten in the two years (Samuels, 2018).

2.5 Defining School Readiness

When surveyed, parents and teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993) agreed in general with the characteristics of school readiness:

- communication skills, enthusiasm, taking turns and sharing, following directions,
- not disrupting class, being sensitive to other children’s feelings, sits still and pays attention, able to use pencils or paint brushes, knows the letters of the alphabet, and can count to 20 or more.

Some of these characteristics differ from traditional academic expectations
young children might be required to demonstrate to be deemed ready to begin school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). School readiness, in its entirety, also encompasses the benefits from increased opportunities of social interest and literacy (Tavernise, 2012; Edwards, 2003).

The concept of school readiness is complex, as it includes not only foundational learning skills but also life experiences and social skills that will support a child’s entry into school. Gaynor (2015) defined school readiness as a “concept related to a child’s readiness at age 5 to learn in a school environment” (p.27). The NAEYC and IRA’s joint position statement addressed the complexity of the concept of school readiness and emphasized the role of natural curiosity in children’s learning. This, however, does not mean they are truly ready for all that school entails and the rigorous curriculum that awaits them (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). There are actually two distinct perspectives to be addressed - whether a child is ready to learn and/or whether a child is ready to go to school (Lewitt & Baker, 1995). These terms are not synonymous.

Traditionally, early childhood pedagogy had been centered on describing the development of children while the focus has now shifted to what is expected (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2003). In 2002, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Department of Education (NAECS/SDE) issued the *Early Learning Standards: Creating the Conditions for Success* which addressed how standards “should be developed and used, and the programmatic supports necessary to ensure that early learning standards are beneficial” (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2003, p. 4). From November 2001 to May
2002, a descriptive study conducted by Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow invited an early childhood specialist from each State Department of Education, the president of the state Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC), and the chief child care administrator in each state to provide data to represent each state.

Using the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement to guide their inquiry, states were asked about the process of developing early learning standards in the areas of physical health, cognition approaches to learning, social – emotional, and language. South Carolina was one of 27 states with early learning standards in at least one of the areas—mathematics; and standards were in progress for language, science, fine arts, and social studies. Scott-Little, Kagan, and Frelow, (2003) commented the creation of the early learning standards, based on the K-12 standards, were not advisable when considering the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE position statement. Based on the feedback from the state representatives, there was a direct link from South Carolina’s early learning standards to the K-12 standards. The position statement encouraged a wide variety of input from parents, state officials, and higher education. Input for South Carolina’s early learning standards came from local school districts, the Department of Social Services/Health Services and the State Legislature. The most significant risk of the early standards was the possibility of all responsibility being placed on the students rather than the adults. The authors of the study concluded the standards were meant to benefit the children “rather than be used to label them” (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2003, p. 16).

Most educators agree that early and intensive immersion in language-rich activities is what is best for children (Start Early, Finish Strong, 1999). The importance of early learning was emphasized in South Carolina by the passage of early learning
standards, Good Start, Grow Smart, 2002 which was completed and published after the completion of the study by Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2003. These standards describe the expected milestones that children aged 3-5 are to achieve, as well as addressing the transition from preschool programs to compulsory school age. The areas addressed in these standards include: approaches to learning, social-emotional development, physical development and health, in addition to the academic areas of mathematics and language/literacy. By 2007, approximately 75% of states had adopted early learning standards (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

One year after America 2000 was established, state education reform led by Governor Jim Hodges of South Carolina, centered on the creation of South Carolina First Steps (South Carolina General Assembly, 1993.) First Steps is an organization that focuses on South Carolina’s youngest children and their families as they get ready for school. The five areas that First Steps focuses on are:

1. Early Education
2. Family Strengthening
3. Child Care Quality
4. Healthy Start
5. School Transition

One parent intervention program that integrates family literacy and home visitation into the curriculum is Parents as Teachers (PAT). PAT has been named “one of seven approved home visiting models meeting the evidence-based criteria of the Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting program” (MIECHV), a provision in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, which was signed into law on March 23, 2010, by President Obama” (Parents as Teachers, 2011).
Although there have been significant budget cuts in *First Steps* programming, more than 4,200 preschoolers participated in more than 45,000 *First Steps*-funded parent education literacy-based home visits in 2008 in South Carolina (South Carolina First Steps at 10, 1999-2009). During the same year, in Spartanburg County, through Family Strengthening initiatives, 766 home visits were conducted with 390 adults and 479 children. Twenty-eight children were served through School Transition strategies and each student received seven or more home visits (Spartanburg County First Steps Partnership, Fiscal Year 2008 Annual Report, 2009). When the Executive Director of Spartanburg County presented the Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 2008, she prefaced her message with a description of the purpose of First Steps as “Closing the gap between what we know and what we do” (Shonokoff, 2007).

On August 8, 2017 the South Carolina Early Learning Standards (SC-ELS) were adopted by our state (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). The goals and indicators embedded in the ELS acknowledge the critical time period from birth to the time a child enters kindergarten. This seminal document articulates the relationship of early childhood experiences to high school graduation. The SC-ELS are described as the “beginning of the continuum from their early childhood experiences to their high school graduation” (p. 19).

The SC-ELS are organized around six domains:

1. Approaches to Play and Learning
2. Emotional and Social Development
3. Health and Physical Development
4. Language Development and Communication
5. Mathematical Thinking and Expression

6. Cognitive Development

These standards are not intended for use as a curriculum. The SC-ELS inform the child’s first teacher, the parents, and early childhood caregivers on age-appropriate expectations for the development of the child (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). The upstate school district, where Youngstown Elementary School is located, adopted a new curriculum for K4 in the spring of 2018. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of exploration and discovery in the learning of young children. Multiple opportunities for purposeful play are interspersed throughout the school day (Creative Curriculum for Preschool, 2017).

Another perspective about home visits is presented through an ethnographic case study that was conducted when researchers from the University of Arizona (Gonzalez et al., 1993) partnered with elementary school teachers from the local school district in Tucson, Arizona. The study’s primary assumption was that the local educators did not see their minority students coming from homes “rich in social and intellectual resources” rather homes that were lacking in rich language development and knowledge that was valued by the school system. Four teachers were selected to participate in this study. Each of them taught at schools in working-class, predominantly Mexican, neighborhoods and spoke Spanish.

During the course of this study (Gonzalez et al., 1993), teachers randomly selected two or three of their students to take part in the study. The teachers visited each of the homes three times and conducted interviews with the parents that lasted an average of two hours. Each student was also interviewed by his/her teacher. Interviews were more conversational in nature with the teachers easily assuming a participant-observer...
role. These home visits were not intended to teach the parent but to teach the teachers about the wealth or funds of knowledge that existed within their own household. Gonzalez et al. (1993) noted the way in which families developed social networks was a particular point of interest. The breadth of knowledge increased as the social circle increased for a family. Children had additional funds of knowledge available to them as their circle of trusted individuals increased. They felt safe in the environment so that they might take risks in their learning.

Teachers wrote field notes following the interviews, and they were encouraged to maintain a personal field journal. Study groups were created as a means to review the findings and to share ideas for instruction. Lesson and units were written as a result of the findings of the funds of knowledge found in the homes. Instruction for these students became relevant to their own lives (Gonzalez et al., 1993).

The quest continues to identify a way to effectively close the achievement gap. Existing research supports the importance of the family’s influence on a child and his/her school success. Brain research teaches us that by age four, 90% of the brain potential of a child is formed (DeVenny, 2012). Partnering with the family at an early age is critical to maximizing the time prior to a child transitioning to school.

2.6 Defining Parental Involvement

Reaching consensus on the operational definition of parental involvement and the various aspects that it encompasses has not occurred as evidenced by the wide variety of definitions used in the literature review by Baker and Soden, 1997. When their paper was written and presented, the research on parental involvement was considered to be in
its “infancy” (p. 21). Prior to discussing plans to increase parental involvement, it should first be defined and each aspect of the concept properly studied.

Most of the time parent involvement is measured by the number of parent visitors and volunteer hours within the school. In its fullest sense, parent involvement in their children’s school and parent involvement/interaction with their child in the home are two distinct aspects of parent involvement (Downey, 2002.) In determining which dimension impacts student achievement the most, one needs to consider that by the time a child turns 18, he/she will have spent less than 15% of their waking hours in school. The majority of their time has been spent in places that are determined by the parent’s influence and often times their finances. The quality of children’s preschool experiences vary greatly and impact their academic growth. For instance, children living in poverty have 50% fewer words spoken to them than children of working class parents; approximately 33% fewer words spoken to them than children of professionals (Downey, 2002). Very young children are greatly influenced by their home and non-school environments.

While there are several models of parent involvement, it is Joyce Epstein’s six typologies that were used in 1997 by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in the development of their standards for family involvement (Lunenberg & Irby, 2002). In 1995, Epstein and her colleagues with the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children’s Learning at Johns Hopkins University developed the six types of involvement that schools could implement:
1. Parenting - This includes ways in which to help improve parents’ understanding of child development, increase parenting skills, and to improve the quality of the home environment for learning.

2. Communicating - This includes the common ways of establishing the two-way communication between the home and school—newsletters, report cards, conferences, etc.

3. Volunteering - This is the most commonly thought of form of parent involvement. It is involvement at school as a volunteer—in the classroom, in the library, etc.

4. Learning at Home - This includes ways to improve and support the efforts of the parents/families in the home as they help with homework and interact with their children.

5. Decision Making - This addresses the extent to which parents serve in advisory and decision-making roles for the school.

6. Collaborating with the Community - This includes the agencies and resources of the community partnering with the school and family members to support the children.

These typologies are not meant to be a progression of stages but offer ways in which schools can plan and implement activities to engage parents, families, and communities in active involvement with the school. It is important to understand the theory upon which Epstein created these types of parental involvement.

According to Epstein (1995), student learning is directly impacted by three spheres of influence—the family, the school, the community. These spheres of influence can be intentionally kept separate or they can overlap. Schools with the philosophy of we
cannot do our job without our parents/family and parents/families that value the importance of knowing what is going on in school “embody the theory of ‘overlapping spheres of influence’”, (p. 702). Communities can also create family-like atmospheres that support their families and schools. The student is at the center of these spheres and their learning can be maximized by the overlapping of spheres rather than the separated spheres that often occur.

2.7 Differences in Parenting Styles

In Lareau’s *Home Advantages* (2000), she writes, “At each stage, children’s access to the next step may be limited or enhanced by their class position because middle-class and working-class parents interact differently with the institutions in which their children learn and compete”, (p. viii). Working-class parents often see a clear separation between the family life and school life. The focus of family life is to teach children manners, take them to school, and prepare them for school so that they are ready to learn. In general, parents give the responsibility of teaching the children to the teachers. Lareau (2000) also found that familiarity with learner expectations and school curriculum was not a part of the parent’s role in the working-class families. Attendance and participation in school functions was not always a priority. Teachers perceived this non-participation as not fulfilling the parental role.

The upper-middle class parents in Lareau’s *Home Advantages* (2000) viewed the relationship between the home and the school as interconnected—even a division of labor. An active parent volunteer program is a part of this relationship. Parents are visible within the school on a regular basis. These visits provide support in the classrooms for
the teachers and students, as well as keeping the parent “in the know” with the daily occurrences in school. The parent’s role at home provided support to the child through practice of homework as well as sometimes supplementing the instruction within the school. Parental intervention in their children’s lives was a regular happening due to parents feeling a strong right and responsibility to embrace this role.

The parental interaction in the school setting differed among parents, as does the parenting approaches in the home. Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods* (2000, 2011) further describes these two distinct approaches to parenting. Working-class families allowed their children to interact freely with one another and live a life of unscheduled afternoons. This approach to parenting is called the Accomplishment of Natural Growth. In contrast, the middle-class families are often seen planning out their children’s social lives in a strategic manner. Children from these homes are often very comfortable interacting with adults and advocating for themselves. These skills are valued by their parents as they shape their children’s growth and develop through Concerted Cultivation.

There are also ethnic and racial differences in parenting of young children. While some parents and children may see little connection between educational effort and job advancement, this does not affect the aspirations that Hispanic parents have for their children. Focusing on their children’s behavior and on making good behavioral choices is how many Hispanic immigrant parents engage in their children’s school life (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) found that these differences do account for the differences in what is considered school readiness. In their study, parenting interventions are examined; home and center-based programs with a parenting component have the largest effect on nurturance with some effect on discipline.
Language is most directly affected by intervention programs with a family literacy component. Parenting interventions are traditionally targeted to specific groups and are more likely to serve a greater percentage of minority families (Brooks-Gunn & Markham, 2005).

2.8 Parent Involvement in their Children’s Education

All parents want their children to be successful in school. As their parent’s involvement in school increases, a student’s academic achievement is greater (Chen, 2008). Within the home environment, it is the parental expectations and parenting styles that are the most important elements affecting student academic achievement (Marzano, 2003).

While the concept of the American Dream may be something that individuals still strive toward in our country, breaking through the class barriers is more difficult in America than in other industrialized nations (Hargreaves, 2013). The income gap between the wealthiest and the poorest continues to widen. In 2009, this gap was the largest since records have been maintained (Smith, 2010). Lareau (2000, 2011) asserts that our social class affects our schooling and academic achievement. Parent involvement patterns also exist based on social class.

Several existing theories help explain why social class influences parenting practices and the degree of parent involvement. The Standard of Desirability represents characteristics that upwardly mobile parents want their children to possess. Kohn, Naoi, Schoenback, Schooler, and Slomczynski (1990) found that traits, such as, self-direction and intellectual flexibility, were desired for the children of their participants. Participants of this study included fathers in America as well as Japan and Poland. Bourdieu (Nash,
1990) argued that the institution of school played an active role in the reproduction of the culture of the dominant class. The skills and experiences (habitus) of the students from the dominant culture shape the perception of readiness for school.

According to Rist (2000), poor children have a difficult time making it through school. He also found that the educational experience of Black urban students was no better than it was 30 years prior when he published “Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations.” In Rist’s original study, kindergarten students were assigned to groups within the classroom based on the teacher’s observations of their social attributes rather than ability. Students who appeared to meet socially acceptable expectations were placed in groups based on their perceived academic ability. Those students who did not demonstrate these socially acceptable expectations were placed in groups perceived to have less academic ability (Rist, 1970). Lareau (2000) termed this practice institutional discrimination. Some researchers found schools actually discriminate against working class and poor families by making middle class families feel more valued. A sense of distrust of “white” institutions by minority families and a lack of respect of the families demonstrated by these institutions create boundaries which negatively impact the relationship between the family and the school (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

A study by the American Educational Research Association from 1988, repeated in 2012, found access to books for low income families had increased over time. The use of books by parents in the middle income homes continued to eclipse the use in the low income homes. Inequalities continued to exist between the parenting behaviors by income level. Middle-income parents embraced the parenting activities and viewed it as a way to help get their child ahead of others (Wong, 2016). While there are many styles of
parenting, there are some commonalities within the styles. Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) describe seven categories of behavior that they consider components of parenting:

1. **Nurturance** - Ways in which affection and love are demonstrated. This would encompass safety and social needs on Maslow’s Hierarchy.

2. **Discipline** - Ways in which parents respond to children’s appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

3. **Teaching** - Ways in which parents share information or skills with their children.

4. **Language** - Ways in which parents verbally interact with their children.

5. **Materials** - Number of books and magazines in the home, educational books and toys for the children.

6. **Management** - Ways in which the parent schedules the family calendar and events.

### 2.9 Perceptions about Parent Involvement in School

Parents from different social classes view the role of parent involvement differently. Working class parents see education as the school’s job rather than middle class parent who see education as a partnership. Interestingly, parents rated teachers who asked them to help their child at home with a learning activity as a more skilled teacher than those parents who were not asked to help their child at home (Epstein, 1986.)

Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) explored low income and minority parents’ ideas and attitudes about school to better understand their perspective of parent involvement. Contrary to the opinion of teachers and administrators, low participation in traditional parent involvement activities did not mean that parents were not interested in their children’s education. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) found parents’ educational
experiences and their level of education impacted the ideas and attitudes of the parents about school and their involvement. Parents could not help children with homework that they were unable to read or understand. If parents attended meetings at the school, they did not feel that their voice was heard—even though the teacher asked if they had questions. Some of the socially acceptable practices that have been established in schools, such as scheduling an appointment, signing in at the front office, as well as the location of school meetings, have further served to isolate parents from the school. Many of the minority parents simply did not want to interfere with what they viewed as the job of the school (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

Patrikakou and Weissberg (1998) found if parents perceive that their child’s teacher is actively providing opportunities for parental involvement, then they will be much more likely to be involved. In Patrikakou and Weissberg’s study of parent’s perceptions about teacher outreach, parents reported that teachers would call them when their child was in trouble at school more frequently than when he/she was doing well in school. Teachers invited parents to come to school less frequently as well as provided specific suggestions for how parents could help their child do better in school less frequently (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 1998).

If parents’ perceptions of teachers’ outreach to them impact parent involvement in school, then teachers’ perceptions about parents’ involvement in school is also worthy of study. In reporting the findings of the Educational Longitudinal Studies of 2002, Anderson (2016) reported that teachers were more likely to contact the parents of black and Latino parents regarding behavioral issues rather than their white counterparts. The parents of Asian students were less likely to be contacted regarding academic or behavior
concerns. Lastly, teachers were less likely to contact to parents they viewed as uninvolved. Anderson’s (2016) research with professors in teacher education revealed that the teacher candidates are hesitant to contact parents, especially proactively. The race and ethnicity factors further complicate this issue.

Most teachers interpret physical presence at school as evidence that a parent is concerned about their child’s education (Lareau, 2000). When teachers encounter parents that hold different views, they often perceive the parent as non-supportive. By broadening the way in which teachers view the home-school relationship, then parental involvement becomes a more inclusive relationship that embraces diversity (Epstein, 1995). An obstacle to parental involvement may then be eliminated. While research exists in the areas of differences in parenting styles and parent involvement, there is a distinct lack of research from the leadership perspective specifically in the area of marginalized communities. This is an area that invites future research.

2.10 Benefits of Parental Involvement in School

Parents have invaluable information about their children—their interests and how they learn best. When teachers hear the voice of parents, they, and the students, benefit from the involvement (Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel 2001). Parental involvement at school increases communication between the home and school; it is also associated with greater achievement in mathematics and reading. Additional benefits from parental involvement at home are increased student motivation and self-efficacy. Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs (2004) observed the strongest relationship to sustained academic growth exists from home-based learning activities.
Waanders, Mendez, and Downey (2007) conducted a study of 154 parents from two Head Start programs. Through the home visits that were conducted, teachers gained insight into the home environment of their students which enabled them to better meet their student’s individual needs. The achievement gap that is often experienced by children of low socioeconomic status was lessened through the visits as the home environment was positively impacted through the home visits. Parent efficacy, which is a key factor in determining parent involvement, was also positively affected by the home visits (Waanders & Mendez, 2007). A trusting relationship developed between the parent and teacher in the home environment, and parent efficacy increased (Blad, 2017; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009).

