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A M O N O G R A P H

Early Childhood Education in Rural Communities: Access and Quality Issues

Edited by Doris Terry Williams and Tammy L. Mann





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Chapter 1

From Early Childhood to Higher Education: Fostering Connections Across the Education Continuum in Rural Communities to Improve Child and Youth Outcomes

Tammy L. Mann and Doris Terry Williams

In 1996, UNCF established the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute (FDPRI) to study barriers and facilitators of educational attainment, largely for African Americans. Since FDPRI's founding, the institute has produced a wide variety of reports on these issues across the preschool to postsecondary education continuum. This monograph underscores our continued interest in working across the education pipeline to ensure that greater numbers of underrepresented minorities have access to educational opportunities that increase the odds of later success, academically and other-wise. There are many reasons why an organization that has devoted more than 65 years to improving college access and success would be interested in early childhood education. Chief among them is our growing desire to strengthen the pipeline of underrepresented minorities who graduate high school prepared

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to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. As this paper will later describe, many of the students enrolled in private historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) come to them from education experiences in states where significant numbers of children live in rural communities and where there are high rates of concentrated poverty, especially for African Americans. Thus, we have a keen interest in assessing the availability and quality of preschool education.

The authors believe, and the data support, that when children and youth have high-quality prekindergarten to Grade 12 (PK–12) educational experiences, they are more likely to leave school ready for postsecondary learning opportunities. Consider the recent report by Marietta (2010) that chronicled changes over time in Montgomery County, Maryland, where a strong commitment, followed up by years of strategic planning and implementation, is beginning to demonstrate the power of an aligned PK–12 education plan. Data over the course of 6 years (2003 to 2009) reflect increased rates of reading proficiency, as measured by performance on the Maryland State Assessment, in Grades 3 and 5. While gaps were still evident when the data were disaggregated by race and ethnicity, results demonstrated that the gap narrowed and performance improved. One essential component of the Maryland plan involved developing a framework that outlined seven keys to college readiness, milestones that, if accomplished, would have the potential to increase the number of students leaving school prepared for college. Currently, too few young people, especially low-income and under-represented minorities, have that chance. If we are to alter this outcome, more attention must be devoted to improving alignment and integration across the PK–12 pipeline and building connections between home and school, beginning in the earliest years of a child’s life.

In this paper, we briefly review theoretical and empirical evidence to demonstrate the need for increased attention directed at enhancing access to high-quality early childhood programs and the corresponding workforce

development issues directly related to providing such programs. We focus on rural communities because, all too often, they are left out, given the overriding concerns about failing schools in large urban centers. We begin by highlighting research on the importance of the early years and its relevance to fostering success, especially as children transition into the K–12 education system. Next, we discuss why a more focused strategy should be directed at rural communities, given higher rates of concentrated poverty in many southern states. We describe key contextual factors that shape access to and use of early childhood education services as well as availability of a well-trained early childhood workforce. We identify specific practice, policy, and research strategies to address workforce development needs. At the close, we highlight how papers in this monograph offer further context about rural communities and the challenges they face in accessing and providing early care and education programs.

The Early Years: An Important Foundation for Learning and Development

In 2000, the National Research Council within the National Academies released its seminal publication *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, which reviewed more than four decades of research on the science of early childhood development (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000). The report amplified the point that children who emerge from these earliest years of development having mastered skills in three core areas—regulation of emotion, behavior, and attention; language, reasoning, and problem solving; and relating well to others and forming friendships—are better positioned to experience greater success when compared with those failing to develop such capacities. The report also posits that early environments and relationships between children and their caregivers play a critical role in fostering these capabilities. While all children are born wired for learning, adults in their immediate environments play a critical role in

facilitating that learning. When environments offer experiences that are responsive and supportive, children thrive. When young children are exposed to toxic stress—defined as severe, uncontrollable chronic adversity—it can undermine development and learning and may set in motion a dangerous process whereby these experiences become “hardwired” into a child’s brain and have lasting effects on behavior and development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005). Shonkoff and others involved in generating and translating neuroscience research refer to this process as the body’s way of creating “biological memories,” which can influence “lifelong outcomes in learning, behavior and both physical and mental well-being” (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010, p.3).

The literature is replete with examples of risk factors known to adversely affect development and learning in children. Poverty and its many correlates (e.g., unemployment and underemployment, poor access to health care and stable housing, food insecurity, exposure to violence, parental depression, etc.) have been studied extensively and are associated with a wide range of negative child outcomes. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, kindergarten cohort (ECLS-K), Lee and Burkham (2002) reported findings that suggest poverty exerts its damaging impact before children begin school. Their analysis of the ECLS-K data revealed that children in the highest socioeconomic group had cognitive scores that were, on average, 60% greater than the lowest socioeconomic group. In fact, they concluded that although other factors (e.g., race and ethnicity, family education experiences, access to quality child care, etc.) were examined in their analyses, socioeconomic status, more than any other variable accounted for much of the variation in cognitive test scores. Hart and Risley (2003) reported a potential gap of 30 million words—with children from professional families being exposed to approximately 30 million more words than children whose parents receive public assistance—by the time children reach age 3. Furthermore, they noted that performance on language tests at age

3 was highly predictive of third-grade performance on similar measures of language skill development. Finally, Halle and colleagues (2009) completed an analysis using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, birth cohort (ECLS-B), which suggested that patterns of differential performance across cognitive, social, behavioral, and health outcomes are evident as early as age 9 months and grow larger over time (24 months). Collectively, these findings lend important credibility to the need for increased focus on the environments that young children experience well before they enter kindergarten, especially those children affected by poverty.

With advances in our knowledge about the importance of early childhood development has come heightened interest in funding programs that help more children, especially those in low-income communities, to access programs that facilitate and bolster development and provide a strong foundation for entering school with the social, emotional, and pre-academic skills needed for learning. For more than 45 years, Head Start has served as our largest federally funded early childhood program, targeting low-income families with preschool-age children. In 1994, the program was extended to include low-income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers after a 1990 report determined that starting early childhood programming at age 3 was, in many cases, too late given that many children were behind before entering Head Start. Child care, provided in homes and centers, was not created to buffer the impact of poverty, yet it represents an important aspect of the diverse tapestry of early care and education programs, especially given the amount of time young children spend in these settings. Much has been written about child care and its associations with favorable and unfavorable outcomes (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2003); Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2000; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2000). In addition to center-based programs, a wide range of home-visiting programs also exist. Healthy Families America, Parents as Teachers, and the Nurse Family Partnership share a

common belief in the power of targeting children and families in their home environment as a part of their strategy to improve child and parent outcomes. They differ widely, however, in their focus, target population, degree requirements for staff members delivering services, scale, and overall level of research supporting their efficacy. For a more extensive review of these programs and the research that supports them, please see Gomby (2007) and Sweet and Appelbaum (2004).

Beyond intervention programs, others have argued that increasing the availability of preschool education can be an effective strategy for reducing inequalities that exist prior to school entry and better prepare children for transitioning into kindergarten. In 2002, the Pew Charitable Trust launched the Pre-K Now Campaign, a long-term strategic effort to influence state and federal policymakers to invest in universal pre-K programs for 3- and 4-year-olds. As economists were able to determine the economic benefits of such programs, the Pre-K Now campaign, in collaboration with many state-based advocates, focused its efforts on helping policymakers understand how an investment in pre-K learning could address school readiness issues in the short term and generate savings over the long term. Pew strategically leveraged its resources to stimulate enhanced funding on an issue they believed was “ripe” for public investment. Results, as reflected in a recent report, suggest that the campaign has made significant progress over the past 8 years to increase public investments in universal pre-K programs (Watson, 2010). From 2002 to 2010, five states (Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia enacted legislation to provide universal access to 4-year-olds, and two of that group of six (the District of Columbia and Illinois) included 3-year-olds. In addition, six states added pre-K to their school funding formula (Iowa, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and West Virginia), and four states (Florida, Hawaii, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) provided first-time investments in pre-K as a result of their participation in the campaign.

Poverty and Rural Communities

Our focus on early childhood education in rural communities comes at an important time in our history. Recently, the U.S. Census Bureau released data from the American Community Survey indicating that children have been one of the hardest hit segments of our population in terms of rates of poverty since the current recession began. Analysts at the Carsey Institute further examined these data and reported that, of the 5.7 million children younger than age 6 who live in poverty, more than 1 million live in rural communities, effectively 18% (Mattingly & Stransky, 2010). In addition, they noted that one in three children (33.3%) in the rural South live in poverty, a percentage that is not only higher than any other region in the country but also higher than the overall rate of 29%.

As was mentioned in our introduction, this issue is of particular interest to UNCF because the majority of its member institutions are located across eight southern states. Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Data System, the FDPRI conducted an analysis and determined that 59% of our institutions enrolled 50% or more of their fall 2008 class from residents within their own state; within this group, 65% enrolled 70% or more students from their own state. Clearly, the overall level of preparation and readiness for postsecondary education is deeply tied to the PK–12 experiences these students are having in school districts within their state, which are overwhelmingly rural and poor.

For several years, The Rural School and Community Trust has released a biannual report titled *Why Rural Matters*, which documents the context and challenges experienced in rural communities as they relate to education. Although the 2009 report does not include data about early childhood education, the inclusion of data on the prevalence of concentrated poverty is especially relevant given aforementioned issues about poverty and its impact on educational outcomes. Following careful review of the state-based data tables in *Why Rural Matters* (Johnson & Strange, 2009), we note

that six of our nine member-school states (i.e., Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina) have greater than 70% of rural, low-income students living in concentrated poverty districts; Mississippi has nearly 100% of its low-income students living in such districts, and South Carolina has 84%. There is very little in difference in spending in rural districts with high rates of concentrated poverty compared to rural districts in general. For example, the rural instructional spending, per pupil in Mississippi is \$4,168, and only 3 dollars higher (\$4,171) in districts with concentrated poverty within the same state, where needs are likely greater. Finally, the odds of high school completion are extremely low in districts with concentrated poverty. For example, for many of the states where UNCF has member institutions: 77% have graduation rates that fall below the national average of 60% for those living in concentrated poverty districts. Clearly, there is a need for targeted attention and investments across the PK–12 pipeline for children living in rural communities beset with high rates of concentrated poverty.

Contextual Factors Shaping Access to, Use of, and Availability of a Trained Early Childhood Workforce in Rural Communities

Poverty and remoteness present unique challenges to families with young children in many rural communities, as several of the papers in this monograph point out. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges is the availability of a trained early childhood workforce. Several interrelated challenges combine to make this challenge a very complex one. Among them are low rates of educational attainment and college enrollment, low wages for child care and early education professionals, and changing demographics.

Low rates of educational attainment and college enrollment. The low rates of educational attainment and college enrollment among adults in high-need rural communities mean there are fewer people in the pipeline to become rural early childhood educators and higher level care givers. Rural

students overall tend to graduate high school at higher rates than urban students (National Center on Education Statistics, 2007). However, the picture is uneven across rural places. The Rural School and Community Trust studied graduation rates in 616 of the nation's poorest rural districts and found graduation rates among them (60%) to be 10 percentage points below graduation rates for rural districts overall (70%) and 7 points below the rate for non-rural districts overall (67%) (Johnson, Strange, & Madden, 2010). These high-poverty rural districts are concentrated in 15 states, including the states from which a significant percentage of UNCF member institutions draw the majority of their students.

The cumulative effect of low graduation rates shows up in the low levels of educational attainment among adults in these high-needs communities. The South, for example, with a third of the nation's population, has nearly half of the nation's adults ages 25 and older who do not have a high school diploma. Those mostly southern states home to a majority of the UNCF member institutions tend to have lower rates of adult college attendance than the nation as a whole. Rural African Americans and Hispanics are twice as likely as non-Hispanic Whites to leave school with less than a high school diploma (Gibbs, 2004). Consequently, rates of college enrollment among rural people of color ages 25 and older are substantially lower than rates of college attendance for other groups.

Community colleges are often viewed as promising alternatives for adults who have not completed high school because there they can earn a high school credential as well as workforce skills and certification. These schools generally have an "open door" policy under which they take students where they are academically, provide the remedial instruction they need to succeed in college level work, and transition them into degree or certification coursework. Community college programs that train providers for entry-level early care and education positions can be as long as 2 years, assuming the student has the requisite literacy and mathematics skills to enter

directly into an early childhood education training program. However, many students do not have these requisite skills and thus must enroll for up to 2 years in remedial courses that do not count toward a degree or certification. The time and cost of multiple years of training becomes a disincentive for persisting and completing such programs. This reality represents a significant challenge for building workforce capacity in early care and education. Any effort to increase the quality and accessibility of early childhood education and care in rural communities must take these matters into account. Adult education programs that place more potential providers and educators in the pipeline are essential but must be accompanied by efforts to transition potential providers and educators into the workforce more quickly.

Low wages among child care providers. The issue of low wages is another challenge complicating efforts to develop and maintain a high-quality early childhood workforce. Students who invest up to 2 years in obtaining a community college degree or certification often enter the field either at or slightly higher than the minimum wage level. Although this challenge is not unique either to rural places or to early childhood education, it is a challenge that must be addressed if quality birth-to-five programs are to exist in high-needs rural places. The problem of low wages is exacerbated by the need for providers to own or have access to some means of transportation in the absence of public transportation in rural areas. All told, many rural residents cannot afford to be early care and education providers in other than a family or home-based setting that requires lower levels of educational attainment.

Changing demographics. Shifting demographics is another complicating factor in efforts to build a high-quality rural early childhood workforce. In Alaska, Arizona, California, and New Mexico, more than half of rural students are from various “minority” racial or ethnic backgrounds.

In eight states (Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas), more than a third of students are students of color. Nearly 60% of rural students of color attend schools in just 12 states (Johnson & Strange, 2009). In the South, rural students of color are primarily African American but are increasingly Hispanic. Many of these students (7.6% in North Carolina) are English language learners. The increasing diversity among rural students and families requires both language and cultural competencies not generally found among rural early care providers and educators (see paper by Nganga & Laughlin in section three). These challenges must be addressed adequately if we are to build a workforce that is able to provide care and early education that helps to eliminate the academic achievement gaps that tend to widen across racial and ethnic groups as children progress through school.

Opportunities to Advance, Research, Practice, and Policy

The unique context, challenges, and diversity of rural places provide tremendous opportunities to advance research, practice, and policy in early childhood education and care. UNCF member institutions are concentrated largely in states with high numbers and percentages of rural, low-income children of color—African American, Native American, and Hispanic—and are therefore especially situated to take advantage of these opportunities.

Practice

Many UNCF member institutions are not Research 1 institutions and traditionally have not engaged in extensive externally funded or sponsored research. However, many of them have historically placed a high value on the preparation of quality public school educators and have nationally accredited programs (accredited by American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) offering majors in education. In some instances, this accreditation includes the Early

Childhood Education Program that is a part of the accredited education department or school. In addition, at least 10 UNCF member institutions have won national recognition and accreditation by the Council for Professional Recognition and Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program. These institutions, along with other HBCUs, are playing a vital role in preparing the country's early childhood workforce.

According to UNC-Chapel Hill's National Center for Early Development and Learning, 50% of HBCUs offer early childhood programs, compared with 29% of non-HBCU institutions. HBCUs are more likely than non-HBCUs to require a practicum in infant-toddler care and education and entire courses in family child care, home visitation, and program administration. They also are more likely than non-HBCUs to prepare students to work with children who do not speak English and children from diverse backgrounds.

HBCUs are uniquely situated to take the lead in improving the quality of existing early childhood education and care; increasing access to diverse, underserved populations; linking early childhood programs to K-12 education; and helping states and local communities develop comprehensive plans for expanding access and quality of early childhood education. Specifically, these institutions should consider the following recommendations:

- ***Assist states in developing a comprehensive birth-to-5 (B-5) education plan that articulates well with K-12 and links with family and health services.*** Currently all 50 states are in one stage or another of developing, revising, or implementing early learning guidelines that describe what children should be able to do and that align with K12 standards. Some guidelines include infants and toddlers as a part of the early childhood education continuum and some do not. More work is needed to ensure better coordination among early child education, family and health service related programs. It is likely that recent changes associated with health care reform will help foster such connections.

- ***Develop early childhood program coursework and practica specific to rural settings.*** Such coursework could come under the umbrella of a rural educator track that targets students from rural areas and incentivizes their participation and practice in rural areas. It would include training in early childhood instruction and care, program administration, connection to community, and other key areas.
- ***Increase early childhood program recruitment efforts specifically to target rural African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan Native.*** This effort would build upon HBCUs' already noted inclination toward addressing issues of diversity in their education programs. It also could help diversify the early childhood workforce and increase accessibility for rural families.
- ***Build upon existing support systems among rural families with young children to expand the pool of highly trained providers.*** This effort involves providing incentives and supports to encourage family and other in-home care givers to obtain higher levels of training.
- ***Partner with rural schools to make quality child care more accessible.*** Full-service community schools are a growing trend in education, and they hold tremendous benefits for rural communities. The co-location of child and family services with educational services provides opportunity for greater alignment between early childhood and K–12 programs and greater parent involvement in children's education. UNCF member institutions should partner with high-needs rural districts to develop or enhance the community school concept with an emphasis on improving quality and accessibility of early childhood programs.
- ***UNCF member institutions should seek program accreditation.*** Those institutions whose early childhood programs are not accredited should make a concerted effort to obtain and maintain program accreditation and thereby improve the quality of their early childhood education programs.

- **Partner with select rural high schools to expand career and technical education in early childhood education.** This effort would include providing (a) certification in entry-level early childhood education and (b) dual enrollment programs that make it easier for high school students to transition into 4-year programs after high school graduation.

Policy

There are multiple local, state, and federal programs that can support expanded early childhood education and care in rural communities. However, these programs often operate in silos, disconnected from one another and from the K–12 system. In addition, far too few states fund universal early education for 3- and 4-year-olds. Funding for such programs is woefully inadequate. In at least one state, New Mexico, legislators are studying the cost of providing pre-K programs that operate on the regular school calendar but with an extended summer component. The goal of the New Mexico study is to determine the cost of providing such opportunities, particularly for low-income rural children. The early childhood arena stands to learn much about policy and financing from this study. In the meantime, the following policy recommendations can help make early childhood education and care in rural communities more accessible:

- **States should fund universal early childhood education for 4-year-olds.** The cost of universal pre-K for 4-year-olds could be prohibitive, especially in our current economic climate. However, states must realize that we cannot turn around the education crisis in our country without giving high priority and funding to the full spectrum of education opportunities. Universal public education for 4-year-olds must become a conscious goal of state governments and of the education sector.
- **State and federal governments and private funders should increase funding to HBCUs to expand their outreach and programmatic elements in early childhood education.** Unlike the larger Research 1 institutions, these institutions historically have demonstrated a

commitment to preparing a diverse corps of educators, including early childhood educators.

- ***States and districts should be encouraged to leverage existing early care funding.*** Break down the silos and remove barriers that inhibit blended funding streams and programmatic efforts.

Research

More than other types of institutions, HBCUs have demonstrated a commitment to early childhood education that has given them the practical knowledge and relationships upon which to build important research agendas that can add substantially to the field of early childhood education. Since these rural communities are often not included in national longitudinal studies (and when they are, the data are rarely disaggregated to show rural specific trends or conditions), there is a need to stimulate research activity in a more targeted manner. Specifically, more research dollars and attention should be directed to institutions interested in studying the following issues:

- ***Exploring the cost of universal early care in high needs rural communities.*** This research would include piloting universal early care programs in targeted communities and devising funding formulas that take into account state, federal, local, and private funding sources that are already available.
- ***Exploring alternative training models for early education and care providers.*** HBCUs should explore alternative delivery models for pre-service and in-service training of early care providers in rural settings. These models would include blended distance and face-to-face models, e-campus models, and community-based or external campus models. Research among existing family and home care providers could help inform the development of alternative structures and delivery modes that would serve this category of provider best, not only for improving the quality of their current work but also for engaging them in higher levels of training.

- ***Investing in adults who live in the community.*** Since rural communities may be challenged in attracting trained early child care providers and educators, investing in adults who actually live in rural communities might provide another means of access for workforce development. For example, women transitioning from welfare to work might benefit from training that can help prepare them for business ownership and work in early care and education. Research directed at exploring opportunities in this area could be very beneficial to creative workforce development efforts and could help to fill the diversity gap between early childhood providers and students as well as increase the quality and accessibility of early care.

