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AN INVESTIGATION OF TIME MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION IN HEAD
START FAMILIES

A Dissertation Presented for
the Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Heather Sedges Wallace
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late grandparents, Oreste and Rose Gasperini, for instilling in me a sense of curiosity and hunger for knowledge that led me to where I am today.

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Abstract

Parents are often advised to increase the amount of time spent with their preschool-age children because of the beneficial outcomes associated with positive parent-child interactions, and numerous programs exist to encourage and support this type of parent involvement. However, there is a paucity of information about whether and how parents manage and organize their time in a manner that facilitates parents' interactions with children. Increasing home-based parent involvement is a federal mandate and central tenet of the Head Start program for low-income parents. One of the ways in which a local Head Start program encourages parent involvement is to offer weekly educational activities to families designed to be completed at home by parents and their children. The purpose of this study was to examine how a group of Head Start managed and organized their time in a manner that facilitated completion of these activities and the way in which other aspects of the home environment affected these efforts. Parents in this study (N =22) were diverse in terms of ethnicity, parenting status (grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers), employment status, marital status, and education. The constant-comparison method was used to analyze comments obtained during focus groups. Parents primarily discussed time management and organization in two ways: techniques and tools that helped them manage and organize time and the obstacles they faced in doing so. Parents also discussed alteration of the physical environment conducive to completing the activity, the benefit of social support, and the ways in which they acquired and maintained their child's engagement in the activity. Knowledge about such time management strategies may be utilized by programs hoping to increase home-based parental involvement. This study contributes to the current dearth of information that exists about low-income family time management and organization.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Parent Involvement

The term ‘parent involvement’ has been defined in a variety of ways throughout numerous studies investigating its relation to measures of early childhood development such as early literacy and language skills (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Hindman, Connor, Jewkes, & Morrison, 2008; Hoover- Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995; Raikes, Summers, & Roggman, 2005; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). One of the most commonly cited and used definitions of ‘parent involvement’ comes from Maccoby and Martin (1983) who used the term to describe when a parent is “committed to his or her role as a parent and to the fostering of optimal child development” (p.48). Use of such broad definitions of parent involvement ensures that researchers are including the variety of behaviors and manifestations.

Parent involvement has been studied across various contexts (e.g. home, childcare, school, public community centers, and libraries) in which parents and children interact (Beecher & Makin, 2002; Neuman & Gallagher, 1994). The two primary contexts in which parent involvement has been studied are the school and home environments (Manz, Fantuzzo, & Power, 2004; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

School-based parent involvement. A predominant characteristic of past studies investigating parent involvement is that they overwhelmingly define the construct as participation in school-based activities (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005; Seitsinger, Felner, Brand, & Burns, 2008) when attempting to explain the relationship between family functioning and assessments of child outcomes. In

these and other studies, school-based parent involvement encompasses parental participation in school-related activities such as attending parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings, and classroom volunteering (Pomerantz, Mooreman, & Litwack, 2007). Studies defining parent involvement in this manner have repeatedly and consistently found that increased rates of parental involvement positively relate to children's reading abilities, indices of critical thinking, and measures of academic achievement (Bailey, 2004; Bailey, 2006; Bailey, Silvern, Brabham, & Ross, 2004; Campbell & Ramey, 1995).

Home-based parent involvement. Parent involvement is also conceptualized as parent-driven activities that promote children's positive growth and development and occur in the home environment (Pomerantz, Mooreman, & Litwack, 2007). This definition of home-based parent involvement is inherently multidimensional, meaning that there are a plethora of parent-child interactions occurring in the home that can be classified as parent involvement.

Previous work (c.f., Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Manz, Fantuzzo, & Power, 2004; Desimone, 1999) has attempted to measure the multidimensional nature of parental involvement by classifying parent behaviors into specific typologies. Such classifications have derived primarily from Epstein's (1986, 1987, & 1995) model of parental involvement. Epstein classified parent involvement into six types of behaviors, ranging from "parenting practices at home" to "community collaboration". In this study, operationalizations of parent involvement combine Epstein's Type 1, "parenting practices at home" and Type 4, "involvement in home learning activities". Home-based parent involvement was a central focus of this study and was operationalized as parent-child engagement in a "homework activity" (described later).

Benefits of Parent Involvement

Previous studies consistently note the positive relation between home-based parent involvement and child outcomes (Hart & Risley, 1995; Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Miller-Johnson, 2000; Barnett & Gareis, 2007; Coard, Foy-Watson, Zimmer, & Wallace, 2007; Gardner, Ward, Burton, & Wilson, 2003). For instance, much research has examined the development of young children's early literacy skills. Within early literacy, researchers have focused on the relationship between parent involvement and children's language and early reading and comprehension abilities. The studies highlighted here specifically focus on the relation between parental interactions and young children's (14 mths. – 7 yrs.) early literacy and language skills.

One goal of a study conducted by Pellegrini, Brody, and Sigel (1985) was to examine the relationship between parent-child shared book reading and children's verbal IQ. Pellegrini, et al. observed parent-child dyads (N = 120) engaged in a book-reading activity in a laboratory setting and assessed children's (3.5-5.5 yrs.) verbal comprehension by measuring their understanding of specific words. Based on their analyses, Pellegrini, et al. found a significant, positive relationship between parent's "high cognitive demand strategies and questions" (p. 336) and children's verbal IQ. Education level, race, and income were not examined as part of this study.

In response, Dodici, Draper, and Peterson (2003) conducted a similar study with low-income European-American mothers, who had mostly attained less than a college degree. Dodici, et al. examined the relationship between interactions of parents and their infants/toddlers and children's early literacy skills. Dodici et al., coded in-home observations of parent-child (N = 27) interactions when children were 14, 24, and 36 months using the Parent-Infant/Toddler Interaction Coding System (PICS; Dodici & Draper, 2001). The PICS assessed parent and child

language, mothers' emotional tone, joint attention, parental guidance, and parental responsiveness using a 5-point rating scale, where higher scores suggested higher quality of parent-child interactions (Dodici, et al). Dodici et al., also measured children's emergent literacy skills and receptive and expressive language abilities when they were 54 months. Results were comparable to those in the study conducted by Pellegrini, et al. (1985), suggesting that higher quality parent-child interactions and children's language abilities shared a significant and positive relationship.

Bracken and Fischel (2008) further investigated the association between low-income family's reading behaviors and preschool children's (N = 233) early reading and comprehension skills. Bracken and Fischel surveyed children's primary caregivers about their family's at-home reading behavior such as the frequency with which they read to children, number of books in the home, frequency of visits to the library, and the primary caregiver's personal affinity for reading. Children's reading readiness was assessed using the "Get Ready to Read!" screen (RTR; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2000) which measures children's "print knowledge, emergent writing skills, and linguistic awareness" (Bracken & Fischel, p. 50). Children's receptive language abilities were assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- III (PPVT-III; Dunn & Dunn, 1997), along with multiple measures of children's letter, book, print knowledge, and story comprehension. Their findings further corroborated the positive relationship between parent involvement behaviors and children's early literacy and language abilities found in the previously mentioned studies. Thus, there is evidence available suggesting an association between parent-child interactions and young children's early literacy and language skills.

Home-Based Parent Involvement Interventions

There are interventions that have recognized the importance and benefits of home-based parent involvement and attempted to increase it through parent-education workshops and activities that parents can complete with their children at home. For instance, Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) reported on an intervention (Early Access to Success in Education: Project EASE) that included 177 parents of kindergarteners. The intervention provided the mostly European American, middle-class parents of typically-developing children, with parent education workshops and home-based activities designed to increase parent involvement specific to children's developing literacy abilities. They compared measures of children's literacy and language abilities to a matched control group of 71 children whose parents did not engage in the intervention program. Results indicated that children whose parents engaged in Project EASE had higher vocabulary and comprehension scores, with the largest gains for children who had low language scores prior to the intervention. This study highlights that working with parents to convey ways in which they can increase engagement in meaningful interactions with their children has the potential to increase positive early childhood outcomes.

Another intervention similar to Project EASE was the Interactive Homework Assignments (IHA) program (Bailey, 2006). IHA was based on evidence that positive parent-child interactions within the home promote positive outcomes for children, and built on Epstein's (1994) successful work with the similar program, Teachers Involving Parents. IHA provided parents and their second-grade children with activities that could be completed in the home environment and facilitated parent-child conversations and collaboration. Bailey investigated the effects of the program using an experimental design, with a control, non-intervention group ($n = 31$) and two intervention groups: one that only received the activities ($n = 27$) and one that

received the activities and supportive parent training (n = 26). Bailey assessed the effectiveness of the IHA program using pre-and post-intervention parent surveys, pre-and post-intervention inference tests for children, parent and child reports of interactions during the specified activities, and tracking of the number of returned and completed activities per parent-child dyad. Results suggested that program participation increased children's inference scores. Thus, based on findings from the previous two studies we see that interventions designed to increase parental involvement have the potential to positively affect early child outcomes.