Marzano (2003) provides insight into planning specific strategies to increase the school-home involvement. These include: establishing two-way communication initiated by the school, involvement in regular day to day activities, and soliciting input in the bigger school decisions. By proactively building the positive relationship with the home, an often insurmountable obstacle to parental involvement is then eliminated. While a variety of models of parent involvement exist, building a trusting relationship with the parents and family is a common element (Blad, 2017; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009).

The District of Columbia, along with 17 states, boasts of a successful home visitation program which is supported by an independent nonprofit. Almost 50% of the schools have been trained in the procedures (Kronholz, 2016). As a new school chancellor/superintendent prepared to take the helm of leadership, Washington Post columnist, Jay Matthews (2016) urged the new leader to maintain this program. A recent
study by Johns Hopkins University found that “D.C. students who had a home visit had 24% fewer absences and were 1.5 times more likely to read at or above grade level” (Matthews, 2016).

2.11 Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator

It is important to understand the role of the Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC). The PFLC’s role is based upon the home visitation program from Parents as Teachers (2011) described earlier in chapter 2. This upstate school district delineated the job qualifications for the PFLC (please see Appendix A) and expectations for the PFLC program (please see Appendix B). The PFLC is a college graduate, sometimes certified as a teacher, who is employed by the school district to work closely with at least 15 families on a consistent basis using the curriculum “Born to Learn” as designed by Parents as Teachers (PAT, 2011). The families should have a preschool child (birth to entry in K4 program) in the home. The successful transition of the preschool child to K4 is the primary goal of the PFLC. Not all elementary schools in South Carolina have K4 classes. An additional goal of this intervention is to provide access to resources/services to the preschool child’s parents/families as appropriate. These resources/services could include Adult Ed (GED), counseling, English classes of English Language Learners (ELL), referrals for medical services, application for Medicaid, and Food Stamps.

Our state’s Profile of the South Carolina Graduate includes rigorous standards and skills for all students, beginning with kindergarteners. The rigor of the kindergarten South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards (SC-CCRS) is vastly different than where many children enter kindergarten (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). Given the rigor of the SC-CCRS for kindergarten students, many students begin school
behind their peers (Yatkin, 2013). Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that it is unfair to expect all students to meet the same academic benchmark due to the vast historical, educational, and moral debt owed to children who have been marginalized.

The South Carolina Early Learning Standards acknowledge the importance of early childhood experience (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). Baron, Immekus, Gonzalez and Yun (2016) found that early childhood teachers often believe that their administrators do not understand the instructional value of play in the classroom. Brown (2009) found years earlier that traditionally-trained school administrators did not have the background to understand early childhood education because they did not have experience in early childhood education. The role of the PFLC serves an integral role due to the experience in the education of young children.

The South Carolina Education Accountability Act of 1998 established the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) which is composed of educators, business leaders, and elected officials (South Carolina General Assembly, 1998). This committee is responsible for ongoing review and evaluation of the state’s K-12 educational system with the goal of continuous improvement. (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2018). Early literacy efforts for K4 and K5 students are briefly addressed in Building the Foundation for Student Success, Birth to 5 in the 2015 SC EOC’s Annual Report. The importance of effective preschool and family literacy programs is noted, with an emphasis on well-trained staff; however, no specifics are provided for preschool children. The creation of South Carolina’s Early Learning Standards (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017) is a positive step toward understanding the importance of early childhood education.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 1, I explained the significance of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2015) and the rigor of the South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards (SC-CCRS). Preschool programs need to be designed to bridge the transition to school for young children and assist them on the rigorous path to the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. The purpose of this study was to improve the services of a Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC) and the Drop In and Play program at a Title I public elementary school in South Carolina. Using an action research design (Mills, 2011), I examined the ways the PFLC program might more effectively benefit preschool children, their transition to the K4 program at this public elementary school, and provide support to parents/families.

3.1 Introduction

According to Mills (2011) a main goal of action research is fulfilled when the lives of children are improved in schools. Mills (2011) argued this systematic inquiry conducted by educators for themselves should result in reflective practices that inspire positive changes to the school environment and, ultimately, in educational practices. Through the process of action research, educators are positioned as learners and empowered to effect change in their own world. Our profession has become highly
regulated by state and federal legislation, and in his preface, Mills (2011) encouraged educators with the hope that “this book will, in some small part, help us keep moving forward, even in difficult times,” (xiii). He argued that action research could provide hope during the difficult times by inspiring individuals to continue addressing tough questions in life and seeking possible answers. As a K-12 public school administrator, the search to determine what strategies will be most effective in meeting our students’ needs often seems to be an unending quest—especially as state and federal educational legislation changes and directly impacts schools.

Efron and Ravid (2013) found that “action researchers may choose to conduct critical research because of their desire to be advocates for marginalized students in society at large and to bring about social justice and equity,” (p.49). As the principal of Youngstown Elementary School, a Title I Schoolwide Project, I am an advocate for my students and committed to leveling the playing field for marginalized students. Additionally, my concurrent commitment to work collaboratively together with faculty and staff to improve our school led me to the design of action research. The role of the PFLC and accompanying Drop In and Play program is unique to Youngstown Elementary School. Ultimately, the aim of the research was to establish an action plan that will best serve our preschool children and families. Parents and family members observed the changes made to the program based on their suggestions and discussions. I believe the collaborative nature of the design of action research served to mediate my authority and power as the principal (Stringer, 2014).

Action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve
specific problems. Action research is not a panacea for all ills and does not resolve all problems but provides a means for people to more clearly understand their situations and to formulate effective solutions to problems they face. (Stringer, 2014, p. 8)

In this chapter, I provide the details of my action research design.

The role of the Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC) is at the heart of my study (Glesne, 2011). I examined the intricacies of the influence, relationships, and interactions of the PFLC, the parents that she serves, and the K4 teachers, who work with the children once they have transitioned to school. My data sources were observations and interviews of the stakeholders. Artifacts, which included the PFLC’s lesson plans and her observational notes from August 2016 through January 2018 were also analyzed to provide a rich historical context. The goal of my research was to understand how to improve our Parent Family Literacy Program. Gaining the insights of those who have lived the experience brought significant meaning to the process (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Mills, 2011).

3.2 Action Research

Mills (2011) stated that “educational change that enhances the lives of children is a main goal of action research” (p. 8). This statement most closely aligns with my purpose and vision for this research. The outcome of this research was an action plan that will serve the unique needs of our preschool children and families. Coding and analysis of the data was integral to the development of an action plan (please see Chapter 5 Discussion and Implications). The development of an action plan is prompted by this question, “Based on what I have learned from this investigation, what should I do now?”
(Mills, 2011, p. 155). Descriptions of the PFLC position and role by the PFLC and stakeholders (parents/family members, K4 teachers, and the PFLC), experiences with the PFLC and Drop In and Play, descriptions of the program’s effectiveness and areas in need of improvement by the PFLC and stakeholders constitute the core of this research and drove the construction of the research questions.

3.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do stakeholders characterize the role of the PFLC?
2. How do stakeholders describe the effectiveness and influence of the PFLC?
3. What do stakeholders identify as areas in need of improvement and the challenges in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program?
4. What do stakeholders identify as successes in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program?

Theory was not used explicitly in the design of my research. Although I am informed by Ladson-Billings’ (2006, 2007, 2013) work on the education debt, and my beliefs about school readiness are shaped by learning leaders such as, Allington & Cunningham (1998), Fox (2001), and Taberksi (2000) whose work supports developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) for young children (Quick, 1998; National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) this study was emic and was participant-driven. It followed an inductive process (Young, 2005). My goal was to represent the views of all participants in an honorable manner so that their voices are the ones most amplified (rather than theorists) throughout the study (Stringer, 2014). Herr and Anderson (2015) describe action researchers as being “committed to a spiraling
synergism of action and understanding” (p. 87). As such, I understood that the path of my research might change as I followed the direction of discovery. The integrity and fidelity of my research was dependent upon my following the research where it took me. I wanted to create the most effective PFLC program possible so that our students and parents would receive the most benefit from the program and children successfully transition to the K4 program.

3.4 Context

As discussed in Chapter 1, Mills (2011) described action research as “research done by teachers for themselves; it is not imposed on them by someone else” (p. 5). In 1999, when I was hired as the assistant principal, I was unfamiliar with the role of the PFLC. My former elementary school, which was in a neighboring district, did not have a PFLC. My appreciation for the PFLC and the role she has served in assisting preschool students and their families has increased greatly over the years. Since becoming principal in 2007, I have assumed an integral role in the planning and implementation of the PFLC program. I view this program as an investment in our very young children and their families because despite President Johnson’s “war on poverty,” which resulted in the establishment of Title I programs over 60 years ago (Matthews, 2014), and the multiple state and federal laws enacted for the same purpose, the gap continues to widen between children with access to insufficient economic resources and those with access to sufficient economic resources (Camera, 2016; Tavernise, 2012; Thomas & Brady, 20015). Gaynor (2015) found that there is a “27% gap in school readiness between poor children and moderate-or high-income families” (p. 31). The increased rigor of the instructional standards (S.C. Department of Education, 2015) further compounds this gap.

While I no longer serve as a classroom teacher, as the school principal I am responsible for every student served by my school. Our superintendent has provided principals the latitude to utilize funding and personnel to best meet the needs of their students, while adhering to fiscal guidelines and board policy. In my experience, early childhood education has been an investment that is honored in our school district. Throughout the years, the number of PFLCs has declined in our district due to funding. Full-time PFLCs are employed at two Title I schools, but only one PFLC serves the remaining four elementary schools in the district.

Family income is used to establish eligibility for free or reduced lunch prices (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). In December 2018, Youngstown Elementary School served 622 students from preschool through fourth grade. The demographic composition of the school was 50.6% White, 29.8% Black, 12.4% Hispanic, 5.9% More than One Race, .9% Asian Pacific, and .4% Native American. The poverty index of this school was 82.8% as defined by the October 2015 definition of poverty (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015).

In the spring of 2017, an intermediate school (grades 5 and 6) in our district was designated as a Title I school. The district’s two Title I elementary schools feed in to this intermediate school. The following year, our funding, at Youngstown Elementary School for the 2017-2018 school year was dramatically reduced due to the new designation. Title I funds had been re-allocated across three schools. In August 2017, the State Department
of Education notified our school district of a substantial reduction in Title I funding to the
district which in turn impacted each of the three schools. Funding for instructional
materials and supplies was directly affected. In spite of the reduction in our Title I
funding and the many challenges that this presented, the PFLC and Drop In and Play
program was fully funded.

I believe that preschool children are ready to learn—even eager, and their learning
is often guided through natural curiosity (National Association for the Education of
Young Children, November 1990; Taberski, 2000). Lewitt and Baker (1995) found that
being ready to learn is not synonymous with ready for school. Reardon (2013) found that
when children enter kindergarten, the income achievement gap is large, yet it does not
grow once in school. I believe this underscores the importance of the preschool years
especially in light of the increased rigor of the current instructional standards (S.C.

At Youngstown Elementary School, material resources are provided to the
children and families on the home visits. A book is given to each child every month,
along with a monthly newsletter from Scholastic which focuses on early literacy skills.
Activities and materials are loaned to parents so they may work with their students. At
the monthly Drop In and Play meetings, parents/family members engage with their
children through developmentally appropriate activities. Every aspect of the PFLC
program is meant to support the children and families served. Following budget cuts in
2017 it became essential that the PFLC program was as effective as possible. In
examining whether or not it is, action research served practical and prudent ends.
3.5 Positionality

My professional experiences as the principal of a Title I Elementary School in a southern state have shaped the way in which I view the role of the Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC). Before becoming principal, I served as the assistant principal at the school for eight years, prior to which, I did not fully understand the role of a PFLC. During the past 20 years, I have seen that poverty may shape the circumstances surrounding our students’ lives, but it does not define them. Each student’s life represents a story they have to tell, and each student brings with them a wealth of experiences upon which we can build. My perspective has developed over the years as I have worked with the students, parents, and the PFLC. My role as principal is to advocate for all of my students and to validate the value of their individual life experiences.

My professional training and experiences have taught me that the identification of “disadvantaged and neglected” does not mean that my students are less intelligent than others. Mere numbers like test scores do not adequately begin to represent my students. Building classroom and school community that encourages students to take risks in their learning is essential to establishing a classroom climate that fully engages our students. My expectation for all of my teachers is that they meet the child where he/she/they are and grow them at least one year rather than measure their achievement through the proficiency standard (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

As a white, middle class, college-educated female, I know the participants of Color in this study may have associated me with a past negative experience. I may represent the “establishment” to many families and bring to mind past negative experiences people of Color have had with white teachers, staff, and administrators. At
face value, I acknowledge that I represent someone in a position of power and influence and am one representative of white privilege (McIntosh, 1988).

All parents want their children to be successful in school. Parents might have had negative experiences in school themselves, which could influence the way they view school and school personnel. In education, we have burned many bridges with parents and alienated them (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Trotman, 2001). I believe building a bridge between the school and the home has become even more crucial in these situations. Creating an environment where parents feel comfortable and trust that we will take care of their children was the first step toward building the bridge. I argue that while restructuring a relationship takes time and must be approached one step at a time, being mindful to ensure that the parents and family are respected and their homes are valued is essential (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

I believe the way in which I honored participant stories and maintained confidentiality impacted how my participants viewed my trustworthiness. I noticed across the project that as participants determined that I could be trusted with what they shared with me, they decided to disclose a little more about their stories as we continued to interact with one another. It took time for me to earn their trust.

I believe that my longevity as an administrator within this Title I school brought a certain credibility to who I am within my position. Parents and children who have known me through the years knew that I expected a lot from the children because I know children have great potential. My reputation in this context was a strength and also made me credible to the students’ parents. I am a parent of a child who attended Youngstown
Elementary, as a school choice student, and is a graduate of this district’s high school. Many of the students’ parents have seen me in the role of “mom.” Through the years, we have worked together side by side at the School Carnival, cheered for our Volleyball Team, or worked the concession stand together. I entrusted snippets of my own story to the students’ parents. Because I live in the neighboring town, there was a distance between my students’ families and me which also provided a degree of privacy. I acknowledge the challenges of navigating the intersecting roles of school principal, parent, and researcher. Navigating my power ethically and understanding the potential effects of my racial privilege were at the forefront of decisions I made, because I did not want any of the relationships to be impacted in a negative way. I was very intentional in this aspect of our relationship and believe all interactions were honored in a respectful manner.

As I considered my position of power and the ways students’ parents, and even the PFLC, might view me, I was aware parents might have been concerned about the consequences of what they shared with me. They could have worried about being judged by me. As her supervisor, my PFLC could have been concerned about what might be disclosed to me and how it might have affected her job. In retrospect, I believe the parents grew to trust me more the longer we spent time together. They witnessed the changes to the program based on what they shared with me. Through this process, the PFLC observed my response to feedback shared with me, how it was valued, and my commitment to continual improvement of our program. It was important that I accurately share my commitment with all stakeholders so it was clearly understood that I genuinely...
wanted our school, and the PFLC program, to meet the needs of our children and their parents.

At times, I wondered if the participants of the study would have been more forthcoming if I had been an outsider (Herr & Anderson, 2015), and they were in another school district. I reflected on how I would have felt, if I had been asked questions about how I viewed my colleagues, my teachers, or my assistant superintendents, by someone I did not know. I would have questioned the motivation of the interviewer, wondered how the information would be viewed or represented, and would have been suspicious of someone from the outside. Herr and Anderson (2015) acknowledge the significant investment of time when building trust when the researcher is an outsider. I believe the relationship I had with parents who have been served by the PFLC as repeating families brought credibility to my role. While some parents may have been suspicious of me and my motives, over time I earned their trust.

The PFLC told me parents have asked her when I am coming back for more home visits. I believe trust existed between the participants of my study and me - and more honest disclosure occurred as a result of the relational trust that existed (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Gergen, 2009).

3.6 Epistemic Orientation

The researcher is historically and locally situated within the very processes being studied, (Denzin, 2001, p. 325). The primary purpose of this study was to understand how to improve our Drop In and Play and PFLC programs. An integral part of the process was gaining a deeper understanding of the parent participants and how they viewed the PFLC—both what impact she may have had on their child’s transition to school and how
her interaction with the parents themselves might have impacted their child. Knowing where we need to improve and any areas of strength are extremely important. I intentionally framed my research questions to glean an understanding of the perspective of my participants. Situated within my study as a research tool, I also gained some insight into how students’ parents’ own stories influenced the suggestions they shared with me and the way they viewed their child’s experiences. I have constructed or made meaning from the stories and perceptions of participants shared with me with a constructivist’s orientation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

3.7 The Pilot Study

Pilot studies are encouraged to help develop relationships and lay the foundation for an action research study (Glesne, 2011; Herr and Anderson, 2015). In the spring of 2014, my pilot study took the form of a descriptive case study (Hill, 2014). The research reflected interviews with the school district’s Director of Title I, the PFLC, and four parents and provided a richness of information that deepened my commitment to the topic. I believe gathering information through the interviews during my pilot study was critical to telling the story of the PFLC. While historical context was provided in the pilot study through exploring the origins of the PFLC’s position and interviews with the Director of Title I and the PFLC, I ended up with more questions and wanted to go back and ask participants to “tell me more.” This is not uncommon as Glesne (2011) suggested pilot studies can generate more questions and wonderings. While a descriptive case study provided a wealth of knowledge in understanding the phenomenon, one disadvantage was the process was not collaborative in nature. The absence of collaboration was one factor which influenced my decision to pursue an action research
design for this dissertation study. The desire to do something constructive for the children and families I serve was the real impetus (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

**3.8 Action Research Design**

Mills (2011) defined action research as “research done *by* teachers *for* themselves” (p.5) resulting in effecting positive changes and improved student achievement. The four elements represented in Mills’ Dialectic Action Research Spiral include identifying an area of focus, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, and developing an action plan (see figure 3.1).

![Diagram of the Dialectic Action Research Spiral](image)

**Figure 3.1.** The Dialectic Action Research Spiral (Mills, 2011, p.19).

The first step of Mill’s process is identifying the area of focus. He emphasized the importance of gaining insight into your area of study through self-reflection and considering what you currently understand about your area of focus and reflecting upon your own educational beliefs and values; descriptive activities to clarify the situation that you want to improve; and explanatory activities that focus on explaining your study with emphasis on the why. These reconnaissance activities provide clarification to practitioner
researchers about what they already know and what they believe will improve the situation.