Looking Ahead

In this lead paper, we have framed the relevance of this issue for UNCF and have articulated the rationale for focusing on the status of early childhood education in rural communities. In a recent paper by Morris and Monroe (2009) a strong argument is made for deeper scholarship that focuses on the place-race connection associated with the achievement gap between African Americans and other racial-ethnic groups. These authors amplify the need for more carefully study, particularly in southern states where the majority of the African American population continues to reside, on the race-place connection as it relates to educational outcomes for African Americans. The papers that follow elaborate on themes discussed herein and introduce new ideas to further frame the challenges and opportunities associated with accessing high-quality early care and education programs in rural communities given the important role the early years can play in later school success. Section I of the report includes one paper by Grace and colleagues, adapted from an earlier publication, identifying disparities among ethnically diverse children in rural and non-rural communities using data from the ECLS-B and the ECLS-K. The paper examines disparities

in multiple areas, including school readiness, access to and use of early care and education services, as well as mental health and family issues. It provides an overview of strengths and challenges disaggregated by race and ethnicity in several important areas of development and family functioning. The papers by Bratsch and Johnson in Section II examine the issue of access and use in more depth, and the paper by Brown introduces challenges that many families experience as they make decisions about the tradeoff between better educational opportunities and leaving the home community. Finally, Section III includes two papers on workforce development issues. Nganga and Laughlin explore challenges associated with preparing early childhood educators for working with diverse children and families, and Burt examines the issue of workforce development from an international perspective, using work under way in South Africa as the case study.

There are multiple areas where more can be done to address critical needs for early care and education in rural communities. We have endeavored to highlight a sampling of such issues with this publication. It is our hope that this monograph would stimulate additional work in an area that clearly merits more attention given the realities facing so many children without access to high-quality early care and education experiences.

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Chapter 2

Rural Disparities in Baseline Data of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study

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This article was adapted from *Rural Disparities in Baseline Data of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: A Chartbook* (Rural Early Childhood Report No. 3), by C. Grace, E. F. Shores, M. Zaslow, B. Brown, D. Aufseeser, and L. Bell, 2006, Mississippi State, MS: National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives, Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute.

This report presents the results from an analysis of young children's care and development in rural settings using baseline data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) birth and kindergarten cohorts (ECLS-B and ECLS-K, respectively). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) launched the ECLS-K in the fall of 1998 when the original cohort of more than 21,000 children was entering kindergarten. The ECLS-K involved repeated waves of data collection in the spring of the children's kindergarten

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year, the fall and spring of their first-grade year, and the spring of their third-, fifth-, and eighth-grade years. The ECLS-K was designed to provide information about numerous subgroups, including Black, White, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Asian (not discussed in this paper) children; children in different family income brackets; and children in both public and private schools (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). All groups of children with the exception of Asian children have higher rural child poverty rates than their urban counterparts, and for that reason, Asian children are not included in the report (Rural Family Data Center, 2004). The NCES expanded the ECLS in 2001 by assembling a second sample, the Birth Cohort, of approximately 10,000 children born between January and December 2001. Baseline data were collected when these children were between the ages of 6 and 22 months, with most of them about age 9 months (Flanagan & Park, 2005).

Most public-use national datasets do not lend themselves to reliable estimates of the status of young rural children (ages 0–8) either because data confidentiality rules preclude identification of rural respondents or because rural children are underrepresented in national samples (Capizzano and Fiorillo, 2004). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) confirmed that less is known about the quality, availability, use, and cost of human services in rural America than in non-rural America because suitable data are difficult to find. DHHS reported that “much of the research on rural areas addresses circumstances in a specific locality with results that may be the consequence of local implementation factors, and not generalizable to other or all rural areas.” Moreover, “some national studies exclude rural sites altogether or, if they do include both rural and non-rural sites, do not report rural and non-rural results separately” (Strong, Del Grosso, Burwick, Jethwani, & Ponza, 2005, p. 2). However, the ECLS does have a rural designation, and both cohorts are large enough to support comparison of rural and non-rural children and families. As part of its Datasets Initiative to address

the information gap in rural early care and education, the National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives, known as Rural Early Childhood, commissioned the nonpartisan research organization, Child Trends, to compare data on selected indicators for children from rural and non-rural subsets in the ECLS-B and ECLS-K baseline data.

Reporting ECLS baseline data by rurality is important in that it provides a clearer backdrop for subsequent studies and comparisons of various indicators over time. It also reveals some of the unique opportunities and challenges that rurality presents for the care and development of young children while underscoring or expanding on others. The Rural Families Data Center, for example, had collected some data and reported that rural children from birth through age 17 were better off than non-rural children on some measures such as English-speaking ability and housing but were worse off on many other measures, including education outcomes (Rural Families Data Center, 2004, p. 5). Poverty was and continues to be most persistent and widespread in rural places, especially among children in the South, in counties bordering Mexico, and in counties with Indian reservations. According to the Carsey Institute (Mattingly & Stransky, 2010), nearly 29% of young children in rural America live in poverty. In 2009, one in four young children living in rural America were in poverty. However, until 2004, these rates, using a precise definition of rurality, had not been available for rural young children (Capizzano & Fiorillo, 2004, p. 36–37). Nor did they correlate precisely to rural areas as designated in the ECLS.

This study's rural and non-rural designations are based on U.S. Census bureau definitions. In this analysis, "rural" areas include those areas with a population of less than 25,000 located outside of central metropolitan statistical areas and metropolitan statistical areas. By this definition, rural children in the ECLS-K baseline data are predominantly Southern and Midwestern, with rural Black children almost entirely in the South and rural American Indian/Alaska Native children almost entirely in the Midwest and West.

Indicators in the ECLS-K baseline dataset were measured when the children entered kindergarten, and included the children's social behavior and language development, foster care placement, and enrollment in a center-based program at age 4; the mother's education level and access to child care subsidies; family poverty; and credentials of kindergarten teachers. Researchers in this study examined indicators in the ECLS-K baseline dataset that included school readiness, utilization of early care and education, and the mental health and family life of young rural children. They especially highlighted the status of young American Indian/Alaska Native children. The ECLS-B indicators examined here relate to demographics, family life, health and physical development, social-emotional development, and child care arrangements.

Discussion

Overall, the ECLS baseline data for kindergarteners suggest that rural life offers young children a few advantages at home and in early care and educational settings, in comparison with the experiences of non-rural children. Those advantages include greater likelihood of contact with a non-resident or noncustodial parent within the previous four weeks for those not living with their fathers, enrollment in a Head Start program during the year before kindergarten, small kindergarten class size (15 or fewer children), and an orderly kindergarten class. They also include greater likelihood of social competence, receipt of certain developmental evaluations, regular family dinners, and safe neighborhoods.

Non-Hispanic White (hereafter White) rural kindergarten children enjoyed some additional advantages over White non-rural kindergarteners, including greater access to full-day kindergarten and a safe classroom. Non-Hispanic Black (hereafter Black) rural children were more likely than non-rural Black children to have early childhood teachers who had taken one or more courses in early childhood education, and they were less likely

to demonstrate internalizing problems such as anxiety or sadness.

However, rural young children are at significant disadvantages at kindergarten entry, in comparison with non-rural children, for numerous indicators. While the major focus here is on differences in children's development and early care (both within the family and in early care and education settings), differences also occur in the broader economic and demographic circumstances that affect them, including the following:

- Rural children are significantly less likely than non-rural children to have parents with at least a bachelor's degree.
- Rural children are only about half as likely as non-rural children to live in households with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more.
- Rural Black children are significantly more likely than non-rural Black children to have parents who lack high school degrees.
- While only one out of five rural Black children lives with both biological parents, one out of three non-rural Black children and three out of four non-rural White children live with both biological parents.

The sections that follow provide rural and non-rural comparisons of selected indicators from the ECLS-K and ECLS-B baseline data focusing on three issues—school readiness, utilization of early care and education, and the mental health and family life of young rural children—and on the status of young American Indian/Alaska Native children.

School Readiness

Gershoff (2003) analyzed the data for children in the ECLS-K by family income, finding that, nationally, increases in family income correlated with decreases in problem behaviors (p. 6). She also found that “children in families whose incomes fall below 200% [of the federal poverty level] are well below average on their reading, math, and general knowledge test scores” at kindergarten entry, “compared to the well-above-average scores

of children living in families with incomes over 300% of [the federal poverty level] [\$55,200 for a family of four]" (p. 5). Gershoff noted, "It is important to recognize that there is considerable variation in academic achievement within each of the groups. The fact that some of the children in low-income families scored considerably above the mean tells us that there are children who are able to surmount the challenges they face. Determining what enables these children to succeed academically should be an important priority for public policy research" (p. 5).

Comparison of the baseline data for rural and non-rural children in the ECLS-K reveals further disparities for many school readiness indicators (see Figures 1 and 2). The analyses point to disparities by rurality overall and within racial and ethnic groups. In addition, there were particularly large differences on some indicators when contrasted for rural Black children and non-rural White children, including the following:

- Rural children overall were 60% more likely to be placed in special education in kindergarten.
- About three quarters of non-rural White children were proficient in letter recognition on entering kindergarten, but only about two thirds of rural White children were proficient (76.6% and 66.3%, respectively). The parallel figures for non-rural and rural Black children were 63.7% and 54.1%, respectively (see Figure 3). The gap between rural Black children and non-rural White children was particularly large.
- About three times as many Black children in non-rural areas as Black children in rural areas were proficient at identifying the beginning sounds of words (22.1% and 7.5%, respectively). The parallel figures for White children in non-rural as opposed to rural areas were 40.0% and 26.2%, respectively (see Figure 4). Again, there was a particularly large gap on this indicator between rural Black children and non-rural White children.

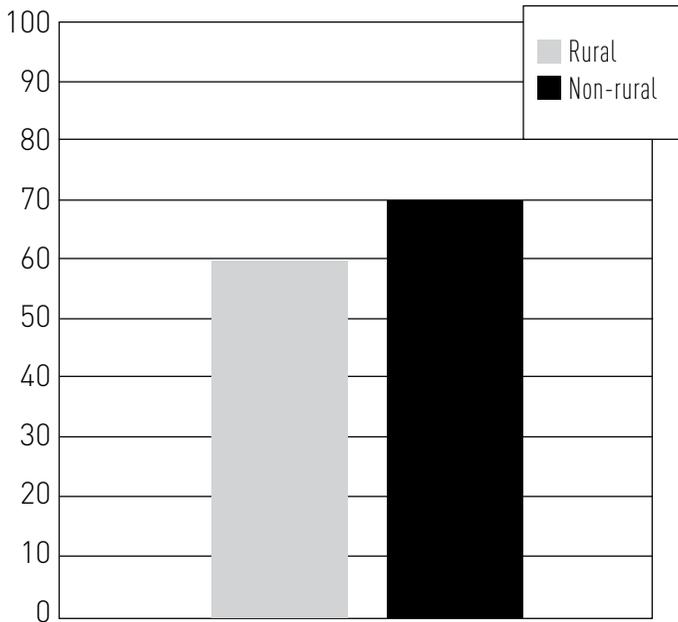


Figure 1. Percentage of children in ECLS-K baseline data with letter recognition skill at kindergarten entry, by rurality.

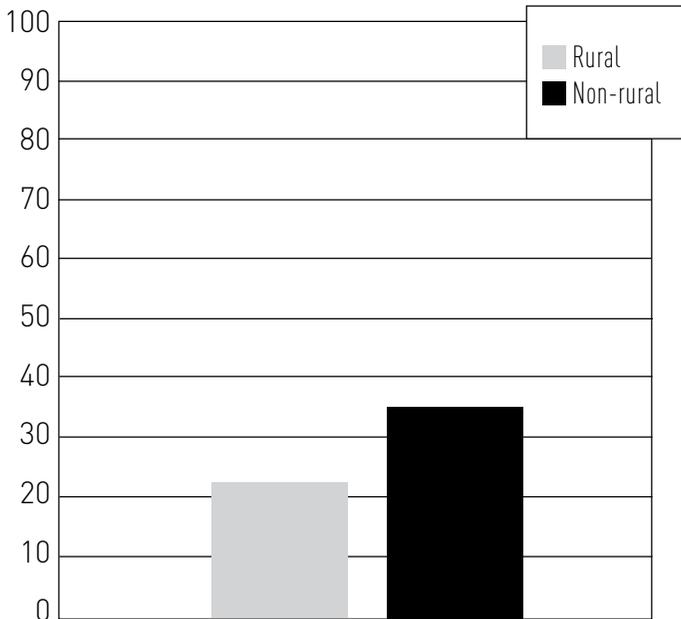


Figure 2. Percentage of children in ECLS-K baseline data with beginning sound recognition skill at kindergarten entry, by rurality.

Utilization of Early Care and Education Arrangements

According to Swenson (2008) an analysis of data from the National Household Education Surveys (NHES) shows that rural preschool-age children are about as likely as those in urban areas to receive care from someone other than their parents on a weekly basis. The NHES data also show that when rural children participate in non-parental care, it is more likely to be provided by relatives and less likely from center programs than the care arrangements of their urban peers. Additionally, rural families, on average, made fewer out-of-pocket contributions toward the cost of child care than their counterparts. Overall, children in rural areas were much more likely than children in non-rural areas to participate in Head Start in the year before kindergarten (17.1% versus 8.7%, respectively). Differences held across racial and ethnic groups. For example, 48.7% of rural Black children participated in Head Start compared with 19.5% of non-rural Black children. Furthermore, 56% of rural Black children were in multiple care arrangements in the year before kindergarten compared with 48.3% of non-rural Blacks and 35.8% of non-rural White children. The pattern held for White and for Black children in rural versus non-rural settings, but was somewhat more marked for Black children. Black children in rural areas had particularly low rates of participation in center-based care but particularly high rates of participation in Head Start. In addition, Black children in rural areas were particularly likely to have multiple child care arrangements.

- Just 13.6% of rural Black children attended a center-based early education program in the year before kindergarten, while 37.2% of non-rural Black children attended a center-based program. The parallel figures for White children in rural and non-rural areas were 35.4% and 54.5%, respectively.
- Overall, children in rural areas were much more likely than children in non-rural areas to participate in Head Start in the year before kindergarten (17.1% and 8.7%, respectively). Differences held

across racial and ethnic groups. For example, 48.7% of rural Blacks participated in Head Start compared with 19.5% of non-rural Black children.

- Fifty-six percent of rural Black children were in multiple care arrangements in the year before kindergarten; only 48.3% of non-rural Blacks and 35.8% of non-rural White children were in multiple care arrangements.

Mental Health and Family Life

Information from the 2008 National Mental Health Survey (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2009) reveals that slightly more than one in five children and adolescents are reported by their parents to have serious difficulties with emotions, concentration, behavior, or being able to get along with other people, a finding relatively unchanged from 2001–2007 survey data. Two factors in rural communities seem to combine to form a greater threat of mental health problems to rural young children: (a) poorer success to preventive and early intervention mental health services and (b) higher rates of poverty. Pumariega, Rogers, and Rothe (2005) suggested that location of mental health services is one systemic factor contributing to disparities in children's mental health. Family poverty can indirectly contribute to childhood mental health problems and behavioral disorders because it can increase the risk of mental health problems in parents and the chance of child abuse (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Of children living below the poverty level or in families with incomes at 100%–199% of the poverty level, 7% had serious emotional or behavioral difficulties compared with 4% of children with family incomes at 200% or more of the poverty level (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2009). Nationwide, the capacity of mental health services has not kept pace with demand (Thomas & Holzer, 2006), and because rural communities have particular difficulty meeting the needs for

mental health services, rural children are one of the groups least likely to have access to services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003, 2004). For example, Gamm, Stone, and Pittman (2003) calculated that 95% of small rural counties, with populations of 2,500 to 20,000, have no child psychiatrist. Mental health providers in rural areas typically are social workers with a bachelor's degree, who do not hold authority to prescribe medications (Koppelman, 2004). State and local rural health leaders have ranked mental health as the fourth-highest rural health priority (Gamm et al., 2003), and Koppelman said an adequate supply of providers is "critical in meeting children's unmet needs for mental health care" (2004, p. 3). The South Carolina Rural Health Center (2005) reports that more than 1.9 million children with mental health problems are living in areas where minimal to no resources are available for their care. Four of every five (80%) rural children with potential mental health problems are living in counties that do not have community mental health centers. However, in bivariate analysis, children living in counties with a community mental health center did not have significantly higher mental health care utilization than other children. This finding possibly speaks to the complexity of access to and use of services within rural communities (Moore, Mink, Probst, Tompkins, Johnson, & Hugely, 2005).

Despite the rural risk factors of poverty and lack of access to preventive and early intervention mental health services, there are few data publicly available about the mental health needs of rural young children and their families (Thompson, 2005). For example, there is a need for clear data about whether rural families living in poverty tend to experience parental depression, domestic violence, and substance abuse at greater rates than non-rural families living in poverty or non-poor families. Observing that poverty, parental depression, domestic violence, and substance abuse all threaten children's well-being, Lawrence, Chau, and Lennon (2004) called for more study of "the extent to which these problems co-occur among low-income families

and about their combined effect on children” (p. 3). Moreover, the proportion of adults with mental illness who are parents is not available, so the scope of unmet need for parenting support among parents with mental illness is not known (Nicholson, Biebel, Katz-Leavy, & Williams, 2002).

In the Kindergarten Cohort of the ECLS overall, children appear to have been developing positive social skills. West, Denton, and Germino-Hausken (2000) found that 80% of parents believed their children joined others, made friends, and comforted others often or very often. Teachers reported observing these positive behaviors less often, but still rated half to three-fourths of kindergartners as having these skills. Concerning problem behaviors, teachers reported that just 10% to 11% of kindergartners often or very often argued or fought with others or easily became angry. Parents reported observing higher rates for frequent problem behaviors: 15% for fighting often to very often, 33% for arguing often to very often.

The ECLS-K baseline data showed that rural kindergartners did not differ from non-rural kindergartners on many indicators of social-emotional health, although rural children were at a significant disadvantage in terms of some parenting practices and in terms of potential access to mental health services through formal early childhood programs. However, rural life appears to offer some benefits for the social-emotional development of young children and their families:

- Social competence—Rural kindergartners were significantly more likely to be rated by their parents as showing social competence (45.3% of rural children compared with 41.9% of non-rural children). Rural Southern children also were significantly more likely to demonstrate social competence than the non-rural Southern children (48.6% and 43.5%, respectively). The South was the only region with such a difference.
- Neighborhood safety—Significantly more rural parents than non-rural parents in the ECLS-K perceived that their neighborhoods

were safe (81.8% and 69.6%, respectively). This difference held for all ethnic and income groups, except American Indian/Alaska Native parents for whom the difference between rural and non-rural parents was not significant.

- Parental warmth—In the ECLS-K, rural parents were significantly more likely to report demonstrating warmth toward their children than were non-rural parents, although reported warmth was high in both groups. The rural advantage in this regard is even greater for low-income parents: 70% of rural parents with annual incomes under \$25,000 reported demonstrating warmth, compared with 62.3% of non-rural low-income parents.
- Home activities—In the ECLS-K, rural families in middle- and high-income groups were significantly more likely to engage in frequent home activities together (such as doing art projects, reading, or playing games) than were non-rural families in the same income groups.
- Parental aggravation—In the ECLS-K, rural parents were significantly less likely than non-rural parents to indicate that they experienced high levels of aggravation in parenting (9.0% and 11.1%, respectively). This difference is striking for parents with annual incomes under \$25,000: Nearly 12% of low-income rural parents experienced aggravation, while 17.5% of low-income non-rural parents did so.

In some other regards, rural life in itself does not appear to be associated with differences in the social-emotional development of young children or their experiences within the family.

- Behavior—Overall, rural children and non-rural children in the ECLS-K demonstrated no significant differences in rates of externalizing problem behaviors such as arguing or getting angry; rates of internalizing problem behaviors, including the presence of low self-esteem or sadness; or rates of self-control, including children's

ability to control their temper and behavior. There were exceptions to the pattern for specific ethnic and geographic subgroups, however: Rural American Indian/Alaska Native children were more likely than non-rural children in the same group (10.8% and 4.9%, respectively) to often or very often demonstrate internalizing behavior patterns. Rural children in the West were more likely to do likewise than were non-rural children in the West (9.2% and 5.6%, respectively).

- Family routines—There were no significant differences between rural and non-rural families of kindergarteners in terms of having regular times for breakfast, dinner, and bed or for eating breakfast together, indicators of family life that support positive communication among family members. Rural families were more likely to eat dinner together as a family than were non-rural families.
- Religious discussions—About the same proportions of rural and non-rural families of kindergarteners appeared to engage in religious discussions several times per week (39.6% of rural families and 40.0% of non-rural families).
- Spanking—The proportion of parents who reported that they spanked their children one or more times per week was not significantly different between rural and non-rural respondents in the ECLS-K (29.5% for rural parents compared with 26.5% for non-rural parents). However, in the ECLS-K, rural White parents were significantly more likely than non-rural White parents to report that they spanked their children once or more often per week (28.0% and 22.2%, respectively). Rural parents with high incomes also are significantly more likely to use spanking than non-rural parents with high incomes (23.9% and 17.8%, respectively).