Promotion of Home-Based Parent Involvement for Low-Income Families

Familial participation in programs that increase the likelihood of positive outcomes is especially important for high-risk young children and families. The term “high-risk” refers to children and families who share similar low-income status and other characteristics that impede upward social mobility, such as low educational attainment and being a minority. This group of children and families are referred to as “high-risk” because repeated studies have noted the increased likelihood of negative outcomes, when compared to non-minority peers from higher-income families with greater educational attainment (Bradley, 1989; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; NICHD, 2005; Orthner & Randolph, 1999).

One program that works with high-risk families in an effort to provide knowledge and resources that support engagement in stimulating parent-child interaction is “Parents as Teachers” (PAT). “PAT is an international early childhood parent education and family support program serving families throughout pregnancy until their child enters kindergarten, usually age five” (Parents as Teachers National Center, 2005). According to Stolz, Brandon, and Wallace (2009), PAT is an evidence-based program and was deemed a “promising program” by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The program is free to families and

provides services such as home visits with a trained parent educator who “gives age-appropriate child development information, helps parents learn to observe their own child, addresses parenting concerns, and engages the family in activities that provide meaningful parent/child interaction” (Parents as Teachers National Center). The program also promotes positive family relationships that support child development through provision of group meetings with other families, developmental screenings, and resource referrals (Parents as Teachers National Center). While available to any interested family, PAT is particularly helpful to low-income families with a demonstrated need for additional support external to the family system (Hoelker & McGilly, 1999).

Another compensatory education effort established to increase the school readiness of low-income children is the federally-subsidized, nation-wide Head Start program. Head Start “provides grants to local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies who provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school” (Administration for Children and Families, 2007). The program began in 1965 and continually seeks to provide children from low-income families with the opportunities and experiences necessary to be as prepared as peers from higher-income households upon entry into school.

Evidence of Head Start’s immediate and long-term effects is well-documented. For example, immediate gains in participating children’s language, early literacy, and mathematic skills were documented by Zill, Resnick, Kim, O’Donnell, Sorongon, McKey, et al. (2003). Sustained, long-term gains were evidenced by results from the Panel Survey of Income Dynamics, reported by Garces, Thomas, and Currie (2002). In that study, information about

social and financial success was collected from adults (ages 18-30 years) who participated in Head Start as young children. Results indicated increased high school graduation rates for European-Americans and male African-American participants. European-Americans also had increased college attendance rates and higher income earnings than matched peers. Results also indicated a reduced likelihood of committing a crime for African Americans.

To increase parent involvement in children's educational life, and in response to federally mandated standards (42 USC 9836A SEC. 641A), some Head Start programs promote home-based parent involvement through accountability requirements (e.g., parent tracks number of books read to child at home) set forth by family service coordinators, parent education workshops that teach activities supportive of healthy early childhood development, provision of informative newsletters about family-centered community events, and facilitated access to community resources (e.g., providing parents and children the opportunity to obtain a public library card).

Local efforts.

Another way in which one local Head Start program has attempted to increase home-based parent-child engagement in cognitively enriching activities is through a program similar to Bailey's (2006) IHA program. The Knoxville-Knox County Head Start (KKCHS) program implemented a "homework activity" program designed to increase home-based parent involvement and reinforce curricular concepts taught in the classroom in 2006. "Homework activities" were designed to be fun activities that parents and children completed together at home, then returned the product of the activity to school to share with their teacher and classmates. Examples of activities were having parents and children engage in a scavenger hunt around the house to identify items starting with the letter B; having parents and children compare

their height by measuring with household objects; and having parents and children create a booklet depicting the child's favorite activities. KKCHS assessed parental opinions of the activities and program at the end of the first year of implementation. Findings revealed that parents may have been more likely to participate in the program if they had the resources and materials required to complete the activities readily available to them at no cost. In response, KKCHS provided a backpack filled with the necessary materials to each family as they began their second year of program implementation. Overall, parents and children seemed pleased with the program and were responsive to requests for their participation and support.

However, questions remained about the contributing factors accounting for differential parental involvement across classrooms and specific parental perceptions about the program and activities (i.e., do parents feel as though teachers notice their involvement, what they felt they gain from participating, etc.). To address these issues Head Start surveyed parents (one parent representative per family, N = 217) attending a monthly parent meeting. One of the primary questions the survey attempted to answer was the cause of differential parental involvement with regard to homework activity completion. To answer this, they asked parents "What makes it hard?" [to complete the homework activities]. The most frequent explanation was that parents were "too busy" or "didn't have enough time".

The notion that parents lack time to complete these activities with their children was reiterated by Head Start teachers who were asked for their opinions about possible causes for differing levels of parent involvement in the program. The most common problem teachers identified about the homework program was that parents do not have enough time to complete the activities with their child(ren). Based on responses from parents and teachers it is evident that

one of the most likely barriers to parent involvement in the KKCHS homework activity program was parents' inability to spend time engaged in the homework activities with their child.

Despite this lack of time, nearly all of the surveyed parents indicated that they enjoyed doing the homework, and most parents thought that two important aspects of completing the activities were that their child gains "experience and knowledge about what homework is" and "valuable bonding time together". Research by Daly (2001) further supports this, noting that parents generally do perceive time spent together as a family as an important component of healthy family functioning. Milkie, Mattingly, Nomaguchi, Bianchi, and Robinson (2004) further investigated the relationship between parental perceptions of the importance of family time and the ability to engage in such activities. Milkie et al., noted that while parents view time spent with children as important, they often perceive an inability to engage in activities that promote positive parent-child interactions because of time constraints imposed by work schedules and other demands external to the family system. Thus, there is evidence for both an actualized and perceived lack of time parents have available for meaningful interactions with children.

Barriers to Engagement in Home-Based Parent Involvement Activities

Barriers to engagement in home-based parent involvement activities (such as a lack of time) exist in many forms for all types of families, not just those participating in Head Start. For instance, households with two working parents may have difficulty finding time for one-on-one interactions with their children if work demands and scheduling conflicts restrict the amount of time they can devote to such activities. Having a child with special needs who requires additional daily and medical care, therapy, etc. is another example of a situation that could potentially impose significant time demands.

It is also important to recognize that some families may not be able to devote undivided time to their children because they are contending with circumstances that make it exceedingly difficult to do so (e.g., concern about procuring basic necessities like shelter, power, and/or food; substance abuse; neighborhood violence, etc.). It is important to recognize the various situations that impose increased demands on the family system, thereby rendering typically used time management strategies ineffective or inappropriate. For example, when a family is going through a divorce, and transitory living situations persist, then it may be likely to expect that household routines are also affected, with responsibilities shifting amongst family members. It is also possible to imagine a situation where a mother is contending with post-partum depression after the birth of a second child. In such a situation the mothers' ability to create and maintain a consistent family routine, that facilitates having time to engage in positive one-on-one parent-child interactions with the first-born, may be hindered.

Barriers to engaging in home-based parent involvement behaviors exist across all socioeconomic strata. For low-income families (like those enrolled in Head Start), coping with specific barriers may be particularly problematic as a result of having fewer and less reliable resources than middle- and high-income families. For instance, one of many plausible examples is that it takes less time to order food from a restaurant and have it delivered to the home than to go to the grocery store, purchase the items, and prepare the meal. What is essentially "bought" by paying for the convenience of meal delivery is time that can then be devoted to parent involvement. One explanation may be that that increased income suggests a greater ability to have stable, reliable resources and schedules affording the time necessary to engage in high quality interactions with their children. Perhaps one reason that low-income parents are more likely to perceive an inability to be involved, and are less able to do so, is that they possess fewer

resources to allocate to time creation (Lareau, 1987 & 2000). These studies reveal how the lack of time and resources pose barriers to home-based parental involvement. Therefore, the present study sought to examine the nuances of time in the lives of a specific group: low-income (Head Start) families.

Work by Dearing, McCartney, and Taylor (2001) indicated that an increase in low-income families' income-to-needs was particularly salient and meaningful for increasing positive developmental outcomes for young children (e.g., school readiness, receptive and expressive language, and social behaviors). Findings suggested that parents were better able to interact with their children when income increased and that increased interaction positively related to young children's outcomes.

The relationship between time demands and home-based parent involvement was investigated by Weiss, Mayer, Kreider, Vaughan, Dearing, Hencke, et al. (2003). Weiss, et al. found that "mothers who worked and/or attended school full-time were less involved in their children's schooling than were other mothers" (p.888). Weiss et al. stated that, "time appears to be a central aspect of employment that creates a barrier to educational involvement for low-income mothers" (2003, p. 881).

Investigating Time

Previous studies have examined the ways in which families use their time (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Bryant & Zick, 1996; Hamermesh, Frazis, & Stewart, 2005). However, there is a paucity of research examining the ways in which families (specifically Head Start families) *manage* and *organize* their time. In this study I specifically focus on the management and organization of time based on the notion that "management has several purposes in family living,

but, in general, it seeks to provide some degree of control over the events of everyday family living” (Paolucci, Hall, & Axinn, 1977).