In the second step of the process, Mills (2011) outlined three broad processes of qualitative data collection: experiencing, enquiring, and examining, which are based on Wolcott’s (2009) research. Researchers actually experience the phenomenon when data is collected through observation. Their written records are represented in the form of field notes. Researchers are enquiring as they ask questions during interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. Researchers are examining as they review records, journals, and artifacts. Utilizing these three fieldwork strategies helped to provide detail needed to develop an action plan and provide methological triangulation (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Rouslton, 2010).

Mills (2011) posited that the third step, “making sense of the mountains of data collected” (p. 124), may be the most difficult part of action research, and I found this to be the case. He advised that reflection throughout the process of the research is important and to allow the process to unfold on its own rather than to rush to premature analysis and action. Specifically, Mills recommended three iterative steps for data analysis: reading/memoing of your field notes and transcripts; describing the setting and participants in a thorough manner; and classifying the data by breaking it down into smaller segments or categories. After classifying and summarizing the data, the researcher critically interprets the data set in order to generate meaning or answer the question, “‘so what?’ in terms of the implications of the study’s findings” (p. 126).

In the final step, Mills (2011) suggested the development of an action plan prompted by this question, “Based on what I have learned from this investigation, what
should I do now?” (p. 155). The process of reflection is critical at this stage. Mills (2011) advised creating a chart with the steps of the action plan to provide a framework. The following should be included: summary of findings, recommended action targeted to the findings, noting the responsible party, who needs to be consulted, who will monitor/collect data, a timeline, and resources needed.

The data collection and analysis of this study is complete. Salient points and findings are presented in Chapter 4. These findings have been helpful assessing effectiveness of the PFLC program and have deepened my understanding and appreciation of the families we serve. The Action Plan can be found in Chapter 5 Discussion and Implications.

3.9 Description of Site and Program

Youngstown Elementary School is situated in a small school district in a southern state. The school has been recognized throughout the years by the state Education Oversight Committee (EOC) for student achievement gains and closing the achievement gap between student groups. The school has been recognized for “closing the achievement” gap and/or general student achievement through the Palmetto Gold and Silver Awards Program since 2008. The Palmetto Gold and Silver Awards Program was established by this state’s Education Oversight Committee (EOC) in 1998. Originally, schools were recognized for the combined results of general student achievement and student growth. In 2008, awards for “closing the achievement gap” between disaggregated groups were added to this program (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018.)
In South Carolina, K4 classes are funded to serve children who are considered the most at-risk determined by family income or the family receives services such as food stamps, Medicaid, or state-funded family literacy programs (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019). In the 2016-2017 school year, Youngstown Elementary School had two K4 classes. One K4 class was funded through Title I and was a full day program. Because more children can be served through half-day sessions, Youngstown Elementary served students in the other K4 class for a half day in an attempt to reduce the number of students on the waiting list. Parents did not see the value of the half-day program, and enrollment in the program declined. For the 2017-2018 school year, Youngstown’s administrators and K4 teachers decided to return to full-day K4 classes.

Each child that registers for the K4 program at Youngstown is assessed with an academic screener and through a parent interview. The Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning-Fourth Edition (DIAL-4) is a developmental screening designed to assess the foundational academic skills of children (Mardell & Goldenberg, 2011). The parent interview focuses on the child’s social skills and developmental milestones from the parent’s perspective. The interview also serves as a means to ascertain the services provided to the family. Students receiving assistance through federal and state programs listed above receive a heavier weighting for each service received, just as those students with lower language scores receive heavier weighting of points. Children are listed by greatest need and invited to participate in the program based on the number of students we are able to serve in a particular school year. Forty students can be served by two full-day K4 teachers and two teaching assistants.
Every school year Youngstown has had the full-day K4 classes, there is a waiting list of students. As students move and withdraw from school, the next student on the prioritized waiting list is invited to join the class. In September 2017, twenty-one students were on the waiting list. In May 2018 eighteen students remained on the list. In September 2018, twenty-seven students started the school year on the waiting list. In May 2019, twenty-one students still remained on the waiting list. Unfortunately, many times students are on the waiting list all school year.

In December 2018, Youngstown Elementary School served 622 students from preschool through fourth grade. The demographic composition of the school was 50.6% White, 29.8% Black, 12.4% Hispanic, 5.9% More than One Race, .9% Asian Pacific, and .4% Native American. The poverty index of this school was 82.8% as defined by the October 2015 definition of poverty (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). There are two K4 kindergarten classes (Title I funds one of the classes). There is a preschool program for students with developmental delays as determined through evaluation through special education services. Identified students can be served beginning on their third birthday.

South Carolina established a comprehensive initiative, First Steps to School Readiness, in 1999 to support families and their young children prior to kindergarten. The small school district in which Youngstown is located embraced the goals of this state initiative by establishing four-year old kindergarten classes at all of the elementary schools and employing PFLC’s to serve each of these schools. The level of the district’s commitment to this endeavor set it apart from others in the state. A surfeit of information-rich examples of the phenomenon abound in this school and the small school district.
3.10 The PFLC, Home Visits, and Drop In and Play

Parents are their child’s first and most important teacher. One of the primary roles of the PFLC is to help parents understand this and to provide support through family educational and support services. Instructionally, the PFLC focused on early literacy skills to better prepare the preschool child for the transition to K4 (please see Appendices A & B).

The PFLC conducted home visits twice a month with each child enrolled in the program. During the home visit, the PFLC used a lesson plan written based on the child’s developmental stage rather than just the age (Barnum, 2017; Brown-Jeffy, & Cooper, 2011; Chingos, 2017). The parent was present during the lesson and interacted with the PFLC and child. The participant observations allowed me to gain a better understanding of the role of the PFLC and process of the home visit within physical context (Glesne, 2010.) There are benefits to the home visits that are unknown to most general educators. Waanders and Mendez (2007) found that parent efficacy is impacted positively during home visits. Matthews (2016) found that academic achievement increases and truancy declines through the home visits completed during a study in the Washington, D.C. area. Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales (1992) found that the “funds of knowledge” that exist in each home are validated through home visits. The concept of home visits was intriguing to me. After having participated in the home visits, I firmly believe that all teachers could benefit from visiting their students’ homes.

Group meetings called Drop In and Play are conducted at the school for all parents and children served by the PFLC. Children completed learning stations, interacted and played with one another, and enjoyed refreshments. Parents and family
members interacted with their child through the learning stations, and they interacted with the other adults.

3.11 Participants

Qualitative researchers usually focus on information-rich cases, which often results participant selection through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). Small sample sizes are typically used to enable a researcher to explore a particular phenomenon deeply. The parent/family participants of this study needed to meet one criterion—to have a child working with the PFLC. The five parents/families of preschool children served by the PFLC were selected through purposeful random sampling (Patton, 2002). The names of the 19 families served by the PFLC were placed in a container and after mixing the names up, I drew five names from the container. Patton (2002) states purposeful random sampling can “substantially increase the credibility of the results” (p. 240-241). I believe the differing perspectives provided through this method of selection increased the credibility of results. One child had been served since birth, and several older siblings participated in the program; while another child was served for four months and discontinued when his mother returned to work full time. The full-time Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC), the two K/4 teachers at the school, and seven parents in the informal focus group (those attending the Drop In and Play) participated in the study. There was no overlap of participants between the one-on-one interviews with parents and the focus group interview (see tables 3.2 and 3.3). IRB approval and informed consent were obtained prior to the study.
3.12 Risks and Benefits to Participants

Participants might have feared consequences for what they disclosed to me, because I was the principal at Youngstown Elementary School. The participants might have perceived this as a risk to themselves. To allay concerns about this position, I intentionally shared my own story and subjectivities, when I invited my parent participants to take part in my study. Establishing trust is essential to the growth and improvement of our program (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). The more time we spent together, whether during home visits or group visits, I believe their trust in me increased. During interviews, I carefully shared my philosophy of education - meeting children where they are in order to grow them. I took time to explain my philosophy of designing our Schoolwide Title I Project in response to our students/families’ needs. Rather than coming from deficit perspectives, which I addressed in chapters 1 and 2, I view my role as an educator from the education debt perspective (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007).

Confidentiality was crucial between the participants and me. I assured participants of the steps taken to keep our conversations confidential. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of all participants in the findings. The words of stakeholders have been purposefully used within the findings for several reasons. First, the voice of those interviewed will invite entrance I their world. Secondly, a thick description will provide a better understanding of the interpretation of the data. These are measures to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of this research (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Unfortunately, the reality is that a potential breach of confidentiality is always a risk. Parent participants, themselves, might have chosen to share what was discussed in the interviews.
Because the participants of this research project were insiders and a part of the school family (parents and staff members), I believe there was an investment into the project. Establishing the respect and trust that was needed between “insiders” was imperative (Herr & Anderson, 2015). McNiff and Whitehead (2010) define insiders as those positioned “inside the situation and will inevitably influence what is happening by their perspective” (p. 18). Outsiders are those positioned outside the research arena. As simple as these two descriptions may appear, Herr and Anderson (2015) assert action research is a “messy, somewhat unpredictable process” (p.98) and caution researchers about the nuances of their positionality shifting during the study. I realized that it was important that parents and teachers felt comfortable enough to be honest with me. Although I could not alter my position as researcher and principal and the power imbued in both positions, I hoped the shared objective of improving our program would be experienced as a common goal.

To maintain the integrity of participants’ experiences, after checking and correcting errors and mispronunciations within the transcripts of the interviews, participants were contacted and asked to review their respective transcripts to ensure that I accurately captured their interviews. I highlighted the interview questions in yellow, and changed the font to green for participants’ responses to facilitate the process. This process is called member checking (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Saldaña, 2011; Stringer, 2014). The PFLC and K4 teachers verified the representation of their responses, and the TA verified the translation of the interview from Spanish to English. When I contacted parent participants, I reiterated the nature of the research project and the impact on the PFLC programming for the next school year however I did not receive feedback from all of
those I interviewed individually. One parent, Harriet Jones, moved to another school. Following the Focus Group Meeting, I had follow up conversations with parents, and at the first group meeting of the 2018-2019 school year, I met with all parents at the Drop In and Play on September 28, 2018. We celebrated the transition of seven children served by the PFLC to K4 and discussed the tentative findings and impact on our PFLC program. Michelle, Teacher Assistant, was present to translate during this meeting. She attended all of the group meetings for this purpose. I had ongoing conversations with participants throughout the school year. This is the nature of being a Title I Schoolwide Project. Ongoing dialogue guides the planning for programming. Herr and Anderson (2015) argue “decisions for action must sometimes be made before the researcher has reached a thorough understanding of the data” and is a tension with insider researchers (p.101). Due to the cyclical nature of program design for Title I programs, action was required based on the tentative findings with the start of the new school year and budget.

3.13 Data Sources and Data Collection

Maxwell (2013) supports multiple data collection methods as a way to check one another and to provide the different aspects of the phenomena that is being studied. I felt strongly it was important to gather as much input from stakeholders during this process since it would inform the plans for the PFLC program. For this dissertation, I used the following data collection methods: semi-structured interviews with the PFLC and four of the five parents whose home visits I attended with the PFLC; an informal focus group composed of parents attending a group session, Drop In and Play an observation of the monthly Drop In and Play (see Appendix C); observations of twelve home visits conducted by the PFLC; semi-structured interviews with two K/4 teachers, and a review
of the PFLC’s lesson plans and anecdotal notes from September 2016-January 2018 for the students’ whose home visits I attended. The PFLC’s notes included her observations of parent-child interaction, routines and home environment, comments and parents’ questions, and family strengths, which were of particular interest to me. A review of the PFLC lesson plans and notes provided me with context. Please see Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Data Collection Sources (Wolcott, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiencing through Direct Observation*</th>
<th>Enquiring: When the Researcher Ask*</th>
<th>Examining: Using and Making Records*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Visits with PFLC</td>
<td>Drop in and Play -- Monthly Whole Group Session</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview 30-45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 visits with 5 families selected; 6 children served from these families</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 Parents --whose home visits I attended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beginning in the spring of 2017 through the end of the 2017-2018 school year, one semi-structured interview, lasting approximately 30-45 minutes, was conducted with each of these participants: the PFLC (please see Appendix E), four of the five parents whose home visits I attended with the PFLC (please see Appendix G), and two K/4 teachers (please see Appendix H). Originally, individual interviews were planned with five families. After numerous attempts to schedule an interview with one family, I was not successful in completing an interview (denoted below*) although I did attend the
home visits for this family. I completed the remaining four parent interviews in each of their respective homes (please see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Participants Selected for Home Visits and Individual Interviews
Note-Information is from Enrollment Form with PFLC Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Number of Children Working with PFLC During Study*</th>
<th>*Parent’s Reason for Joining the Program</th>
<th>*Length of Time Working with PFLC</th>
<th>Number of Home Visits P/O attended</th>
<th>Total Number of Children</th>
<th>Total Number of Children PFLC Served</th>
<th>Child’s Transition to K4 Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana Bravo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“To get him help.”</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes; 9/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adam DOB 2/13/14</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bobby/ Cindy Allen</td>
<td>“To help my baby learn.”</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A-Yes; Will Transition 9/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B-No; due to age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-Karen DOB 5/19/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B- John DOB 9/25/18*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harriet Jones</td>
<td>“To have him ready for school.”</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes; 9/2018 Moved Transitioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to K4 class in the District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evan DOB 4/26/14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alan/ Heather Smith*</td>
<td>“He isn’t talking.”</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes; Will Transition 9/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nate DOB 5/21/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jessica Long</td>
<td>“To have him ready for school.”</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A-Yes; 9/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-Garrett DOB 1/3/14</td>
<td>A--“To have him ready for school.”</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B-Yes; Will Transition 9/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B-“To keep him on track with his</td>
<td></td>
<td>children’s home visits were on</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>development.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>the same day.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-Levi DOB 8/5/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Drop In and Play sessions occurred monthly, and I attended most of the monthly meetings. A video recording of the December 2017 Drop In and Play was included during the data collection period. Analysis of this data point in particular allowed me to step out of my role as participant observer during Drop In and Play and focus on the interactions of the PFLC and parent participants, and between the parent participants which was very interesting to me. My attendance in these group meetings helped me to build rapport with new parents among the group.

Maxwell (2013) advised that the relationship one has with any participant is complex. It is critical to remember that what is just a research project to researchers is entry into a person’s life for participants. I focused on being respectful, responsive, and an active listener. Glesne (2011) reminded researchers that each decision is subject to change as one moves through the process of the study, and I found this to be true. Home visits needed to be rescheduled when children were sick or parents’ work schedules changed. When one family moved out of our school’s attendance area, I wondered whether there would be sufficient stakeholder input to inform the action plan. As I considered the impact on our PFLC program, I discussed the benefits of an informal focus group with Dr. Anders. Improving the PFLC program was my goal, and I believe increasing the number of stakeholders involved in the process provided a solid foundation for the development of the action plan.

An informal focus group (please see Appendix F), composed of the parents/family members attending a Drop In and Play took place in February 2018. Focus groups allow for more participants to be interviewed, and the interaction among the participants generates a broad range of ideas and opinions (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Roulston, 2010).
found the focus group to be very helpful and the opinions shared were insightful about the program. There were times during the focus group that several people spoke at one time, and there were questions that not all participants answered in the focus group. I attempted to leave the door open for things they might want to share with me later, “Please let me know if you think of anything else…..” In total, eleven families served by the PFLC were included in the interview process, either through individual interviews, or the focus group (please see Table 3.3 Participants of Focus Group on p.76).

Another rich source of information included the PFLC’s lesson plans and anecdotal notes from home visits. The PFLC’s lesson plans were planned specifically for each child’s interest and their stage of development based on the “Ages and Stages” assessment. What I found most intriguing in these anecdotal notes were the PFLC’s observations of family strengths. I observed home visits of five parents/families from March-May 2017. During the bi-weekly home visit, the PFLC worked with a child in her/his/their home environment. During the home visits I attended, I became more intentional in looking for the family strengths as I observed the lesson and all interactions.

3.14 Data Coding and Analysis

In order to capture the voices of the participants of my study and the detail needed to develop a plan of action, methodological triangulation (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Roulston, 2010) was utilized with the following data sources: semi-structured interviews (1 PFLC; 4 families with 5 children served by the PFLC; 3 K/4 teachers), an informal focus group (parent/family at Drop In and Play), one Drop In and Play observation, 12 home visit observations, and a document review of PFLC lesson plans and anecdotal notes from September 2016-January 2018. I recorded the interviews (4 hours 16 minutes)
Table 3.3 Participants of Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent/s</th>
<th>Number of Children Working with PFLC During Study</th>
<th>Length of Time Working with PFLC</th>
<th>Total Number of Children</th>
<th>Total Number of Children PFLC Served</th>
<th>Child's Transition to K4 Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johnny Johns</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-Holly  DOB 2/18/2014</td>
<td>A-1 year</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A-Yes; 9/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-Aria  DOB 1/28/2015</td>
<td>B-2 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B-Yes: Will Transition 9/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassie Edwards</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-Eva  DOB 12/8/2014</td>
<td>A-2 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A-Yes; Will Transition 9/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-Ethan  DOB 7/5/2016</td>
<td>B-1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B-No; due to age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C-Baby Girl DOB Spring 2019*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C-No; due to age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanette Hayes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zaidyn  DOB 10/11/2014</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes; Will Transition 9/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan/Amanda Caesar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eric  DOB 5/19/2014</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes; 9/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Ayola</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jonathan DOB 1/13/2015</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes; 9/2018 at another school in district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Returning to School in K5 on special permission to attend-Limited School Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter/Linda Raines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stacia  DOB 9/22/14</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes; Will Transition 9/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb Cash</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jason  DOB 5/6/14</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes; 9/2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and focus group (1 hour 29 minutes) on my iPad with the audio memo app and used the voice memo app on my phone as a backup method. Observations (11 hours and 24 minutes) were recorded on my iPad, and the voice memo app on my phone. When I was not able to locate one of my home visit recordings, I began to store all recordings and transcripts on my Google Drive. I had the recordings transcribed using Vanan Online Services. I painstakingly checked the transcripts (246 pages) against the recordings and my field notes. I corrected the transcripts as needed. Some of the corrections were due to regional dialect while other corrections were transcribed inaccurately. Overall, the accuracy of the transcripts from Vanan Online Services was not acceptable to me. After the focus group interview, I contacted another transcription company based on a recommendation from a colleague, and the focus group recording was transcribed Transcript Divas. I coded the focus group interview transcript (48 pages) following an accuracy check where I compared the recording to the transcript and my notes. The quality of the transcript was better than Vanan Online Services; however, I believe a transcription company based in the South would do a tremendous business.