However, for some indicators of parental mental health and indicators of participation in care settings where child maternal health problems

could potentially be identified, rural life appears to be a significant risk factor for young children:

- Family routines—Rural White families are significantly less likely than non-rural White families in the ECLS-K to eat breakfast together at least three times per week (66.0% and 72.2%, respectively).
- Potential access to mental health services—Early childhood education and care programs and medical visits are two settings in which problems in development can be identified and intervention suggested. Rural children overall were only two-thirds as likely as non-rural children to have attended a center-based early childhood program in the year before kindergarten (30.4% and 45.4%, respectively). Rural Black children were significantly less likely than non-rural Black children to have visited a doctor for a well-child check-up in the year before kindergarten entry (92.3% and 96.1%, respectively).
- Maternal depression—Maternal depression is an important risk factor for young children. Young children with depressed mothers have higher rates of school difficulty, childhood depression, and adult depression themselves (Child Trends, 2004). According to rural mother’s own reports of depression in the ECLS-B, they were more likely to demonstrate symptoms of depression, with the gap primarily occurring between rural and non-rural White women (7.3% and 4.3%, respectively).

Within rural areas, much higher proportions of Black kindergarteners live in single parent families compared with other rural children. Rural Black kindergarteners are more likely than rural White and rural Hispanic kindergarteners to live in poverty. Rural Black children are also much more likely than non-rural Black children to live in poverty. Such demographic

differences may contribute to a number of disparities in family functioning and child well-being:

- Parental aggravation—In the ECLS-K, Black rural parents were more than twice as likely as White rural parents to report high levels of parental aggravation (16.8% and 7.6%, respectively).
- Neighborhood safety—In the ECLS-K, Black rural parents were significantly less likely to believe their neighborhoods are safe than were White rural parents (66.7% and 85.5%, respectively).
- Home activities—Only half of Black rural families (51.8%) in the ECLS-K reported engaging in frequent home activities such as art projects and reading stories, while two thirds of White rural families (66.3%) in the same sample did so.
- Discipline strategies—Almost half of Black rural parents reported spanking their children once a week or more often, while less than a third of rural White and rural Hispanic parents did so (45.7% compared with 28.0% and 28.5%, respectively). Only 19.2% of rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners had parents who spanked once a week or more often. The range across all ethnic groups was much wider for rural parents (26.5 points) than for non-rural parents (14.1 points). Black rural parents were substantially less likely to report that they would use only positive discipline approaches with their children in a hypothetical situation in which the child hit them (43.6% of Black rural parents compared with 72.6% of White rural parents and 75.9% of Hispanic parents). American Indian/Alaska Native rural parents were the most likely to report that they would use positive discipline exclusively (85.0%). Researchers described positive approaches as having the child take a time-out, talking to the child about what he or she did wrong, making the child apologize, taking away a privilege, giving the child a warning, or making the child do household chores. The gaps in positive

discipline were wider for rural than for non-rural parents. Non-rural White, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native parents all reported using positive discipline exclusively at rates of above 75%, while 51.5% of non-rural Black parents did so.

- Family routines—Rural White families are substantially more likely than rural Black families to eat breakfast together at least three times per week (66.0% and 42.4%, respectively). This gap is narrower for eating dinner together at least three times per week (95.0% of rural White families compared with 87.4% of rural Black families).
- Television watching—Rural Black children were almost three times as likely as rural and non-rural White children to spend three hours or longer per weekday watching television. Rural Black children also were more likely than non-rural Black children to spend three hours or longer per weekday watching television (41.8% and 34.5%, respectively).

A Special Look at the Status of American Indian/Alaska Native Young Children

America's Indian and Alaska Native children, unlike other groups, are predominantly rural. In the ECLS-B, 1.2% of rural children and 0.3% of non-rural children are American Indian or Alaska Native. In the ECLS-K, American Indian/Alaska Native children are 5.4% of the rural child population and only 0.6% of the non-rural child population. For this reason, attention to early care and education for American Indian/Alaska Native children is an explicit research priority of Rural Early Childhood. Likewise, analysis by rurality of health and school readiness indicators for the American Indian/Alaska Native subset of the ECLS was a specific recommendation of the American Indian/Alaska Native Education Research Agenda (Strang and Von Glatz, 2001). The agenda was the product of White House Executive Order 13096 (1998) and reflected a scarcity of research on early childhood development and

education for this group of children (Demmert, 2001). A working group gathered ideas through a series of regional forums, a conference, and other means, ultimately setting the following priorities for research in the area of early childhood education: status of infant and preschool children on school readiness indicators and availability of programs and services for infants and preschoolers (Strang, Von Glatz, & Hammer, 2002).

The authors of the agenda suggested that the ECLS was “the most significant study ... underway” and predicted that findings concerning Native children would be “invaluable for Native researchers who seek to untangle the interrelationships among personal characteristics, family background, community, early childhood services, and success in making the transition to school” (Strang & Von Glatz, 2001, p. 34). “Comparisons of educational outcomes within the population of American Indian/Alaska Native students may be very useful. For example, comparisons could be based on ... urban or rural residence” (p. 11). The authors of the agenda noted that the ECLS Birth Cohort included “a specific oversampling of the Indian population through a supplement provided by the Office of Indian Education” and that the ECLS Kindergarten Cohort would “provide useful data on high-poverty rural populations” (p. 14).

In the spirit of the American Indian/Alaska Native research agenda, we examined selected indicators for this group of children in both ECLS cohorts, finding that these young children and their families possessed some important advantages in comparison with other rural children and families. For example, American Indian/Alaska Native rural parents in the ECLS-B were more likely to exhibit positive parenting skills, during observation, than other rural parents:

- Encouraged play—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native parents were more likely than rural Black and Hispanic parents to provide toys or interesting activities for their babies.
- Allowed exploration—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native parents

were less likely than rural White and Hispanic parents to interfere with or restrict their babies' actions or exploration at least three times during an observation.

- Positive discipline strategies—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native parents were significantly more likely than all other subgroups to report that they would use positive discipline strategies exclusively in response to a hypothetical situation in which their child hit them. More specifically, when parents were asked how they would respond if their child hit them, those who responded by indicating they would have the child take a timeout, talk to the child about what he or she did wrong, make the child apologize, take away a privilege, give the child a warning, or make the child do household chores were included as using only positive discipline strategies.
- Parental warmth—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native parents (76.1%) were about as likely as rural White parents (77.8%) and more likely than other subgroups to report high levels of parental warmth.
- Parental aggravation—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native parents (8.0%) reported similar levels of aggravation in parenting as rural White parents (7.6%) and were significantly less likely than rural non-Hispanic Black parents (16.8%) to report high levels of aggravation.

Rural life also appears to offer some benefits for American Indian/Alaska Native children and their families in comparison with non-rural life:

- Head Start participation—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were more likely than their non-rural counterparts to have attended a Head Start program (39.1% and 14.1%, respectively).
- Attendance at full-day kindergarten—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were more likely than non-rural counter-

parts to be enrolled in a full-day kindergarten program (89.8% and 37.8%, respectively).

As the NCES reported in August 2005, ECLS-B baseline data do not show differences between American Indian/Alaska Native children and other children in early cognitive and physical development (Flanagan & Park, 2005). However, analysis by *rurality* of the ECLS-B cohort reveals that American Indian/Alaska Native parents and children in rural America differed significantly from their counterparts in non-rural areas and from rural children in other ethnic subgroups on numerous health indicators that could affect children's later development:

- Breastfeeding—In the ECLS-B, rural American Indian/Alaska Native mothers (8.8%) were significantly less likely than rural White (25.6%) or Hispanic (23.6%) mothers to be breastfeeding their babies at baseline.
- Secondhand smoke exposure—In the ECLS-B, rural American Indian/Alaska Native babies were significantly more likely than rural Black and Hispanic babies to be exposed to smoking in the home.. There was no significant difference between American Indian/Alaska Native and White or Hispanic babies on this measure.
- Parental alcohol use—In the ECLS-B, rural American Indian/Alaska Native babies were significantly more likely than rural Black babies to have mothers who drank in the 3 months before pregnancy. There was no significant difference between American Indian/Alaska Native and White or Hispanic babies on this measure.

In addition, the ECLS-K provides further evidence of gaps and risk factors for American Indian/Alaska Native children:

- Poverty—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were more than twice as likely as their non-rural counterparts to live below the poverty threshold (60.5% and 23.1%, respectively).

- Parental education—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were only about a third as likely as non-rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners to have a parent with a bachelor's degree or higher (7.8% and 26.4%, respectively).
- Parents reading to children—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were less likely than non-rural kindergarteners from the same groups to have a parent who read to them three or more times per week (60.5% and 82.7%, respectively).
- Children reading to themselves—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were less likely than their non-rural peers from the same groups to read to themselves outside of school three or more times per week (58.2% and 82.4%, respectively).
- Social competence—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were less likely than non-rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners to be rated by their parents as very often exhibiting social competence in terms of their ease in joining play, making and keeping friends, and interacting positively with other children (38.85% and 53.80%, respectively).
- Self-control—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were less likely than their non-rural counterparts to be rated by their teachers as very often exhibiting self-control, as reflected in their respect for the property rights of others, control of their tempers, and acceptance of peer ideas for group activities (19.9% and 37.3%, respectively).
- Internalizing behavior problems—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native kindergarteners were more likely than non-rural counterparts to exhibit internalizing behavior (10.8% vs. 4.9%), as rated by their teachers. Internalizing behaviors included anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and sadness.
- Externalizing behavior problems—Rural American Indian/Alaska

Native kindergarteners were more likely than their non-rural counterparts to exhibit externalizing behavior (15.3% and 7.35, respectively), as rated by their teachers. Externalizing behaviors included the frequency with which a child argued, fought, got angry, acted impulsively and disturbed ongoing activities.

- Letter recognition—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native children in the ECLS-K were significantly less likely than rural White or Black children to be proficient at letter recognition.
- Beginning sounds recognition—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native children in the ECLS-K were less than one-fourth as likely as rural White children to be proficient at beginning sounds recognition.

Data from both the birth and kindergarten cohorts indicate that rural American Indian/Alaska Native children were more likely to be in care by a parent or relative and less likely to be in a center-based program, than other rural children:

- Care by relatives—Among rural babies, rural American Indian/Alaska Native babies were significantly more likely than White and Hispanic babies to receive care by a relative (42.5% compared with 26.9% and 13.6%, respectively).
- Non-relative care—According to ECLS-B baseline data, American Indian/Alaska Native children were the least likely group of rural children to be cared for by non-relatives as babies: Only 5.1% of rural American Indian/Alaska Native babies were cared for by a non-relative.
- Center-based pre-kindergarten care—Rural American Indian/Alaska Native children in the ECLS-K were less than one-third as likely as rural White children to have attended a center-based pre-kindergarten program (10.6% for American Indian/Alaska Native children compared with 35.3% for White children).

Conclusion

The findings in this study show that, overall, rural residence in some ways confers advantages on young children and their families, particularly in terms of family functioning and mental health (for example, neighborhood safety and children's social competence). In other ways, it involves disadvantages such as maternal depression, poverty, less participation in center-based care, and access to services where early developmental problems may be identified. Among rural families, groups at particularly high academic risk also show greater risk in terms of some indicators of family functioning.

The analysis of data reported in this paper should be used in advocating for better access and higher quality of services for children that are, by the quirk of geography, being left out and left behind. In particular, the following recommendations highlight possible changes:

1. Center-based programs should be designed to speak as much as possible to the unique academic and social-emotional developmental challenges and opportunities presented by the rural circumstance and across racial and ethnic groups. Quality rating and improvement systems in predominately rural states should be constructed to support quality advancements that are more challenging than in urban areas of the country, including professional development of teachers and parent engagement.
2. Parent outreach and education efforts should reflect and speak to a deeper understanding of family life and circumstance. Public and community health providers should review how they can be more involved in providing information that promotes the parent's role in young children's brain development and how they can become more aggressive in their information-sharing role.
3. Where early care programs and caregivers cannot address the broader challenges that affect young children's development, partnerships must be formed and local governments must become

much more creative in resource allocation and collaboration.

4. Higher education programs should develop an academic focus and field experiences that prepare both degree and non-degree early childhood workers for the uniqueness of the rural experience. This focus should be accompanied by a greater research focus on rural early childhood care and development with a goal of exposing and removing the disparities between rural children of color and other population subsets and increasing quality and access for all children.
5. Policymakers at all levels must make early childhood care and development a centerpiece in our country's strategy to provide a quality education and ensure success for all children, regardless of where and into what circumstance they were born.

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Chapter 3

Factors Influencing Rural Families' Child Care Placement Decisions: A Literature Review

Mary Bratsch

As early as 1979, influential psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner hypothesized that child care may have larger effects on human development in modernized, industrialized societies than any other direct effects. More recently, scholars have agreed with his contention that child care affects not only the child but also the family and society at large through its impact on employment, child-rearing, and transmission of cultural values (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Johnson et al., 2003). Now, some 30 years after Bronfenbrenner's assertion, more than 80% of all 4-year-olds in the United States are enrolled in some kind of public or private preschool program (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2008). For policy-makers, families' child care options and the cost and quality of those options continue to be of concern because child care arrangements have the potential to aid or hinder parents' employability; reduce or increase dependency on welfare; and impact, positively or negatively, children's development (Joesch, Maher, & Durfee, 2006).

Previous literature has discussed various types of child care, includ-

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ing partner care, in-home nonrelative care, relative care, family child care, and center care (e.g., Early & Burchinal, 2001; Huston, Chang, & Gennetian, 2002; Li-Grining & Coley, 2006; Morrissey, 2010; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 1997). However, the literature has not sufficiently explored the accessibility, utilization, and quality of various child care options for families living in rural communities. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2005), this literature is insufficient largely because “much of the research on rural areas addresses circumstances in a specific locality with results that may be the consequence of local implementation factors, and not generalizable to other or all rural areas” (p. 4). While some national studies exclude rural places altogether, others do not disaggregate rural and nonrural findings (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). Disaggregated data specific to rural African American children and families are even more difficult to find. This literature review explores the accessibility, utilization, and quality of child care options with a focus on center, family, and relative care as well as, where possible, care primarily among African American families living in rural communities in the southern United States. It examines the relationships between accessing the various types of child care and factors such as maternal employment and income, maternal education, geographic isolation, and social support.

African Americans and the Rural South

Complicating the limited discussion of rural early childhood issues in the research literature are the multiple definitions of the word *rural*. Some definitions are based on population density, others on proximity to metropolitan or urbanized areas, and still others on the economic and industrial characteristics of a place (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, & Shapley, 2007). Depending on the definition one chooses, the United States’ rural population ranges from 17% to nearly 49% of the total population. The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as all areas with fewer than 2,500 people

located outside of an urban area. By this definition, estimates put the rural share of the country's population at 70.6 million people or 23% of the total population. African Americans make up 4.6 million or 6.5% of the country's rural population (U.S. Census Bureau 2008).

Nearly 87% of African Americans living in rural communities live in the South—defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia—where they make up 12% of all people living in rural areas. In 2008, 33% of African Americans and 39% of African American families in the rural South were living below the federal poverty line. Sixty percent of African American families in the rural South were headed by females, and more than half (57%) of those families were living below the federal poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a, 2009b).

This latter statistic is especially important in light of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* (PRWORA), also known as the Welfare Reform Act. This act transformed the nation's long-standing approach to providing relief to poor families with children. At the core of the act was the replacement of welfare entitlement with a mandatory work, service, or job training requirement for the head of every family receiving welfare payments. Within 2 years of the beginning of benefit payments, recipients with children over the age of 6 years had to work a minimum of 30 hours a week. After 2 months, they had to begin performing community service if they had not found employment. Recipients with children under the age of 6 years were required to work 20 hours a week and were exempt altogether if they could not find child care. Child care subsidies were increased and a lifetime limit of 5 cumulative years was imposed on the receipt of benefits.

By 2005, nine years after the inception of welfare reform in 1996, welfare rolls in the U.S. had decreased by approximately 60 percent, the lowest number of people on welfare since 1967 (U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, 2008). This trend signaled the entry of many female householders into the workforce for the first time, thereby increasing the demand for affordable and accessible child care (Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005). It also prompted a greater need to understand the still under-investigated quality, cost, and accessibility of child care options for rural families and for rural African American families in particular. Rurality might affect their geographic access to care, but in addition, deep and persistent poverty likely affects their ability to purchase child care even when it is available (Thornburg, Mathews, Espinosa, & Ispa, 1997). The inability to access adequate child care, in turn, can affect a family's ability to work and earn sufficient incomes (Baum 2002; Mammen, Lass, & Seiling, 2009; Walker & Reschke, 2004) or even to access the additional education that might improve their employment opportunities (Huston et al., 2002). Failure to focus research and policy initiatives on the unique circumstances of families living in rural communities means that the needs of these families will continue to be unmet.

Child Care Types: Associated Characteristics, Access, and Use

Several studies of the types of care accessed by families have revealed that various population groups access care differently and that there may be differential outcomes due to variations in the activities and relationships experienced by children within the different types of care settings (Fuller, Kagan, Loeb, & Chang, 2004). The following sections provide more detail about the characteristics, access, and use of three types of care that are more commonly accessed (center care, family child care, and relative care), exploring specifically the benefits and disadvantages of each and, where possible, current findings for rural African American families.

Center Care

Center care includes structured, group care in settings such as nursery schools, day care centers, preschools, prekindergartens, and Head

Start programs (Capizzano, Adams, & Sonenstein, 2000; Magnuson, Meyers, & Waldfogel, 2007). Where the option exists, center care has been shown to benefit children in ways that may lead parents to choose it over other types of care. Select benefits include more advanced cognitive and language development (Crosby, Gennetian, & Huston, 2001; NICHD, 2005d); improvement in early academic skills (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005); higher levels of school readiness (Rigby, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007); and more diverse interactions with peers (Shpancer, 2002). Children in center care may be exposed to a higher quality of care (Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien, & Roy, 2001) because center-based caregivers are likely to have more training in child development and higher levels of formal education (NICHD, 2005b; Shpancer, 2002). Of particular importance to families is the reliability of center care (Kisker & Ross, 1997). Unlike other forms of child care that rely on a single caregiver, centers tend to operate on scheduled days and hours and continue to operate even if one or more of the child care providers is not working.

Families living at or just above the poverty line may make child care decisions based primarily on subsidy availability or access to government-funded centers such as Head Start (Shlay, 2010; Weinraub, Shlay, Harmon, & Tran, 2005). These options can make center-based care an affordable alternative to other forms of care (Kisker & Ross, 1997). Head Start, for example, is a publicly funded, comprehensive early childhood program designed to improve social, intellectual, and emotional development for low-income children (Zigler & Anderson, 1979). In 1994, when Congress reauthorized the Head Start Act, it added Early Head Start, a program that targets pregnant women and low-income families with infants and toddlers. Services are comprehensive, much like the Head Start preschool program, and can be delivered in the home or in center-based settings. Children who have participated in Early Head Start programs, where services are delivered in center-based settings, have shown gains in cognitive and language development (Love et al., 2003) while children who have attended Head Start have shown gains in prereading

and preliteracy skills (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2005). In 2008, Head Start served over 900,000 children, 30.1% of whom were African American (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2008).

Despite the benefits of center care in general and Head Start in particular, center care has shortcomings that are of practical significance to families. Like other forms of regulated care, centers generally have policies prohibiting sick children from attending (Bradley & Vandell, 2007; Early & Burchinal, 2001; Gordon, Kaestner, & Korenman, 2008). While this stipulation undoubtedly helps to protect children's health, it may make the center option less attractive to families needing more accommodating care arrangements (Usdansky & Wolf, 2008). In addition, NICHD (2005b) found fewer instances of positive care giving in child care centers than in home or relative care settings. Defined as "sensitive, encouraging, and frequent interactions between the caregiver and the child" (NICHD, 2005c, p.10), positive care giving is a measure of the quality of care based on observable behaviors of the caregiver. Although licensing standards set adult-child ratio ranges for all regulated care settings, the lower positive care giving findings in centers overall have been associated with centers' relatively higher adult-child ratios and larger group sizes, particularly as children get older (NICHD, 2005b). Higher adult-child ratios and larger group sizes, in turn, may mean that caregivers have less time for one-on-one contact with children (Adams & Rohacek, 2002). It also might explain why some researchers have found higher incidences of behavioral problems in centers than in other settings (Early & Burchinal, 2001).

Using nationally representative data, Kimmel (2006) reported that across the United States, center care was a common choice of African American families from among four types of care—parent, relative, nonrelative, and center care. These data showed that 33.6% of African American children were placed in center care. Other studies have substantiated the finding that

African American families choose center care at high rates and, in some cases, at higher rates than other racial and ethnic groups (Early & Burchinal, 2001; Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005; Radey & Brewster, 2007; Shoffner, 1986; Singer, Fuller, Keiley, & Wolf, 1998). African Americans have also been found to put their children in care at earlier ages (Singer et al., 1998).

In a culturally diverse sample, Walker and Reschke (2004) found rural single mothers to rely more on center-based care than rural partnered mothers. Maher, Frestedt, and Grace (2008) found among their sample of rural and nonrural families in Illinois, Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina, and Washington that 37% of preschoolers were in center care while 12% were in family day care and that there was no significant difference between rural and nonrural families. Some of the national longitudinal studies that have examined parental child care decisions also have found that center care is most common (between 32% and 44%); unfortunately, these studies did not differentiate between racial groups or rurality (Capizzano, et al., 2000; NICHD, 2005d).