The idea that the organization and management of time may be particularly salient for Head Start families is rooted in previous work noting the increased likelihood that low-income households are more chaotic in nature than middle- and high-income households (Petrill, Pike, Price, Plomin, 2004; Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, & Reiser, 2007). Roy, Tubbs, and Burton (2004) support this assertion, noting that “understanding the navigation of time for low-income families without access to adequate resources requires more than consideration of how hours are allocated during a typical day” (p. 169). They also suggest that “a reconceptualization of time and multiple yet distinct approaches to temporal organization are necessary to best examine complicated lives” (p.169).

In their work, Roy, Tubbs and Burton (2004) attempted to address this issue by examining how low-income mothers spend their time and how they “coordinate resources to meet changing time obligations” (p.170). They conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of 75 low-income mothers of children ranging in age from 18-48 months. Results indicated that “almost 40% of mothers saw their children for less than six hours a day, with 10% spending less than two hours with children” (Roy, Tubbs, & Burton, p.171). Reasons accounting for this amount of time with children include (a) “41% of employed mothers worked second-shift jobs between late afternoon and midnight, and another 8% worked third-shift jobs through the early hours of the morning” and (b) “most mothers spent at least two hours each day in transit with some commuting up to five hours each day” (p.172).

Roy, Tubbs, and Burton (2004) also found that low-income mothers organized their time by primarily using three strategies: “staggering obligations, expanding resources, and decreasing

obligations” (p.174). They specifically noted that being able to engage in such strategies was contingent upon reliable and consistent resources such as transportation and child-care.

Barring this and few other studies, we see a lack of critical examination about the ways in which low-income families manage and organize time. The current study attempts to fill this gap and builds upon Roy, Tubbs, and Burton’s (2004) study by specifically examining how low-income families manage and organize time to facilitate the occurrence of home-based parental involvement (i.e., Head Start “homework activities”). Investigating the mechanisms through which low-income families manage and organize time is supported by Lareau (2000) who stated that, “we need more studies...that show how parents go about marshalling resources as well as investigations of the outcomes of the process” (p.190). Lareau also stated that, “we need to highlight the multiple ways that families seek to comply with school requests [such as engaging in homework activities] and the uneven ways in which families “activate” their resources” (p.192).

Guiding Framework

A prominent aspect of studies investigating the associations between barriers to parent involvement, the ability to spend time with children, and children’s outcomes is the fact that these variables are all intricately intertwined. This is because parents’ ability to find time to interact with children is affected by forces both external to and within the family system. One way to understand the interactions that occur between parents and children and the contexts in which they live is through Bronfenbrenner’s Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model.

The PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) evolved from, and is an extension of, Bronfenbrenner’s earlier bioecological view of human development that described forces that interact with an individual,

how the individual interacts with those forces, and within the multiple contexts in which h/she lives. The PPCT model emphasizes the dynamic processes and interactions between people and their sociocultural environments central to Bronfenbrenner's previous work. The PPCT model provides a framework through which the interacting relationship between the home environment, time management and organization, parenting, and parent-child interactions can be better understood. The four components of the PPCT model are addressed below, but are out of typically presented order (presented herein as: Process, Context, Person, Time) to facilitate the flow of discussion.

Process. Central to much of Bronfenbrenner's work and the PPCT model is an understanding and investigation of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1999; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). According to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, proximal processes are "the primary mechanisms (or engines) of effective development" (p.572). At the most fundamental level, a proximal process is an interaction between people and objects within their immediate environment. According to Bronfenbrenner, to qualify as a proximal process an interaction must be consistent and occur often over time, require individuals to actively interact, and increase in complexity.

One such proximal process highlighted by both Bronfenbrenner and Roskos and Twardosz (2004) is the interaction that occurs between parents and children within the home environment. In this study, KKCHS' homework activities are considered to be one such proximal process.

Context. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the interactive nature between people and the context in which they live. Contexts range from being conceptually proximal (e.g., home, school)

to distal (e.g., parents' work environment) in accordance with the level of interaction a person has with the context.

One context in which parents and children regularly interact is the home environment. Home environments have defining resources and characteristics. For instance, studies have reported that low-income household contexts are more likely to be chaotic in nature (Petrill, Pike, Price, & Plomin, 2004). According to Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) "chaotic home environments characterized by high levels of social and physical stimulation in conjunction with disorganization are associated with dysfunctional proximal processes such as less responsive parenting with preschool children (as cited in Matheny, Wachs, Ludwig, & Phillips, 1995)" (p.121). Bronfenbrenner and Evans also noted that "chaos has the potential to interfere with the development and maintenance of proximal process that foster competences and character" (p.121). Thus, it is plausible that the chaotic nature that is presumed of some low-income households (per results from previous studies) may not be supportive of a proximal process such as completing a "homework activity" together.

Contextual resources. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) noted that "like all engines they [proximal processes] cannot produce their own fuel nor are they capable of self-steering" (p.572). In other words, Bronfenbrenner posits that in order for proximal processes to occur there must be supportive and facilitative resources available. Resources such as time, people, or knowledge "can either promote or hinder the occurrence of proximal processes" (Roskos & Twardosz, 2004, p. 289). Supportive (and/or hindering) resources are contained within the contexts in which proximal processes occur. Thus, when considering the key proximal process of this study (homework activities), it is imperative to note the supportive or hindering contextual resources.

Person. Just as contexts have certain characteristics and resources, so do individuals. A person's characteristics, knowledge, and skills alter the dynamic of a process because of the interaction that occurs between the interacting people and the contexts in which it occurs. Accordingly, a parent's ability to engage in the homework activities depends on the characteristics, knowledge, and skills needed to utilize resources (such as their time management and organization skills).

Time. The PPCT model posits the investigation of the nature of processes as they occur and change over time. Therefore, to truly capture the essence of the PPCT model, this study would have to be conducted longitudinally, which is not currently possible. Despite the inability to track fluctuations in family processes over time, this study will attempt to capture and describe interactive external and internal forces that influence engagement in the homework activities, such as the use of resources that contribute to parents' time management and organization.

Application of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework. In previous studies, there has been a focus on family book reading behaviors that influence young children's early literacy skills. Roskos and Twardosz (2004) recognized that family book reading could be classified as a proximal process and investigated the resources that support the occurrence of this form of home-based parental involvement. To do this, they classified resources into three categories: physical, social, and symbolic. According to Roskos and Twardosz, physical resources include "space, time, and materials" (p.290). Social resources are the persons present in the home environment that are willing and able to support family functioning. Symbolic resources are considered to be things such as routines and the influence of communities, societies, and culture, which frame and guide interactions with the physical environment and those within it.

Roskos and Twardosz (2004) investigated the physical, social, and symbolic resources described in 12 empirically-based, peer-reviewed, published studies that examined reading to children at home (which is one of the many forms of home-based parent involvement). Of significance to this study is that Roskos and Twardosz found that “none of the researchers provided information about whether families had predictable schedules and how they managed numerous family responsibilities to have time to read to their children” (p.297).

Dolezal-Sams, Nordquist, and Twardosz (2009) continued Roskos’ and Twardosz’s efforts and conducted an exploratory study to investigate “features of the home environment and organization of family life as they pertain to early literacy interactions”. The study used multiple observational and self-report measures to describe resources that appeared to support book reading practices between parents and children.

One of the measures used in the Dolezal-Sams, et al. study was the Home Literacy Resources Checklist (HLRC). The HLRC was based on the eight sub-categories of physical, social, and symbolic resources proposed by Roskos and Twardosz (2004). The HLRC is a checklist used to guide assessment of resources available within the home that support early literacy practices. Included in the HLRC were prompts to assess the sub-category ‘time’; which is considered a physical resource and is of greatest significance to this study. Specific items within this sub-classification were:

- (a) Child was not too active, excited, or upset by a previous event when the reading began;
- (b) Family members spend several hours at home together each day;
- (c) There is a predictable routine or schedule of daily events;
- (d) Parents and children share uninterrupted leisure time;
- (e) It appears that someone knows or

plans the family schedule; (f) Parents' work schedules allow for predictable time with family during daylight hours.

These items highlight an attempt to capture the essence of Bronfenbrenner's concepts and measure the interactions between processes within the environment and resources of the environment. Overall, results of their study suggested a positive relationship between the frequency of book reading interactions and the amount of physical, social, and symbolic resources found within the home environment.

Study Purpose

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, Roskos and Twardosz's (2004) classification of resources, and the work of Dolezal-Sams et al. (2009) served as a guiding framework for considering how families manage and organize time. In this study, I specifically focused on the interplay between individuals within a family system and the contextual resources they use to create time during which they can complete Head Start's weekly homework activity. As mentioned earlier, there is noted a lack of information regarding how families manage and organize time. The purpose of this study was to specifically address that gap by investigating the ways in which families manage and organize, time to facilitate the engagement in KKCHS' homework activities.

The premise for investigating how low-income families manage and organize time derives from previous work highlighting: (a) the positive benefits of home-based parental involvement, (b) evidence from interventions supporting increased rates of home-based parent involvement activities, and (c) socio-economic constraints hindering the occurrence of home-based parent involvement activities, like the homework activities.

Perspective of the Researcher

Inherent to qualitative research is the need to clearly articulate the researcher's perspective about their subjects, topic, and methods to ensure that the investigator's potential biases and expectations are evident at the onset of the study. Accordingly, I share herein my personal thoughts and predispositions that guided this study.