The PFLC’s lesson plans and anecdotal notes from the home visits of children I visited (155 pages) were organized in a one and a half inch binder. The PFLC recorded notes on the child’s progress as well as strengths of the family and parent-child interaction. I was very interested in these notes because it was evident the PFLC was intentional to look for the strengths in each home and family. After reviewing these artifacts (approximately 12 hours), I organized my notes from each child’s home visits in a spreadsheet and coded them.
I reviewed my research questions to determine the most appropriate coding to use. Saldaña (2016) defines a code as “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 4). Saldaña organized coding methods in two cycles:

First cycle methods are those processes that happen during the initial coding of data and are divided into seven subcategories: Grammatical, Elemental, Affective, Literary and Language, Exploratory, Procedural, and a final profile entitled Themeing the Data…Second cycle methods are a bit more challenging because they require such analytic skills as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting conceptualizing, and theory building. (pp. 68-69)

As I interviewed the participants, I wanted to understand from their perspective, how they described the PFLC’s influence, and ways we can improve our program. I explored how the descriptions and stated influences of the PFLC might inform new policy within the program. During the first cycle of coding, I utilized in vivo coding first to capture the actual voices of those who have lived the experience (Saldaña, 2013). In Vivo Coding is especially useful in representing the voices of marginalized populations (Saldaña, 2016). Secondly, I used descriptive coding, also known as topic coding, which summarizes the topic of a passage. Descriptive coding’s primary goal is “to assist the reader to see what you saw and to hear what you heard” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). At the request of Drs. Cox and Ylimaki at the defense of this proposal, I completed a round of protocol coding. Protocol coding is “based on a pre-established, recommended,
standardized, or prescribed system” (Saldaña, 2013, p.151). The protocol codes were derived from literature reviewed and related to the research. Many of these topics are discussed in Chapter 2. The use of protocol coding may “also contribute to the reliability and validity (i.e. credibility)” of the study (Saldaña, 2016, p.175).

I utilized the codes resulting from the first cycle coding to transition to the second cycle coding. Saldaña (2013) suggested the use of code mapping to organize the codes developed from first cycle coding. Code mapping uses the actual codes to organize all of the codes that were generated from all of the data collection methods. During the second iteration of code mapping, the initial codes from the study were categorized and re-categorized. Basic outlining of the codes was utilized to provide a visual format. I used the Excel program to created tables and matrices of the information. The data was reorganized by sorting and presenting in a variety of formats each reflecting ways to answer my research questions. I copied and pasted codes electronically, and there were times I literally cut and pasted codes and data in different organizational groupings to make meaning of the data. (Saldaña, 2013) calls this “touching the data” (p. 205). Finally, I wrote jottings, which I sometimes called “random thoughts” and analytic memos (Saldaña, 2013, 2016) as a way to reflect and make sense of the data. The use of pattern coding during the second cycle of coding enabled me to look at the relationships across codes and categories from the first cycle coding. During second cycle coding, pattern coding provides a way to organize the initial clusters of data into “a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldaña, 2016, p.236).

The sheer volume of data generated was overwhelming at times. It was important to organize and reduce the data to manageable amounts. I located two valuable
resources—*Qualitative Research: Analyzing Life* (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) and *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I revisited these resources often for guidance. Interview condensation was a concept I found helpful in determining relevant information. It was critical to organize my jottings and analytic memos in one location for ease of access. I discovered leaving myself a note at the end of the work session for the “next step” was helpful so I did not repeat tasks. Lastly, keeping the research questions close at hand was an effective tool in maintaining my focus.

**3.15 Advantages and Disadvantages of Action Research**

Garcia and Guerra (2004) argue that real education reform has not occurred because educators often place the blame for low student achievement on the students and families, while state and federal officials place the blame on the school. The most significant advantage of action research is that it is seeks improvement and solutions—just the opposite of placing blame on anyone. Action Research empowers those most closely positioned to the inquiry (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Mills, 2011; Stringer, 2014). My primary role was an advocate for my students and their families, and I looked for solutions to challenges that were encountered.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Mills (2011) stated that “educational change that enhances the lives of children is a main goal of action research” (p.8). My study was action research with the primary goal of understanding how to improve the PFLC program for our students and their families. It is important to acknowledge limitations that might have existed within the structure of my research. This study was conducted in one Title I Elementary School in a southern
state, in a school district that serves 8,074 students. This Title I Elementary School has a full-time PFLC and two K4 teachers. Another school is the district is identified as Title I and has a full-time PFLC. The remaining four elementary schools share one PFLC and are served one day a week. Having two teachers of four-year-old kindergarten at this site increased the scope of the study compared to a study that might be completed at a school with only one class.

Not all parents of future K4 students participated in the study. Four parents, whose children were served by the PFLC, participated in the individual interviews and the home visits that I observed. Parents of the children attending the Drop In and Play group session were participants of an informal focus group. This provided an opportunity for a broader representation of the families served by the PFLC. Most of the families attending the group session knew one another. The environment was informal and seemed comfortable for them (Roulston, 2010). The school district required that a minimum of 15 children be served by the PFLC. During the 2017-2018 school year, the PFLC served 19 families with a total of 21 children. The data sources from the interviews and informal focus group with some of these family members provided detailed accounts of what was and was not working in the program. In addition, thematically I reached saturation when I coded and analyzed for salient points the families shared about the program. I believe the benefits realized from the information, salient points and findings, far outweigh any potential limitations of my study (Patton, 2002).

An intensive study of the role of the Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC) and the families she serves provided a deeper understanding of the role of the PFLC. Stakeholders were directly involved in this research. Salient points and findings are
represented in Chapter 4 and informed the design of the action plan which I discuss in
detail in Chapter 5 Discussion and Implication.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The rigor of the South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards (SC-CCRS) should be a reality for the students of South Carolina. Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, students were “retained in the third grade if the student fails to demonstrate reading proficiency at the end of third grade as indicated by scoring at the lowest achievement level on the state summative reading assessment SC READY” (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019, p.1). Public preschool programs designed to meet students where they are socially and academically can serve to bridge the transition to school and assist them on the rigorous path of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2015). Families of our students are a major influence on their achievement in school (Barnum, 2016; Hanushek 2016; Lareau, 2000, 2011).

Among other benefits as one real way to mediate retention rates in third grade, the purpose of this study was to understand how to improve the services of a Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC) and the Drop-In and Play program at a Title I public elementary school in South Carolina. Using an action research design (Mills, 2011), I examined the ways the PFLC program might more effectively impact preschool children and their transition to the K4 program at this Title I public elementary school. As
I addressed in Chapters 1, 2, & 3 my perspective as an educator is viewed through the lens of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007). Youngstown Elementary School is situated in a small school district in a southern state. Each of the six elementary schools in this district provides services to their preschool children and parents through a Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC). The two Title I Schools in this district employ full-time PFLC’s while one PFLC serves the other four elementary schools.

Sarah Caldwell, (PFLC), holds a Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education. She has served within this small upstate school district for thirty-nine years. Twenty-two years of her service have been as PFLC at Youngstown Elementary School. Prior to becoming PFLC, she was employed with the first full-day kindergarten program at another elementary school in the district. When Sarah came to Youngstown Elementary twenty-five years ago, she worked in the media center.

The national Parents as Teachers (PAT) program was built upon the belief that “parents are in the best position to influence their child’s readiness to learn.” The primary goal of the PFLC program is to help parents see themselves as their child’s first and most important teacher (Parents as Teachers, 2011). Secondly, the PFLC works to increase parental involvement by strengthening literacy in the home, strategy 7 of the Title I Schoolwide Project. Increased parent efficacy is a result of accomplishing this strategy. The successful transition of preschool students to elementary school is the fulfillment of strategy 8 of the Title I reform strategies. The reform strategies for a Title I Schoolwide Program were listed in Chapter 2.

The data collection period for this study spanned from March 2017 through September 2018. I interviewed a total of eleven parents served by the PFLC individually.
or during the focus group. Seven children served by the PFLC transitioned to K4 in September 2018. The parents of five of these children participated in the individual interview or focus group. The term parent is used although the caregiver of the child may be another family member or friend. Interviews were conducted with the PFLC and the two K4 teachers. Additionally, I interviewed the PFLC and two K4 teachers and analyzed the PFLC lesson plans and anecdotal records (please see Table 3.1).

A discussion of some salient points (Saldaña, 2013) will precede the findings relevant to this study’s research questions:

1. How do stakeholders characterize the role of the PFLC?
2. How do stakeholders describe the effectiveness and influence of the PFLC?
3. What do stakeholders identify as areas in need of improvement and the challenges in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program?
4. What do stakeholders identify as successes in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program?

Saldaña (2013) defines a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p.3). The salient points that are included (and followed by 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 on thematic analysis) were substantial and informative to my project but did not reflect the saturation needed to become a theme. They are included here for poignancy and context before my discussion of themes.

**4.2 Salient Points**

I coded and analyzed five salient points in the data. These were important contributions to my understandings, but I did not develop themes from them because the
points were not saturated across the data set. Themes are represented in sections 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6.

4.2.1 Learning About the Program

Most parents found out about the Parent Family Literacy Program when they registered an older child for school. During the individual interviews, Cindy Allen, Jessica Long, and Harriet Jones shared how they learned about the program.

Cindy: “When I registered Edward for K4, because he fell behind because of this birthday. He was five when he started K4. We’ve been working with Ms. Caldwell since 2008. It started with Sally [oldest daughter].”

Jessica: “We took Adam to test for K4. Ms. Caldwell was in the hallway saying ‘hi, how are you? How’s the little one?’ and she told me about the program.”

Harriet: “I was signing my 5 year old up for K4 at the elementary school. She [Ms. Caldwell] proceeded to inform me of some information about the program and later she told me she’d tell me more information.”

During the focus group, Walter Raines and Jennifer Ayola shared how they found out about the program when they registered a child for school. In reviewing the PFLC’s enrollment forms, Jeanette Hayes, Cassie Edwards, and Barb Cash noted they too found out about the PFLC program when registering an older child for the K4 program.

Walter: “I think it was when we signed up the oldest one for school. They told us about the program to where they come for home visits, if you have any other children in the house.”

Jennifer: “You [principal] told me one of the times I came to register the [older] children. You said, you know we have this program. So that’s how I found out about it.”
During the focus group, Amanda Cesar and Anna Bravo shared how it was through word of mouth that they found out about the program.

Amanda’s oldest child, Jorge, attended Youngstown Elementary, and Michelle Brown, Teacher Assistant, worked with Jorge. Michelle recounted, “I told Jorge about the program. He told his mother and she called the school, and we talked about the program.”

Anna learned of the program when she was at a relative’s house.

I found out about the program when I went to Jennifer’s [my sister-in-law] house to take care of Jonathan while she [Jennifer] was taking Brandon [older son] to school. And there I saw the teacher and there I asked [about the program].

Noting this process of communication was important because the ways middle class parents in contrast to working class families communicate with/about school is very different. Middle class parents enlarge their social network to include parents of their children’s classmates, while working class families socialize more with family members and fail to receive school-related information (Lareau, 2000). Poor children of working class parents begin their school career already at a disadvantage; Gaynor (2015) found a “27% gap in school readiness between children of poor and moderate-or high-income families” (p. 31).

The quality of children’s preschool experiences vary greatly and impact their academic growth. For instance, children living in poverty have 50% fewer words spoken to them than children of working class parents; approximately 33% fewer words spoken to them than children of professionals (Downey, von Hippel, & Broh, B., 2004). During K4 registration, this data is collected through in person recruitment and assessment of the child with the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning, also known as a
DIAL (Pearson, 2016). Both data collection methods are necessary during the registration process.

**4.2.2 The Waiting List—An Ongoing Need for Service**

When the PFLC program began at Youngstown Elementary over twenty years ago, students were identified by eligibility criteria similar to what the state department of education used for the full-day K4 program. The priority was students identified as “at risk”—see Chapter 2 for discussion of at risk. For the past ten years, the PFLC program has been offered to any preschool child residing in the school’s attendance area. This results in a waiting list for the program.

The recommended student caseload for the PFLC is fifteen students. During the 2017-2018 school year, the PFLC served 19 families—21 children. There is a waiting list of students every year. When students served by the PFLC transition to the K4 program or move outside our school’s attendance area, families on the waiting list are contacted. The PFLC offers the parents services through the program.

**4.2.3 Tougher Curriculum Earlier, Technology, and Easier Grading System**

Navigating the educational system can be challenging for all parents. In describing how social class influences parent involvement in school, Lareau (2000) describes the relationship that working class families have with the school as “characterized by separation” (p. 8). She argues working parents “limited educational competence” (p.109) serves to decrease their confidence to work with their children and with the school itself. During the individual interviews and focus group, parents were asked, “If you have older children, how do you think their experience in school has changed over the years?”
Cindy: “Yes, drastically, grading is crazy. You can get a 60 and pass [ten point scale]. It is more challenging.”

Jessica: “First grade—I remember when I was in school that’s when we learned to read.”

Johnny Jones: “I know with us it’s…we wouldn’t do multiplication the same as they are now, none of that stuff.”

Barb: “Katy [older child] told me when she was in first grade, she started taking German.”

Parents stated the change in grading practices, increase in rigor through instructional content, and different instructional strategies. Two parents also noted the technology in school is very big change.

Amanda shared it was the “Technology…the technology…the changes in technology now in schools, and then going home [taking laptops home]. It’s a challenge for us.”

Jennifer: “With the older ones [children], it’s that technology thing…that’s changed.”

Youngstown Elementary is situated in a school district with a one to one initiative (electronic devices) for students in grades 3-8. Students take home their laptops as long as the technology fee is paid. The technology fee is $40 for the first child and the fee is reduced for each additional child.

During the focus group, Johnny wondered about the appropriateness of technology with his preschool children and asked, “So when does she start at home on
The ways school has changed in only six years, since Cindy’s ninth grade son was in elementary school, could increase feelings of uncertainty and further distance parents from engaging in school events and working with their children outside of school. Lareau (2000) asserted social class can give “children a home advantage” (p.176). The specific changes within school noted above have increased tension within parents.

4.2.4 Noting a Difference: Parent and Family Enthusiasm for the Program

Waanders, Mendez, and Downey (2007) conducted a study of 154 parents from two Head Start programs and the home visitation program. Benefits included, increased teacher insight into the home environment of their students which enabled them to better meet their student’s individual needs; increased student achievement and parent efficacy. Waanders, Mendez, Downey (2007) is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

When parents were asked of their initial response to the PFLC program, most responses were positive.

Anna thought, “That it would be useful for my children to absorb, speak, and learn stuff; and I won’t be afraid.” During the member checking process, Anna explained, “I did not want him to be behind in his learning. I do not want him to be so far behind like [his older brother] was.”

Barb: “I love it. We look forward to it. That’s all he talks about—when’s my teacher coming? When am I going to Drop In and Play?”

Walter: “I thought it was a good idea.”

Jennifer: “She felt good [about the program].”
The most enthusiastic responses to the PFLC program came from two mothers with some college experience.

Jessica has three children. She found out about the program when she registered her oldest child, Adam, for K4. Her two youngest sons were served by the PFLC program. She shared,

Yeah, I think it’s wonderful. And I wish it would have happened much sooner for Adam. I thought it would be beneficial. At the time, Adam had just overcome a speech delay. Garrett was just a little tot, so I didn’t know if he was gonna have any issues with keeping up.

Harriet has five children and had been a single parent for five years. She worked a third shift job at a foreign automobile manufacturing plant and described herself as “trying to do the best she can.” When she first heard of the PFLC program, she was very positive about the program. She noted in particular “a difference” among her children who participated in the program and her eldest child who did not.

Well, I think it was pretty cool, it was like, my first (response) was like there will be something to get him school ready because my older child didn’t get any school until, it was like first day in K5, and I can tell a difference, so I decided…I was excited about him, especially with him being so young. I didn’t know that there was a program for little kids like him.

Harriet’s prior experience with her older children increased her awareness of her youngest child’s learning needs. “My ten-year-old didn’t go to school until he was like kindergarten and when he did he was always falling back in the third grade because of the reading thing, but if earlier they can still educate the kids better.”
I believe Jennifer and Harriet exhibited what Lareau (2011) called Concerted Cultivation through their endeavor to access this early childhood program for their children.

### 4.2.5 Earning Trust

Initially, several parents, Cindy Allen, Johnny Johns, and Amanda Caesar, expressed uncertainty about participation in the PFLC program. Cindy and Johnny presented concerns about the home visit and seemed to fear being judged. A trusting relationship developed over time between each of these parents and the PFLC (Blad, 2017; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009).

Cindy described her first impression of the PFLC and program,

I was kind of skittish because people come out to the home. I thought maybe they’d be looking at your home and all that kind of stuff. I was kind of skittish at first, but then Ms. Caldwell’s like a third mama to me.

During the first home visit with the PFLC to Cindy’s house, I noticed a camera mounted near the front door. As we entered the living room, a small television monitor was set on a table in the living room. During the pilot study, Cindy told me about the camera at the front door. She explained this was a security measure so she would know who was at the door before opening it. Cindy disclosed to me her family had been investigated by the Department of Social Services (DSS) when she was a child. There was a time during her childhood when she and her sister were in foster homes (Field notes, April 13, 2017).

The PFLC began serving Cindy’s family in 2008--the longest served family. In September 2018, Cindy gave birth to her sixth child. He is the 5th child served from
Cindy’s family. Ms. Caldwell has faithfully celebrated the birthdays of Cindy’s youngest children--by visiting the hospital when they were born.

Sarah Caldwell, the PFLC, takes time to catch up with Cindy on family member’s health. During home visit on April 13, 2017, Sarah asked Cindy about Karen, “Any medical problems or allergies? Cindy responded, “Just allergies.” Sarah followed up with, “Any concerns at all. Okay, how’s the issue with the tummy?” Cindy responded that Karen was doing well, “It's normal. No more diarrhea and I've been giving her whole milk too.” During the May 18, 2017 interview, Bobby, Cindy’s husband is present. Bobby was injured while working on his car and is out of work. Sarah asked Bobby and Cindy how the school might help them (Field notes, May 18, 2017). These are two examples of why I believe Cindy considers Sarah a “third mama”

Another parent, Johnny, questioned the value of the program initially:

I wasn’t sure if it was going to be a waste of time or not. I ain’t going to lie to you. Especially the kids, are they going to report anything if it’s a little dirty or whatever, but she has been great with them.

Later during the focus group, Johnny explained further,

The reason I had said that is, one of the [DSS case workers] she was doing it. She reported us for – when they [DSS investigator] walked in, she was like, I’ve got to call my boss; because I don’t see anything that’s on this report. So [unintelligible] but then they have to come back out again. It’s just a pain.

Per enrollment paper with the PFLC, Johnny’s three children were placed with his
family through DSS. The placement of the children necessitated intermittent visits by a DSS caseworker. I believe his initial response to the PFLC program and the home visits was influenced by Johnny’s prior experiences with DSS.