Family Child Care

Family child care, generally defined as care offered in providers' homes to children other than their own (Helburn, Morris, & Modigliani, 2002), has benefits that make it the desired form of care for many families. Johansen, Leibowitz, and Waite (1996) found that mothers value knowing their caregiver chose family child care over center care, particularly for younger children. Family child care provides a home-like environment with the potential for lower adult-child ratios, and is sometimes, like center care, regulated by states. Family child care is often cheaper than centers, has more flexible policies for sick children, and can be a reliable source of care (Kisker & Ross, 1997). Family child care providers also have been rated as being more positive than center caregivers in their interactions and frequency of interactions with children (NICHD, 2005b).

In general, however, family child care has been shown to be of lower quality than center care, although generally of higher quality than relative care (Rigby, et al., 2007). On an observational measure of child care quality indices such as caregiver sensitivity, stimulation, positive regard, and cultivation of exploration, parents in the NICHD Study of Early Child Care were less likely to choose family child care if quality was a motivating factor in their decision. Among sample participants, 35% of parents chose family child care, while nearly 52% chose center care (Peyton et al., 2001). Finally, low-income families may not know that they can use subsidy support to pay for family child care, which may limit their usage of such care further (Shlay, Weinraub, Harmony, & Tran, 2004).

The extent to which rural African American families use family child care over other types of care is unclear from available data. In Early and Burchinal's analysis of national data (2001), near-poor African American families used family child care for both their infants and preschoolers at higher rates than the poor and not-poor families. However, these rates were still relatively small compared with the use of center and relative care. In a sample of low-income participants in which African American families were over-represented, the NICHD Study of Early Child Care found that family child care was the second-most utilized type of care for the above-poverty groups, while it was the third-most utilized type of care for both the poverty and near-poverty groups. Among African Americans in the study, 16% used family child care for their 36-month-old children (NICHD, 2005a). Both of these studies revealed that families living below the poverty level were not as likely to use family child care as families with incomes above the federal poverty line.

Relative Care

Several studies have examined the benefits of relative care, which is generally defined as nonparental care provided in the home of the child or a related adult (Capizzano et al., 2000; Hickman, 2006). The benefits of rela-

tive care include flexibility and familiarity (Katras, Zuiker, & Bauer, 2004; Li-Grining & Coley, 2006); availability during nonstandard hours (Kisker & Ross, 1997); lower adult-child ratios and more one-on-one care (Atkinson, 1996); greater opportunities to attend to individual needs of children (Shpancer, 2002); better communication between parents and caregivers (Li-Grining & Coley, 2006); positive care giving (NICHD, 2005b); better child behavior (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005); affordability (Johansen et al., 1996); and cultural or language continuity with the home environment (Kisker & Ross, 1997). Grandmothers in a rural sample met a large number of child care needs that are not common elements of center-based and family child care, including transportation and care for sick children (Reschke, Manoogian, Richards, Walkder, & Seiling, 2006).

The accessibility and familiarity that relatives provide have prompted families of varying cultural backgrounds to use relatives as caregivers. For European American and African American urban mothers moving from welfare to work, relative care was seen as an acceptable alternative to center care because center care, while perhaps more stable, meant relying on strangers (Scott et al., 2005). Lowe and Weisner (2004) found that parents preferred the nurturing, safe environments of relative care. Finally, among her rural lowan sample, Atkinson (1996) found that some families preferred relative care because it was more similar to immediate family care.

Despite these benefits, however, some studies have identified shortcomings associated with this form of care. Relative care is generally not regulated, thus increasing the likelihood that children may be exposed to health and safety risks (Kisker & Ross, 1997). Child care that is provided by relatives may also be unreliable (Katras et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2005), especially if the income needs of extended family members change and they are no longer able to provide care (Kisker & Ross, 1997). In addition, if families rely on only one relative as caregiver and that person becomes ill or otherwise unable to provide care, it affects the parent needing child care (Scott et al., 2005).

The extent to which African American families tap into relative care remains unclear; studies have reported differing rates of reliance on relative care. Two national longitudinal studies reported conflicting findings on relative care based on the income levels of the samples. Early and Burchinal (2001) found that across income groups (poor, near-poor, and not-poor), African American families placed their preschool-age children in relative care at similar rates (16%, 19%, and 12%, respectively). In contrast, NICHD (2005a) found that relative care for 36-month-old children was more widely used by the families in poverty (30%) than the near- or above-poverty groups (18% and 11%, respectively); in particular, African American usage of relative care was at 26%. Yet both of these studies reported much lower usage of relative care than Rigby and colleagues (2007), who, in their intensive review of five different studies, found that families placed their children in relative care 42% of the time. Again, these numbers, ranging from 12% to 42%, reveal considerable variation in how much African Americans rely on and utilize this form of care. Additional research is required to understand the extent to which African Americans living in rural communities tap into relative care over other types of care.

Factors Affecting Child Care Decisions

Maternal employment is a major reason parents seek child care services (Atkinson, 1994; Mammen et al., 2009). The decision about where they will place their children in care is influenced ultimately by many inter-related factors. For low-income rural families, for example, child care costs may exceed 35% of the family budget (Walker & Reschke, 2004), suggesting that income may curtail the family's access to child care or, at the least, narrow the range of child care options open to them (Peyton et al., 2001). This section examines several interrelated factors that impact families' child care decisions, in particular, maternal employment and income, maternal education, geographic isolation, and social support.

Maternal Employment and Income

Although some researchers have attributed increased child care demand to maternal employment (e.g., Fuller et al., 1996), it is not entirely clear which comes first: child care availability influencing mothers' ability to work outside the home or mothers' employment opportunity influencing the search for child care (Singer et al., 1998; Walker & Reschke, 2004). What is known, however, is that limited access to child care limits a mother's ability to seek or sustain employment. This effect may be true especially for women living in rural areas (Atkinson, 1994; Walker & Reschke, 2004), for African American women (Singer et al., 1998), and for lower income families (Weinraub et al., 2005).

Geographic location can impose additional employment constraints on families living in rural communities, which in turn inhibits their ability to access child care. Previous research has suggested that women living in rural areas are employed disproportionately in marginal, part-time, low-paying positions with few benefits (Ames, Brosi, & Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Atkinson, 1994; Brown & Lichter, 2004; Thornburg et al., 1997). To support or contribute to the support of a family, they may be required to work multiple jobs and long hours (Perroncel, 2000). These jobs tend to offer inflexible hours that might also limit a family's access to affordable child care (Johnson et al., 2003; Perroncel, 2000; Peyton et al., 2001). In a longitudinal study of 245 rural, low-income mothers, maintaining stable employment proved a constant challenge, in part, because these mothers were unable to access reliable care. In some cases, mothers in this study changed jobs or remained out of the workforce to care for their children (Berry, Katras, Sano, Lee, & Bauer, 2008). Similarly, in a racially diverse rural sample, Mammen and colleagues (2009) found that the probability of the mothers' ability to work were 173% greater if they had child care assistance. This finding underscores the strong relationship between accessing child care and the ability to participate in the work force.

Type of employment also may influence where families place their children in care. If women are employed in jobs that either start with little warning or have weekend hours, unpredictable schedules, and little flexibility for child care emergencies (e.g., sick children), they may be more inclined to use relative care to satisfy their child care needs (Walker & Reschke, 2004). In a study of how subsidies affect child care use by low-income African American families, parents were less likely to be receiving child care subsidies if they worked night shifts or variable hours (Weinraub et al., 2005). Families with such nontraditional work schedules, therefore, may be more likely also to seek out relative care since the availability of subsidies is a predictor of more regulated (generally center) care usage (Fuller, Kagan, Caspary, & Gauthier, 2002). This tendency may be especially true for families with younger children. In contrast, others have found that mothers who work non-day jobs are *less* likely to select sitter or relative care, and more likely to use center or relative care. In addition, it has been shown that when mothers worked more hours and had more stable employment, they were more likely to use center or family child care (Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992; Huston et al., 2002).

Maternal Education

Statistical analyses from the U.S. Department of Labor (2009) reveal that women with higher levels of formal education were more likely to be working or searching for work than women with lower education levels. Among women ages 25 years or older with less than a high school diploma, 34% participated in the labor force; with some college but no degree, 62%; with an associate degree, 72%; with a bachelor's degree or higher, 73%. In an earlier study, only 29% of parents who did not graduate from high school had children in care versus 42% and 52% of parents with college and post-graduate degrees, respectively (Singer et al., 1998). These studies indicate that a positive relationship exists between maternal education and child care use; further, the research literature has linked maternal education to

type of care used. In general, previous studies have found that parents with higher levels of education use center care or in-home, nonrelative care at greater rates than parents with lower levels of education (Hofferth & Wiskoker, 1992; Huston et al., 2002; NICHD, 1997; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999) and that this care is often of higher quality than the care used by parents with lower levels of education (Shpancer, 2002).

There are several hypotheses regarding the link between center care and education. One is that parents with higher levels of education may be employed in jobs with higher incomes and thus be able to afford center care, which is often the most expensive form of care (Huston et al., 2002). Another is that the positive correlations between maternal education, maternal employment, and income levels may drive demand for more centers in locations or neighborhoods where mothers are more highly educated (Fuller et al., 2002). Yet another is that mothers with higher levels of education may appreciate the developmental and educational benefits of child care and may value center care more than mothers with less education (Huston et al., 2002; Johansen et al., 1996).

Families with lower education levels, however, may be less likely to tap into center care unless they also have low incomes and can receive child care subsidies. Data from NICHD (1997) revealed that respondents with lower education levels were more likely to use parent or grandparent child care. Low-income African American mothers who had earned a high school diploma but not a college degree were more likely to access subsidies, leading to higher rates of center-based care usage (Weinraub et al., 2005). Fifty-four percent of mothers with secondary education used subsidies while 86% of those without secondary education used child care subsidies.

Geographic Isolation

The previous socioeconomic factors may be less unique to rural families than the geographic isolation that characterizes many rural ar-

areas (Perroncel, 2000). For families living in such areas, transportation can impact how child care is accessed (Huston et al., 2002; Li-Grining & Coley, 2006; Pindus, 2001). Many families may make the decision on where to place their children based on minimizing transportation cost and distance. In a study examining child care access for families living in rural communities in three states, Walker and Reschke (2004) found that for the respondents from one rural Maryland community, the only formal child care option (e.g., center-based care) was located in a neighboring county 50 miles away. Families, therefore, may be forced to make choices based on proximity to work or home, thus reducing their access to a wide variety of care (Katrass et al., 2004; Perroncel, 2000; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999). In other words, they may have to forego preference in favor of convenience or cost containment (Thornburg et al., 1997).

Other factors found to be related to rurality and geographic isolation are also related to where rural families may place their children in child care. Compared with the national average, Perroncel (2000) found that families living in rural areas were somewhat more likely to use family-based or in-home care; in a similar finding, Walker and Reschke (2004) found that family day care was the most widely available type of care in rural communities. Earlier, NICHD (1997) reported that children living in rural areas were more likely to be cared for by relatives. The likelihood of a family choosing center-based care, family child care, or relative care may be different based on the level of geographic isolation and should not be assumed to be homogeneous for all rural families.

Social Support

Social support can be understood as interactions between people and their social networks as well as the resources provided within social networks (Vaux, 1990). Social support has been significantly related to the long-term economic well-being of mothers living in poverty in rural commu-

nities (Simmons, Braun, Wright, & Miller, 2007). Three attributes of a social support system—instrumental, financial, and informational—have been used to help clarify how families use social support to access child care (Henly, Danziger, & Offer, 2005). Instrumental supports include forms of assistance such as child care and transportation (Henly et al., 2005), and they additionally provide an important social connection (Pindus, 2001; Swanson, Olson, Miller, & Lawrence, 2008). Financial supports are monetary gifts, loans, or child care payments. In addition, families may provide child care services for free (leading to relative care usage), help provide payment for alternative child care arrangements (Atkinson, 1994), or provide meals for the family (Swanson et al., 2008). Informational supports include helping families learn about child care opportunities and how to access them (Atkinson, 1994). For lower income families, however, such supports may serve a “coping” function rather than a “leverage” function (Henly et al., 2005, p. 122). That is, social support may not help a family attain economic mobility, but may provide a network that helps resolve the day-to-day challenges that families may face (Henly et al., 2005).

Some of the challenges resulting from geographic isolation may be mitigated by proximity to relatives, a commonly discussed attribute of the social support network in relation to child care. In a longitudinal study of 245 rural, low-income mothers across 14 states, Berry and colleagues (2008) found that a strong social network, and especially dependable child care, helped mothers remain consistently employed across time. In one of the rare studies of its kind, Shoffner (1986) examined child care in the rural South (where two-thirds of participants were European American and one-third were African American). She found that over 30% of respondents lived near one to five relatives while over 20% lived near more than five relatives. Geographic proximity to relatives may be associated with where families place their children in child care, potentially leading relatives to serve as child care providers. Other studies have found that social support within

African American families may include relatives (mainly grandmothers) residing with young mothers (Hogan, Hao, & Parish, 1990; McDonald & Armstrong, 2001). Co-residence with relatives may boost the family's economic capacity (Hogan et al., 1990) and provide easy access to flexible and affordable child care assistance.

Hogan and colleagues (1990) found that African American mothers, regardless of marital status, reported inadequate access to child care. This finding was unaffected by better access to kin, although unmarried mothers seemed to tap into free child care by relatives more than married mothers did. Also, African American mothers appear to be involved in social support networks at a higher rate (56%) than European American mothers (20%). Single mothers were even more likely to be involved in social support networks. Even so, they still reported inadequate access to child care (Brewster & Padavic, 2002; Hogan et al., 1990). What remains less understood is how African American mothers who live in rural communities perceive and access their social support systems.

Conclusion

Previous research literature on child care has largely foregone a focus on accessibility, utilization, and quality of child care options for rural and African American families. The literature is even thinner on families that are both rural and African American. The literature that does exist has revealed contradictions about what types of care African American families most often access or prefer and about the factors that influence their type of care decisions. While some of the contradictory results might reflect a variation in study samples, they also indicate the need for further research. Policymakers cannot assume that families will turn automatically to a specific type of care to resolve child care issues or that they will access a particular type of care just because it is available. There are currently not enough data to inform policymakers about which child care services families most need

or prefer: high quality, subsidized center slots; subsidized smaller, more localized care (such as care provided by relatives) held to quality standards; or both. In addition, previous research has failed to build a strong knowledge base for how best to mitigate the challenges surrounding these families' child care needs, including poverty, transportation, cost, quality, and access. Additional research on child care in rural communities is therefore needed in several areas.

First, there is a need for more research on child care availability. Data should be disaggregated to address the child care options available to rural families, and further disaggregated to focus specifically on race and ethnicity of families living in rural communities. These future studies should explore more fully the variations in child care availability across income and education levels of mothers and with respect to the extent of rurality and the strength of social networks.

Second, future research should focus on the extent to which *high-quality* care is available to rural families, coupled with identifying the various resources needed to access that care. Policy initiatives can then be designed to enhance those resources.

To make these research efforts possible, policymakers should target funding toward studies that include or specifically direct their research toward families living in rural communities, with a specific focus on communities with large concentrations of racial or ethnic minorities. These efforts will then help pinpoint how future policy strategies should be shaped to increase the supply of and access to high-quality programs. With additional research on child care quality in rural areas, it will be possible to make recommendations to local, regional, and state social service agencies about how to assist clients better in the selection of care that meets quality standards.

However, policymakers do not have to wait for research to become available before taking positive steps toward ensuring high-quality child care for rural families, including rural African American families. The delivery of

child care services should entail more cohesive planning on the part of local, state, and federal governments. These governmental bodies are largely responsible for child care subsidy distribution and child care quality regulation. If these systems are delivered adequately, they have the potential to aid families making child care decisions in what is now a largely disjointed system of providers. This system can be difficult to negotiate, especially for parents facing constraints due to economic challenges and geographic isolation.

Finally, to enhance employment opportunities among rural families living in poverty, partnerships between private and public institutions may be needed to increase job training and child care opportunities for rural African Americans. Given the current economic realities in the United States, these recommendations are especially important as access to work, wealth, and child care are inextricably entwined.

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Chapter 4

Bertie County, NC: A Case Study in Rural Early Childhood Education Utilization

Jereann King Johnson

The research literature widely extols the benefits of early childhood education and intervention to families and young children. However, access to quality early childhood programs and services in low-resourced rural communities involves overcoming a number of challenges, including inadequate funding for quality facilities, scarcity of licensed and trained early childhood professionals, transportation barriers, and communication gaps. In many rural places, the organizational structure of early childhood centers (family-based, publically funded, faith-based, nonprofit) can dictate the overall quality and sustainability of the program. For example, according to Connie Richardson, Bertie County federal programs director, in a privately run church-based childcare facility, professional development opportunities may be fewer for teachers and caregivers than in a school-based, publically funded program (Connie Richardson interview, October 20, 2009). This kind of disparity across programs can have a significant impact on the quality of the early childhood education experience, which in turn

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can contribute to community perceptions and impact participation levels.

However, in the shifting political and economic climates of our time, publicly funded early childhood programs are also at risk. Recruiting and retaining quality staff members and creating appropriate classroom designs required for program licensing continue to be of concern, especially in rural communities. Regardless of the program's organizational structure, the question of early childhood education demands the attention of the entire community and requires a broad community vision of the relationships, supports, and resources necessary for young children and their families to thrive. This study highlights one rural community's success in bringing this kind of focus to the prekindergarten arena. Much of that success centers on unique relationships, the organizing capacity of key professionals, and the belief that early childhood education matters.

Bertie County: A Profile

Bertie County sits in the historically tobacco-dependent northeast region of North Carolina. With 700 square miles of rich agricultural land and a population of 19,337, the county is peppered with small towns of 200 to 300 residents each. Windsor, the county seat, has a population of about 2,000. While North Carolina's population increased by nearly 15% between April 2000 and July 2008, Bertie's population decreased by more than 2%. African Americans make up 60% of the population, and only 64% of adults over the age of 25 years have completed high school. More than one fourth (26%) of the population lives below poverty, and median income (\$28,531) is 64% of the state's median (\$44,772) (NC Rural Economic Center, 2008).

Bertie's history in many ways parallels American history. Abundant native tribes embraced the early Europeans who arrived in the Albemarle region of Northeast North Carolina in the 1650s. Because of the region's rich soil, suitable for producing cotton and tobacco, and its proximity to

coastal ports, the institution of slavery was especially beneficial to White plantation owners and the local economy. With the abolition of slavery came the rise of sharecropping and tenant farming, which also proved to be lucrative for select farm interests.

Between the World Wars, Northeast North Carolina established economies based mostly on textiles and agriculture. During the mid-1950s to early 1970s, like many other rural communities throughout the region, Bertie County was confronted with the demands for social and political change fueled by the Civil Rights Movement and the Voting Rights Act. School integration in the late 1960s resulted in the displacement of African Americans in local educational leadership roles¹ and had a lasting impact on the nature and quality of education in the community.

Today, Bertie, like most of the surrounding counties (Halifax, Hereford, Martin, Northampton, and Washington) is undergoing the fall-out from a declining population, drastic reductions in manufacturing and production employment, and a shifting agricultural economy. Bertie has explored a number of innovative approaches in rethinking how it addresses economic and community development. Still, local leaders understand that at the heart of community and economic development is (a) availability of and access to quality education, (b) an engaged citizenry, and (c) a vision of how Bertie County might look as a thriving community.

¹ *Displacement* became the term that subsumed the many policies and practices by southern school boards, school superintendents, and politicians that sought to undermine the employment and authority of African-American educators: dismissals, demotions, forced resignations, “nonhiring,” token promotions, lower salaries, less responsibility, coercion to teach subjects or grade levels other than those for which individuals were certified or had experience. All of these practices fell under the rubric of displacement (Fultz, 2004). To access a talk by Fultz that was adapted from Fultz (2004), go to <http://eps.education.wisc.edu/reference/displacement.brownconf.pdf>.

A Research-Based Framework for Early Childhood Education

Of particular interest to this study is the early childhood education research that has guided Bertie’s development of structured early childhood education programs. That literature includes research on quality practices and indicators in preschool programs as interventions for early (and even later) educational success; supportive environments, including families’ understandings, values, and beliefs about literacy and literacy interactions in the home; and leadership in low-resource rural communities striving to improve educational outcomes that then connect to the bigger picture of community development.

Quality practices and indicators. In an effort to ensure that the state’s preschool programs were of high quality, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction convened a committee of early childhood educators and parents to examine the research and other states’ standards on early childhood education and care. The publication (Work, 2005) that resulted from the committee’s work outlines “guiding principles” and “widely held expectations,” encapsulating research-based practices and policies for high-quality early childhood programs and services. For example, the guide stresses the importance of practitioners understanding early childhood cognitive development theory, “pondering, processing, and applying experience” as an important principle. The guide describes the principle:

This aspect includes forming ideas, reflecting on past events, posing ideas about the future and acting on knowledge about the real world. (Work, 2005, p. 13)

Next, the guide lays out the widely held expectation, describing how the principle of “pondering, processing, and applying experience” might look in a learning setting:

Children begin to:

- Draw on everyday experiences and apply that knowledge to other situations.
- Seek information for further understanding.
- Generate ideas and suggestions that make predictions.
- Describe or act out a memory of a situation or action.
- Form hypotheses about cause and effect. (Work, 2005, p. 13)

Then the guide suggests a list of strategies for early educators and families that can be used to support the overall principle. This format continues through all of the identified domains of development: approaches to learning, emotional and social development, health and physical development, language development and communication, and cognitive development. While these practical strategies are proven effective within the early education center, early childhood education research also emphasizes the significance of the family environment and ways in which literacy is valued and practiced in the child's home.