My personal experience, past research, and observation of families inform my belief that parents' value of their child's education, healthy development and future, as well as their use of available resources to manage and organize time, are essential components that increase the likelihood of meaningful parent-child interactions. I fully recognize that my personal upbringing in a privileged, upper-middle class family likely influenced this perspective, and thus will need to suspend this perspective, and remain as objective as possible, when interacting with participants and analyzing their words.

I sought to gain the perspective of parents without imposing my own assumptions by asking standardized questions and prompts and letting discussions develop naturally. I chose this method because I believe the best way to understand a person's perspective and the intricacies therein is to directly ask them, allowing for a flow of discussion to prevail. I am most closely aligned with the postpositivist paradigm given that I believe that the full extent and understanding of what "reality" is can never be fully understood because it is ever-changing, subjected to alteration by the experiences lived by individuals, and can act in an "invisible" manner. As Hatch (2002) described, I believe that as researchers we can only "approximate" reality through participants' perspectives. Despite the rigor employed in a study I believe that there will constantly be influential factors that cannot, or will not, be accounted for because of the invisible manner in which they influence people's lives.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Setting

In 2009 the Knoxville/Knox County Head Start (KKCHS) program served 925 low-income families of young children (36-48 months) across 44 classrooms in six centers located throughout the Knoxville area. KKCHS offers full- and part-day high quality early education, transportation services, as well as healthcare and developmental screenings for all children. Each family is visited at home by a Head Start representative at least once per year and is encouraged to support the accomplishment of agreed upon goals, such as increased involvement in the homework activities program. Parents have opportunities to become involved with the KKCHS program by volunteering in various ways in the classroom and at the administrative level. KKCHS supports parenting education by offering information about positive parenting practices and children's health and well-being during monthly group parent meetings.

KKCHS was an integral and supportive partner in this study. KKCHS informed parents about the study during a monthly meeting, distributed recruitment letters and collected parental interest forms, provided meeting spaces and support staff, prepared and served food and beverages, and provided childcare and transportation services for each focus group.

Participants

Families served by the Head Start program included in this study were only eligible if they fell at or below the current poverty index. Head Start parents were an ideal population for this study because they were familiar with programmatic efforts to increase home-based parent involvement via the homework activity program.

Participants included in this study were the primary legal caregivers (referred to throughout as ‘parent(s)’) of a child enrolled in KKCHS. Except for three instances only one parent representative per family attended the focus group. In two of those cases parents were not literate and had an accompanying family member complete the demographic questionnaire in his/her stead. One parent requested the presence of her spouse and newborn infant, citing cultural preference to not leave home without either family member.

Demographic Characteristics. The mean age of children referred to in this study was 59.87 (range: 48-67) months. The mean parent age across all focus groups was 33.18 years (range: 21-67). Of the parents who participated in the study, 68.2% ($n = 15$) were the child’s biological mother, 9.1% ($n = 2$) were biological fathers, 18.2% ($n = 4$) were biological grandmothers, and 4.5% ($n = 1$) was a biological grandfather. All but one parent (95.5%) reported that they had attended at least one monthly parent meeting at KKCHS since August 2008. Of those parents, most had attended more than half of the meetings, and 31.8% reported attending all of the meetings. Thus, nearly all of the parents in this sample were aware of and took advantage of KKCHS’s attempts to involve parents in their child’s education. Demographic information per homework completion level and focus group as it relates to Head Start overall is presented in table one in appendix A (all tables located in the appendix).

Participant Selection Process. Families were identified as belonging to either a high- (≥ 10 returned activities), moderate- (6-9 returned activities), or low-homework completion group (1-5 returned activities) based on the number of returned homework activities documented by teachers from August 2008-December 2008. Completion of at least one homework activity was required because of the need to be able to respond to questions about the program. All parents were blind to the fact that they were grouped according to the number of completed and returned

homework activities. Only families from the high- and low-homework completion groups were included in this study.

There were 451 potential participants (low homework completion group = 311, high homework completion group = 140). Parents were excluded if their child transferred classrooms during the homework tracking period or stopped attending KKCHS ($n = 182$). At the time of their transfer or drop, 82.6% of those excluded would have been categorized as part of the low-homework completion group. Parents identified by the program's English Language Coordinator as unable to proficiently speak and understand the English language were also excluded ($n = 33$), leaving a final sample of 236 potential participants. These parents were evenly distributed across both the high- and low- homework completion groups.

Recruitment

Families first learned about the study through announcements made by parent liaisons at a monthly meeting for all parents that occurred at all six centers of the KKCHS program. During one of the monthly meetings a parent liaison (who was informed about the study and equipped with a script and talking points) explained the purpose of the study to other parents present at the meeting. Within two weeks of that announcement classroom teachers gave potential participants a recruitment letter explaining the study and inviting the parent to participate. Interested parents returned completed forms with their contact information in order to schedule and confirm their focus group attendance.

Recruitment efforts resulted in a 27.2% response rate, with a similar number of parents responding from the high ($n = 34$) and low ($n = 27$) groups. However, this was further reduced to 32 participants (26 high / 8 low) because of failure to reach parent by phone ($n = 13$), errors

on the response form ($n = 8$), conflicting work schedules ($n = 4$), personal illness ($n = 2$), or family emergency ($n = 2$).

Focus Group Numbers

Separate focus groups were conducted for the high- and low-homework completion groups. The reason for conducting separate and homogenous focus groups was to encourage parents to respond in a manner that was most representative of their experiences and to allow for group comparisons. This is supported by Morgan (1997), who stated that the homogeneity resulting from such segmentation “allows for more free-flowing conversations among participants within groups, but also facilitates analyses that examine differences in perspective between groups” (p. 35).

A total of 18 high-homework completion group parents participated in three focus groups (n per group: 7/8/3) and four low-homework completion group parents participated in two focus groups (n per group: 2/2). Reasons parents gave for not being able to attend a focus group after agreeing to do so were tracked. For the high group reasons included parent ($n = 2$) or child ($n = 5$) illness and unexpected work obligations ($n = 1$). For the low group, anxiety/stress over lack of basic utilities ($n = 1$), mechanical car problems ($n = 1$), child illness ($n = 1$), suspected domestic dispute ($n = 1$), precluded participation.

Focus Group Procedure and Questions

A trained assistant moderator and I conducted each focus group in a multipurpose room at one of the KKCHS’s centers. Upon arrival, parents were welcomed by the assistant moderator then directed to childcare (if needed) and to the meeting space. The meeting room in which the focus groups were conducted had tables and chairs arranged in a rectangle to facilitate collaborative group discussion. Placed at each seat were two informed consent statements (one

for parents to sign and return prior to beginning the focus group and one for them to keep for their records) and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). Upon arriving at the meeting space I introduced myself and invited parents to serve themselves and begin eating the offered meal. Many times, parents took this opportunity to engage in informal conversations with other parents and complete the demographic questionnaire. As parents finished eating, I provided explanations about confidentiality and the purpose and procedure of the group meeting and asked them to sign the informed consent document if they agreed to participate.

Once all informed consent documents were collected, I began recording the focus group conversations. I first asked parents to engage in a silent reflective-recall about a time that they engaged in one of the homework activities with their child. Then, the following questions (and related follow-up questions if necessary) were posed to parents one at a time. Following each question was a group discussion during which parents provided elaborative responses.

1. What was doing that activity with your child like?
2. What helps you find the time to do the homework activities with your child?
3. What makes it difficult to do the homework activities with your child?
4. Does anyone else in your child's life help him or her complete the homework activities?
5. Is there anything that you would like Head Start to know about family life and the things that either help you or make it difficult to do the homework activities?

At the end of each focus group parents were given a bag filled with children's school supplies/ arts and crafts materials (e.g., crayons, pencils, glue, construction paper, etc.) that served as a "thank you" for their participation. These procedures were consistent, regardless of the number of participants present at each focus group.

Focus Group Management

On average, focus groups with seven or more people lasted for 75 minutes. Focus groups with three or fewer people lasted approximately 50 minutes. The difference in the amount of time spent with larger versus smaller groups was a function of the volume of comments made per person, per group. Overall, parents contributed to conversations fairly equally. In a few circumstances I had to prompt specific parents who had not yet contributed unique comments to the conversation. To do so, and to stay in-line with the direction and tone of the discussion, I asked for their thoughts about the question or another parent's comment. Sometimes I followed with, "tell me more about that" in order to elicit further reflection on the topic.

There were also times that parents began discussing topics that were not central to the purpose of the study or in direct relation to the original question. In these situations I listened carefully and chose a specific comment to tie back to the original question and focus of the conversation. Interestingly, when one parent became tangential, other parents would often make comments like, "Well. That's true, but it's not really about what we're discussing." Thus, the self-regulatory abilities of the group often prevented me from having to purposefully realign the conversation.

Pilot Testing

Krueger and Casey (2000) stated that focus group questions should be pilot tested, then refined in accordance with suggestions. Drawing from the Head Start sample may have reduced the number of parents who were able to participate in the focus groups. Thus, focus group questions were pilot-tested with four non-Head Start affiliated mothers who had at least one child between the ages of 3-5 years. All pilot-testers agreed that the questions and follow-up prompts were easy to understand and presented in a logical order. The only suggested alteration was to

change the wording in the first question from “recall” to “think about” and use follow-up prompts to support parents’ reflective recall.