One parent, Amanda, interpreted the program’s mission as telling parents, “You don’t know how to raise your child.” This was Amanda’s initial response to the program, and it is important to note that parents may believe the PFLC program staff view them through the deficit perspective. Seven years ago, when Amanda was enrolling her oldest child in school, her preschool daughter was with her, and during the registration process, Amanda was told of the PFLC program by the Teacher Assistant, Michelle Brown, who also served as translator. Amanda felt as though she failed her children in some way, “I must be doing something wrong. Like, maybe I don’t know what I’m doing. That’s honest. You come in to educate me-my child.” Amanda experienced the offer to participate in the program as a presumptive judgment about lack in her family.

During the interview with Amanda, Michelle, the Teacher Assistant, interjected, “[Amanda] didn’t realize how much is involved in working with your child. They look at not being the first teacher. That’s one of the things I always tell them. You are the first teacher.” Michelle has served at Youngstown for over twenty years. She understands the increased rigor and accountability schools face are a construct of the dominant educational establishment (Lewitt & Baker, 1995). I believe this is why Michelle made the comment given the demands of the white middle class culture in U.S. public schools, expectations set by white, middle class performance (McIntosh, 1988).

Several years have passed since the initial services provided to Amanda’s middle child who is now in third grade. Amanda reports her daughter, is “striving.” The youngest
child from this family has now been served by the PFLC for several years and transitioned to K4 in September 2018.

The Hispanic families served by the PFLC are also served by Michelle, Teacher Assistant. Through the years, positive relationships have developed between Michelle and the families with whom she works (Blad, 2017; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009). Because she is trusted by the families she serves, they trust her. Eventually, she acts as broker to vouch for the PFLC program.

Cindy, Johnny, and Amanda may have been hesitant about the PFLC services; however they did consent to have their children served by the PFLC. I believe their perspective of the program changed over time.

In the second part of this chapter, I represent analyses connected to each research questions. Four themes are represented: Section 4.3 Resource, Section 4.4 Connections, Section 4.5 On the Right Track, and Section 4.6 Investing in Families.

4.3 Research Question 1: How do stakeholders characterize the role of the PFLC?

Resource

Stakeholders described the role of the PFLC as a resource. While some parents cited the literal resources—books, games, and activities—Sarah provided them to use with their children, other parents described the PFLC’s role as a resource in terms of their parenting skills. Parents also described the PFLC in terms of a resource for their child.

a. Resource for Parents

Four parents, Cindy, Harriet, Cassie, and Jennifer described how the PFLC supported them in their parenting. Cindy shared, “She [Sarah] showed me things I can do differently to make it easier.”
Harriet explained,

She [Sarah] is real straightforward and just really is telling me the things I need to know to be like a parent the educator. She gives you lots of different tools, little games, just lots of different things. Not only looks like the education stuff, but different milestones like use using the bathroom.

Cassie stated, “She brings some of the little activities that give me an idea of the—to do the same thing.”

Jennifer explained, “They [PFLC and Teacher Assistant/Translator] showed me what to do, even teach me about time out” during her involvement with the program.

K4 teacher, Rachel Lee, also described the PFLC role as it related to parenting.

I think it’s an awesome role. I thought it was from the beginning. There are a lot of parents out there that are just—I guess for a lack of a better word, ignorant to what they can do for their child but they love their children and they want to do the best for them. I think that’s where [Sarah] has stepped in—help the parent teach the child. It’s a wonderful program.

Rachel’s response privileges the approach of Concerted Cultivation in parenting (Lareau, 2000, 2011). I believe Rachel’s experience as a public school teacher informs her opinion. Rachel understands the rigor of the instructional expectations and realizes the importance of early learning prior to a child entering school.

b. Resource for Parents and their Children

Three parents, Anna, Jessica, and Amanda, described how Sarah supported them through both their parenting and working directly with their children:
Anna described the home visit and explained the role of the PFLC, “You (Michelle, Teacher Assistant) tell me what the practices are for the day with him, such as adding, drawing, to differentiate colors. Everything’s fine, and she (Sarah) starts to work with Adam.” Ana also described how the PFLC works with her, “She tells me that I have to use colors, books, or pages which can help him to say longer words, to work with Adam.”

Jessica explained, “Oh, boy, I’m always happy to see her. I like her style of teaching and things like that cause it’s similar to the way I am with parenting and things like that.” Jessica described how Sarah told her, “You need to do this instead of just—they practice but I like how she’s direct and keeps them focused when she’s working with them.”

While Amanda described her initial feeling as, “I thought I must be doing something wrong but I was happy to learn. Like maybe I don’t know what I’m doing. That’s honest. You came in to educate me—my child.”

Sarah, the PFLC, described the mission of the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program and the focus on empowering parents:

Parents as Teachers (PAT) was started to ensure all children would be able to start school with the same chance of successful learning. Building on the concept that parents are in the best position to influence their child’s readiness to learn. By providing information about child development in the family’s home, it could make a difference in their school success. We talk about what they can reasonably expect their child to do. They will say, “They can’t say their A, B, C’s and I tell them they shouldn’t. We talk about the role of the parent—importance of
providing interests, play, and promoting curiosity. We want the child to be independent. Parents want to help their child and the oldest children often do it [things] for them.

I believe Sarah views a part of her role as the primary source of education Information for her parents at the home visits and during the Drop In and Play (Lareau, 2000) and views her role through perspective of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007, 2013). While she does not use the term, I have observed how her practices align to this perspective.

c. Resource for the Children

Three parents Barb, Walter, and Johnny describe the PFLC a resource for their children. Barb and Walter used the term “teacher”; while Johnny’s description is broader.

Barb stated, “I love it. He does real good when she comes to the house. We look forward to it. That’s all he talks about—‘when’s my teacher coming? When am I going to Drop In and Play?’”

Walter described what he told his neighbors, “the parents were kind of shocked about it. They were like, who’s coming? ‘It’s like a teacher.’”

Johnny shared in general terms, “She’s been great with them. They love her. It’s a great program and they [others] need to check into it.”

Valerie Starnes, K4 teacher, shared her personal connection to the role and commented on the PFLC’s role directly on children:

She plays an important role. My appreciation for the role has grown every year for sure. I was actually in that role working with families in another district. I did that for three years and got certified in Parents as Teachers (PAT). But here, it’s
been nine years, but I’ve got a totally different perspective because the age group that I worked with at the time from two years to school entry is different. She does birth and—they could possibly have her as the first teacher or the second teacher if the parents had already gotten involved in teaching.

Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) describe seven behaviors of parenting (see Chapter 2 for detailed discussion). One behavior is providing materials, such as books, to their children. In 2012, the American Educational Research Associates, conducted a repeat study from 1988. The 2012 study found access to books for working class families had increased. While the increase in print material for the children in these homes was encouraging, it could not compare with the materials and resources found in the middle-income homes (Wong, 2016). Differences continue to exist between parenting behaviors based on income (Reardon, 2013). At each home visit, the PFLC brought materials for the lesson with the child. Sarah brought materials and little activities for the parents to use with their children in between the home visits and showed them how to use the materials. After modeling for the parents, the materials and tools were left with the parent to use with their child.

4.4 Research Question 2: How do stakeholders describe the effectiveness and influence of the PFLC?

Connections

Ten of the eleven parents responded to questions about the effectiveness and the influence of the PFLC. As of September 6, 2019 there has been no response from the follow up contact with the eleventh parent through the member checking process.
a. *Connection for the Children*

Four parents described their children’s connection with Sarah and their response to the home visits. Harriet and Johnny described the development of this connection over time.

Harriet described her child’s relationship with the PFLC:

Every week, you know every time she came he really got more comfortable. It was like, you see, he was really comfortable. What he’s noticed, that’s she’s family. He is really using the word, the more he sees her, he feels like more comfortable. When he comes to school, he won’t feel odd or alone because he has somebody and he knows he has a familiar face, that’s important for sure.

Johnny shared how his girls responded to the PFLC and program:

They love it. They love Ms. C and everything. Holly didn’t run from her but she didn’t do a thing for her for the first couple of weeks [of home visits]. For some reason, they [the children] don’t listen to us, but they listen to her and they watch her—colors and shapes.

Anna commented, “He [Adam] likes her. He would get excited when he knew she was coming. He liked what she brought in her bag [of activities]. He sits longer and pays attention.”

Jeanette noted, “Zaidyn opened the door for her [at home visits], he’s so excited.”

Two parents describe their child’s connection with the PFLC program and their learning.
Jennifer shared, “Learning—the biggest thing I notice is the difference between the older girls and my son. He’s doing so well in school that the teacher brags on him. He works well with others and shares well.”

Barb recognized, “He’s learning. He’s learning shapes and colors and numbers. You can tell him to show me ___ and he’ll point to the object on the wall and tell you what it is.”

A positive relationship between students and their teachers is critical to creating the risk-free environment (Blad, 2017; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Prince & Howard, 2002). When the threat of failure is diminished, they feel more confident to take risks in their learning (Marzano, 2003; Pierce, 1994).

b. Connection for the Children and their Parents

Four parents articulated the benefits of the PFLC program for their children and themselves.

Cindy described her children’s response to the PFLC, “They love Ms. C., and they’ve really developed because of her. She (Karen) is always able to learn.” Cindy explained why the children responded so positively to the PFLC,

Because they see how much I trust her. They see that we get along and we’ll laugh. We talk while they play and so they see us interact, and yeah, I think that’s why they got so attached to her.”

Cindy saw the benefit of both features of the PFLC program but perceives the home visits as most beneficial—“I think Drop In is wonderful, but I don’t think it’s as beneficial for me being able to—because I need that one on one but then they need that…the kids need interaction.”
Jessica explained how important receiving ideas at Drop In helped her at home and explained her sons’ feelings toward Sarah, the PFLC, “They love her. They really do, and I think it’s positive.” She sees the instructional benefit for her children and herself:

I think that they are keeping up with where they need to be. Drop In—getting the kids exposed to other kids since they aren’t in daycare now. I think it’s good so when they start school, it’s not a shock. At Drop In, she has the center set up and it kind gives you ideas, I can do this. I’m home. There are activities and projects, things I might not think about doing fun activities. So I think that aspect of it is very good.

Amanda shared her observation of the change she saw in her child during the home visits—both socially and instructionally, “He used to run into the bedroom and lock the door. He’s made so much progress because he’s speaking mostly English, and he knows his colors, shapes. His motor skills are great!” Amanda reflected on the difference in her awareness as a parent from their first child, “With [our first child] we didn’t do anything, we just let him play all day. We did not know how important it was to teach colors and numbers because I did not grow up that way.”

Cassie observed how her daughter responded to the PFLC during the home visit, “She can say ‘no, don’t do that’ they sit right down and behave. And when I tell her, it’s like ‘no, I want to…!’” Cassie realized how she and her husband could help their daughter, “We can help her become more social and more open. She’s willing to learn and then the separation anxiety got better (during the Drop In and Play).”

Sarah, PFLC, explained her focus and where she sees the benefit of the PFLC program:
Parents don’t realize they are their child’s first and most important teacher. PAT helps to provide the foundation for success in school and life. The main goal of the program is to provide parent information, support, and encouragement to their child.

Sarah worked with parents to be intentional while observing their child. “I ask for observations. ‘Did you see your child use______?’” She explained, “making the connections between the observations and conversations we have are important to building the capacity of the parent in their role as first teacher.” Parents and their children benefited from Sarah’s focus in this area.

c. Teachers see a connection for the Parents

Both K4 teachers noted the connection Sarah makes with the parents. Rachel, a thirty-four year teaching veteran, observed,

She has a great rapport with the parents and can tell them things because she has developed this rapport with them. They understand how much she cares about the children and what she’s done for them. So they take her advice.

Valerie, in her thirtieth year of teaching, shared,

[Sarah is] such an influence on parents—you still have to convince people to talk to the children while they’re still in your womb. If you think about when they’re babies, all you’re doing is feed them, burp them, and put them back to bed.

Brooks-Gunn and Markham (2005) found home/center-based programs with a parenting component had the largest effect on nurturance with some effect on discipline. Benefits of home-based parenting programs include the increased insight of teachers into the home environment of their students. Waanders and Mendez (2007) found the
achievement gap was lessened through the positive impact on the home environment and parent efficacy increased. Both K4 teachers observed the overwhelming support provided by the PFLC to parents and children. Sarah’s (PFLC) strong relationship with parents was a positive influence on the connections which existed between them.

4.5 Research Question 3: What do stakeholders identify as areas of need of improvement and the challenges in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program?

On the Right Track

Stakeholders’ responses range from--no suggestion provided (from parents-Cassie, Walter, Jennifer, Johnny, Ana, and Jeanette); to maintain and protect the positions/program (Rachel, K4 teacher); to expectations exceeded (Jessica, parent); to more opportunities for visits and group sessions (Cindy, Harriet, and Amanda, parents); to wishing the program was in a neighboring county (Barb, parent). Specific suggestions were shared by Valerie, K4 teacher, and Sarah, PFLC.

Cassie, Walter, Jennifer, and Johnny offered no suggestions during the focus group. (As of September 6, 2019 there was no response from follow up during member checking process.) Ana responded, “I find it good enough right now. I don’t know.” Jeanette stated, “No, you all are doing good. [You] think of everything.”

Rachel, K4 teacher, expressed her support for continuing the program and the full-time PFLC.

I know in some schools they cut back and a parent educator might have to do two schools. I don’t think that’s a great idea. I know they have to think about funding and all kinds of things but—especially with a school like ours (Title I).
Jessica shared her opinion, “They exceeded my expectations. I was not expecting her to come and work with them every other week. I think it’s a wonderful program.” Barb’s wish was the program was available in the neighboring county, “I wish you had this program in Cherrydale (neighboring county school district) because my godson went to school there. He didn’t get to go to K4. He had to start K5.”

Three parents, Cindy, Harriet, and Amanda expressed the desire for “more” sessions. Cindy stated, “She covered everything; maybe more sessions.” Her husband, Bobby, interjected, “I mean, just keep it going.” Harriet responded, “Programs-more—so the kids come a little more and get a little more.” Amanda commented specifically about the Drop In and Play, “We would love to have it more than once a month. I know it’s hard money wise.”

In contrast, two staff members, Valerie, K4 teacher, and Sarah, PFLC, have specific suggestions for refining the program.

Valerie, K4, focused on the early engagement of children and parents. What would help according to Valerie would be, “getting in contact with parents who are in our district who are pregnant and don’t have children in school and connected already. So it’s kind of hard.”

Sarah, PFLC, had several suggestions for program improvement. She responded, “[There’s] always room for improvement. Almost doing a parent report card—you have to help them recognize their [parent’s] strengths. I want to focus on good and positive. Parents are excited and I don’t want to discourage them.” Sarah spoke specifically about the home visits and Drop In:
I wish I could see them weekly—rather than every other week [home visits]. A lot want more than once a month [Drop In]. I think, I would love parents to have time and a time for kids separate. So they aren’t like, ‘oh, we didn’t get to see that [activity]—we were in the meeting.’ And possibly transportation—like for Adam’s mother.

The separate time for parents during the group session would provide an opportunity for monthly speakers sharing school-related information. This would be time to enlarge the social circle of our families (Lareau, 2000, 2011).

4.6 Research Question 4: What do stakeholders identify as successes in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program?

Investing in Families

a. Home Visits and Drop In and Play

Six of the parents noted the home visits and group sessions as the success of the PFLC program. Several parents found the one to one of the home visit the most important.

Cassie, “Well, the home visit is so helpful, but the children coming to school helps them make the adjustment.”

Jennifer found, “It’s more beneficial with the home visits because you’re getting that individualized help. But if you ask Jonathan and he likes the Drop In and Play because he isn’t a morning person.”

Barb shared, “He does good on both. Home visits are good because it’s just me and him at home. He doesn’t get to interact with other children until his sister comes home. He’s always excited to come to Drop In—‘When are we going to get to go?’ It
helps him to be with other kids.” Barb explained she would tell a neighbor about the program and the benefits, “Enroll your child, because it’s going to help in the long run when they go to school.”

Walter stated his daughter’s preference for the Drop In, “The youngest one, she talks more about coming in. I think that is to come to ‘big school’. It helps her interact more with people or children outside [home].”

During the focus group, Johnny stated the “home visit and one on one time was the most beneficial part of the program” for him. Jeanette concurred with “one on one” as being the most important for her.

b. **An Early Start for Children and Building Parent Capacity**

Five of the parents noted the success of the PFLC program is the early start. Five of these parents also noted the impact of the program on themselves as parents.

Cindy stated, “She starts with them early. [The program] made me more aware—mom is not with her all the time.”

Anna shared the strength of the program, “Lots of good ideas and having someone to translate.” She described the impact on her son,

He is learning things I did not think to teach him. When you teach my son, I learn some words I did not know and learn. I do not have to drive to school. I like that I understand enough English to help him. She brings a book and activities.

Jessica stated she really valued, “How she [PFLC] breaks it down—a teaching so I can repeat what she does. Definitely the hands on—whether it’s painting, stringing beads. And Levi enjoyed the stories.”
Harriet commented, “It’s an awesome program. It really is, it really give the kids, it give them a chance.” Harriet noted the importance of this early childhood program, My ten year old didn’t go to school until he was like kindergarten and when he did he was always falling back in the third grade because of the reading things but if earlier they can still educate the kids better.” Amanda stated, “Ms. C comes prepared with things for the children to learn from and she leaves so we can keep working.” The most memorable experience for the family was when their daughter was served by the PFLC, “it consisted of a few visits. It was like an awakening of, oh my gosh, I didn’t know that part of doing daily things with them is also a learning activity and how much young children can learn on a daily basis.” Amanda urged a neighbor to “Look into the parent educator program, because you may not always know and there are so many advantages offered.”

c. Relationship with the PFLC

Both K4 teachers identified the success of the PFLC program as the relationship and rapport developed with Sarah, the PFLC.

Rachel, K4 teacher, found the influence of the PFLC the true success of the program.

I think she’s awesome. She has a great rapport with parents. Parents that are a little more nervous about the school setting—she helps them transition so well. I think she’s done a great job with them. She also has children prepared for K4 and more relaxed about coming to K4.

Valerie, K4 teacher, identified the success of the program as the PFLC’s influence on parents and children.
It’s just the influence on parents and children because the ones who don’t know that they need help, or the ones that don’t know. You may talk, you may sing, but you don’t know looking at the stages and ages of development because she [PFLC] did the assessment with them. And they [parents] start to make that connection and they [children] talk. Yeah, she’s supposed to be talking but—she didn’t have so many words and then she came and worked with Ms. C and then I read books. They really get excited because they now know. I guess understand what [the child] should be doing at that time.

The PFLC, Sarah, viewed her rapport and relationship with the parents as the success of the program. She explains, “I really connect to them—make them feel comfortable, meet them on their own level. My personality changes from home to home in order to meet them where they are.” During the member checking process, Sarah explained a little more, “You can’t use education jargon. I choose vocabulary easily understood. Over time, parents will confide in me. ‘I can’t read English’ or ‘I can’t read real well.’”