Supportive home environments. Researchers (Bowman, Donovan, & Burn, 2000) have called into question the simplicity of the age-to-competency framework for child development and have emphasized the role of a supportive environment with well-equipped and caring adults in strengthening and supporting learning in a particular domain. Researchers noted that "stimulation from the environment changes the very physiology of the brain, interlocking nature and nurture" and that "a defining feature of a supportive environment is a responsible and responsive adult" (Bowman, Donovan, & Burn, 2000, p. 5).

Of particular relevance to the Bertie County investigation is a study by Curenton and Justice (2008) that focused on the role of mothers' beliefs about literacy and the home literacy environment that mothers create. Curenton and Justice investigated connections between children's preliteracy skills,

mother's education, and mothers' beliefs about shared reading interactions for 45 low-income, primarily European American Appalachian families. Not surprisingly, they found that the preliteracy skills of children whose mothers were more educated were significantly better than those of children with less educated mothers. Surprisingly, though, the frequency of home literacy activities among both less educated and more educated mothers was about the same.

Weigel, Martin, and Bennett (2006) also examined mothers' beliefs about literacy development in regard to the home literacy environment. They studied 79 mothers and their children over a 1-year period and observed that some mothers, classified as "facilitative," believed in taking an active role in teaching their children in the home. Other mothers, classified as "conventional," believed that schooling outside of the home was the way to teach children. The conventional mothers reported more challenges to teaching reading to their children than did the facilitative mothers.

Motheread (n.d.) offers another perspective that centers on the bond between the child and the family member and the role that book-reading literacy practices have on the quality of the child-adult relationships. Motheread further suggests that it is critical to help parents see themselves as learners and participants in a literate society.

A Motheread² organizational evaluation (Gorham, n.d.) found that adult participants attending Motheread classes for 16 to 36 hours improved their tested reading scores by one to four grade levels; expressed greater understanding of parenting styles, thinking, and problem solving; and were better able to relate their own or their children's life experiences to those of characters found in children's literature. The study results suggested that

2 Motheread, Inc., is a nationally acclaimed private, nonprofit organization that combines the teaching of literacy skills with child development and family empowerment issues. Parent and children learn to use the power of language to discover more about themselves, their families, and their communities.

classes (based on or influenced by Motherhead) “can have a positive impact on reading competency and parents’ motivation to apply these skills at home with their children.”

Dwyer, Chait, and McKee (2000) identify features of high-quality early childhood programs that promote cognitive and language development. Noted first is parent involvement and related quality indicators: development of home-school relationships, home literacy environment and parent-child interactions, and competence in working with diverse parent populations. This guide underscores the importance of attention to relationship building between school and parents and families in programs that serve preschool children. This framework is particularly applicable in programs that serve both parents and young children, as is the case in Bertie County’s early childhood centers.

Leadership and the broader context of community. In Bertie County, as in most of eastern North Carolina, race is a major social and political influence in community development that factors into the roles of Blacks in leadership and into diminished or inadequate services in Black communities.

Because early childhood services fit into the broader context of community life, research on community development offers some intriguing insights for this case study. Most interesting is the work of Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997), which raises inclusiveness, leadership, assets, unique relationships, and organizing capacity as important elements of community development. They focused on the role of women as nurturers of families and communities and saw it as a leadership role:

We came to see that women of all colors often become community leaders who sponsor the development of the most marginal and vulnerable members of the community.... Because Black women come from a culture where the tradition of developmental leader-

ship is more clearly established, they helped us see that there was a tradition to be studied even when the tradition has no name. Because the public leaders we studied were so focused on nurturing the development of people, families, and communities, we decided to name their organizations “public homeplaces.” (p. 13)

The idea of “homeplace” resonates widely in the Black experience. Homeplace is often thought of as that place where you are understood, where you can settle, work, and rest. In Bertie County, in regard to strengthening the bond between early childhood education and community, the notion of homeplace offers a powerful lens through which to view and understand early childhood programs.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) flipped the usual “needs assessment”-driven community development approach on its head by starting with identifying a community’s assets rather than its deficits. They suggest that there is value in encouraging individuals, community organizations, and local institutions to use their full potential for building strong communities. They also suggest leveraging resources within and from outside the community for locally driven development. This approach has tremendous potential for building strong supports for early childhood education.

The studies reviewed here highlight the importance of quality standards; beliefs, values, and practices about early education and literacy within the home and early school environment; and the broader community context within which early childhood education services fit. Limited reporting of demographics in the studies makes it difficult to determine fully the efficacy of various interventions with respect to children’s socioeconomic status, age, and race. However, North Carolina’s More at Four program does provide some evidence of the effectiveness of preschool interventions in preparing underserved, at-risk children to be more successful in kindergarten (Peisner-Feinberg & Schaaf, 2008), indicating that these demographic characteristics might

not alter the effectiveness of the interventions. Further research is needed because there is still much to understand about early childhood education and literacy development in low-income families and low-resource rural communities with significant African American populations.

Study Design and Methodology

This study was designed to examine the beliefs, practices, and relationships that have led to Bertie County's noteworthy success in engaging its 3- and 4-year-olds in structured early childhood education programs. The study is largely ethnographic and uses both qualitative and analytical approaches. Semi-structured interview questions allowed researchers to chronicle the development of structured early childhood education opportunities in the community from the late 1940s to the present, unveil perceptions and beliefs about quality early childhood learning program, examine the role of community assets and organizing in program development and participation, and bring to light community expectations for successful young people through quality early childhood education.

The director of federal programs in Bertie County Public Schools, Mrs. Connie Richardson, helped to coordinate interviews with the parents, practitioners, and community members. Mrs. Richardson suggested that the researcher attend an evening Book Fair event at one of Bertie's early childhood centers to meet and interview parents. The researcher attended the event with a sparse number of parents, invited all of the parents for interviews, and most in attendance volunteered for the interview. Bertie County Public Schools operate two early childhood centers, and teachers from both centers participated in the interviews. Study participants responded to a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) that were constructed and posed by the researcher. The researcher tape-recorded the interviews, which typically ranged between 20 and 30 minutes in length. A number of supplemental sources also provided data for this study, including newspaper articles, vari-

ous school data sources, and Bertie County strategic planning documents.

Study Participants

The researcher interviewed 30 individuals, including six parents attending an evening Book Fair, a grandparent and a godmother participating in the county’s Even Start program, 14 early childhood educators from the county’s two early childhood centers, and two of the county’s senior community members. In addition, the researcher interviewed a longtime Bertie County early childhood education and community development activist, the school district’s director of federal programs, the Bertie County director of economic development, a state Even Start program administrator, and a national adult literacy and early childhood advocate. The interviewees were mostly African American and female (see Table 1).

Table 1. Study Participants Identity by Race and Gender

Event/Location /Title	African American	White	Other	Female	Male	Total
Book Fair (Parents)	5	1		4	2	6
Early Childhood Centers	9	3	2 (Filipino born)	14		14
Even Start Class	2	1		3		3
Senior Community Members	2			2		2
Community Activist	1			1		1
Federal Programs Director	1			1		1
Economic Development Director		1			1	1
State Even Start Director		1			1	1
Adult Literacy/ Early Childhood Advocate		1		1		1
TOTAL	20	8	2	26	4	30

Data Analysis

From the transcribed interviews and review of selected documents, the researcher identified recurring themes that shape and contribute to the development and success of the early childhood programs in Bertie County. The most common themes focused on program quality. The use of blended services and funding streams across multiple federal and state early childhood programs was the fundamental approach for establishing and operating the two childcare centers. Strategic partnerships were important assets, and local leadership, parental involvement, and community support and expectations were inextricably intertwined and were at the core of many of the interviews. Because the school district's federal programs coordinator emerged throughout the discussions as the primary leader in Bertie's early childhood efforts, the researcher made a special effort to understand and document her background, role, and unique relationships in the community, which is described in the Leadership and Community Building section.

Discussion of Findings

The objective of this study is to examine Bertie County's early childhood education practices as well as community values, beliefs, expectations, and relationships regarding early childhood education. The literature reviewed for this study draws attention to quality early childhood education practices and indicators, the role of supportive home environments, and the role of leadership in the broader community. The study's discussion of findings is organized under the following themes: program quality, blended services and funding streams, strategic partnerships, leadership and community building, parental involvement, and limitations of the study design.

Program Quality

Visitors to the C. G. White and Askewville early childhood centers will see a high-quality, five-star early childhood program in action. A high

level of quality is reflected in the centers' learning environment, pedagogy, curriculum, staff members, and continuous improvement activities.

Quality of learning environment. The C. G. White and Askewville early childhood centers enroll about 15 children in each classroom with the appropriate teacher-child ratios. The buildings are safe and secure and have rich literacy environments and well-equipped playgrounds. The early childhood centers' resource teacher had the following to say about the programs:

The word is out that we are a five-star center and we all worked hard for that.... We have a good staff here, we love the children, enjoy what we do, we are not just here for the money. We help the children and that makes a difference and parents can see that when they come to the Center. They can tell that the teachers enjoy what they are doing. And the children learn better. The environment has a lot to do with how children learn and how they pick up. (Early Childhood Center Resource Teacher Interview, October 20, 2009)

When asked about their understanding of criteria for center ratings by the North Carolina Division of Child Development inspectors, a C. G. White teacher in the More at Four program responded that inspectors were looking for "perfection, perfection, perfection. They are looking for certain things, everything according to the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)." All of the teachers and assistants were well informed and prepared to meet the criteria for the learning environments.

Quality of early childhood pedagogy. Critical features of quality pedagogy include attention to the individual child's cognition and language, physical and motor development, emotional and social development, and cultural and aesthetic development. It is important that teachers are able to connect and integrate new learning to what children already know and

have experienced and are able to encourage children to reflect, predict, and question. One of the teachers at the Askewville Early Childhood Center stressed the importance of understanding the uniqueness of each child:

Understanding that each child differs, we do not have such structured programs like they have in the school [elementary] system. We have to understand that they learn through play and we have to get them to socialize more. (C. G. White More at Four Teacher Interview, October 21, 2009)

Quality of the early childhood curriculum. Teachers and assistants made several references to the Creative Curriculum (Dodge & Colker, 1992; Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002) as the framework they currently use to guide instruction. The teachers explained how they use relevant themes to develop group lesson plans with adaptations for individual children:

We adjust our lesson plans. You may do a basic lesson plan for the whole group, but then you may also do a small more individual activity for the child, age-appropriate activity. (Teacher Interview, October 21, 2009)

Another teacher stressed the importance of contextualizing lessons and added:

If everybody understands the development of children then we all can pull together and discuss what types of themes are good for children in our area versus themes that children may experience in other rural areas. (Teacher Interview, October 21, 2009)

Quality of early childhood staff. The five-star ratings at the C. G. White Center and the Askewville Center reflect the quality of the centers' staffs and leadership and the quality of the services they provide. The teaching staff members, most between 27 and 47 years old, are fully licensed for their staff positions and regularly participate in professional development

activities. The Even Start family literacy program director, a Bertie County native with a master's degree in elementary education, has been with the program for almost two decades. A veteran teacher with a degree in social work and early childhood education teaches parenting skills and GED preparation. She is certified for K–6, and she and her assistants have been involved in numerous professional development activities, including the nationally recognized Motherhead professional development. The resource teacher, a seasoned early childhood veteran, balances her time between C. G. White and Askewville, making sure that teachers understand, have available, and use curricula and other resources in effective and appropriate ways.

When asked what contributed to the quality of their program, the teaching staff members at C. G. White mentioned meeting the needs of the individual child, assessment, understanding child development theory, and working as a team. The site coordinator put it this way:

When she [Connie Richardson] hired us ... she interviewed us. There was a professional level that was very important. She wanted the best, not just education, but the personality, how she thought you would work with children as well as your educational level. (Early Childhood Center Resource Teacher Interview, October 20, 2009)

The partnership with the community college supports much of the ongoing professional development in early childhood and adult education. The North Carolina State Even Start director spoke specifically about Bertie County and the effort of their local Even Start director:

The staff development that she has organized and provided for her teachers, both the adult education and early childhood teachers, is right at the top of the list. They have had family literacy training, they had the administrative training, and they have had the early childhood training.... Whatever they are doing, she organizes and pro-

vides the people with the appropriate staff development and keeps them up on what they are suppose to be doing. (North Carolina Even Start Director Interview, October 28, 2009)

Quality assessment and continuous improvement. The teachers in the publically funded early childhood centers in Bertie County are trained and adept at using individual and class assessment to plan instruction and implement special interventions. One teacher spoke about the connections among quality early childhood, assessment, and instruction:

Some children learn faster than others. Therefore, you have to adjust ... to the individual child's needs. You may have something set up for a group activity and you realize that another child may be a quicker learner and you will need to have something for that individual child so as not to slow down her learning. We used to use the AGS³ assessment, which is the same assessment they use for kindergarten. Now we are using Brigance.⁴ We also use the Creative Curriculum. It is an ongoing assessment, where we use anecdotal notes to help us every quarter to determine where the child's level is, so that we can group the children according to their learning skills. (Teacher Interview, October 21, 2009)

Continuous program improvement is on the minds of all the staff members in the two early childhood centers. Teachers are aware of their own professional development and certification needs while Connie Richardson keeps an eye on the big picture and what is needed to ensure overall success and quality results.

3 AGC is a publisher of various early childhood assessment products.

4 Brigance is an early childhood system that helps programs monitor progress and focus on developmentally appropriate instruction to ensure that each child is prepared for kindergarten.

Blended Services and Funding Streams

Bertie serves its young children and their families through a variety of state and federal early childhood programs, including More at Four, Even Start Family Literacy, Preschool Exceptional Children, Title I Preschool, and Head Start. All of these programs are institutionalized in publically funded or private nonprofit childcare facilities in Bertie County. A merging of funding streams and programs provides comprehensive services and is a major factor in the development of quality early childhood and family educational programs in the county. Currently, blended services and funding streams support two five-star facilities serving approximately 160 children in Bertie County.

More at Four is a North Carolina state effort to prepare at-risk children to succeed in school. Children follow a full-day academic year schedule and may be served in public schools, licensed childcare centers, or Head Start programs. The More at Four funding supports services for the 4-year-olds enrolled in the two early childhood centers.

Even Start Family Literacy is a federal comprehensive family literacy program intended to help break the cycle of poverty and low literacy and improve educational opportunities for low-income families. In Bertie County, the program funding supports 3-year-olds and their parents' or guardians' involvement in one of the two early childhood centers. The program integrates early childhood education, adult literacy, and parenting education. It supports the philosophy that the educational attainment of children and their parents is interrelated and that improving the literacy skills of parents has a positive effect on the educational experiences of their children.

The Preschool Exceptional Children's Program is a federally funded program mandated through the federal Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, Section 619 and entitles all pre-K children with disabilities ages 3, 4, and 5 to a free and appropriate public education. There are licensed teachers in both of Bertie County's early childhood center providing services to children with disabilities.

Title I Preschool Program and Head Start are federally funded. Title I is designed to enable young children to meet challenging state standards while Head Start is designed to meet emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs of 3- and 4-year-olds and their families and to help low-income children to be prepared for school. Family involvement is an integral component of Title I Preschool Programs. In Bertie County, this program contributes to the support of communication between home and school to strengthen the family's knowledge and understanding of their child's development and to allows parents and teachers to work together to plan appropriate learning experiences.

Strategic Partnerships

Well-chosen partnerships have played a key role in Bertie's early childhood education success story. The following external partnerships have been especially beneficial.

North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., (NCPC). This organization was established in 1993 to provide statewide oversight of the Smart Start initiative, a public-private initiative providing early education funding to the state's 100 counties. Smart Start funds are administered at the local level through local nonprofit organizations called Local Partnerships. NCPC provides technical assistance and training in the areas of program development, administration, organizational development, communication, fiscal management, technology, contracts management, and fundraising. NCPC takes a lead in developing a statewide early childhood system for children ages birth–5 and their families and coordinates statewide advisory groups to address policy barriers as well as service gaps and duplications.

Higher education institutions. Postsecondary institutions also have been important partners. Shaw University, located in Raleigh some two

hours away, has a Center for Alternative Programs in Education in Bertie County. The center provides, among other offerings, undergraduate teacher education and certification programs that are easily accessible to local residents. Martin Community College also provides professional development and certification for members of the program staffs in, or in close proximity to, their home communities.

Leadership and Community Building

The expansion of quality early childhood education in Bertie required leadership—someone who had a special relationship with the community, was familiar with the public school system, and knew the principles of early childhood education. It required a leader with high expectations of self and others, someone who was willing to step out into the community and not only identify but also connect the dots. In reality, early childhood education work in Bertie County was essentially community-building work. Repeatedly, the researcher noted that community members, school leaders, and parents attributed the program's success to the leadership and community building efforts of Connie Richardson, the school district's federal programs coordinator. After observing Connie Richardson on several occasions, the researcher noted:

Connie Richardson gracefully moves between her professional and organizing roles. She is a collaborator, a relationship and community builder, and an educator. Additionally, she is well aware of her capacity and the capacity of others for promoting early childhood education throughout the community. (Johnson field notes, October 22, 2009)

Connie Richardson grew up in Bertie County and lives in the house in which she was born. She attended a consolidated, segregated school in Bertie County, went off to college, and then returned to eastern North Carolina to

begin a career that has spanned more than three decades of work in early childhood, migrant, and adult education as well as professional development for K–12 teachers. Her appreciation for her community’s rich history, notwithstanding the oppressive conditions of Jim Crow and sharecropping, is undeniable. “Where I was born is where I live,” she said as she proudly identified community elders who helped to create the environments in which teachers, parents, and communities held high expectations for children who otherwise had very little hope. Mrs. Richardson credits these early life experiences for her desire to use every possible resource to ensure that there is quality early childhood education available for all children in Bertie County and that parents are knowledgeable of such programs.

During the 1950s and 1960s when Connie Richardson was growing up in Bertie County, there were adults in the community who were not associated with the formal school system but were active working with children and were looked on as teachers who motivated and inspired educational achievement. One interviewee who now teaches preschool reflected on her own experience:

Because we were sharecroppers [my mother] was really into us getting that education, so that we would not be on a farm. Her thing was, “I don’t own a farm and my children would not be working on one.” So she made sure that when we were in kindergarten, she was a visible parent. Time that she was not on the farm she was in that school system. So what I had was, being in the middle of seven children, and the three above me excelled in school, so you could not be the dummy. And there was Mama, coaching us along.... She said “I am poor but I can give you this and I can give you that to help you be successful in school.” So she was always there, supporting us and providing that which she could. Which made us rich; we just didn’t know how rich we were. With a supportive family and the knowledge she had of how important education was and she made

sure all seven of us got it. (Early Childhood Teacher #1, October 21, 2009)

The mother in this situation wanted to be a teacher but was financially unable to complete her college education. Mrs. Richardson reminded her friend that even though her mother was unable to complete her college education, she was still a teacher:

Now tell the whole story. [Your mother] was the teacher of all the children in the church. Every child, every pre-K child, every young child that went through New Bethel Baptist Church, they went through your mother. She trained each generation as they went through the church. (Connie Richardson to Early Childhood Teacher #1, October 21, 2009, from Johnson field notes)

Many older African Americans in Bertie believed education was at the core of family and community development, and many understood that children were the responsibility of the entire community. Another of Connie Richardson's longtime acquaintances, a child advocate and one of the first owners of a nonprofit child care center in Bertie County, reflected on the trust and the tight networks within families and among community members during her upbringing:

You ever heard of "village," it takes the whole village to raise a child? Well that is what happened long then.... But long then, if I went to play with some other little children, their mother or grandmother would chastise me and I would behave myself just like I would if I were home with my parents. That is what happened. The village helped raise the children. (Alice Ballance Interview, October 27, 2009)

Today, that concept of village is unrecognizable. However, local leaders, parents, and community members play critical roles in creating new net-

works and structures for rearing and educating young children. Bertie County is spawning new models in early childhood education, honoring the wisdom of community building, and striving for quality services and programs. These efforts are reflected in Bertie County's strategic plan for the 21st century (Bertie County Commissioners Steering Committee, 2008) where early childhood education is seen as a key to uplifting the entire community. The plan described the disparities among the county's 32 early childhood centers and noted that "having certified staff persons to assess the needs of all children and trained personnel to develop individual prescriptions based on data collected is crucial in the operation of more efficient Pre-K readiness programs" (Bertie County Commissioners Steering Committee, 2008, p. 13).