Analysis

Focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word[®]. Demographic data was entered into a SPSS database and analyzed using the software’s descriptive analysis tools. The initial analysis plan was for participants to collaboratively group their responses into themes. However, this was not done for numerous reasons. First, because of the small number of participants, it was difficult to generate enough data to be able group into themes in the low-homework completion groups. Second, I received poor and disinterested reactions when I explained the task of creating themes to the first two focus groups. Based on their reactions I decided to forgo the activity and concentrate on having deeper conversations. I feared that by trying to force the parents into doing something that they did not seem interested in would alter the synergistic energy and positive direction that the focus group was displaying. Third, not having participant-based themes for all groups meant that comparisons across groups would have been impossible.

Per suggestions by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), I began the data analysis process by reading through each focus group transcript three times. The first two times I read the data to gain an overall sense of focus group and nature of the issues that parents discussed. During the third reading, I used the iterative constant comparison method to create themes of participant responses to each question. To accurately group data I compared and contrasted each line/sentence by asking, “What is this about?” and “How does it differ from the preceding or following statements?” (Ryan & Bertrand, 2003, p. 23). When creating themes I electronically

cut and pasted lines of data from the focus group transcript into mutually exclusive thematic categories listed on separate Microsoft PowerPoint® slides.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Three primary categories emerged from analyses: time management and organization, people and the physical environment, and methods of parental involvement. Sub-themes and parents' quotes are included to support each category. It is best to think of each category not as identical responses grouped into a homogenous whole, but rather as a continuum along which perspectives differ, yet still relate to the overall theme.

Presentation of the three categories begins by addressing the primary goal of this study (investigating time management and organization) and addresses aspects that are helpful and hindering to time management and organization. A secondary goal of this study was to investigate potential differences between the high- and low-homework completion groups. However, given the disparate numbers of parents between homework completion groups, results for parents from all focus groups were combined. Included in the discussion section will be further elaboration about this alteration of the research plan. It is important to remember that these themes were extracted from conversations with a small, non-representative group of Head Start parents. Thus, readers should be very cautious about any conclusions drawn from these results.

Time Management and Organization

Across both homework completion groups parents discussed how they managed and organized responsibilities in order to find time to complete the homework activities with their children. Parents mainly discussed time management and organization in two ways: techniques and tools that helped them manage and organize time efficiently and the obstacles they faced in doing so.

Supportive time management and organization techniques. The most prominent theme (mentioned by 68.1% of parents) relating to time management and organization was the utilization of organizational aids such as planners, calendars, and/ or a specific storage location for the homework activity sheet.

Well, I even put homework on the calendar. On my front door...my calendar is magnetic and it's on my front door, okay. And just like with the homework, so I can remember to give it to 'em, just like the note, we just got something just yesterday that we need to return.

Many parents (54.5%) also explained that having a standard routine with regard to when the homework activities were completed reduced having to figure out when to find time each week and helped their children understand that the activities were important.

And I mean we do it right when he comes in from school. Like he comes in, because I work part-time at night three days a week. So as soon as he comes in and he kinda settles down we do it right then. We set a certain time.

Thursdays we'd get together and we'd work on her homework after breakfast and after she'd got herself ready to do whatever and we'd sit down and do some homework. And that worked out pretty well for us.

Other parents explained that they did not have a specific routine regarding the homework activities. These parents embraced a flexible perspective about time that allowed them to capitalize on available, unplanned moments when they felt it was appropriate to engage in the homework activities with their children.

I found that out really quick...that *time* will present itself, normally. Somewhere during the week, um...you know that you've got 'til, from *now* until Friday to turn the homework in, so that gives us some flexibility. Sometimes it's that Monday when we do get it done...sometimes it's not 'til that Friday. You know, or somewhere in *between*. You know, I mean it's just when the opportunity is best according to the children, according to your schedule, to their schedule...to whether or not if there's doctor's appointments goin' on during the week, or you know...if it's your social life or whatever may come into play. The time'll usually present itself.

Parents also (45%) spoke about organizing time in accordance with their child's state, and the importance of capitalizing on moments when the child was most agreeable to engaging in the homework activity. Some parents specifically noted that they waited to engage their child in the activity when he/she was in a “settled” or “calm” state. One mother said, “Yeah, I make sure they eat first, then I get ‘em settled. My little ones, *then* we do the homework.”

If you catch the children when they're tired, they don't want to do it...they're irritable, you know. If you catch them when it's a little bit too late, than they're sleepy and they don't want to complete it and it doesn't make it enjoyable. It's like an older child in an older school that's just procrastinating on doing the homework...these babies do it too.

Obstacles to managing and organizing time. Some parents lacked reliable transportation and/or a valid driver's license. These parents explained how needing to rely on others or using local public transportation was a significant hindrance to managing and organizing time. They specifically talked about the inefficiency of the local mass transit system.

Takes about four hours to get to one place. If you have to go like to out west, it'll take you that long. It takes *soo* long. Cause they have to stop everywhere and you have to get off of the bus and connect to another bus.

Parents (31.8%) also cited their children's behavior as an obstacle to managing time and that they sometimes found it challenging to engage their child in the homework activity. One mother noted that her son was especially stubborn saying, “Sometimes it's hard when they don't wanna...they don't have their mind set on it.” Another parent said that for her, “It was like pulling teeth. You know? But if it's something...we try to make them interesting, but then there's some he's just like, ‘I don't care’, you know? ‘Not fazing me’.”

During some focus groups were discussions about how parents felt as though their child's staunchness to want to complete the activity led to parental exasperation. One parent explained

how her child wanted to do the activities with her immediately after school, but that she was not always “in the mood” to do them with her child.

There were also very tangible aspects of daily life that parents perceived as obstacles to finding time to spend with their children. The most commonly noted of these were daily and household-related responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, laundry, etc. Some parents contended with this by completing certain tasks when children were not in the environment. Parents noted that doing this allowed them to focus on their children when they *were* present.

Myself, mixed schedule...I'm off Monday and Tuesday, so she off on Tuesday and Wednesday, so then on Monday I wash the clothes, you know...fix the house and everything...because the babies in the school I don't have nobody with me. I'm trying to do some work, keep all my...it's what I do all the time...and when she is home she do the same thing...clean the house... *before* the kids is coming home.

Cause I have found out the best time for me to mop the floor is while they're asleep.

Parents noted that appointments, such as going to the doctor, meeting with case/ social workers from the Department of Human Services, and/or complying with requirements necessary for receiving government aid were significant obstacles to being able to manage and organize time.

Appointments, doctor's appointments, or something came up that you gotta do at work or whatever. It just comes up and you just you gotta get things done, you try to squeeze them in and if you don't make the time for it, it won't get done. I remember one time we had a WIC appointment. I showed up about 9 o'clock, I was there until four. I was there all day and I had to go back to work at 5:30. I was like 'ooh, my goodness'.

Yeah, appointments...yes, WIC, oh WIC is the worst. WIC, you're usually there about four hours depending on whether you get quick WIC or not. If you got main WIC, you might as well pack up your whole house and just sit there. Cause it's

gonna take you a while. And the food stamp office, you show up for your appointment and then your worker's not there and they make you reschedule.

Parents also explained that caring for and/or helping others sometimes made it difficult to manage and organize their time.

Well, with my sister, I have to pick her up everyday from school...she just refuses to drive, she's just afraid, she doesn't like...she's afraid to drive. So I have to pick her up around 1 o'clock.

You know a lot of times I gotta take my momma a lot of places in her car, taking care of her vehicle. So you know most the time when she come over I be like 'T, we gotta go'.

However, some parents specifically noted that responsibility to their child was their highest priority and considered that prior to helping others.

We got a big family too, but it's not *my* family, it's my baby daddy's family. His mom had 12 kids. And she's got twins that's three and I watch them sometimes. So, I say...I do my little boy's homework *then* I come down there and get them. That's what I do. But if his homework ain't done, I ain't gonna do it.

Parents explained that it was difficult to manage and organize time in ways that afforded them the opportunity to interact with their children when their work schedule differed from their child's available time.

My husband works first shift, then when I get off work my husband goes to work. So it's like, I'd see him for half an hour a day and that's it.

If I had a regular work schedule, and you know, knew more than a week in advance what I was working, that would help.

High levels of parental stress were also noted by a couple of parents as an obstacle to engaging in the homework activities.

But a lot of times I'm stressed out and got a lot on my mind and I be like, 'Ba-shh. Forget that right now, we can get to that another', ya know?

Yeah, it could be somethin' like you ain't got no gas for your car. Just worrying about you know, everyday life stuff.

People and Physical Environment

There were also discussions about how things proximal to family life and daily functioning, such as the physical environment and interactions with people, related to the homework activities and the management and organization of time in a manner that facilitated completion of those activities. Subsumed within this theme are aspects such as perception of family support, inclusion of siblings during completion of the homework activity, and alteration of the physical environment during engagement in the homework activities.