The most memorable experience Sarah shared is about a relationship with a family that developed over time.

One family was court ordered to work with me through DSS. The mom and grandparents had custody of the child. The grandparents were great to work with, but the mom was difficult because of the drug problem. The mom decided I was coming for her daughter and was going to work with her no matter what she said and did to me. After DSS closed the case, mom decided she wanted me to
continue to come. I was with the family from the time the child was two weeks old until she started K4.

Sarah had difficulty identifying the most valuable component of the program. “I can’t—both (home visits and the Drop In and Play) are so important. Honestly, maybe home visits…teaching—always teaching.”

Parent efficacy, which is a key factor in determining parent involvement, is also positively affected by the home visits (Waandes & Mendez, 2007). A trusting relationship can develop between the parent and teacher in the home environment, and parent efficacy increases (Blad, 2017; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009).

My understanding of the PFLC and the PFLC program crystalized during this research process. The themes represented in sections 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 informed the design of the Action Research Plan (please see Table 5.1). While saturation across the data set did not occur with the five salient points (4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.2.4, and 4.2.5), this information deepened my understanding of the nuances of the program and the complexity of issues represented through the voices of parents. The importance of building a trusting relationship with parents is even more important than I originally thought. It is important that parents view the school as a primary source of information and as being approachable.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I describe the action research plan, offer the impact of this study on stakeholders, and consider implications of this research. The purpose of this study was to understand how to improve the services of a Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC) and the Drop-In and Play program at a Title I public elementary school in South Carolina. Three stakeholder groups composed of parents, K4 teachers, and the PFLC, were involved throughout this research. During the data collection period, from March 2017 until September 2018, I attended two home visits each with five families. Individual interviews were conducted with four of the families. Attempts to interview the fifth family were unsuccessful. During the spring semester 2018, a focus group was conducted, and seven parents participated in this group. A total of eleven parents served by the PFLC were interviewed individually or during the focus group. Interviews were conducted with the PFLC and the two K4 teachers.

In Chapter 4, salient points and themes are discussed in detail. I coded and analyzed five salient points in the data.

1. Learning About The Program (p.86)
2. The Waiting List—An Ongoing Need (p.88)
3. Tougher Curriculum Earlier, Technology, and Easier Grading System (p.88)
4. Noting a Difference: Parent and Enthusiasm for the Program (p.90)
5. Earning Trust (p.92)
Findings of the four research questions included:

Research Question 1: How do stakeholders characterize the role of the PFLC? Resource (p. 95)

Research Question 2: How do stakeholders describe the effectiveness and influence of PFLC? Connections (p. 99)

Research Question 3: What do stakeholders identify as areas of need of improvement and the challenges in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program? On the Right Track (p. 104)

Research Question 4: What do stakeholders identify as successes in the PFLC position and Home Visit/Drop In Program? Investing in Families (p. 106)

In the next section, I specify how understanding the impact on stakeholders (section 5.2) informed the Action Plan and relate to future discussion (section 5.4).

5.1 The Action Plan

I described the four elements represented in Mills’ Dialectic Action Research Spiral (2011) in Chapter 3. The first three elements are: identify an area of focus, collect data, and analyze and interpret data. The fourth element of Mills’ model of action research is develop a plan of action based on what you have learned (please see Table 5.1). Mills (2011) simply asks, “Based on what I have learned from my research, what should I do now?” (p. 152.)

During the interviews with K4 teachers and parents, the importance of continuing the PFLC program was emphasized numerous times. The K4 teachers knew from first-hand experience how reduction in funding affected the four non-Title I elementary schools. Beginning in 2016, one PFLC served four non-Title I schools, and home visits
were eliminated from their program. Each school received one day of service through a group session, Drop In and Play. Full-time PFLCs remained only at the two Title I elementary schools. The PFLC positions were funded through each school’s Title I program. K4 teachers recommended protecting funding for the PFLC program at our school.

Table 5.1 Action Research Plan (Stringer, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2018-2019</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Person(s)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Increase programming Opportunities- Adding a second Drop In II during the month</td>
<td>Check school’s schedule— availability of room Coordinate activities</td>
<td>Principal PFLC PTO Volunteer Coordinator</td>
<td>Instr. materials for activities; Give Aways (Books, materials); Snack</td>
<td>Title I Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Establish monthly speaker for parents during Drop In</td>
<td>Brainstorm list of speakers Check availability of a room for parents; relocate special area class during the duration</td>
<td>Principal PFLC PTO Volunteer Coordinator School’s Leadership Team- Admin Guidance</td>
<td>Materials speakers might provide; Give Aways-Books</td>
<td>Title I Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2019-2020</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Person(s)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Continue second Drop In-renamed “Little Learners II”</td>
<td>Schedule event/rooms Coordinate activities</td>
<td>Principal PFLC PTO Volunteer Coordinator</td>
<td>Instr. materials for activities; Give Aways (Books, materials); Snack</td>
<td>Title I Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Solicit suggestions from parents for speaker at Drop In “Little Learners I”</td>
<td>Contact requested speakers</td>
<td>PFLC PTO Volunteer Coordinator Principal</td>
<td>Materials speakers might provide</td>
<td>Title I Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents realized the PFLC program was unique to our school district. Before the recession of 2008, each elementary school in our district offered some type of service through the PFLC program. Cindy (parent) and her husband recounted why they did not purchase a home when they discovered it was on the side of the street was in a neighboring district. “So, we didn’t want to move out of the district” (Interview, 5/18/17). Michelle, TA, explained the families she served did not want to move out of district, “They’re not the first family to tell me that they’re wanting to move, but they refuse to move from District _____. I have another family that’s saying the same thing” (Focus group, 2/9/18).

Recommendations from parents included protecting the PFLC program—“keeping it going”—and providing “more” programs. Home visits are conducted with each child served by the PFLC every two weeks. Sarah (PFLC) carried a larger caseload than the recommended fifteen families. Realistically, the PFLC’s schedule did not allow time for additional home visits. We looked closely at the group sessions, Drop In and Play, as the possible “more” parents wanted.

Early childhood education has always been a priority for our school. In a recent Quality Counts publication, Ujifusa (2018) reported limited programming for early learners is a factor of low-performing states. This article renewed our commitment to improving the PFLC program. As we considered the suggestions from our stakeholders, we invited our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) volunteer coordinator to join the planning discussion. Candy (PTO volunteer) is a phenomenal coordinator, and she serves on our school’s Title I Committee. She has faithfully attended every Drop In and Play for the past few years. Candy (PTO volunteer) coordinates a reading program called,
“Rocking and Reading”, with our K4 students. Volunteers read with one or two K4 students at a time.

During the planning session, Candy (PTO volunteer) readily volunteered to facilitate a second monthly group meeting, Drop In and Play II. At the first session of Drop In and Play II on 10/12/18, seven children and their parents attended. Funding provided through our Title I project supported this additional session which includes book giveaways and refreshments.

A significant discovery materialized the day of the focus group in February 2018—an aha moment. The preschoolers served through the PFLC program are seldom with children their age and seldom away from their parents. The morning of the focus group, the PFLC and parent volunteers interacted with the preschoolers while parents met with me. This provided time for the children to socialize with their peers and become accustomed to separating from their parents. The parents enjoyed this brief time during Drop In and Play II. They appreciated the opportunity to interact with other adults—something they do not often experience. Cindy (parent) described this interaction with other adults, “It’s just you, drop in, but it’s not like we have the opportunity to do this” (Interview, 5/18/17).

Beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, each month’s Drop In and Play hosted by the PFLC, included a thirty minute period specifically for parents. There are two facets of these sessions. First, children had the thirty minutes to play with their peers separate from their parents. The purpose of this program feature is to increase appropriate social interaction between the children and successful separation from parents.
During this thirty minute period, parents met in a nearby yet separate location for an informal discussion time with a school staff member. The staff member joined parents in a discussion of a variety of topics. Topics for discussion for the 2018-2019 school year were: the school nurse (wellness and tips for parents); school resource officer (personal safety); and literacy coach (literacy tips and reading behaviors of students); guidance counselor (support services available in school and within the community); parent volunteer coordinator (opportunities for involvement); speech-language pathologist (developmental sounds and tips for working with your child); assistant principal (attendance policy and procedures); and the principal (explaining the purpose and focus on the PFLC program, Title I programming, instructional standards, Read to Succeed legislation). Topics and speakers were subject to change based on parent interests. For example, my goal for this feature of the program is to enlarge the social circle of parents, to provide important information to parents directly from school staff (Lareau, 2000, 2011), and to increase trust between parents and school staff with whom they may be unfamiliar (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009). Introducing parents to school staff in an informal setting helps to present them as more approachable. These additional facets of the PFLC program broadened the interaction of the school and community with the family in keeping with Epstein’s (1995) Overlapping Spheres of Influence.

5.2 Impact on Stakeholders

5.2.1 Parents

Our parents entrusted their lived experiences to me during this process. Their suggestions, delineated in Chapter 4 and earlier in Chapter 5, informed the PFLC program for the 2018-2019 school year. My hope is parents understood their stories were
honored and valued. Initially, several parents were hesitant about their participation in the PFLC program. They shared their reservations with me during the interviews and focus group. Two parents disclosed significant life events from their past which brought context to their uncertainty about the program. Cindy (parent) revealed the involvement of Department of Social Services (DSS) with her family when she was younger. During a home visit, I observed a security monitor recording the front porch and door at Cindy’s home. The presence of the security monitor enriched my understanding of Cindy’s initial response to the program. During the focus group, Johnny (parent) articulated his concern about a possible DSS report if the house was “a little dirty or whatever”. He recounted a prior DSS visit that was determined to be unfounded. Bryk and Schneider (2003) describe how relational trust develops, “respectful exchanges are marked by genuinely listening to what each person has to say and by taking these views into account in subsequent actions” (p. 41). I believe parents disclosed these personal details about their lives because of our relationship, which developed over time. During our interactions, whether home visits, group sessions, interviews, I was intentional in listening to what people had to say. Through time, concerns parents may have had were eased when they actually saw how their suggestions shaped the PFLC program.

Sarah, the PFLC, acknowledged some parents initially thought she is with the Department of Social Services (DSS). It was only over time, parents began to trust Sarah. When the study’s initial findings were discussed with stakeholders in September 2018, a discussion about how trust develops occurred (Blad, 2017; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009). There are times trust takes longer to develop based on one’s previous life experiences. Parents were watchful to see if we were walking the talk—if we were for
real. I believe the trust of our parents was honored, and they determined we, the school, were trustworthy.

Parents learned the intent of the PFLC program was to provide their child with “the same chance of successful learning” of other children (Sarah, PFLC, interview 2/22/18). Rather than using the language about gaps or deficits, the program’s intent was communicated through the perspective of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007, 2013). Harriet (parent) conveyed her opinion of the program as it “really gives the kids a chance”. Through this research process, parents came to understand the importance of their role as their child’s first and most important teacher (PAT, 2011).

Through the home visits, parenting skills increased and parental efficacy was shaped. Bandura (1989) theorized people avoid situations when they doubt their capability. Unsuccessful experiences reinforce this doubt. As skills and abilities increase in specific situations, it is important for an individual to acknowledge their competencies —self-efficacy. Parents discussed how their parenting changed over time. Anna acknowledged the importance of being consistent, “I am learning to keep a routine”. Cindy described her parenting style now as “trying to do all the same” and be consistent with her children. During the focus group, Amanda shared how she began to provide more structure for her children through her involvement with the PFLC. With her first child, she was “letting him play all day”. Amanda voiced her enthusiasm that her second child was learning at home “doing daily things” and “realized how much she grew in the times she had the visits”. As parents worked with their children by providing more structure and read with them, they realized their children would reap a greater reward in the school system (Lareau, 2000).
Coleman and Karraker (1998) advised first emphasizing self-efficacy in parental involvement or intervention programs. Parenting self-efficacy “emerges as a powerful correlate of parenting behavior” (p. 49). Self-awareness is important to personal growth. Parents with a strong sense of efficacy are empowered in their role as parent. As parents, it is important to acknowledge what we do and do not know about parenting (Heyward, 2002). Most parents recognized how much they learned from their first child. As educators, many of us may have had strong opinions about parenting before we had children. After parenthood, many of us are humbled by the lessons.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) contend increasing parent involvement “should be grounded in the knowledge that parents’ beliefs about their roles in children’s schooling and their effectiveness in helping their children succeed are primary points of entry into increased involvement” (p.35). Parents expressed the ways they had learned. Cindy (parent) explained the PFLC “showed me things to make it easier” (Interview, 5/18/17). Jessica (parent) described how the PFLC “break them down—a teaching thing—so I can repeat what she does” (Interview, 6/25/17). Parents’ awareness of their own learning increased when they heard their own spoken words during the study.

5.2.2 Children

At the conclusion of the 2017-2018 school year, seven students graduated from the PFLC program and in the fall of 2018 transitioned to the K4 program at Youngstown Elementary School. In May 2019 nine students graduated from the PFLC program and transitioned to K4 in September 2019.
5.2.3 PFLC

When interviewed on 2/22/18, the PFLC expressed the importance of filtering her own values and thoughts during interactions with parents. “Be okay with their language, situations, filter (your thoughts and words)…you are there for the children.” Sarah explained the importance of “keeping your own thoughts and values to yourself.” She emphasized the importance of “avoiding education jargon and using words that are easily understood.” She also understood the importance of trust and how it develops over time.

At one point in time, Michelle (TA) was part time at our school. In addition to our school, she served another elementary school in our district. Our Hispanic families were not served by the PFLC during this period of time due to the lack of Michelle’s availability and the language barrier. Sarah, PFLC, was frustrated by being unable to serve all families. Sarah, PFLC, relies on Michelle, TA, to help family access the program.

As a school, we understand how critical Michelle’s (TA) role is for providing access to information and programming for our parents. For the past few years, we have paid for half of Michelle’s salary through Title I funds so she would be full time at our school. Sarah (PFLC) understood the importance of the TA’s role in serving our Hispanic families. I do not think Sarah fully understood the importance of Michelle’s (TA) role in the transmission of trust to her role as the PFLC until we went through this research process. There was a common thread between our Hispanic families served through the PFLC program. Michelle, (TA) had previously established a trusting relationship with the families she served prior to their participation in the PFLC program. Michelle’s role of the TA was critical to parents served by the PFLC. Parents trusted the PFLC through her
association with Michelle (TA). I fully realize when Sarah (PFLC) and Michelle (TA) retire, filling the positions will be extremely challenging. Any candidate would need to fully understand the importance of building trust with the parents.

5.2.4 Staff

Both Rachel and Valerie, K4 Teachers, understood the value of the PFLC and the PFLC program. Once students served by the PFLC transitioned to K4, these teachers knew they could consult with the PFLC as needed because of her relationship with the parents. Valerie’s suggestion (Research Question 4.5) is something we will continue to pursue—how might we communicate with parents about the PFLC program even earlier than we do?

5.2.5 Principal as Researcher

My appreciation for the PFLC program has grown immensely through the twenty years I have served at the school. This is my twelfth year as principal. My superintendent has provided me latitude in programming for our school that other principals in our state may not enjoy. Although our district is small, each principal is responsible for designing programs specific to the needs of our own students. Our superintendent trusts principals to design programs specific to the needs of our students and families and holds us accountable for this task. A sense of safety and confidence exists for school building principals in our district because of our superintendent’s trust (Gergen, 2009; Maslow, 1970). Over the years, this sense of safety has encouraged me to be creative in designing programming for our school. I realize this environment does not exist in every school district.
The concept of trust (Byrk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009) has become integral to my professional life through the years. Through the years, I have come to understand just how much our parents value and trust our PFLC. Michelle, our Teacher Assistant, has worked with our families so closely in school matters and concerns existing outside school. She has assisted families in a variety of ways from helping them with their rental agreements to facilitating their understanding of the citizenship process. They trust her entirely. Even now, we receive requests for Michelle to attend meetings with former parents at other schools within our district. We try to honor as many of these requests as we can because parents rely on her help. While I understood this, I did not realize the importance of Michelle’s role in the transmission of trust to the PFLC. The analysis process illuminated the significance of Michelle’s role to me.

The Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC) played an integral role in building awareness within our parents of their role as their child’s first teacher. Through individual interviews and the focus group, I was surprised how much the parents talked about the PFLC’s influence on them and their ability to parent their child or parent efficacy. Their ability to articulate what they had learned—their self-efficacy as a parent—communicated a sense of empowerment to me.

Theoretically, I understood how parenting styles differed between working class and middle class parents (Lareau, 2000, 2011); I did not have a true understanding of how this affected my students’ parents directly. As parents shared their life stories, I gained a better understanding of the lasting and adverse impact experiences have on people. I believed we had been intentional about providing information to our parents through a variety of ways—newsletters and social media. Information was translated to
provide access to all of our families. Through this study, I gleaned the importance of the human connection with our working class families in providing accurate school or community-related information.

5.3 Epilogue

As a Title I school, stakeholders are surveyed annually about the effectiveness of our programming. Suggestions are solicited every spring for planning purposes. In May 2019 our parents were surveyed about the 2018-2019 PFLC program (please see Appendix I). A very simple and parent-friendly survey is used because we are unsure about the reading levels of our parents.

a. All seven of the parents completing the PFLC survey stated the separate time away from their children during the group session was “very helpful”.

b. When asked what speakers the parents would like to hear from in the future, the responses included, “Teachers”, “Any of them-all”.

c. In response to the questions, “What do you want to know about school before you child enters?” responses included, “Learn more about the teachers’ and “Police, fire, teacher”.

d. Parents were positive about the two group sessions per month. Responses included, “I really loved the two group visits per month. It would be nice to have more in the future. I feel like it really helped my children and also educated me more as a parent.” “They are really helpful for the kids to get to know other kids.” “Great.” “Excellent.” “I thought the 2 group visits a month was very good. My child always wanted to come more than once a month.”
“Very helpful. Anytime my child can interact with others is a blessing.” “It was a good idea.”

e. In response to “How do you think the Parent Education program is going? What suggestions might you have for us?” the responses were, “It’s going great!” “Parent Education helped me a lot to understand roles and regulations from school. Everything that you did was great.” “I think it’s going great.”
“Great😊” “I think it is going very well. I have seen many improvements since last year.” “Everything is great.” “It’s doing good.”

Our leadership team (PFLC, PTO Volunteer Coordinator, and Principal) decided to change the name of the group session to “Little Learners” beginning in the 2019-2020 school year. This change was to emphasize young children can learn no matter how old they are, and children can learn through play. Parents were receptive to the group session name becoming “Little Learners.” The second group session will be called “Little Learners II”.