Parental Involvement

High-quality early childhood programs place a high premium on parental involvement. Parent involvement is a dynamic principle that evidences the values, expectations, and beliefs of parents and practitioners in their relationships and actions with one another and with respect to children. One parent's observation typified what the researcher found to be a common notion among Bertie early childhood parents:

Well, early childhood education is important so that he [her son] can have a foundation, learn how to interact. By him being the only child in the home, it will give him an opportunity to interact with other children and learn how to share, how to play, how to get along, and basic learning. We have done our best to teach the basic ABCs, count and spell his name and those things. But there are a lot of things he can benefit from here, in a group. I feel that a lot of times he does better in a group than he does one-on-one with us. So that is why it is important to me, it will give him a jump-start for kindergarten and whatever else in school. (Early Childhood Center Parent Interview, October 20, 2009)

One father enrolled his daughter in the More at Four program after hearing about it from one of the teachers;

I came out here and looked into it and found out that it was good for her... My mother was keeping her and she was picking up all of the old people's habits.... My mother is 89 and she really couldn't help with what she needed to learn to get her going with school. (More at Four Father Interview, October 20, 2009)

This father indicated that he has seen a lot of progress in his daughter's development, preschool readiness skills, and attitude about school since enrolling her in the pre-K program.

When asked about characteristics of quality parent involvement, members of the More at Four teaching staff were especially vocal about the need for an inclusive program that engages and involves parents and family members through parent conferences and home visits:

At the beginning of the (school) year we have a set of home visits. That gets us to know the family and the child's environment. And it helps us to know how to work with that child, because each child comes from a different environment, and once you get a relationship with that family you can work with the child better. (More at Four Teacher Interview, October 21, 2009)

Another teacher added,

We also have parent conferences quarterly and we send home Creative Curriculum assessments stating what the child has done thus far. And we encourage the parents to come out and meet with the teacher and discuss the child's progress. (More at Four Teacher Interview, October 21, 2009)

Many of the parents show their support by actively participating in center-sponsored activities. Parents of one 4-year old spoke of their involvement in activities at the early childhood center:

Well, anytime they send something in the mail and we can be a part of it, we are here.... Anytime he is involved in something, we try to be here or show up. (Parent Interview, October 20, 2009)

Getting parents out to center events is important; however, teachers and members of the program staff also recognize the need for parents to understand what happens in the classrooms and the overall objectives of the teaching and learning with the children. One teacher explained that the open house in the beginning of the year is used to increase awareness of the early childhood teaching and learning process:

At the beginning of the year, we do open house. This allows the parent an opportunity to come into the center and see how the classroom is set up and meet the teachers and let them get a feel for the environment. And they have a chance to give us information they may have forgotten during the home visit. (Teacher Interview, October 21, 2009)

During the home visits, teachers model promising practices and observe parent-child interactions. This approach is especially important for maintaining a continuum between the home and the center and for reinforcing language and literacy development as well as social development.

Even Start also places a high premium on parent involvement through its Family Literacy Program. The lead Even Start teacher described the program:

Our parents come to the school with their children so they can get an even start. While the children are over in the preschool classroom learning social skills, school readiness skills, we are over here working on math, reading, writing and all of the academics along with the parenting.... The children, if they are talking about fall, pumpkins and activities, things you do in the fall, we are over

here talking about pumpkins also, the states where most of our pumpkins are raised and grown, the color, how much they weigh. We talk about average weight and weighing so that we are getting some math skills in and getting some facts, too. (Even Start Teacher Interview, October 21, 2009)

Parents who lack a high school diploma, GED, or basic skills and who are parents of 3-year-olds are eligible for the Even Start Family Literacy Program. The parents attend the program 4 days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. In the morning, they work on GED preparation, basic literacy, and parenting skills, and in the afternoon, they engage with their children in some literacy activity or other interaction. On Fridays, teachers visit the children's homes.

The program allows for a variety of family and extended family members to serve as a guardian or representative for a child. A grandmother talked about how she encourages her social network members to get involved in the Even Start program and her personal desires for the program:

I tell the ones that don't have a GED about this program. I say, "If you have a child, bring them out here. You might have missed out [on schooling] while you were coming up, like me." Thought I was grown, quit school. That was the biggest mistake I could ever make. I tell them, "Please don't make that mistake." Now, I have a nephew and a grandbaby [enrolled in the program] and this is my second year out here because I want to get my GED so bad and it is good for my granddaughter because when she gets to go to kindergarten, she will already know things that kindergartners don't know because they didn't come out here. (Even Start Grandmother Interview, October 21, 2009)

The grandmother indicated that she had been unable to get the child's parents to participate in the program. She noted that her grandson "wanted

to come to school so bad, so I am going to take him on myself” (Even Start Grandmother Interview, October 21, 2009).

A second parent attends the program as a guardian for her godson. Her goal is to “*one day*” get her GED. She said the following about her experience with the Even Start program:

“Well I talk to my niece. I tell her about the program. I have been coming out here for two years.... I want to get my GED. Everybody talking about, “when you going to get it?” I say, “It is not that easy and you can’t just get it in two or three days. You got to work and get it in your head.” (Even Start Godmother Interview, October 21, 2009)

The adult instructor creates a safe environment for parents to share aspects of their personal lives, their hopes, and their dreams for themselves, their families, and future generations. This openness spawns special relationships in a “public homeplace.” The teacher contextualizes the instruction and aligns it with themes taught in the preschool and with issues of importance to the parents and their community.

Limitations of the Study Design

The qualitative approach used in this study admittedly reflects the researcher’s personal biography as African American and female .The analytical approach is interpretative and includes interviews with selected individuals determined by the researcher to hold important roles, views, or control. The basic theoretical stance of the analytical approach is therefore also subjective (Martin, Nakayama, & Flores, 1998).

Additionally, the researcher centered much of the data collection and analysis on the two Bertie County early childhood centers, C. G. White and Askewville—five-star centers in which multiple state-funded and federally funded programs merge. The quality of these programs is not to be taken as representative of the quality of all 32 of the county’s early childhood centers.

Conclusion

Rural and low-wealth, Bertie County has succeeded in enrolling 73% of its 3- and 4-year-olds, most of whom are African American, in high-quality, structured early childhood programs. The success of Bertie County's early childhood efforts rests on several pillars: developing and implementing high-quality programs; blending funding streams and program opportunities to serve young children *and* their families; having an experienced community outreach person at the helm of the efforts, organizing to attract young families; and building on the county's rich culture and legacy of education. Bertie's success story holds several implications for research, policy, and practice in the early education of rural children of color.

First, the complexity of blending funding sources and funding formulas for early childhood education services might easily overwhelm local program administrators and community leaders. Higher education institutions, state education agencies, and other service providers should make it a priority to assist local early childhood education programs in addressing this issue to maximize limited funding and programmatic outcomes. In addition, school district policymakers and administrators should think strategically about how to leverage their ability to expand funded childcare slots in their community and how to outsource those slots and funds to community-based early childhood providers as a means of increasing program participation and ensuring high quality.

Second, obtaining suitable community-based facilities is often a challenge for nonschool-based early childhood programs. Local government units and school districts should work with nonprofit early childhood service providers to make available unused school, governmental, or other community facilities. Early childhood centers so situated can become full-service centers to address the educational, health, and wellness needs of young children and their families. This effort requires a whole-community, whole-child approach to early childhood education.

Third, researchers should focus more effort on understanding the connections among early childhood education participation, community development, and community organizing in low-resource rural communities. A special focus should be on the role of indigenous knowledge and relationships in fostering communitywide commitment to the education of young children and their families. Leveraging a commitment to early childhood education to foster increased adult literacy, parental involvement, and literacy-rich, out-of-school environments should also be a prominent research focus. Further effort should be made to make research findings accessible and easily translated into practice at the local level.

Fourth, higher education institutions should place a premium on providing consistent professional development opportunities for rural child-care practitioners and administrators and on incorporating relevant research and research findings into their professional development activities.

Fifth, higher education institutions, and especially UNCF member institutions, should develop a rural early childhood preparation track in their teacher preparation and certification programs. These programs should prepare early childhood teachers and program administrators for rural settings, should incorporate relevant research on early childhood education, should model effective community outreach and whole-community collaboration, and should support a relevant research agenda.

Finally, local and state policies should encourage and support stronger early childhood partnerships between school- and community-based programs. These partnerships should be leveraged to increase the availability of slots and funds to serve young children and their families. Such partnerships will help practitioners, educators, policymakers, and community members keep in mind the big picture of the community and family as integral to the education and success of young children and the importance of the education of young children to the overall health and vitality of the entire community.

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Appendix A

Practitioner Interview Questions

1. What makes this a quality childcare program?
2. How long have you worked in early childhood education?
3. Tell me about what you do here.
4. What is your educational, employment, social/cultural background?
5. How is it that you have larger numbers of preschool aged children enrolled in your programs compared with surrounding counties?
6. What role does Mrs. Richardson play in the success of this program?
7. Talk about how you connect with families and how they connect to you.
8. How does this program benefit children and their families?

Parent, Guardian, and Family Member Interview Questions

1. Why is early childhood education important to you?
2. How did you hear about this program?
3. How did you decide to enroll your child in this particular program?
4. Are there other children in the family?
5. What were your early childhood learning experiences like?
6. How does this program benefit your child (children) and your family?
7. What do you enjoy most about having your child (children) enrolled in this program?
8. What do you hear people in the community saying about early childhood education?

Chapter 5

Dilemmas of Belonging: Balancing Loyalty to Home With Desire to Succeed

Deborah Brown

Save the Children serves some of the poorest children in the United States and around the world. Founded in 1932 to help children and families in rural Kentucky during America’s Great Depression, Save the Children today responds to the urgent and long-term needs of poor and marginalized children worldwide. In rural America, the focus has been on serving the needs of low-income children who face the challenges of not only illiteracy but also poor nutrition and physical fitness while living in poor under-resourced communities. In 2006, responding to evidence documenting a clear correlation between success in school and early learning experiences, Save the Children introduced Early Steps to School Success (ESSS) to provide children and families in rural America with access to quality early learning from birth to age 5. One of the early issues faced during implementation was the strong tension between educating children for a “better” future—which for some may mean leaving the community—and the need for belonging and feeling connected to home and family. To examine the impact

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of culture and rurality on attitudes about early childhood education in two diverse rural communities, the researcher collected related data from cultural and historical records, program participation and child growth records, interviews, stories, and field notes.

ESSS provides services to children and families through home visits, parent/child groups, and a book exchange program, from a mother's pregnancy until her child enters kindergarten. Connections to the schools and other community partners as well as extensive professional development for local staff members are important parts of the capacity-building aspect of the program. ESSS programs are established in rural areas where there are few other early childhood supports. The demographics of the communities served are diverse and, together, represent Caucasian, African American, Native American, and Hispanic families.

The ESSS focus on language and early literacy is a response to research that highlights the critical disparities between what children know and what they can do before they enter kindergarten. The four goals of the ESSS program are designed to put this research into practice:

- Children will enter school with the skills necessary for school success.
- Parents will have the skills and knowledge to support their children's education.
- Home/school connections will be strong and transition to school well prepared.
- Early childhood knowledge and skills in the community will be increased.

In the fall of 2006, the ESSS program began with 10 sites in 4 states. In 3 years, it has expanded to serve 73 sites in 10 states. Each site offers year-round early childhood education services to 50 children from prebirth to age 5 years as well as education services to their parents and/or other

caregivers. Twenty enrollees at each site comprise pregnant mothers or children up to age 3 years. The remaining 30 enrollees are children from ages 3 to 5 years. Save the Children requires that the programs identify and enroll children who are most in need of services. The specific priorities for services are determined by the local programs. Program activities include home visits for children ages 0–3, family-school connections through group activities and events, a book-bag book distribution program, programming for 3–5-year-olds, and supported transition to kindergarten.

The ESSS curriculum was developed in partnership with ZERO TO THREE: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, a national nonprofit organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals, policymakers, and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of very young children. The curriculum includes materials for home visiting, parent/child groups, transition, and dual-language. This evidence-based curriculum grew out of a curriculum and training initiative by ZERO TO THREE titled *Cradling Literacy: Building Teachers’ Skills to Nurture Early Language and Literacy From Birth to Five*, which was piloted over a 2-year period using a quasi-experimental design and was found to have significant positive effects on both caregiver and child outcomes. The curriculum is being further evaluated through a randomized controlled evaluation currently being implemented in Eastern Kentucky and funded through the U.S. Department of Education.

To ensure cultural understanding and relevancy, the program hires early childhood coordinators from the local community. Because it is rare to find professionals in the rural communities served who are highly qualified in 0–3 education, ESSS provides intensive, ongoing, and varied opportunities for professional development. This training has the dual benefit of contributing to the effectiveness of the program and to the community’s capacity to sustain early childhood programming in the future.

Save the Children expects the children who participate in ESSS to reach positive social, emotional, and cognitive school readiness outcomes.

Parents are expected to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to support their child's growth and development during the first 5 years of life and then into subsequent school years. The effort to track results in early childhood programs is an exercise in patience. All infants and small children grow and develop rapidly, but they do it in their own way, at different rates and in different styles. It is difficult to develop a baseline when growth and change are exploding. The outcome evaluation proceeds with the question framed this way: Are the ESSS programs developing the tools, professional development, and support systems that build capacity in the communities, schools, and early childhood staff members that will allow them, in turn, to teach, mentor, and support parents to create a language and literacy rich environment for their children, which will, in the end, produce positive outcomes for the children?

To lend context to the evaluation, Save the Children's evaluator is conducting case studies in several communities. The studies use an embedded, ethnographic design-related inquiries on several levels. Data from cultural and historical records, program participation and child development records, interviews, stories, and field notes are interwoven to explore what happens on the level of the individual child, of the parents, of the school, and finally, of the community capacity and context. Voices "speaking" through various streams of data (cultural and historical research, data about participation, the child's educational growth and development, interviews, stories, and field notes) have a "conversation" with one another and with the research questions, and in the process, we discover the emerging coherence of the story. The studies, at the time of this writing in their first or second year, are designed to continue over 5 years. Early information yielded by two of the case studies, Mound Bayou, MS, and Taholah, WA, is included here to illustrate the discussion about the impact of rurality and culture on early childhood education. Mound Bayou, considered here first, is an all-Black town on the Mississippi Delta with a rich and proud history.

Mound Bayou

Crying on my pillow

Drooping like a willow

I feel just like a fish that's cast up on the shore

Waiting for the tide to take it home once more.

Mound Bayou...

Got to cover ground for

Mound Bayou...

That's the town I'm bound for.

—song by Leonard Feather and Arnz Rasaf

Mound Bayou was founded in the Delta region of Mississippi in 1887 by two former slaves: Isaiah T. Montgomery and Benjamin Green. The town was established to be self-sufficient Black community—a haven in the midst of the White-controlled, Jim Crow south. “Mound Bayou has ALWAYS had black officials like mayors, sheriffs, school board members, aldermen, and police, so that the fears associated with dealing with the white counterparts has been somewhat subdued in local residents.... In the words of modern residents, ‘Mound Bayou was a place where a black man could run FOR sheriff instead of FROM the sheriff’” (Young & Crowe, 1998, p. 1).

The Delta during the 1880s had large cotton plantations along the Mississippi River, “but the remainder of the Delta contained thick forests of hardwoods and pine trees, with numerous streams and bayous, which made the area virtually impenetrable. The earliest colonists of Mound Bayou were faced with the tremendous task of carving a town and community out of the wilderness with little or no economic resources” (Young & Crowe, 1998, p. 2–3).

“President Theodore Roosevelt named Mound Bayou ‘The Jewel of the Delta’ and the town had the backing of Booker T. Washington and many

other prominent Americans” (Young & Crowe, 1998, p. 4). Various industrial and commercial endeavors were established in the town. These ventures included several cotton gins and a cotton oil mill. Its position on the Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas railroad line helped establish its prosperity. There were six churches, several public and private schools, hotels, stores, Black-owned banks, and a lively music scene. Its economy depended on the production of cotton, timber, and corn as well as on being an agent for the railroad. Mound Bayou was home to famous leaders such as Booker T. Washington, T.R.M. Howard, Medgar Evers, and Fannie Lou Hammer.

The town declined during the great migration, but remained a symbolic haven as evidenced by the song, “Mound Bayou” quoted at the beginning of this section. The 1942 opening of the Taborian Hospital, the only hospital in the area at the time, sparked a renaissance (Taylor, n.d.). In the words of one person interviewed by the author, “When I was coming up, Mound Bayou was the place to be.” During the murder trial of Emmett Till’s killers, Black reporters and witnesses stayed in T.R.M. Howard’s Mound Bayou home. Howard was the founder of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership and surgeon in the Taborian Hospital. He provided the witnesses with an armed escort to the court house in Sumner. From 1960 to 1970, the population nearly doubled, and the town seemed poised for another resurgence (Mound Bayou Movement, n.d.), but that rebirth has not come to pass. The loss of the railroad line, the consolidation and mechanization of agriculture, and other issues have contributed to the decline of Mound Bayou and many other Delta towns. What one sees in town now are boarded up, abandoned buildings, and what one hears are stories about what used to be.

Between 2000 and 2008, Bolivar County, MS, as a whole suffered an 8% population decline to its former level in 1936 (MS HomeTownLocator, n.d.). The poverty rate for the county as a whole was 53% in 2007; for African American children under 18, the rate was 94%. Twenty-five percent of the young adults (ages 18–24) did not have a high school diploma. Mound

Bayou's population was 2,102 at the time of the 2000 census. During the 2006–07 school year, there were a total of 653 children enrolled in the Mound Bayou Public School District Grades K–12. The district's children were 99.7% African American, and all were eligible to receive free lunch (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009).

The ESSS program in Mound Bayou began in the fall of 2006. Demographic information collected on the enrolled children serves to underscore the community- and school-level data. Only 72% of the parents of enrolled children have completed high school, and 38% have full or part-time work. The children face an average of more than four risk factors known to be associated with lack of success in school.

One of those children is Katelyn.¹ She faces seven identified risks. Katelyn's mom, Tracy, is a 23-year-old single parent with four children. Three of the children are enrolled in ESSS: two in the 0–3 program and one in the 3–5 program and Head Start. The fourth child is also in Head Start. Tracy and her children live in a very crowded, small house with her boyfriend's mother and extended family, including her boyfriend's sister and two brothers and his sister's two children. Tracy has a high school diploma and has been employed on and off over the course of their involvement with the ESSS program. The family gets the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program support and food stamps, but their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) eligibility has ended due to noncompliance with the work requirement. The children's father can't read well. He drinks a lot, and there is a history of domestic violence.

Tracy has lived her whole life in Mound Bayou. Just about all her family is here. She doesn't remember the heyday of the town. Things had already changed before she can remember. Her dream, she confesses, "is not around here." Tracy used to travel to Chicago just about every summer.

1 "Katelyn" and all other names used in this report are pseudonyms used to protect the privacy of study participants.

She liked it there. There was a lot more going on, and it was easier to get a job. She used to dream about living there, but, she says, “I was by myself then—now I got to take [the kids]. I can’t leave them behind. It’s not going to be easy.” In the end she says, “I think I’ll stick around here—city life’s too fast for them.” She would like to go back to school and build a career in social work. Still, Tracy would like her children to grow up in a better environment. “The schools [in Mound Bayou] are all right but I don’t think they learn as much as they could—they don’t get taught much. [We] need more playgrounds—kids play only on the street, really. [We] need more recreation [for the older kids].”

When asked to describe her children, Tracy says, “They ain’t wild and bad; they obey; they’re smart; they talk a lot.” The best thing about being a parent is, “It’s fun. I get to be free. I have a lot of help. It’s hard, though, when they’re sick and have to go to the doctor—especially more than one of them at a time. Sometimes [their dad] is mad at me, I guess because I’m too easy on them. I have to tell them too many times to do one thing.”

Tracy enrolled her children in ESSS because, as she says, “I like for them to learn more and faster—even though it’s at an early age. They get to do things that they’re going to need to do, so they’ll be ‘ready to roll’ and get along with other kids—and talk. A lot of kids don’t talk.” Tracy’s son did have a hard time when he first started Head Start. “He didn’t want to do anything but hang around in the corner.” Both he and his sister love it now, though.

Latisha was enrolled into the ESSS program in 2006 when she was 1 year old. She is now 3. In spite of eight identified risks associated with lack of success in school, she attained a score of 82 on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test—very close to the cutoff for the normal range of 85. Her mother, Donna, is a 22-year-old single parent. They live in a crowded home with her mother, her brother, and his girlfriend and her two children. Latisha’s grandmother, Grace, who is actually the primary caregiver, has lived in the same house for 20 years.

In 1955, in the tiny town of Money, Mississippi (pop. 100), Emmett Till was murdered and Grace was born. When Grace was 7 years old, she moved to Mound Bayou. The year was 1962: the year when James Meredith was admitted to the University of Mississippi and riots broke out in protest. Grace's family went to visit an uncle in the all-Black town of Mound Bayou and decided to move there. "Uncle and Auntie moved here and we came to visit him. I'd never hear of Mound Bayou before that.... He was my mother's baby brother.... He found her a house and moved her here."