Half of the parents felt supported by other members of their immediate and extended families, and said that this support made it easier to manage to find time to engage in the homework activities with their children. Some parents noted the importance of relying on family during emergency or unexpected situations. Other parents noted their ability to trust and rely on their partner to complete the homework activities with their child should they be unavailable or unable to find time to do so during a particular week.

My brother...he'll help them. If I get frustrated, cause if they don't want to do it, or if I just don't have time, my brother will take over, he'll sit there and read it and make them read it. They've got a lot of help that helps them.

Some parents noted a consistent lack of support from family and/or friends due to being a single-parent or having a spouse with a disability. Some parents also discussed their inability to entrust completion of the homework activity with anyone but him or herself.

Like his dad has helped him do homework activities...but like in extreme cases, emergencies, his dad has helped him, but I feel more comfortable...I'm kind of a little control freak when it comes to my son.

More than half (54.5%) of the parents mentioned the inclusion of siblings during completion of homework activities. One parent said, "See I have another son and he gets in on

the homework which he's smaller, he's a year younger and he get in on the homework too."

While some parents fully involved siblings, others limited sibling involvement during the activity. For example, one mother explained how she allowed the younger sibling to get materials in preparation for the activity, but did not allow him to participate.

Yes, he likes to go and get the crayons. I'll say 'Ja, can you go and get the crayons?' And he'll go in and find the crayons, or I'll tell him to go and find the colored paper...ah...the construction paper. And he'll go in the drawer and get it.

Parents also discussed how and why they did or did not alter the physical environment, and where they engaged in the homework activities with their child. Less than half of parents (40.9%) said they turned off the television while they and their children completed the homework activity.

It's off cause the T.V. distracts you.

At that age you can't have the T.V. on because they'll zone into it.

If you're trying to compete with Spongebob or Hannah Montana you, I mean...it's just. I mean forget about it! You gotta get 'em away from the radios, TVs...we turned off the stuff throughout the house. I mean we turned it *off*. We didn't just go in another room and leave the sets on. It was just because their little ears don't miss anything unless they wanna miss it.

Other parents elaborated on why they never turned off the television during the activity.

I think it's real important when it comes to the homework. I don't change the environment very much. I leave the TV going if the TV's playing, if the radio's playing I'll leave the radio goin', if the dogs are running around in the yard or in the house barking because there's a cat outside. I leave those distractions goin' because I know that she's not gonna have a, um, the opportunity to always get a quiet place, everything to be all nice and *calm* when she has to do homework in the future. So, ah...leave those things goin' has a way to help her to concentrate on what she's doing instead of everything around her so she can kind of shut those things out while she does her homework. To not to get real distracted and wonderin' what SpongeBob's doing on the T.V. That *now* we're focusing on your homework. And she's getting' so much better at doing that.

Some parents (40.9%) completed the activity with their child at the kitchen or dining room table. This percentage includes parents who said they do and those who said they do not turn off the television. Thus, while these parents do not specifically alter the environment, they do ensure the use of a consistent location that serves as a “marker” that they are engaged in the homework activity and not with anything else that may be going on around them during that time.

Methods of Parental Involvement

The third primary theme centered on how parents’ were involved with homework activities. Within this theme are issues related to how parents prepared for, and ensured completion of, the homework activities.

Nearly 60% of parents engaged in some form of homework activity preparation, and mentioned that doing so made it easier to find time to do the activities. Three distinct forms of preparation were evident within this sub-theme: material, mental, and verbal preparation. All parents who contributed to this conversation explained that they prepared and gathered the materials needed to complete each activity before engaging in it with their child.

But, I usually always have you know all the supplies I need before we sit down and do our homework. And we go to the closet and get it out. I usually have plenty of stuff though in the box. I try to keep it full.

When I get mine on Monday I go and I make a list of what I need.

These parents also mentioned that they thought through how to complete and best engage their child during the activity. Mental preparation entailed thinking about and discussing engagement strategies.

I usually go in and read it and then I think about stuff...like okay...what can I do with this? What kind of fun things can I make with this?

But if it's something...we try to make them interesting, but sometimes it's just the way it's presented and we have to...sometimes my husband and I...sometimes we wait 'til Friday cause we're trying to come up with another way to present it to him.

Of the parents who said they prepared for the activities in some manner, 23% said that they verbally prepared their child for the activity. Parents did this by telling their child what the activity was about, when the activity due, and when it was likely that they would do it together.

Parents also discussed ways they maintained their child's attention during the homework activity. Some of the specific engagement strategies mentioned included making homework "like a game", parent/child role reversal, avoidance of the activity being "chore-like" or rushed for the child, making the homework activity relevant to their child's life and preferences, and having a specific weekly or daily routine during which the child could expect that the homework activity was going to be completed.

That's the only way he wanted to do it, is if it was a game. So that's the main thing you know we had to make it a game. We sit down and we *play* school.

You know I think the real key especially in the age group we're dealing with here is don't make it a chore. It's gotta be number one, it's gotta be fun. Just like she's gotta want to (laughter from group). Cause if you make it a chore they're gonna show you who's boss.

If you can tie other things, things that happen around the house. We would try to tie into a lot of the activities on the homework activities and ah, compare what the homework was stressing as to what she did on a regular basis, in her bedroom, in her playroom, outside or whatever.

Validation Strategies

In an effort to provide trustworthy and credible data I triangulated my data sources. First, in the results section I corroborated the themes (guided by participant input) with supportive quotes provided by parents during the focus groups. Second, a peer-review of the themes was

conducted with skilled and objective peers involved in the Interdisciplinary Phenomenology Colloquy at the University of Tennessee. Their role was to provide an external check of my methods and interpretations to ensure I minimized researcher bias and maintained consistency in my methods and analyses. The Interdisciplinary Phenomenology Colloquy meets weekly and is focused on the finding deeper meanings of universal human experiences through use of existential phenomenological inquiry (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Finally, I conducted a member check with one parent that participated in each focus group and asked him/her whether he/she thought the identified themes were representative of the focus group discussion and of theirs and other Head Start parents' experiences in general. All of the parents ($n = 5$) included in the member check agreed with the way the data was interpreted. None offered additional comments or thought anything needed to be changed.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The results of this exploratory study suggest that most participants managed and organized time to facilitate completion of KKCHS' homework activities. Parents discussed resources that were supportive of their ability to manage and organize time, such as social support, and issues that hindered finding time to spend with their child (e.g. lack of transportation). This discussion section explores the previously identified themes as they relate to parents' conceptualizations of time, parents' reports of children's influence on time management and organization, and the interactions between people, processes, and contexts as they relate to completion of the homework activities. Study limitations and implications for research and practice are also discussed.

Conceptualizations of Time

The findings of this study suggest that to complete Head Start's weekly homework activities parents utilize time management and organization techniques such as organizational aids and routines, having a flexible perspective about time, and initiating interactions with children when they are in a calm and rested state. Throughout all of the discussions with parents it was evident that there was a continuum along which parents managed and organized time; ranging from highly structured and guided by calendars and routines, to flexible daily schedules that did not rely on standardized daily schedules. The notion that families think of time along a continuum was supported by findings from an ethnographic study of 14 families (see Darrah, Freeman, & English-Lueck, 2007).

The families included in Darrah, Freeman, and English-Lueck's (2007) study were of upper middle-class status and had considerably more tangible resources (e.g., reliable and

consistent use of transportation and childcare) available to facilitate and maintain the management and organization of time. Nevertheless, those families also noted similar time barriers found in this study such as demanding work schedules, helping others outside of the immediate family, and high levels of parenting stress. However, families included in that study never mentioned two of the most passionately discussed “time-takers” for families included in this study— contending with unreliable transportation and spending time waiting to meet with DCS case workers. Thus, there is some support that finding time to spend with children may be an issue for families across the socioeconomic spectrum, but that there are some barriers unique to low-income families with fewer financial and tangible resources that serve as convenient “time-savers”.

Overall, parents mostly discussed time management and organization in very concrete ways, citing the usefulness of organizational aids and bemoaning the time it takes to use public transportation. Abstract themes, (e.g., organization of time in accordance with child’s state) were never directly discussed by parents, but were extrapolated from their comments. The relative lack of reflective introspection about time management and organization is not limited to this study and was in fact a central finding of Darrah, Freeman, and English-Lueck’s (2007) study. Darrah et al. concluded that discussing time is difficult for many people as a function of its abstract nature. They also noted that intangible time management and organization issues are so deeply interwoven into our lives that it is difficult to recognize, extract, and discuss them in meaningful ways. Therefore, it is not assumed that the lack of deep introspection and discussion about time management and organization was related to parents’ income, education, or other characteristics, but rather to the subject matter itself.

Parents' Report of Child Influence

Lengua and Kovacs (2005) suggested that child irritability positively correlates with inconsistent parenting. They offered the suggestion that in turn, inconsistent parenting may lead to child irritability. This reciprocal relationship between child characteristics and parenting was further explored in Carson, Carson, Klee, and Jackman-Brown's (2007) study which found that parents of children with speech-language disorders reported less nurturance and relied more on physical discipline techniques than parents of typically developing children.