Based on the projected enrollment of K5 and the large number of students registered for K4 for 2019-2020, I moved a teacher and teacher assistant position from K5 to K4. As of September 2019, we have three full-time teachers for K4 and serve 60 children. The class size for K5 is currently 20-23, which is relatively small compared to the 26:1 state ratio. Sadly, there are 17 students on the waiting list for K4—even with the addition of the third K4 class. Information was shared with parents whose children were placed on the waiting list about a free K4 program in a neighboring district—Free4KSC.org. To be eligible, other than the age requirement, children must be eligible
for Medicaid, free/reduced lunch, foster child, or considered homeless. Our Director of Instruction at the District Office shared this information with schools.

5.3.1 Practicable Action Plans

For several years, I have mulled over the idea of home visits for all of our students. During the first week teachers return to school, classroom teachers would stop by the home of each student to introduce themselves and drop off a “welcome to the new school year” gift bag. I wonder what impact this might have on the relationships between the parents and teachers. Challenges with the plan’s implementation include: partnering teachers to ensure support and safety, mapping out and coordinating the routes between partner teachers, communicating the plan to parents, and the general busyness of the first week of school for teachers. This is a concept I will continue to consider for our staff. I realize this plan will entail much planning and have briefly spoken with our Director of Transportation and PTO Board. As a concession for not being able to implement schoolwide home visits, our school is planning “Literacy Night—On the Road” for October 2019.

Why do I want to attempt to take our teachers into the community and homes we serve? Teachers involved in ethnographic case study conducted by Gonzalez et al. (1993) found the rich resources within the homes, funds of knowledge. The successful home visitation program implemented in the District of Columbia impacted school attendance and academic progress in reading (Matthews, 2016). I know that home visits can be a powerful resource for educators and families. The reality of home visits for all students at Youngstown Elementary is still a work in progress.
5.4 Implications for Future Research

5.4.1 Leadership

Michael Fullan (2014) acknowledged “education has entered the most volatile period in its history” (p.86). School principals are faced with more and more challenges each year. Legislation and policy changes trickle down to the school level. In the midst of these changes, the principal’s role is to implement the changes while protecting the instructional environment so student learning is sustained. Fullan (2014) realized the many changes public school faced. South Carolina’s transition from the Common Core Standards to the implementation of the SC-CCRS standards to meet the all-encompassing Profile of a South Carolina Graduate (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2015) is one such change. The principal’s role is increasingly more complicated than in past years.

Fullan (2014) described “leading learning” (p. 55) as an essential key to maximizing impact as a principal. Focusing attention on the learning of teacher leaders positively impacts their own teaching practices and results in an increase of student learning. Capacity is built among the team leaders, and the instructional practices of team members improve. Schmoker (2006) wrote about the power of these Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s). When the principal is a member of the PLC as “leading learning” (Fullan, 2014), relational trust is strengthened (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009).

Fullan (2014) offered a framework for leading learning to a systemic level through a concept he and his colleagues, Andy Hargreaves, termed Professional Capital. “Professional capital is a function of the interaction of three components: human capital,
social capital, and decisional capital” (p. 70). The quality of teachers is considered human capital, while the interactions and relationships among staff is the social capital. Decisional capital occurs when social and human capital are maximized to achieve the organization’s goal (Fullan, 2014).

Years before, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005) cited the importance of developing a strong school leadership team as the first step of effective school leaders. The presence of change in education was noted as a constant condition. Two types of change were presented by the authors. First-order change was considered as “an extension of the past” (p. 113), while second-order change “is perceived as a break from the past” (p. 113) and requires a different leadership approach. Innovation and shifts in paradigm would be considered second-order changes. Seven skill sets are critical to the successful implementation of the second-order changes. Shifting a faculty’s perspective from deficit to debt would be a second –order change and would require much finesse.

a. A foundation of relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009) is critical to this endeavor. I acknowledge at the forefront implementing the home visitation program for all students is a second-order change (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Successful implementation of this home visitation program will require careful planning, conversations with all stakeholders, and the support of all involved in the process.

b. School leaders should intentionally look for solutions to their challenges beyond the wall of the school and into the community. Miller, Pavlakis, Lac, & Hoffman (2014) described “policy fluency” as a required area of expertise for today’s school leaders. This results in school leaders becoming education leaders with a broader perspective. Principals who believe in “meeting (students) where they are” (p. 136) and
navigating the intersections where school and community overlap for solutions embody ideal education leaders (Miller, Pavlakis, Lac, & Hoffman, 2014). Epstein (1995) describes these intersections as the “overlapping spheres of influence” (p. 702).

c. If meaningful and sustained change is to occur in education, I believe the local level must be given latitude to implement programs within the parameters of the federal and state guidelines. Individuals and professional learning communities need to intentionally reframe our thinking to avoid the deficit perspective (Harper, 2010) which comes to the surface when discussing student proficiency versus student growth. Educational leaders must learn to effectively navigate the constant stream of legislative and policy changes while encouraging teachers to maintain their focus on first growing their students from where they start (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). We need to discuss relevant topics with our school staff which may cause us to be awkward or uncomfortable. Further discussion and study of the following salient and recurring themes is needed.

As noted in Chapter 2, while research exists in the areas above, there is a void of Leadership research in the parenting styles of traditionally marginalized populations. This is an area that should be explored.

5.4.2 Impact of Deficit Theory

The language of deficit has been interwoven through federal and state legislation for over fifty years (Ladson-Billings 2006, 2007, 2013). The Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) was signed into law in 1965. Title I programming was one of the six sections of ESEA. States received funding based on the income of families, then distributed funds to school districts based on the same criterion. Ladson-Billings (2015) applauded the
intent of ESEA as a “deliberate attempt through schooling to close the opportunity gap and pay down the education debt” (p.108). The intent of a law can be distorted if purposeful guidelines for implementation are not firmly in place. Ladson-Billings (2015) suggested several steps to improve the implementation of ESEA. First, the delivery of instruction by highly effective and qualified teachers is essential. Secondly, teachers who acknowledge the strengths of the family and of the students is important. Third, building on what the student knows rather than what they do not know constitutes a shift in thinking.

Until the perspective of the majority of educators shifts to education debt, authentic growth of students will not occur, and the debt will continue to accumulate (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007, 2013). Garcia and Guerra (2004) argued, real education reform will not occur until we stop placing blame on the students and families. When individual students’ growth is more important than their proficiency (Barnum, 2017; Chingos, 2017), we will have started on the path to true reform.

There are challenges we must acknowledge and address. Milner (2012) argues too much emphasis is placed on standardized testing and the ensuing discussion about the achievement gap. He argues the construct of the achievement gap is actually a result of gaps in opportunity. Milner shares the Opportunity Gap Explanatory Framework as an analytic tool in this discussion. This framework is composed of five areas embedded in current educational practices, which include: color blindness, cultural conflicts, myth of meritocracy, low expectations and deficit mindsets, and context-neutral mindsets and practices (Milner, 2012). This framework can assist teacher’s understanding of their own practices and the impact on their students. By broadening teacher’s thinking, they may be
challenged to view their students and families from the education debt perspective and inform their instructional practice.

Whitehouse and Colvin (2001) cautioned us from “reading” families and making judgments about them. Eliminating the practice of “imposing our own values on families” (p. 218) or the values of the surrounding institutions is critical to moving past the language of deficit to seeing the strengths of the families we serve. Through her years of service Sarah, PFLC, learned “to understand where parents came from. I would think, surely you can take 10 minutes a week to do (work with your child). They are worried about food, not being abused, don’t want to rock the boat” (Interview 2/22/18). Harper (2010) emphasized the importance of reframing our thinking to avoid existing deficit thought patterns. Sarah’s (PFLC) practices through the years reflect the intentional shift in her thinking.

In *Ain’t No Makin’ It*, Jay MacLeod (2009) illustrated the structural inequities created and perpetuated by society (p.241). His research and interactions with the Brothers and Hallway Hangers demonstrated poverty is an issue of class. Race compounded the effects of the inequities. The African American members of the Brothers and Hallway Hangers faced limited opportunities. MacLeod (2009) described the impact of social reproduction on the aspirations of the two groups of boys from Clarendon Heights. “An additional and essential component of social reproduction is the process by which individuals in a stratified social order come to accept their own position and the inequalities of the social order as legitimate” (p. 113). A sense of hopelessness can result from the acceptance of this positioning. This state of despair is contradictory to
the heart of most teachers who are optimistic by nature. I wonder about ways in which to address with teachers—how to begin to truly make them aware of these realities.

In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks (2003) recounts a conversation about confronting racial inequities in educational policy with Ron Scapp, a White colleague. Scapp emphasized the importance of building trust through the common goal of improving education. He stated, “Many people who occupy positions that afford them the opportunity to set educational policy are often distrustful from the start when encountering anyone who claims to offer anti-racist strategies, particular new insights” (p. 106). This discussion may be awkward, yet it needs to occur with school staff. Additional research to guide the process of initiating the conversation within a public elementary school is needed. bell hooks (2003) emphasized the commitment of public school teachers to “let all students know the purpose of education is not to dominate, or prepare them to be dominators, but rather to create the conditions for freedom” (p.92).

Educational leaders must be reflective practitioners. We are duty-bound to confront the raw, honest reality and ask, “So, what now?” (Mills, 2011). When building an awareness among teachers on staff, might a starting point include sharing the salient points 4.2.5 Earning Trust and 4.2.3 The Continual Change of Schools with teachers to demonstrate the realities of the imbalance of power some parents feel and uncertainty felt with the educational changes within school.

As a school principal, I need to consider the background of my staff and how to approach them in the discussion of creating culturally relevant instruction. Lowenstein (2009) describes the typical pre-service teachers as “White, female, in her 20s, a monolingual speaker of English, and from a lower middle to middle income background”
Although the student population across the United States becomes more diverse, the number of teachers of color continues to decrease (Freedman, 1995; Lowenstein, 2009). In Freedman’s (1995) review of Lisa Delpit’s book, *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, this process is described as ‘teaching other people’s children’ (p.32). Most teachers are products of the middle class and cannot identify with poor children or children of color. As a result, students are viewed through the deficit perspective. Freedman (1995) depicts the perpetuation of White privilege throughout school life and concurs with Delpit’s assertion the instructional strategies of African American children may be ineffective. As a profession, candid discourse of this awkward topic is a priority.

Lowenstein (2009) argues the focus on pedagogy within Multicultural Education courses is “nebulous” (p. 178). This is something to consider as a building level principal. A minimum of training, often one course, in cultural diversity and multicultural education is required in teacher education programs with the focus on theory. Teacher candidates’ beliefs on diversity demonstrate “a lack of complexity in understanding multicultural issues” (p.200) is a consistent theme across twenty years of research. Future research in this area should focus on specific instructional practices of pre-service candidates (Castro, 2010). I would also argue this should be a focus for teachers currently in practice.

Gloria Boutte (2008) challenged public school educators to be intentional in the development of program and practices that promote social justice rather than “inadvertently contribute to oppression—despite good intentions” (p. 166). To illustrate, Boutte (2008) included excerpts of a conversation with her son, Jonathan, when he was
four. The conversation illustrated how young children are colorblind and do not think about issues of race and racism. Jonathan’s remarks surprised Boutte as she had actively taught her son people from diverse backgrounds could “coexist” together (p.166). Boutte (2008) concluded children “are very proficient at studying adults’ actions and unspoken words” (p. 166). Despite good intentions, I realize the whole concept of the PFLC’s role and program may unintentionally contribute to marginalizing families we serve. Emphasizing the perspective of education debt and consciously addressing personal biases may help to counter this possibility.

Boutte (2008) provided some practical suggestions for teacher candidates and practicing teachers. Classroom practices of substance should be:

1. **Grounded in students’ lives-**Children should make connections with real life from broader perspective.

2. **Critical-**Children should be taught to critique information and literature.

3. **Multicultural, antiracist, and pro justice-**Multiple perspectives should be presented.

4. **Participatory and experiential-**Children should be engaged in activities to teach them how to make decisions and solve problems.

5. **Hopeful, joyful, kind, and visionary-**Children need a safe environment to take risks in their learning.

6. **Activitist-**Children should be taught to be human and humane—*to think critically, feel, and act.*

7. **Academically rigorous-**Children should be exposed to rigorous curriculum.
8. *Culturally sensitive*-Teachers need to communicate to students that they are also learners and do not know everything (Boutte, 2008).

Boutte (2002) recognizes the power of literature on children. This article “deconstructs the misconception that the messages in children’s books are simple, neutral, and inherently good” (p. 147). Boutte (2002) provides helpful guidelines for critical discussions about books, which include:

1. *Continuously develop your book collection and avoid simplistic dichotomies.*

2. *Include books that represent a broad experiences of children.*

3. *Revisit books multiple times and reconsider positions to increase understanding.*

4. *Encourage children to think critically about books.*

5. *Form literature circles or books groups.*

6. *Be intentional with your notes about your questions and comments to students.*

    *Think about how your preferences influence children’s preferences.*

7. *Share what you are reading with your students so you are viewed as a reader* (p. 150).

Boutte (2002) also, encourages teachers to create a balanced library with an assortment of genres and representative a different cultures. As the parent of a teacher candidate, these are recommendations I will hold close and hope they will guide my daughter in her practices as an aspiring teacher. These are also considerations for the selection of books for classroom libraries and purchases for book give aways for the coming school year 2020-2021.
5.4.3 Cultural Capital

The late Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is probably best known for the concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital continues as a central concept taught within the sociology of education. Lareau and Weininger (2003) argue two essential aspects of cultural capital have emerged from the predominant interpretation. The first aspect is related to the benefits one gains from the exposure to cultural events, such as art, music, and literature which is usually associated with the middle and upper class families because such capital can be exchanged with middle and upper class families. The second aspect is the perception of finesse gained through interaction with the cultural events or fine arts. A reserve is created from which individuals may draw upon. Lareau and Weininger (2003) suggested a broader definition of cultural capital. Culture is viewed as a resource that “provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and is under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next” (p. 587).

In *Home Advantage*, Lareau (2000) explored the impact of social class on cultural capital and the influence on school and home interactions. Lareau’s (2000) study offered that “key elements of class culture become forms of cultural capital because they give parents a pool of resources which they can activate” (p. 177). Lareau and Weininger (2003) contend the probability of “parents’ compliance with institutional standards” (p.589) is dependent on social class.

As much as we declare the United States is a classless society, this is not so. Until we accept this harsh reality, meaningful change will never occur (Elkind, 2009; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). The concept of meaningful, organized play (Miller & Almon, 2009) is supported by the National Association for the Education of Children (2009) yet is directly
opposite to the approach many working-class families employ—Natural Accomplishment of Growth (Lareau, 2000).

5.4.4 Parental Involvement

Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) posited the traditional approaches to parental involvement minimize the role parents play in school. Minority parents are viewed through the deficit perspective. “Inequities related to race, class, and immigration shape and are shaped by parent involvement programs, practices, and ideologies” (p. 150). Lareau (2000) emphasized the role of social class on parenting and involvement in school. Neither parenting approach, Accomplishment of Natural Growth or Concerted Cultivation, is better. Children may have more advantages in school when parents provide more structured time for them and read to them. Our educational system is shaped by the middle class. Ladson-Billings (2007) argued the rigorous standards are meant to appease the middle class.

Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) stated

Our educational system has been built on a European legacy that to this date returns to a history that redeems colonial practices and promotes success through notions of excellence based on Western values such as individually earned merit, which assumes a level playing field” (p. 169).

As a school principal, I am responsible to help my students and their parents successfully navigate our educational system. The “rules of school” should be known to everyone. Schools must follow district, state, and federal laws and policies. Title I schools work within a very specific framework (National Archives and Records
Administration, 2002). The challenge is how to communicate the rules of the game or expectations without presenting them from the deficit perspective. Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) asserted contemporary parent involvement models, which emphasis family strengths, could still operate within a deficit framework. They offer an option of a home-school relationship framed through the funds of knowledge orientation (Gonzalez et al, 1993). Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) maintain, “from this perspective, families could be better positioned to have their needs addressed by the school rather than continue to subscribe to the traditional home-school paradigms that strive to quickly assimilate families into the structure and culture of school…” (p. 168).

Dworin (2006) described a literacy project conducted in a fourth grade biliteracy classroom. He defines biliteracy as “a term that refers to people or individuals who have literate competencies in two language” (p. 510). The Family Stories Proejct was couched in a funds of knowledge orientation (Gonzalez et al, 1993). Dworin (2006) explained the biliteracy perspective counters the common deficit view when students lack a firm grasp of English. Students collected family stories from within their homes and shared their written stories with classmates. Stories were originally written in Spanish and read in class. After questions and suggestions were shared by classmates, revisions were made to the stories and family members were asked to sign the final drafts as contributors. Students worked with partner to translating the stories into English. Each story was published as two books, one in each language. Every student received two copies of each book. According to Dworin (2006), this project “provides for the importance of bilingualism—a common yet often underappreciated sociocultural resource for learning
in school” (p. 519). This writing project is worthy of further study in a variety of settings and schools, and is a consideration for the 2020-2021 Action Plan.

There are many points that merit further research and discussion. I encourage my colleagues not to be discouraged by the weight of the endless changes in legislation and policy but to consider where they might start in their own little part of the world to make a difference and challenge their thinking. Samuels (2018) succinctly states, “If there are things that we are doing that are disadvantaging some of our students, because we are not thinking about cultural differences or generational differences or access to technology, it’s not [the students] who have failed. We’ve failed them” (p.5). Pick one thing, one focus, and just start!
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APPENDIX A

JOB DESCRIPTION OF PARENT/FAMILY LITERACY COORDINATOR (PFLC)

POSITION: Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator

QUALIFICATIONS: College Degree (BS, BA)
Teaching Certificate (preferred)
Teaching Experience (preferred)
Experience in Social Work (preferred)

Reports to: Principals

Job Goal: To enable parents to excel in their roles as being their children’s first and most important teachers through family educational and support services.

Terms of Employment: 190 Days

The Parent Educator has responsibility for:

- Building a strong relationship between and within the school, home, and community
- Coordinating support services within the district by assisting the classroom teacher, guidance counselors, and other support personnel in identifying students who need physical/health services, social and emotional counseling, and academic assistance.
- Promoting positive school experiences for students and families
- Assisting parents in the selection and use of instructional materials and strategies
- Serving as liaison between identified students/families and community/social services
- Serving as liaison between the school and home by conducting home visits to promote improved home-school relationships; offer suggestions to parents on ways to assist their children; and encourage participation in educational activities
- Planning and conducting parent workshops as needed
- Maintaining records for formative and summative evaluations
- Achieving voluntary enrollment of parents of identified children from birth to age 5
- Providing and/or coordinating diagnostic screening a necessary
- Assisting families in obtaining services available for adult education and family literacy enhancement
- Duties imposed by law and administrative regulations, as well as, discharging faithfully such duties as may be reasonably prescribed by the Superintendent of his/her designee

Signed: _________________________________ Date: __________________
APPENDIX B

PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS FOR PARENT/FAMILY LITERACY COORDINATORS (PFLC)

In order to achieve the goals of the Parent/Family Literacy Program the following components of the program serve as a framework for the program in District _____, in each community, and in each school.