There have been a lot of changes in Mound Bayou since that time. Grace remembers that "a train used to run through." She says there "used to be a lot of things going on right here in our own hometown. We used to have our own jobs in our own town. You could get work—like in the hospitals that's been closed down. It's a whole lot different from back then." Now people have to leave town for work in the "casinos, in Burger King or WalMart or like that."

Nowadays, Grace is the primary caregiver for her 3-year-old granddaughter, Latisha. Latisha's mother, Donna, is not working, but she is gone a lot. Grace says Latisha is "just a Grandma's baby; she likes to hang around me." Latisha has sickle cell anemia. "It's the bad kind—the kind that makes you hurt all the time." She wasn't sick when she was a baby, her grandmother reports, but recently has had some real problems, needing blood transfusions, medications, and hospital stays. When she's not sick she's an active child. The lack of adequate medical care nearby makes a difficult situation even harder. Some of Latisha's medicine is not available closer than Jackson—a drive nearly 3 hours away. When Latisha has "an episode"—when she is sick—she has to travel there to see a specialist and be hospitalized. Grace states that "we need more health care here in Mound Bayou—our own town. We should have doctors here that know how to treat our types of complaints—right here in our home town."

Grace dreams that Latisha will finish high school and go to college.

“Since she loves playing doctor all the time—and nurse—I hope she grows up to be one.” She also hopes she’ll stay in Mound Bayou to help bring the community up again. She sees ESSS as very important support to prepare Latisha to go to Head Start and school. “When they go to Head Start, they already know some things, they know what to expect.” Latisha’s uncle added that she will be “smarter for school—get 100s every day.”

Taholah

The second community studied is Taholah a town on Native American tribal lands on the shore of the Pacific Ocean in the state of Washington. Unlike many eastern and midwestern tribes, the Quinault Nation retained a substantial portion of their traditional lands when they were forced into treaties with the United States:

We are among the small number of Americans who can walk the same beaches, paddle the same waters, and hunt the same lands our ancestors did centuries ago.²

The Quinault Indian Nation (QIN) encompasses approximately 200,000 acres of coastal land at the mouth of the Quinault River on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington. There are 23 miles of coastline. The Web site describes the lush and beautiful land:

Its rain-drenched lands embrace a wealth of natural resources. Conifer forests composed of western red cedar, western hemlock, Sitka spruce, Douglas-fir, Pacific silver fir and lodgepole pine dominate upland sites, while extensive stands of hardwoods, such as red alder and Pacific cottonwood, can be found in the river valleys. Roosevelt elk, black bear, blacktail deer, bald eagle, cougar, and many other animals make these forests their home.³

2 Quinault Indian Nation Web site home page (<http://209.206.175.157>).

3 Ibid.

The Quinault people, comprising many separate tribes, flourished along the Pacific coastline for centuries. They were known for the huge canoes they fashioned out of the immense cedar trees that grew in the coastal forests. The canoes were seaworthy and could accommodate 30–40 people. It was not until 1775, when they visited a Spanish ship off their shores, that they encountered the White man. During the early part of the 19th century, White settlers began to arrive and lay claim to land. A treaty was first offered in 1855, but the Native peoples refused to sign. Finally, in 1873, an Executive Order by President Ulysses S. Grant set aside the present day reservation. This Quinault Reservation was created for all the “fish-eating” Indians of the Washington coast (Van Mechelen, 1986).

Presently, the QIN is governed by an 11-member business committee, which meets with officers of the General Council. It functions under a set of bylaws, which the tribe adopted in 1922, and a constitution ratified in 1975. The tribe has 2,453 enrolled members, about 1,370 of whom live on the reservation. The QIN has a reservation police force, a tribal court with a chief judge and associate justices, a health center, a bank, and a small museum. Economic enterprises run by the tribe include timber, seafood processing, a casino and several social service agencies. As in many Native American communities, there has been a historical, gradual erosion of the Quinault language and cultural traditions and an increase in social problems.

There are 520 children under 18 on the reservation, and 38% of them live below the poverty line. Of the young adults (ages 18–24), 41.5% have not graduated from high school. “Native Americans scored significantly lower across all subjects (reading, writing, math and science) and across all grades when compared with their European American counterparts” (The People: Pavel et al., 2008, p. 1). The study cites the finding that scores are even lower when there are higher numbers of Native Americans in the school and postulates that there may be unique challenges and stressors

facing such schools. Noting that “a persistent recurring theme in the literature that Native language, culture, and history are important to Native people and critical to the educational attainment and achievement of their children” (The People: Pavel et al., 2008, p. 5), a 2006 briefing paper by the Tribal Leader Congress on Education recommends integration of Native language, history, and culture into schools and into training for teachers (Tribal Leader Congress on Education, 2006).

The Taholah School is a public school with 131 children in pre-K through Grade 8 and another 69 in high school. Many of the high school students are older than 18 but are still working on their diploma. Performance on state achievement tests is not good—Reading proficiency, 37.5%, and math proficiency, 63.7%—but the trend is toward improvement, with children in the younger grades doing better. Although it is a public rather than a reservation school, there is an effort to integrate traditional customs and language. As part of an effort to resurrect the dying Quinault language, all elementary children have Quinault classes. Three teachers are certified to teach the language. However, only one teacher in the school is a member of the tribe. Parents of children ages 0–3 enrolled in the first year of the ESSS program in Taholah were more educated than the Taholah population as a whole, with 80% of those reporting having finished high school. Seven of the primary caregivers for these children work full time, three work part time, and the rest (53%) are unemployed.

Elinor was enrolled in ESSS when she was age 1 year. Her dad has been the primary caregiver for this family since the mom works at the local Head Start and is pursuing her college degree in child psychology. However, he recently accepted a job at the child care center also, so the whole family goes to work and school together. Mom reports that both she and Elinor’s father have had problems with drugs in the past and that they have had some hard times in their relationship. They got sober together 5 years ago and now look forward to furthering their education and giving back to the community.

Mom reports that Elinor loves books and that both she and her husband love reading with her. She hopes that her children will get a good education and go to college but says the most important thing is that they will be together as a family. She knows the importance of education, but ultimately, what is most important to learn is what is right and wrong. What is important, as a parent and as a community, is to provide a safe environment and structure for the children. Then, she believes, “It’s up to the child.”

Nancy is a single mother of 2 ½-year-old, Kayla, who is enrolled in ESSS. Nancy also has a 9-year-old daughter and reports that she has learned a lot from her experience with her older child. “The mistakes I did with her. I’m trying not to do that with Kayla.” Nancy has lived on the reservation for almost all of her life, and her family has lived there for generations. She has seen a lot of changes since she grew up. In her opinion, there are more drugs, and the kids get away with more. “Kids get away with anything now. It’s easier now.”

She left for a while when she was 16 to go to high school in a nearby town. The she went to college for a while, but studying and working at the same time was too stressful for her and she moved home.

Nancy and her children have moved around a lot lately, but are now staying with her brother in Taholah. Kayla’s developmental screening raised concerns about her communication skills. As a result, the child was evaluated by the school’s early intervention services, and she is now receiving services through that program. Her speech is improving. Nancy says she takes life day to day and she has never really thought about dreams for her children. She would like them to go to college.

Discussion

Members of both communities spoke of serious drug and alcohol problems, especially among young adults—often resulting in grandparents providing most of the care for young children. Both communities are desper-

ately poor, and in both, a large portion of the adults are not well educated. These characteristics and other difficulties they share with most of rural America.

[R]ural communities, have economic histories of massive, externally controlled resource extraction,... have experienced significant demographic losses in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially among the talented young. Like others, they face the uncertain impacts of a rapidly changing, global, technologically sophisticated economy. (Cornell, 2001, p. 99)

Economic realities reinforce the negative narrative as the small agricultural enterprises and the sustenance way of life can no longer provide a standard of living beyond poverty. Poor children living in rural America face significant educational, social, and economic challenges just as their urban counterparts do, but many of these problems are exacerbated by the isolation and limited access to support services common in rural areas. Rural parents are also more likely to have less education and they are more likely to be underemployed. The poorer education and job experiences of their parents mean rural children are more likely to be poor. Moreover, recent changes in family structure (fewer rural children in married-couple families) have exacerbated child poverty in rural America (O'Hare & Savage, 2006).

Isolated rural areas tend to develop and sustain an insular culture (Jones, 1999). Whether the community is defined by race and ethnicity or by historical or class distinctions, familial and value-driven forces push to sustain the traditional cultures and attachment to place. In today's technological era, however, television and Internet media showcase a different world. The media-driven encroachment of the urbane, modern world sells a powerful alternate reality as the norm and marginalizes rural cultures with disparaging stereotypes. People living in rural communities "experience their marginalization as invisibility and as a spectacularly exaggerated

denigration.... [T]hey are placed as 'low others'" (Ching & Creed, 1997, p. 4).

Out-migration further exacerbates the problem. Children grow up facing the knowledge that if they want to get higher education and a good job and if they want to participate in the mainstream culture, they will have to leave home. Yet leaving home for many implies a rejection of a set of cultural values and a wrenching disruption of family. Because there is little opportunity for success (in the sense of being educationally and economically successful) in the local community experience, children feel the pressure, overtly or covertly, to choose—home or success. As social mobility increases, this polarization between the two values increases.

For both Mound Bayou and Taholah residents, race and ethnic prejudices amplify the alienation. These communities of people have a history of deplorable oppression by the European American society, and residents of both have sought to build a safe and comfortable place to live and practice what remains of their original cultures. Both communities developed institutions and governance structures to sustain a place where they could live and work separately from the racism and bigotry on the outside. Parents in both communities hope their children will get educated, but will then come back and participate in the improvement in the community. Stephen Cornell (2001), in his exploration of leadership in rural communities, notes that:

like other parts of rural America, they are searching for the secrets of a particular kind of success: How do you create an increased measure of prosperity that does not, in the process of its achievement, destroy what you most value in your land, your community, and your way of life? [p. 99]

Belonging, Identity and Language

Knowing that you spend love and give love and it's a win-win situation.

—Taholah mom on parenting

These tensions faced by rural America in general—and more

intensely and poignantly for communities such as Mound Bayou and Taholah—have more than a subtle impact on even the very youngest community members. Their connection to home, family, and community is vital for their development, and the conflicts and struggles faced by their parents become an intrinsic part of their world.

In recent years, science has confirmed what instinct has long understood: the attachment and bonding created in the dance of communication between a parent and an infant child is critical for the child's life and learning. It is the foundation that produces all other learning. That parent-child dyad is, itself, embedded in other critical connections of family, community, and culture. The parent is not an isolated self. Her own worldview and identity have been constructed in connections—bonds and attachments—with her own family, community, and culture and have been modulated by her experiences in life. All this information she transmits to her child—at once letting him know who he is and that he belongs.

Those communications, often subtle, but always powerful, form a foundational vocabulary of a life—a milieu we call “culture.” Alison Gopnik, Andrew Meltzoff, and Patricia Kuhl compare infants with scientists in that they “formulate theories, make and test predictions, seek explanations, do experiments, and revise what they know in light of new evidence” (Gopnik, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 1999, p. 161). In this way, babies are of making sense of their world. The child's immersion in the culture of home contributes to his sense of belonging. Although culture may be not very tangible and not very visible, it is, nonetheless, directly phenomenally accessible. From this shared and deep phenomenon there emerges an experience of cohesion. A set of foundational beliefs, values, and behaviors is formed and understood to be right and true. From the inside, as a part of the culture, it feels like home: comfortable, comprehensible, a place where one belongs.

An outsider observer or visitor to a culture also experiences a cohesive phenomenon, but a phenomenon that is apart. As one might view

the water in a fishbowl, the outsider is able to observe culture as an object in a way that the fish cannot. It is identifiable as a place where he does not belong. It is also accessible to observation by the outsider in a way that it is not accessible to the insider. The insider identifies with the culture; he identifies *it* as an objective phenomenon. Like fish in water, people do not notice much of the culture that engulfs and nurtures them—that is, in until they are outside of it.

Thus, while the infant-caregiver connection is the child's doorway to the world, it also begins to define the boundary of the child's emerging self. The babies learn who they are—and who/what they are not. Again, science confirms and helps us understand what is intuitively obvious by defining some of the mechanisms for such identity formation. For example, recent research about the developing brain (Hawley, 2000) found that a newborn infant has many neurons creating potential for recognizing and expressing sound. As the child learns and becomes acculturated, some of those potentials drop off in favor of those sounds he encounters frequently in his environment.

The ability to speak and to understand other's speech requires only the minimal opportunity to communicate that almost all children experience. However, which language a child learns to speak depends on the language he experiences, and his brain will adapt to this specific language. When an infant is 3 months old, his brain can distinguish several hundred different spoken sounds, many more than are present in his native language. Over the next several months, however, his brain will organize itself more efficiently so that it only recognizes those spoken sounds that are part of the language that he regularly hears. For example, a one-year-old Japanese baby will not recognize that "la" is different from "ra," because the former sound is never used in his language. (Hawley, 2000, no pg.)

Implications

All four mothers interviewed exhibited strong ties to their local community. All of them also expressed a desire for their children to get an education, while hoping they would stay connected to family and home. In conversations with the evaluator, home visitors and school personnel in both towns repeatedly echoed the findings of the rural studies literature: Most young people who go on to get an education make their homes elsewhere. Taholah can't find enough qualified Quinault people to teach in its school. Mound Bayou institutions and commercial enterprises are literally boarded up because the people who might have run them have gone elsewhere.

Children and families in Taholah and Mound Bayou are faced on one side by the costs and the benefits of belonging and, on the other side, by the costs and benefits of educational and economic success. Parents struggle—wanting what is best for their children but not wanting to pay the cost of their alienation from home and culture. Being rooted in an “other” world, how can they give their children the vocabulary (literally and figuratively) that they will need to flourish in the mainstream world?

Can they have it all? How can early childhood programs better support families who deeply desire the best for their children but also want to ensure that they remained connected to their cultural identity? Save the Children's practice of hiring home visitors from the local community and through the local schools provides a bridge to help parents process this tension. The approach has been of critical benefit in building cultural relevancy into the program. ESSS provides intensive education about early childhood development, and it provides professional skill building, but what the home visitors contribute to the program is equally valuable. They understand the local community; they have the vocabulary of the local culture. The knowledge about early childhood that they gain from Save the Children is integrated into their own worldview. In this way, they can—and do—pass this knowledge on to the parents and community members with whom they

work. The boundary-spanning function of the home visitors is supported by the flexibility of the model and a built-in encouragement to adapt it to local conditions. The continuous training, mentoring and coaching by the ESSS early childhood specialists helps them keep the local adaptations in the context of best practice.

It is imperative for programs such as ESSS, which seek to improve the lives of rural children living in poverty, to do their work within the context of the home culture and with the understanding of the dilemmas of belonging implicit in their situation. Ideas and values about education infused in program operations may present a conflict with values embedded in the local culture. Sensitive and respectful two-way communication is essential. The silent struggles experienced by rural families, and likely other families, who are trying to escape poverty while remembering and valuing the foundation that home provides are deep and have the potential to have a significant impact on outcomes. Early childhood programs need to pay explicit attention to this reality.

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Chapter 6

Preparing Culturally Responsive Rural Early Childhood Educators: Infusing Diversity Into Multiple Course Work

Lydia Nganga, Peggy Laughlin

The 2000 census suggested that by the year 2020, the population of the United States will be very different from what it is today. “The relative percentages will be non-Hispanic Whites 64 percent, Hispanics 17 percent, African Americans 13 percent, and Asians six percent.... Four states—New Mexico, Hawaii, California, and Texas—and Washington, D.C., will have a minority majority population” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 11). States located in the intermountain west—Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming—are already experiencing these demographic shifts (Winkler, Field, Krannich, Luloff, & Williams, 2007), particularly in areas impacted by rapid growth in industry, farming, and tourism (Kambutu & Nganga, 2009). Like their urban counterparts, “rural communities all over the country are finding themselves with growing populations of racial and/or ethnic minorities. They are finding themselves having to deal with the same differences in culture, including religious, social, and linguistic, that urban schools have been struggling with for years. Nor are they doing any better at it than urban or suburban schools have” (Yeo, 1999, p. 7).

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Predominately rural and sparsely populated, Wyoming has a majority White and working class population. According to U.S. Census estimates for 2010, 86.2% of the state's roughly 544,270 residents were non-Hispanic Whites with 8.1% claiming Hispanic origin, 2.6% Native American, a scant 1.4% African American, and the rest Asian or Other (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Approximately 6.5% spoke a language other than English in the home. In 2007, just three years ago, U.S. Census estimates for the non-Hispanic White population was at 87.3%, Hispanic at 7.3%, Native American at 2.3 %, and African American and others at 2.1% (Wyoming Department of Administration and Information, 2008). If predictions and current trends hold, rural Wyoming will continue to experience a significant increase in diversity in the coming decades, with growing numbers and concentrations of African Americans and people of Hispanic origin (Miller, 2008). These demographic shifts hold powerful implications for early childhood education and the preparation of rural early childhood educators.

Wyoming's Early Childhood Pre-Service Teacher Population

A majority of University of Wyoming pre-service teachers have been raised in rural areas of Wyoming and have had little or no exposure to learners from backgrounds that are ethnically different from their own (Laughlin & Nganga, 2008; Nganga, 2009a; Nganga & Kambutu, 2009). Teachers who work in the schools and mentor pre-service teacher residents are also primarily from the local community and do not have experience in diverse settings. Emerging literature on rural pre-service teacher education echoes this phenomenon. Universities situated within a rural context may have difficulty enhancing perspectives related to diversity because of limited access to diverse classroom settings with culturally responsive teaching role models (Powell, Sobel, Hess, & Verdi, 2001; Wenger & Dinsmore, 2005). This problem can be explained in terms of situated or everyday contextual knowledge that influences pre-service teacher under-

standing and transfer of new concepts into practice.

Powell et al. (2001) indicated that pre-service teachers may have difficulty with information that does not fit their situated knowledge. It is therefore critical that early childhood teacher preparation programs ensure that pre-service teachers are effectively prepared to work with children from diverse backgrounds (Early & Winton, 2001). This chapter explains the interdisciplinary approach taken at the University of Wyoming to help pre-service teachers gain a better understanding of culturally responsive teaching (Banks, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), “culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and maintain cultural competences; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). Culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to the academic needs of their students and respond to the sociocultural dimensions of learning through an examination of students’ realities. In other words, culturally responsive teachers are students of their own students and communities (Laughlin & Nganga, 2008).

Gay (2000) noted that culturally responsive teachers are critically conscious of the power of symbolic curriculum as a teaching instrument and use it to help communicate important information, values, and actions about ethnic and cultural diversity. Culturally responsive teacher preparation programs help pre-service teachers understand that the communication styles of different ethnic groups reflect cultural values and shape learning. “They include knowledge about the linguistic structures of various ethnic communication styles as well as contextual factors, cultural nuances, discourse feature, logic and rhythm, delivery, vocabulary usage,

role relationships of speakers and listeners, intonations, gestures, and body movement” (Gay, 2000, p. 111). In short, these programs help pre-service teachers gain knowledge and skills that are key to modifying classroom interactions to accommodate culturally diverse learners.

For the purpose of this study, we defined *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* (CRP) as a practice that incorporates knowledge of diversity with activities that integrate diverse perspectives into the curriculum, in which equity and respect for diverse cultures are developed and Western European dominance in the curriculum is deconstructed. Teachers not only acknowledge and confront cultural dominance but also are committed to social action. They have transformed their thinking about multicultural education from finding ways they can just “tweak” their teaching lessons to teaching with intentionality toward changing the status quo and becoming agents of change. Therefore, multicultural education, which has many implications and interpretations, is applied to one’s practice in ways that are responsive to the cultural context, namely, CRP.

CRP in Early Childhood

Culturally responsive educators must also take into account how children develop racial and ethnic identity. By the age of 3, children are already aware of racial and ethnic differences. They “are sensitive to other children’s attitude toward their skin color because they are already becoming aware of societal bias against dark skin” (Derman-Sparks & A.B.C Task Force, 1998, p. 32). Hair and eyes are also frequently the subject of pre-school comments (Derman-Sparks & A.B.C Task Force, 1998). By age 5, children can make the connection between individual and family cultural identity and their larger ethnic backgrounds. These children can also understand people’s struggles for justice (Derman-Sparks & A.B.C Task Force, 1998). Therefore, CRP should be integrated throughout all developmental stages. When CRP is integrated, children from all cultural backgrounds

develop cultural sensitivity and understanding and see that they, too, are valued (Nganga, 2006, 2009b).

Bowman (1994) described culture as a prism created from shared meaning; members of a cultural group see the world from distinct perspectives, making sense of their experience in distinctive ways. The absence of continuity and congruence between the child's home culture and the school—an absence of shared meaning—may interfere with children's competent functioning in the school setting. Emphasizing the role of the teacher as co-constructor of knowledge, Bowman and Stott (1994) added that teachers must bridge the gap between the culture of the home and school by using interactive styles and content familiar to children, thus establishing new and shared meaning. "When teachers plan experiences that connect them to their children through understanding and respect, they can 'make meaning' together" (p. 131).