Similarly, parents in this study noted how children influenced their time management and organization behaviors. For example, parents cited children's affective state as one influence on the way in which they managed and organized time. Parents also described how their child's behavior during the activity influenced their willingness to engage in the homework activities (i.e., child lacks attention and is hyperactive during activity decreases parents willingness to engage in the homework activity). While parents may govern the ways in which time is managed and organized, it seems that they also recognized their children as influential to that process.

These findings are not unique to this study. Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Burow (1995) revealed that 86% of their parent sample altered interactions with their children based on the child's unique characteristics (e.g., parental assessment of child's cognitive development and capabilities; perception of frustration threshold) and how, specifically those characteristics influenced the occurrence of home-based parental involvement activities (similar to KKCHS' homework activities). Given repeated support in this and other studies, it is important to consider children's characteristics and parents' level of awareness of their child's behavior patterns when discussing how parents manage and organize time and home-based parental involvement.

Bronfenbrenner's Framework

This study described external and internal mechanisms that supported or hindered parents' ability to find time to engage in KKCHS' homework activities. One lens through which we can consider these mechanisms is through Bronfenbrenner's assertion (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) that people, processes, and contexts interact and change over time; and that resources must be available in the context where the processes occur. In this study, KKCHS' homework activities were considered as one such proximal process. Some of the influential and supportive resources in the contexts where the homework activities occurred were social support, inclusion of siblings, and use of routines and organizational aids.

Parents' conceptualization of time influenced the homework activity processes. For instance, some parents perceived time as a commodity that they actively managed and organized using routines and organizational aids. Other parents had a more passive view of time wherein they never specifically planned, but remained aware of and capitalized on, opportunities during which they could engage in the homework activities with their children. For parents with a structured view of time it may be that homework activities typically occur on the same day, at the same time, and in the same place; while engagement in the homework activities occurs on different days and at various times and places for those with a flexible view of time. These different perspectives about time may be attributed to culture. For instance, Jones and Brown (2005) described perspectives about time in terms of a past, present, or future orientation. They explained that a person's actions and time management behaviors (or lack thereof) were guided by which perspective they most identified with. Thus, one way to explain the differences in time

management and organization behaviors may be to consider the culture in which a person was raised and lives.

The findings of this study mirror results described in previous work (see Heymann & Earle, 2001; Weiss, Mayer, Kreider, Vaughan, Dearing, Hencke, et al., 2003), suggesting that low-income parents contend with specific barriers such as lack of transportation, late shift-work hours, appointments required to obtain government aid, as well as household responsibilities and care of others that cannot be delegated to paid labor agencies. Parents explained that these contextual characteristics increased their stress levels, causing them to rush children through the homework activity. When considered through an ecological systems-lens, it may be that parents' conceptualizations of time and levels of stress influence if, when, where, and how the homework activities occurred.

Limitations

Great caution should be taken when generalizing these results given this study's limitations. First, selection bias was a considerable factor in this study. This sample was primarily comprised of Head Start parents who were asked to participate specifically because they had completed many of the homework activities, an indication that they were probably highly involved in their children's life. Furthermore, parents in this study were self-reporting in a group setting. This may have led to parents' providing socially desirable answers. Additionally, parents may have been influenced by other parents' comments in the focus group and responded differently than if interviewed alone.

Second, this study had a low response rate (27.7%). Efforts to recruit families were limited to a group announcement and letters sent directly to eligible parents. The possibility exists that the response rate would have been higher if recruitment was conducted over a longer

period of time and in a more personal manner (e.g. principal investigator available in classrooms and on bus to meet and talk with parents). Having more personal contact with parents may have reduced trepidation they may have felt in being involved in a research study. Had there been a higher percentage of responding parents, then perhaps more parents would have attended the focus groups.

Third, this study had a very low sample size, consisting only of a select group of parents from one compensatory education program. Moreover, certain groups of parents (moderate amount of homework completion, English Language Learners) were excluded. Fourth, this study only considered parents' involvement with the KKCHS' homework activity program. This view of home-based parental involvement may have excluded the likely possibility that parents managed time to be involved in their child's life in other ways (e.g., bedtime book-reading).

Alteration of research plan. The original intention for this study was to conduct an equal number of focus groups, with an equal number of parents for high-and low-homework completion groups. The rationale for this method was to facilitate the comparison of time management and organization techniques across such families. However, despite plans and efforts to accomplish this, both the number of parents and the number of focus groups was greater for the high-homework completion group than the low-homework completion group, hindering the ability to draw inter-group comparisons.

Insights for future research. The following description of my experiences is included here to aid future researchers conducting similar research. At the beginning of the recruitment process there was an equal response rate from potential high- and low low-homework completion participants. However, many could never be reached because of phone disconnections or because they never returned messages. Parents also gave various reasons for

not being able to attend a focus group after agreeing to do so, such as mechanical car problems, anxiety about not being able to afford basic utilities, and a suspected domestic dispute. Perhaps the same obstacles that precluded parents from participating in this study are the same or similar obstacles precluding them from completing many of the homework activities with their children.

With regard to the quality of their comments, my impressions were that the small number of participants in the low-homework completion group provided cursory descriptions of engaging in a homework activity that were void of affect and detail, and seemingly apathetic at times. Parents' evaluations of the homework activity program focused on aspects they did not like or enjoy. In one low-homework completion focus group, parents seemed to echo each other's responses, rather than engaging in a collaborative dialogue. It is important to note that there were only two parents present in each low-homework completion focus group. Thus, these parents were not in the same type of social situation as parents participating in the high-homework completion focus groups. In turn, this situation may have accounted for the fewer social interactions and dialogue that occurred.

Implications for Research and Practice

Future Studies. In order to further examine this topic and contribute to what is known about family time management and organization, it will be important for future research to include a wider range of homework completion rate groups and investigate how families find time to be involved in their child's life in other ways. It will also be important for future research to include families from diverse cultural backgrounds and ELL parents and in order to better understand how culture and learning English as another language influence time management and organization.

Of the 22 parents included in this study, nine were single parents. The data analysis procedure used to identify themes did not allow for comparison of single and coupled households. Past research has found that the presence of a supportive spouse can be a benefit to the household (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Simons, Lorenz, Wu, & Conger, 1993). It is likely that the number of adults in a household available to provide assistance and be involved in the child's life may influence the ways in which time is managed. Therefore, it will be important for future research to consider the time management and organization behaviors of single and coupled households.

As is noted in focus group methodology, focus groups should consist of more than two people (Morgan, 1997). Having more than two people in each low-homework completion focus group may have reduced the likelihood of the echoing of responses that occurred. Furthermore, focus group methodology suggests a maximum of ten participants per group (Morgan). While possible, it was quite challenging to both the moderator and participants in this study to ensure equal participation when there were only eight participants. Thus, it is suggested that there should not be more than eight participants in a focus group when discussing family processes.

General findings about low-income parents suggest that they may be less likely to engage in home-based parent involvement activities, like Head Start's homework activities, because of poor personal educational experiences and a low sense of parenting efficacy (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Demsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Jones, 2001). However, when looked at on an individual level, we see that some families are engaged and evidence great enthusiasm about their child's education. Thus, there is much need for future research to focus on the variations within a population, rather than making broad generalizations about a group.

Implications for practice. The following are merely suggestions for practice, given that this was only one study with a small number of participants. Before considering any policy changes, replication of this study, as well as more and larger studies about family time management an organization, should occur.

First, time management and organization strategies that worked for some families in this study may also work for other families, and increase their ability to engage in the homework activities program. One suggestion may be for parents to observe their child's behavior patterns, noting when their child may be most receptive to engaging in an activity. For instance, in this study some parents noted that they engaged in the activities after the child's bath-time, when he/she was most calm. Parents also explained that one of their time management strategies was having routine of when, where, and how they completed the homework activities. Another suggestion may be to encourage parents to include all children in the environment to participate in the homework activity. KKCHS, and other similar programs, may want to highlight such strategies during monthly parent meetings or perhaps during one-on-one home visits with parents.

Second, parents may be motivated to sustain or increase their involvement in the homework activities program if their participation were acknowledged. Currently, parents who engage in the homework activities with their children are not praised or recognized in any manner by the KKCHS program. One suggestion is to institute a recognition program, whereby parents who complete homework activities with their children are acknowledged in a way that is meaningful to them. Third, KKCHS, and other similar programs, may want to consider further highlighting the utility of the homework activities to parents. In doing so, it is suggested that

teachers and administrators note that the activities are not just to reiterate curricular concepts, but to also give parents an opportunity to engage with their children while at home.

Fourth, parent education and intervention efforts seeking to increase home-based parent involvement might be designed or amended to address family time management and organization. In doing so, programs would want to work with families to first identify if and how time management and organization functions in the family's life. Next, existing supports and barriers to effective time management and organization should be considered. Then, other potential environmental and social resources that might facilitate specific time management strategies should be discussed. Of utmost importance is for such efforts to develop a plan that mobilizes any existing resources, is respectful to each family, and is congruent with each family's unique attributes and values, rather than mandating what "should" or "should not" be done to manage and organize time.