- Each Parent/Family Literacy will serve at least 15 families on a consistent, intensive basis using the “Born to Learn” curriculum as designed by Parent as Teachers. The visit should last approximately one hour.

- A minimum of two home visits per month for each of the 15 families will be provided by the Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator.

- During home visits, information will be provided to parents on child development and ways to encourage learning through the “Born to Learn” curriculum (Parents as Teachers).

- A minimum of four group meetings will be provided for parents each year.

- Periodic screenings using the Batelle Development screen and “Milestones” observation checklists provided in the “Born to Learn” Curriculum.

- Small group sessions will be provided for families at the school, _____ Community Center, library, or other locations as appropriate on a monthly basis.

- Parent Educators will work with the _____ Community Center, school nurses, and guidance department at _____ and _____ High School in coordinating services for teen parents.

- Learning packets will be provided for parents during home visits.

- “Welcome Baby” packets will be provided to families of newborns who will be attending District _____ schools.

- Parents will be provided with timely information about Adult Literacy services at the _____ Community Center and _____ High School.

- Linkage of families with other community services, if needed that are beyond the scope of the program will be provided.
• Coordination with the ______Community Center to provide home visits to teen mothers who are participating in the programs provided by the center.

• Attend on-going staff development opportunities and monthly meetings with the Parent/Family Coordinators and the Director of Elementary Education.

• Meetings with the staff of the ______Community Center will be scheduled as needed.
APPENDIX C

DATES FOR DROP IN AND PLAY

The following are dates for Drop In and Play for the 2017-2018 school year:

October 27
November 17
December 8
January 19
February 9
March 9
April 13
May 4

Sessions are from 9:30-10:30 and 10:30-11:30.

Originally, the sessions were scheduled specific to the ages of children—e.g. birth-18 months and 19 months- up. Based on parent feedback and the realization that the developmental stages don’t always coincide with ages, two “repeat” sessions were scheduled on each Drop In and Play date. These sessions are held in a large classroom in the gym annex at the school. As the student population of the school has grown, the location of these sessions has changed. Currently, this classroom is also used one day a week for kindergarten music classes.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR OF TITLE I-2014 PILOT STUDY

This is my 40th year in education and my 26th year in District _____ and at that time (1988) the former principal that I worked for became the assistant superintendent here. To make a real long story short, the job that I have now was created when he became the assistant superintendent after he had been here several years. So, when this job was created in District _____, he knew that I had been doing the same sort of job in _____ County so he called me and he said, ‘would you be interested?’

And at that time, my job was a lot more focused than it is now. I only worked with elementary grades through- at one time five then six then back to four. Over the years, when we lost our Title I Director, I became the Title I Director; when we lost the intermediate/middle school director, I became that too. The Parent Family Literacy Program, we created because there was no Parent Family Literacy Program when I came here. There was no K4 program when I came here, and I helped to develop, and there was no full day K5 program. This was added when state money became available for Parent Educators or however we wanted to use it. Most districts just gave someone like me added on responsibility and that person did home visits, but Dr. ________, in all his wisdom, which was wonderful, decided ‘no, if we’re going to do it, we’re going to do it right.’ So I was the coordinator and that’s just a small part of my job; then we hired folks at each school to be Parent/Family Literacy Coordinators or home visitors/parent educators.
Back in the beginning…there were four PFLCs. Two of them are still with us and when those people were hired, we wrote the job description so that they had to have a college degree, not necessarily a teacher degree, but several of them did have, um, degrees in teaching in elementary. And when we read the guidelines for that program we felt, and Dr. _________ supported me, we felt that for our schools to really have the benefit from it, the home visitation was the most important part of the job description in getting parents and children involved in their preschool education before they came to K4.

Also when I came, like I said, we did develop the preschool program before the parent educators. And that was, um, I think our only site was Washington Elementary and it was two half day sessions. And then, through district funding because that, right now we just have enough funding for just one K4 teacher and probably one just parent educator, so the district supplements those funds so that we can have the people that we have. And you know through all of the budget cuts and everything, it is just remarkable to me that our district has supported this parent involvement and has continued to provide the funds for it. So the K4 program came first, and also when I came, we did not have full day kindergarten. We only had half day programs. And the curriculum and a lot has changed. So, we had one K4 teacher and then we expanded to K4 teacher at every school-split sessions. And then a parent educator came aboard a long that time at every school, but we did start out with one at every school. We did not have just one person.

Dr. ___________, actually his wife was a kindergarten teacher, and he was involved in the district where he came and a lot with parent involvement. So, his heart was with the early childhood education so he really understood. See, he was the one that
expanded our kindergarten to full day and built all those new wings on to the schools so we could house it. He came to me and he said, ‘draw plans for new kindergarten rooms’, and I said, ‘You’ve got to be kidding me.’ I was thrilled and was involved in designing them and ordering the materials and equipment.

It’s interesting, because we started out with the one each and because of the funding issues, we ended up with only two positions funded by the district. Now one position is split between two schools and of course, the Title I funds supplement the salaries of the parent educators for Washington and Youngstown Schools. The other (third) PFLC now has four (non-Title I) schools. What I did was to give you her job description that I created during the summer. And what she’s doing now is in school, and in other words, just as _______ (PFLC at Youngstown) still has Drop In and Play, she’s doing that approach one day a week in each of those four schools. So she has identified the families basically the same way that _______(PFLC at Youngstown) identifies the families but bringing them in to the school and working with them in small groups and a different school each day. So, she is using what they were trained in from the very beginning, the Parents as Teacher (PAT) curriculum.

When we developed this program for the district, I found out about the PAT program, and I made that part of the job description that they would all be trained in PAT. And all of them have always been trained in it. Whenever we hired anyone, we would do the training. When the curriculum was updated, they were re-trained. It is excellent. There is a national organization of Parents as Teachers (PAT). So, they have the curriculum that they use. So, she (one PFLC serving four non-Title I schools) is using that curriculum plus other materials and resources she has for more or less to Drop
In and Play. And if she has to do a home visit, she will, but she really doesn’t have the time to do that anymore because she is school-based. All of these people were school-based but hers is going to be parents coming in. She sort of started parents coming into the school and using those lessons from PAT that she used with Drop In and Play.

At one point (early 2000’s), the county had an association for Parent/Family Literacy Coordinators (PFLCs). Well, that was through First Steps. So, when we began all of our folks with PAT, First Steps is another funding source, of course, First Steps is funded by our state and they still have a First Steps organization in (our)_________ County, and they are much more limited now than they used to be. We did not have to be involved in First Steps because they didn’t fund any of our folks. I wanted to make sure that our folks had support and they went to monthly meetings, heard from other people that were funded by First Steps, and they were using PAT curriculum too. I wanted them to be a part of that group. They had a very good coordinator, ____. And he used to lead the meetings. I would go with them every month and sit and listen and talk. Then I would meet with them after everyone else had gone. I would say, tell me what you’re doing, tell me where you are. Of course, every year, I would go on home visits with them.

We are no longer associated with PAT because with __________ (PFLC serving 4 non-Title I schools) having this new job description as some of ours changing a little bit, like ______’s role, we could not continue meeting the criteria for PAT. We are still using the curriculum and we will continue to use the curriculum and the components of PAT, but we’re not officially national members anymore because the criteria is so strict and it’s gotten even more so with federal funds being attached to it nationally and on the
state level. They’re having their PAT people now have to do more reporting and they have to carry a laptop with them and they have to do all of detailed reporting.

The programs, such as in ours, is still pretty unique because those centers are funded through different sources. Many times through the district but then through other sources as well. I am always amazed at the parent educators when I go on home visits with them. Especially, one of them. Talking about, speaking about (PFLC at Youngstown School)-her relationship with those families. Because many times she’ll start with them when they are born and follow them until they get into the K4 program. Her rapport and her relationship with them is something very special, and the whole idea of our program has always been –preparing these children to enter the K4 program and preparing the parents. In other words: connecting the parents with adult ed, connecting the parents with the ESL classes, connecting the parents with Child Find for Early Intervention and early identification of needs. Without them, we would have none of that because they find the kids that need to go to Child Find. I always tell them that ‘you are so important because you were the first contact that they have--these families have.’ They don’t already have siblings in school with our school district. I have heard stories that just amaze me of what these parent educators have done with these families and for these families. I have always admired the relationship. I can tell when I walk in the home with (PFLC from Youngstown) they just trust her and they identify with her. And then she is doing lessons with them. She is asking the dad, mom, grandmother to stay in there and watch and she gets them involved. She gets them playing with the child. She always leaves something with them –to do with the child and she checks up with them the next time she comes. And these parent educators assess the children through Ages and Stages.
And they go over that assessment from the time they are born until they leave them with those parent educators and they explain the assessment to them. And then they say, now, your children is, uh, not developing well in language. Here are some things you can do with your child. I’ve shown you some things you can do with them until I come back. (PFLC at Youngstown) holds them accountable. (She) does a great job of trying to get parents involved. I don’t know what you could do to take the place of what the parent educators are doing when they are at home with them. I know your guidance counselors do a lot with children and the families but as far as going into the homes, there’s going to be a void. I don’t really know what else could be done with the faculty, I mean with the staff, if you did lose that person.

Yes, that’s why these people (PFLC’s) are special to me. It’s because they establish that connection in the home. They go into that home and those parents have to trust them to let them in. They have to trust that they care about their children. It’s just amazing the things that I’ve seen when I’ve gone into homes with them. They have taken me into very interesting places. They will, you know, parents will ask them for more than what they can really give. Can you bring me this, can you do this? Because I’ve seen her, when a mama asks her, ‘Well, can you run to the store for me.’ (Your PFLC) will tell them, I can’t do that. If you are out of food, that’s a different thing. You can go over to __________Community Center, but I can’t go to the store to get you some Coke (Snow, 2014).
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS—PARENT/FAMILY LITERACY COORDINATOR (PFLC)

1. How long have you worked in the school district? How long have you served as a PFLC?

2. Tell me about your students/families that you served/are serving
   a. last year?
   b. this year?

3. Tell me about your first impressions of the PFLC and Drop In?

4. How would you characterize the PFLC and Drop In and Play now?

5. How has the PFLC program changed through the years?

6. What is a typical Drop In and Play like?

7. How would you describe the PFLC and the Drop In and Play program to a parent?

8. What benefit do you tell them the program brings? (Yatkin, 2013).

9. How do you explain the PFLC program’s purpose?

10. What is a typical home visit like?

11. What would you like each child to get out of working with you as the PFLC?
    (Matthews, 2016; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009; Quick, 1998; South Carolina Department of Education, 2013; United
12. Describe how you plan your lesson/home visits with your students?

(Parent As Teacher, 2011).

a. How do you assess engagement with reading in the home?

b. Describe engagement with reading with families. What barriers do families encounter with engagement?

c. What barriers do families encounter with engagement?


13. What parenting style and involvement from parents participating in the program benefit their children most? (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Downey, 2002; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 2000,2011; Lunenberg & Irby, 2002).

14. In what ways can we help cultivate a style and participation that research indicates works best?

15. When you think about your experiences with the children/families and Drop In and Play program, what are some things that we could improve? (Downey, 2002; Epstein, 1995).

a. Based on attendance at Drop In and Play, what might help improve parent participation?

b. Are there families that have never attended? Perfect attendance?

16. Describe the ways parents provide input in the skills their children develop or topics of discussion/Drop In and Play, etc.? (Epstein, 1995).

18. What are some things you think, you as the coordinator(s) do well? the program / home visits/Drop In?

19. Tell me about one of your best memories from working with your families.

20. Tell me about a frustration or challenge that you have faced through the years of being a PFLC.

21. What do you think is the most valuable part of the PFLC program?


23. What have you learned through the years of serving as a PFLC?

24. What advice would you have for a new PFLC?

25. What have I not asked you that you would like to share about your experience as the PFLC? (Roulston, 2010).
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS-FOCUS GROUP

1. What was the first thing that came to mind when you heard about the PFLC program?

2. How long have you been working with the PFLC?

3. How would you describe your parenting style? How might it have changed over the years? Has it changed from one child to another? (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Downey, 2002; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 2000, 2011; Lunenberg & Irby, 2002).


5. What part of the program is the most useful to you and or child? (Epstein, 1995).

6. If you had a child that has worked with the PFLC and went on to K4, how did the program help the child transition to K4? (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Reardon, 2013).

7. If you have had an older child, how do you think school has changed over the years? (Yatkin, 2013).

8. Tell me about one of your most memorable experiences that you had while working with the PFLC.
9. What is something that surprised you about the program—something you didn’t expect?

10. How has the schedule for Drop In and Play worked for your family? What suggestions do you have for us to improve the program? (Downey, 2002; Epstein, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007, 2011).

11. What do you see is the most helpful part of home visits for your child? For you? What suggestions do you have for us to improve the program? (Epstein, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007, 2011).

12. What would you tell another parent about the program?

13. Does anyone else have an experience or story that you would like to share?

14. Are there any questions that I haven’t asked that you would like to talk about? (Roulston, 2010).
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS-PARENTS

1. Tell me about yourself and your children:
   a. Tell me about your children’s preschool / schooling experience(s).
   b. Tell me about your preschool / schooling experiences.

2. How did you hear about the PFLC originally?

3. Tell me about your experience and your child’s experience with the PFLC.
   (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Matthews, 2016).

4. How would you describe the PFLC and the Drop In and Play program to another parent?

5. How would you describe your parenting style? How might it have changed over the years? Has it changed from one child to another? (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Downey, 2002; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 2000,2011; Lunenberg & Irby, 2002).

6. Tell me about your first impressions of the PFLC and Drop In and Play?
   a. What is a typical Drop In and Play like?
   b. What is a typical visit to your home list?

7. How long have you been involved with the Parent/Family Literacy Coordinator (PFLC)?

8. Describe your child’s relationship with the PFLC (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Gergen, 2009; Prince & Howard, 2002).

10. Tell me about the ways you see your child learning.

11. Describe ways that the PFLC has worked with you to help your child to learn new things. (Matthews, 2016; Parent As Teacher, 2011).


13. Have you been able to attend Drop In and Play? What has a typical session been like for you and your child (ren) there?
   a. What has been useful in the Drop In and Play program? What do you think benefitted your child most (during Drop In and Play)? (Epstein, 1995).
   b. What skills/topics would you like addressed during the sessions?
   c. Tell me about one of the best memories or experiences that you had at Drop In and Play?
   d. How might the scheduling of Drop In and Play be changed to work best with your schedule?

14. When you think about your experiences with the coordinator(s) and Drop In and Play program, what are some things that we could improve? (Epstein, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007, 2013). Tell me about challenges you think we could address. (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007, 2013).

15. What are some things you think the coordinator(s) and program do well?
16. What has been useful in the home visits? (Matthews, 2016; Waanders & Mendez, 2007). What do you think benefitted your child most (during the visits)? (Epstein, 1995).

17. Tell me about one of the best memories or experiences that you have had working with the PFLC.

18. If you had a child that has worked with the PFLC and went on to K4, how do you think the program help the child transition to K4? (Matthews, 2016; South Carolina Department of Education, 2013; United States Department of Education, n.d.; Waanders & Mendez, 2007; Yatkin, 2013).

19. If you have older children attend school, how do you think their experiences in school has changed through the years? (Yatkin, 2013).

20. What would you say is the best thing about the PFLC program?


22. What have I not asked you that you would like to share about your experience and your child’s experience? (Roulston, 2010).
APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS-K4 TEACHERS

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. What grades/ages have you taught?

3. How do you find the expectations for students has changed through the years? instructional standards? (Yatkin, 2013).

4. With the increased rigor of the instructional standards, how do you work with your parents/families to help their children? (Epstein, 1995; Lewitt & Baker, 1995; Yatkin, 2013).

5. How many students have you taught who have been served by the PFLC?

6. Tell me about your experience with the PFLC?

7. Tell me about your experiences with the Drop In and Play?


9. Tell me about your first impressions of the PFLC and Drop In and Play?

10. How would you characterize the PFLC and program now?

11. What does a typical interaction with the PFLC look like?

12. How long and in what capacities have you worked with a PFLC?
13. Describe the PFLC’s role with students? with the parents? (Lareau, 2000).

   Describe ways that the PFLC has worked with parents to help their children to
   learn new things.

14. What else would be helpful for the PFLC to work on? (Epstein, 1995; Ladson-

15. When you think about your experiences with the coordinator(s) and Drop In and
   Play program, what are some things that we could improve? (Epstein 1995;

16. Tell me about challenges you think we could address. (Epstein, 1995; Ladson-

17. What are some things you think the coordinator(s) and program do well?

18. What would you say is the best thing about the PFLC program? What do we do
   well?

19. What additions, suggestions, and improvements do you think we could make for

20. What have I not asked you that you would like to share about your experience
   and your child/student’s experience? (Roulston, 2010).
APPENDIX I

YOUNGSTOWN ELEMENTARY RESULTS OF PFLC SURVEY
2018-2019

Thank you for your support of our PFLC Program!
Next year, our group session will be called “Little Learners.”

Continuous improvement is our goal.
We want to hear what you have to say and grow in our practices and relationships with
our families.

*Please circle the best response and feel free to explain or give us more information.

1. What time of day works best for you for our group sessions?
(They will remain on Fridays.)

   a. 9-10:30 a.m. 6
   b. 9:30-11:00 a.m. 1
   c. Other—please explain—

2. During Drop In and Play 1, we included time for the children to play by
themselves while parents met as a group and had a speaker. How do you think this
went? How did you like it?

   a. Very Helpful 7
   b. Somewhat Helpful
   c. Not really Helpful
3. If we continue to have speakers visit with our parent group, what speakers might you like to hear from? What would be helpful or informative?

Teachers.

Any of them. All.

What do you want to know about school before your child enters?

Learn more about the teachers.

Police, fire, teacher.

4. Next year, with “Little Learners 2”, we are thinking about including a library time here at Youngstown’s library for children/parents. What do you think?

a. I would LOVE to have the library time included. 5

b. Going to the library would be nice. 2

c. We go to the local library so it would not be as helpful to me.

d. I would rather not have the library time during the group visits.

5. What have you thought about the two group visits a month?

I really loved the two group visits a month. It would be nice to have more in the future. I feel like it really helped my child and also educated me more as a parent.

They are really helpful for the kids to get to know other kids.

Great

Excellent

I thought the 2 group visits a month was very good. My child always wanted to come more than once a month.

Very helpful. Anytime my child can interact with others is a blessing.

It was a good idea.
6. How do you think the Parent Education program is going? What suggestions might you have for us?

It’s going great!

Parent Education helped me a lot to understand roles and regulations from school. Everything that you did was great.

I think it is going very well. I have seen many improvements since last year.

Everything is great.

Its doing good.