It is also important to recognize that finding isolated time segments during which parents and children can engage in homework activities may be overwhelming or not feasible for some families. In those situations, Head Start, and other programs attempting to increase parental involvement, should focus on alternative options for parental involvement that can be interspersed throughout the day and parents' typical daily interactions with their children. For instance, parents could integrate learning and sharing opportunities during bath-time (e.g., comparison of what floats and what does not float), or while at the grocery store with their child (e.g., identifying produce and colors, counting, weighing). Thus, the need to find an isolated amount of time does not increase parents' stress and allows parents to capitalize on the time that is available to them.

A substantial number of parents described the extensive amount of time they had to wait to receive healthcare and financial aid services from government-appointed offices. Some government offices recognize this injustice and have attempted to decrease this inconvenience on families (<http://q-matic.com/en/Int/What-weve-done/Public-sector/test4/>). However, system-wide change is slow. Scholars have noted that making low-income families who are in need of services wait serves to perpetuate the power differentials between social classes (Nicholas & Tideman, 1971). The cause of the extended wait times in these offices is not documented in this study. However, what is evident is a need for change to an inefficient, time-taking system that is designed to serve and alleviate barriers for low-income families, not create them.

Conclusion

Children living in poverty, when compared to middle-and high income peers, are at greater risk for long-term negative outcomes such as poor academic achievement, lower language and literacy skills, and greater likelihood of receiving special education services for learning disabilities (Bradley, 1989; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Hart & Risley, 1992; Gottlieb, Alter, Gottlieb, & Wishner, 1994; Kozol, 1991; NICHD, 2001; NICHD, 2005; Schorr, 1988). KKCHS' homework activities are one way that parents can be encouraged to interact with their children, perhaps contributing to school readiness, thereby closing the achievement gap that exists between socioeconomic strata upon school entry, and increasing the likelihood of positive academic achievement for their children (Bus, Ijzendoorn, & Pelligrini, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Unfortunately, the likelihood of this type of involvement may be hindered by a lack of resources, specific barriers, and/or family characteristics. Rather than attempting to alter all of the impediments to home-based parental involvement, one way programs can assist families is to

help them learn how to use existing resources to manage and organize time in a manner that supports occurrences of home-based parental involvement. This builds on a strengths-based perspective of working with families. Research guided by this perspective recognizes that families have inherent strengths and resources (e.g. social networks) available to support their family functioning (Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004; Domínguez & Watkins, 2003). This study contributes to the strengths-based literature by illustrating how some low-income parents value their child's education and mobilize resources to support it.

It is worth noting that home-based parental involvement encompasses many different types of interactions between parents and children. This study examined just one aspect of that type of involvement by looking at parental involvement in KKCHS' homework activities. Therefore, this study does not offer additional insight about other parent-child interactions that might occur in the home environment. Furthermore, it should not be concluded that parents who were not highly involved in the homework activities program were also not involved in other aspects of their child's life. In fact, the possibility exists that perhaps parents and children are already engaged in activities outside of school, making participation in the homework activities program burdensome.

This study's unique contribution is that it documents, for one of the first times in empirical literature, that low-income families do manage their time and how they go about doing so. Families spoke about very specific time management and organization techniques that can be translated to practice for other programs and families. Thus, study is a beginning step towards filling the gap that exists in what is known about family time management and organization techniques, but more research is needed to better understand and work with families on this issue. Contrary to some previous research, many low-income parents in this study valued their

child's education and actively supported it by managing and organizing their time in a manner that facilitated engagement in KKCHS' homework activities program.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Focus Group	High #1	High #2	High #3	Total High	Low #1	Low #2	Total Low	KKCHS
N	7	8	3	18	2	2	4	925
Mean completed activities (SD)	12.14 (1.574)	12.25 (.886)	12.67 (1.528)	11.80 (1.470)	2.00 (1.14)	1.00 (0.00)	2.87 (1.463)	Not reported
First year at KKCHS	4	5	1	10	1	2	3	Not reported
Second year at KKCHS	3	3	2	8	1	0	1	Not reported
Child Sex (% male)	57.14	50.00	33.33	50.00	100	100	100	Not reported
Child Ethnicity (%)								
European-American	85.71	50.00	33.33	61.11	50.00	0	25.00	57.30
African American	14.28	25.00	33.33	22.22	50.00	50.00	50.00	32.40
Bi-racial	0	0	33.33	5.55	0	50.00	25.00	9.40
Hispanic	0	12.50	0	5.55	0	0	0	13.50
Asian	0	12.50	0	5.55	0	0	0	0.90

Table 1. Participant Demographics, continued

Focus Group	High #1	High #2	High #3	Total High	Low #1	Low #2	Total Low	KKCHS
Child Age (months) (SD)	61.05 (5.76)	57.48 (7.08)	64.00 (2.55)	60.10 (6.19)	56.90 (7.35)	60.85 (7.99)	58.87 (6.67)	42.00
Parent Age (years) (SD)	35.14 (16.94)	32.00 (7.67)	41.00 (15.39)	34.72 (12.80)	26.50 (.71)	26.00 (2.82)	26.25 (1.71)	Not reported
Household Type								
Two-parent	85.70	50.00	66.7	72.22	0	0	0	30.30
Single-parent	14.30	50.00	33.3	27.77	100	100	100	70.70
Education Level								
Less than HS	0	37.50	33.33	22.20	0	100	50.00	31.90
HS degree / GED	28.60	37.50	0	27.80	50.00	0	25.00	58.90
Assoc./ Training	28.50	0	33.33	16.60	0	0	0	7.50
Some College	42.90	12.50	33.33	27.80	50.00	0	25.00	Not reported
College Degree	0	12.50	0	5.60	0	0	0	1.70

Table 1. Participant Demographics, continued

Focus Group	High #1	High #2	High #3	Total High	Low #1	Low #2	Total Low	KKCHS
Work Status								
Employed (any)	42.90	37.50	33.33	38.90	100	0	50.00	57.60
Part-time	14.30	0	33.33	28.60	100	0	50.00	Not reported
Full-time	28.60	37.50	0	71.40	0	0	50.00	Not reported
In-school	0	12.5	33.33	11.10	50.00	50.00	50.00	4.60
Child diagnosed with disability	42.90	25.00	0	29.40	0	50.00	25.00	11.60

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

ID # _____

The following questions are about your child who is enrolled in _____....

1. Is this your child's first year in Head Start? _____ Yes _____ No
If not, then how many years has your child been in Head Start? _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
2. What is your child's date of birth? _____ / _____ / _____
Month / Day / Year
3. How would you describe your child?

a. _____ White	f. _____ Middle Eastern
b. _____ Black	g. _____ Asian
c. _____ Hispanic	h. _____ Pacific Islander
d. _____ Eastern Indian	i. _____ Other, please specify _____
e. _____ American Indian	

The following questions are about you....

4. What is your relationship to the child? (mother, father, grandmother, aunt, etc.) _____
5. What is your date of birth? _____ / _____ / _____
Month / Day / Year
6. How would you describe yourself?

a. _____ White	f. _____ Middle Eastern
b. _____ Black	g. _____ Asian
c. _____ Hispanic	h. _____ Pacific Islander
d. _____ Eastern Indian	i. _____ Other, please specify _____
e. _____ American Indian	
7. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

a. _____ Less than High School or GED	e. _____ Some college
b. _____ GED or High School Degree	f. _____ Associate's Degree (2-year degree)
c. _____ Some Trade/ Technical school	g. _____ Bachelor's Degree
d. _____ Completed Trade/ Technical school	h. _____ Graduate Degree

8. Are you...

- a. ☐ Single, never married
- b. ☐ Single, living with significant other
- c. ☐ Married, living with spouse
- d. ☐ Married, living apart / separated
- e. ☐ Divorced

9. Is your job full- or part-time? (please check option(s) below)

☐ Not currently employed

Job #1: ☐ Full-time (at least 30 hours per week) ☐ Part-time (less than 29 hours per week)

Job #2: ☐ Full-time (at least 30 hours per week) ☐ Part-time (less than 29 hours per week)

10. Do you currently attend school or training program?

☐ No ☐ Yes... Please circle one: Part-time or Full-time

11. Has your child ever been diagnosed with any of the following (Check all that apply)?

Speech / Language disability ☐

Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD or ADD) ☐

Other disability (please list) _____

12. Have you attended any of the monthly parent meetings at Head Start since last August?

Yes ☐ No ☐

13. If yes, how many? (circle your response below)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Thank you! You have reached the end of the questionnaire.
Please feel free to write ANY comments you have in the space provided below.

Vita

Heather Sedges Wallace was born in Morristown, New Jersey on October 31, 1980. She moved to Knoxville, Tennessee in 1991 and graduated from Knoxville Catholic High School in 1999. In 2003, Heather earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Child and Family Studies, with a minor in Psychology, from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Heather then worked as a teaching assistant at the Montessori School at Emory in Atlanta, GA. In 2004, Heather returned to graduate school at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and earned her Master of Science degree in Child and Family Studies in August, 2007. Heather continued her graduate education immediately thereafter at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and will graduate in 2010 with her Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Child and Family Studies. Heather hopes to continue her work as an engaged scholar through collaborations with community-based organizations and teaching.