An Interdisciplinary Approach to CRP and Teacher Preparation

Preparing teachers who are culturally competent and adept at CRP requires an interdisciplinary approach to teacher education. The interdisciplinary approach used in this study builds connections between social studies teaching and literacy development. "Interdisciplinary teaching can provide a powerful model of academic engagement for both instructors and students. It allows the exchange of new information, a shift in intellectual paradigms formerly based on ownership, and the pleasure of collaborative effort" (Brown & Pollack, 2004, p. A9).

Additionally, social studies education provides a rich context in which the reading and writing processes can be investigated. For instance, culturally responsive early childhood teachers devise language arts teaching strategies that integrate social studies and other curricula areas critical in helping learners acquire communication and writing skills. They select a wide variety of content-based material and incorporate strategies for attend-

ing to diverse learning needs (Jarolimek, 1990; Zarrillo, 2004). It is therefore crucial to train early childhood teachers using a cross-disciplinary approach in methods courses to facilitate acquisition of CRP skills.

Interdisciplinary teaching can be a rewarding experience for college faculty members because it permits them to work in collaboration for a common cause, sharing teaching practices and adopting course materials that enhance better practices (Brown & Pollack, 2004). In our case, we hoped to help our early childhood educators learn to appreciate multiple and diverse ways of seeing and “making sense” of the world by encouraging them to recognize and celebrate diversity. We infused diversity into the curriculum and presented multiple strategies that could help early childhood educators understand the importance of creating a learning climate in which diversity, according to Tyminski (2010), is not merely accepted but also celebrated.

Infusing diversity and CRP into early childhood pre-service teacher education is not without its challenges. Kea, Campbell-Whatley, and Richards (2006) point out the dilemma that many teacher education programs face in this regard:

Some schools of education have acknowledged the urgency for developing culturally competent teachers, while others grapple with ways to fit appropriate programs into their curriculum. Unconvinced of the academic merits of culturally responsive programming, but not wanting to appear “anti-diversity,” some TEPs [teacher education programs] will grudgingly add a diversity course to their curriculum. Overcoming this resistance is crucial to developing effective TEPs that will provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to educate diverse learners. (p. 3)

Others also have noted that competency in working with diverse children and families cannot be developed in one course (Hill-Jackson, 2007; Stay-

ton et al., 2003). Lim, Maxwell, Able-Boone, and Zimmer (2009) have suggested that, "Including components of diversity in both coursework and field experiences are promising strategies to address the challenges of preparing teachers to work with children and families from diverse backgrounds" (p. 65).

It is with these strategies in mind that we attempted to help pre-service teachers make connections *across* academic disciplines and find creative ways to apply these connections in their future assignments. To address the limitations of including only one diversity course in the teacher education curriculum, we infused CRP into three courses and investigated the extent to which the cross-disciplinary approach resulted in deeper gains in early childhood pre-service teachers' awareness of culturally responsive practices. Pre-service students engaged in a variety of cross-disciplinary curricular activities such as reviews of multicultural children's literature, reflections on relevant coursework, case studies, observations, and classroom dialogue. These activities were designed to promote a deeper understanding of culturally relevant teaching and ways to design learning experiences that address issues of diversity. Additionally, students participated in a semester-long practicum to observe classroom environments for culturally responsive practices.

Research Design and Methods

Data from this study were drawn from reflections and journals that students kept during their enrollment in three re-designed courses. Specific questions during course work helped generate discussions and additional data. Other activities included but were not limited to the following:

- Observing and studying children in early childhood classroom settings once a week for 2 hours for one semester
- Observing mentor teachers in early childhood classrooms
- Reading, analyzing, and applying multicultural children's literature

- Reading and analyzing texts on literacy development of culturally and linguistically diverse learners
- Engaging in group discussions and journal reflections about culturally responsive practices

Forty-five undergraduate students in the teacher education program at University of Wyoming, Casper College Center, enrolled in the three classes—Oral & Written Language Development, Elementary Literacy Education, and Elementary Humanities Education. These courses are among a core of required foundations and methods courses for pre-service teachers who will be working in mostly rural early childhood settings. Ninety percent of the pre-service teachers are White and female. Those remaining are a mix of Latinos, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and African Americans. The majority are nontraditional (age 25 and older) and from working class backgrounds. Many are also working parents.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What do early childhood pre-service teachers perceive as best practices for selecting materials for culturally diverse early childhood classrooms (4-year-old Pre-K through Grade 3)?
2. Are pre-service early childhood teachers able to evaluate classroom practices for culturally relevant instruction?

Data Collection

Data were collected during class from 45 students enrolled in literacy, oral and written language development, and humanities courses between the spring of 2006 and the fall of 2007. Data consisted of individual reflections and notes taken during class discussions at the beginning of the study and at the end of a subsequent course in the fall of 2007. Additional data were derived from specific questions provided to the pre-service teachers (see Appendices A and B). Students' notes, reflections, and responses

to the questions gave insights into their perceptions of culturally responsive literacy pedagogy. Notes and reflections were analyzed in accordance with the characteristics of CRP described earlier in this chapter, as we looked for statements that confirmed pre-service teachers' understanding of and ability to articulate a pedagogy that was culturally responsive (see Appendix C).

Practicum Experiences

Students in Oral and Written Language Development and Elementary Literacy Development completed a one-semester practicum in which they conducted a case study with a child between ages 3 and 8 years (see Appendix D). Case studies were intended to help early childhood pre-service teachers understand how diversity is manifested at the individual level in a classroom setting. In spending a significant part of their time outside of the college classroom interacting with children in early childhood classrooms, these students learned how children respond to a variety of literacy challenges and how each child brings a different worldview into the formal classroom setting. We asked the pre-service teachers to develop relationships with the children in their case studies through observation, interviews, informal literacy assessments, and discovery of each child's unique assets and learning style. Additionally, the pre-service teachers were asked to meet and talk to the parents of their case study child to further their knowledge about the child's cultural background and social context. Each case study culminated in a portfolio and reflective paper in which students discussed what they learned (see Appendix D). These pre-service teachers also reflected on culturally responsive practices that they had observed in their practicum sites.

Using Children's Literature to Foster Diversity

In both the humanities and the literacy education courses, instructors presented multicultural children's books as a means of developing cross-cultural awareness, increasing students' knowledge of alternative

perspectives, and helping them develop sensitivities in facilitating discussions about issues of race, class, gender, and ability. By purposefully selecting children's books, instructors could challenge traditional narratives used in language arts and social studies classrooms and integrate a variety of assignments and activities in classes, including modeling reading aloud, developing Readers' Theater, and facilitating critical dialogue on sensitive topics. Early childhood pre-service teachers critiqued a variety of children's literature based on criteria for analyzing texts for racism, sexism, and other potential biases (see Appendix E), which prepared them to use similar criteria when selecting books for their own classrooms.

Findings

The findings are organized according to major research questions (Research Questions 1 and 2) representing data from written reflections across teacher education courses at the beginning and culmination of our study. Additionally, findings from specific strategies used in the courses (Case Studies; Readings, Discussion and Student Presentations) are separated out to enable examination of the effectiveness of these strategies in teacher education courses.

Research Question 1: What do early childhood pre-service teachers perceive as best practices while selecting materials for culturally diverse early childhood classrooms (Pre-K through Grade 3)?

At the beginning of the study in the spring of 2006, our pre-service teachers lacked depth in their descriptions of what they perceived as best practices in selecting culturally responsive children's books. They also showed a very shallow understanding—or none at all—of the meaning of *culturally responsive practice*. This lack of depth is evidenced in the following scripts.

I think best practice should include bringing multicultural materials into the classroom.

Rationale: It is good for children to know different cultures so they can better understand what the world is made of. It also helps because they are going to have friends and classmates who will be different. (Mina, Pre-instruction, Spring 2006).

Another pre-service teacher said:

I don't think that I know any titles but there are many books about different American nationalities. I also think these books should be grade and age level appropriate. They should also be entertaining.

Rationale: I think that this is important because books need to be entertaining and colorful. (Dona, Pre-instruction, Spring 2006)

Tinny had the following to say regarding selecting culturally responsive best practices:

I have no idea. Possibly remembering diversity. I am not even sure I know what culturally responsive practice is, so I cannot answer this question adequately. (Tinny, Pre-instruction, Spring 2006)

These initial responses are reminiscent of the limited amount of diversity within the local communities and across the state. They also provide a point of reference for a subsequent transformation of student perceptions at the end of the study.

At the end of this study (Fall 2007), early childhood students who had spent 2 years (four semesters) in the restructured teacher education program responded to the same set of questions. Their responses showed significant growth in what they thought were best practices in selecting culturally responsive children's literature in their classrooms. The following scripts are evidence:

I think that best practices when selecting children's books that are culturally responsive are that, 1). Include a variety of multicultural

children's books. 2). Use books with bilingual concepts, 3). A teacher should always know her/his students to be able to select these materials, 4). As a teacher to always think, "how can the literature I have in my classroom help my students' uniqueness."

Rationale: Because children need to be exposed to a variety of literature that is beneficial to their growth and development. (Mina, Post-instruction, Fall 2007)

Dona also was able to expound more on culturally responsive best practices. She noted the following:

The teacher should always ask themselves—is it something the children will be interested in? Is it something that the children can relate to? Is language and culture represented in the literature?

Rationale: Because these practices ensure that there is a cultural variety and that children can make meaning of the literature because they see images that look like them. I also think for children who speak another language, for example Spanish can learn better if their language is also represented. (Dona, Post-instruction, Fall 2007)

Tinny also had a lot to say at the end of the study about culturally responsive best practices in selecting children's literature, as is revealed below.

The first thing is to ensure that the literature being selected will not be biased or stereotypical. Then the teacher needs to select materials that reflect tolerance and kindness among people. Teachers also need to review the literature before presenting to the children so they know what is in it.

Rationale: The above practices are important because the teacher must know the children's background. As soon as they know their

children, then they can select materials that the children can relate to. A teacher who does this is culturally responsive and is always thinking about what to include showing the uniqueness of each child through choice of materials. (Tinny, Post-instruction, Fall 2007)

Results also showed that providing opportunities to critique children's books was helpful. After using guidelines provided in the humanities methods course (see Appendix E) to evaluate a set of children's books, one pre-service teacher indicated the following:

The biases in many books go unnoticed by many children and adults alike. My books have much information about white people and little bits here and there about other cultures in Wyoming. The Indian stories found in the books are presented from a white man's perspective, however; I know they did their best to tell the truth and present factual information. However, there are pictures of Indian tribes that are stereotypical. They show Native Americans wearing feathers and holding shields as if they are going hunting. I do not think Native Americans wear feathers and shields when going hunting today.... Before taking this course, I just used whatever children's books I found without thinking of these issues. (Shyla, Post-instruction, Fall 2007)

The parallel experience using similar guidelines in the literacy methods course (see Appendix F) provided more opportunities for students to analyze children's literature for racism and sexism, as one student noted:

1. Make sure it's unbiased,
2. Variety of story types,
3. Male and female lead characters, and
4. Offer high and low level reading books.

Rationale: There is a lot of crap out there being taught to kids. We must (as teachers) take responsibility for the fact that we take part in the socialization process to make sure we are not facilitating un-sound ideas or beliefs. (George, Post-instruction, Spring 2007)

In summary, the pre-service teachers in the study seemed to have developed a deeper and more complex understanding of best practices in selecting children's books.

Research Question 2: Are pre-service early childhood educators able to identify classroom practices for culturally relevant instruction?

At the beginning of the first semester, pre-service teachers in the Humanities and Oral and Written Language courses showed a limited understanding of how culturally responsive literacy instructions should look. The following responses (taken from Nganga, Notes, Spring 2006) are evidence:

"I am not sure what this is. So I do not know."

"I have noticed Indian Mythology and pictographs."

"I have noticed that the teacher reads traditional stories from other countries, which showed the children the similarities and differences."

By the end of the second year, these responses had changed. Pre-service teachers could identify culturally responsive practices and give evaluative comments regarding their practicum sites, as is evidenced below.

In my practicum site a Spanish teacher came for half an hour per week and had the students watch SALSA videos. She also had discussions with the students. I do not really consider this culturally responsive because it was required by the school and my mentor teacher did not do it on her own. The activity was also done for a very short time. (Brit, Fall 2007)

Kristi, who had initially observed "Indian Mythology," had additional

insights. "In my practicum site, we looked into the lives of Native Americans tribes. We discussed how cultures are same and different."

Kristi also noted that although stories were read in her practicum site, "I really have not observed too many activities. I cannot say that I saw a conscious effort to teach students about other cultures. My teacher stated that they have too much on their minds that cultural issues are pushed aside unless issues arise" (Nganga, Notes, Fall 2007).

One pre-service teacher commenting on course work felt that the activities had really helped him grow toward becoming a culturally responsive educator. However, he also lamented that when he was young, teachers in his school did not teach about diversity, nor did they acknowledge the uniqueness of each child. In his reflection he noted the following:

I really liked the idea of bringing guest speakers into the classroom to talk to children about other cultures. I think this is a great way to acknowledge differences and similarities. When I was young my differences or anyone else's were never discussed or considered. We were never really taught that anyone was different or it was alright to be different. It was as though our cultural differences did not exist. When I was young, I think I would have truly enjoyed sharing my culture with my class or hearing about other cultures. One thing that I know I have learned in this class is not to be afraid to communicate with parents and children about their cultures. I feel I have become a better person in working with other cultures. (Garcia, Fall 2007)

Reflections From Case Studies

Case studies appeared to help our early childhood pre-service teachers gain a better understanding of being a culturally responsive educator. One pre-service teacher said:

I believe that this project was appropriate for pre-service teachers to have a field experience on how children learn to read, write, listen,

and speak. I learned how much time a teacher needs to [commit] to each individual learner. I also learned how important it is for students to get the individual attention, as well as the group activities, that they need in order to become oral and written language learners for life. The project also gave me an opportunity to work directly with a parent, something that I had not done before. I feel teachers should always make the home to school connections with parents. (Alisha, Fall 2007)

In another response, a pre-service teacher expressed how the case study had helped her understand and acknowledge the child's culture:

Although the case study was a long process, I am glad that this class gave me the opportunity to focus on one child. By observing Kyler (a 5 year old) and working with her mother the whole semester, I learned that it is not only important for me as a teacher to recognize all the different kinds of homes a child may be coming from, but also that I need to embrace differences. Kyler's mother spoke Spanish and some English. Kyler could speak some Spanish but mostly English. His dad spoke English only. (Vero, Fall 2007)

Caitlyn's final course reflection indicated her understanding of the child within a larger social milieu and how the teacher needs to make family connections to meet the needs of each child in a classroom:

The teacher should know every child, their family, where they come from, and about their interests. The teacher should also work hard to know about the culture that each child comes from so that they can teach them in the best and most appropriate manner. The teacher should also be aware of the homes that children come from and how it will affect the experiences that they may or may not have been provided with while growing up. Then once the teacher knows all of these

things about the children she should work hard to represent each of the children through the classroom and her teaching. (Caitlyn, Spring 2007)

Reflections From Readings, Group Discussions, and Student Presentations on Culturally Diverse Learners

Class discussions from readings and student presentations that focused on literacy development across cultures were a powerful tool to help students who had little exposure to diversity in oral and written language development. For one assignment, students worked in small groups and selected a chapter or article that focused on one cultural group in the United States and presented it to the class. This activity allowed them to teach one another about a variety of constituent cultural groups in the United States with a history of marginalization in public education by examining language systems, values, and traditions that teachers should consider. Their comments indicated a transformation of assumptions about diverse ethnic groups and a growing commitment toward CRP.

One pre-service teacher became more aware of how culture and language relate to literacy:

The biggest component I learned was how culture plays such a huge role when a child is learning to read and write. Since literacy is based so much on oral development, students who are second language learners are at a disadvantage. I will use this information by keeping in close communication with parents and researching strategies that work for diverse students. (Kenya, Fall 2007)

Another realized the value of becoming better educated about different cultures in the United States:

Having a strong knowledge of different cultures and possible diversities in their classroom is probably one of the best ways for a teacher to prepare for this type of environment. Once this is accomplished,

the teacher can always try to include the different cultures into the classroom with activities and readings that give all of the students a little background and understanding of the different cultures, and some of the differences that they may not know are common. I don't think a teacher should ever single out a student/students from a different culture, but it is important to assure that all of the students in the classroom can relate, so a teacher should try to incorporate cultural activities and lessons into other lessons or unit in a form of a game, group discussion, etc. (Alisha, Fall 2007)

Finally, others shared the importance of valuing each person's cultural identity as well as his or her experiences, humanity, and place in society.

Having students share their personal stories and talking about how proud they should be about where they come from can bring culture, language and SES situation out to the class. I think that by knowing we all have different stories, it will create more understanding and a responsive environment. (Pete, Fall 2007)

A classroom of social democracy starts with modeling. Multicultural issues are easy to incorporate into ANY lesson plan. (Lucy, Fall 2007)

Discussion of Study Findings

At the end of the study, pre-service teachers reflected on (a) the case study assignment in the Common Assessment of Oral and Written Language course (see Appendix D) and (b) their efforts to analyze children's literature in the Elementary Humanities and Literacy courses. In addition, they participated in presentations and discussions of multicultural readings across all three courses (see Appendix G). Data showed that the cross-disciplinary infusion of diversity into course work helped early childhood pre-service teachers gain more knowledge and skills and demonstrate

competence toward becoming culturally responsive educators. Their discussion notes and final reflections indicated that they recognized that instructors were modeling CRP through the interdisciplinary approach that was woven through their education courses. Students attributed their deeper understanding of the meaning of culturally responsive teaching to this approach and expressed satisfaction with having a continuing theme in literacy and humanities courses. Many pre-service teachers who were involved in the study recommended that, in the future, all students in the University of Wyoming Casper Center be engaged in similar courses and activities.

Findings from this study indicate the importance of infusing diversity education into early childhood teacher preparation programs. The data also provide a point of reference for rural early childhood education programs when there is little or no access to ethnically diverse classrooms in the community. The study provides some insights into a pedagogy that is culturally responsive and that acknowledges and addresses the unique context among isolated populations of rural White students as well as addresses the challenges already established in the literature. Although there is a large body of literature that defines multicultural awareness for teaching in diverse settings, particularly as applied in urban environments, we believe these findings will add to the knowledge base for teaching early childhood pre-service teachers in rural settings, where diversity may not be as visible and pronounced.

In particular, these findings will be important in the design of teacher education coursework as programs address and refine their own pedagogical practices. Of special importance is the use of children's literature and primary source materials (e.g., biographies and photo journals) as teaching resources. The use of case studies was also found to be helpful.

As evidenced from the data collected from our revised courses, participants in the research have been given opportunities to reflect on culturally responsive literacy instruction and what it means to be a culturally responsive educator in a rural environment in a predominantly White part

of the country. Having our students critically look at the cultural context of language development in literacy and humanities courses influenced their perceptions in a positive manner. Incorporating such content across disciplines might therefore be key to preparing culturally responsive educators.

Implications and Directions for Future Studies

Infusing CRP throughout early childhood pre-service teacher education courses can provide an integrated and solid foundation for pre-service teachers to develop their own practice. An emerging body of literature has revealed the challenges that teacher education programs face in addressing the increasing diversity in rural areas (Huerta & Flemmer, 2005; Laughlin & Nganga, 2008; Nganga & Kambutu, 2009; Powell et al., 2001). It has been established that White pre-service teachers from the majority culture struggle with issues of diversity and multicultural awareness (Helms, 1994; Hill-Jackson, 2007; Howard, 1999; *Rethinking Schools*, 2000/01; Sleeter, 1996). In rural areas, limited exposure to diverse populations and cultural influences of the pervasive majority leave many people unprepared or unwilling to embrace a culturally responsive stance toward diversity (Huerta & Flemmer, 2005; Irwin, 1999). This problem creates steeper learning curves for pre-service teachers and unique struggles for teacher educators.

This study has identified some promising interdisciplinary practices that may have value for teacher education programs either in similar isolated contexts or in hybrid environments. We believe that the findings have expanded on existing studies and should add to the knowledge base for multicultural pre-service teacher education in rural communities. By infusing themes of diversity as a foundation rather than as an add-on to teacher preparation programs, we are attending to a vision that our future teachers will inspire in their own students—to see connections that will help them become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers in an increasingly complex and diverse society.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Pre-service teacher understanding of culturally responsive literacy instruction in a White rural community

1. What is literacy?
2. What does it mean to be culturally responsive?
3. What comes to mind when you think about a culturally responsive literacy classroom?

4. In your opinion what are some (about 5) literacy practices that are culturally responsive? Why do you think these practices are culturally responsive?
5. From previous or current practicum experiences, describe some culturally responsive practices that you have observed or participated in.

Appendix B

End of Study Reflections

Interdisciplinary Learning—Discussion Activity

1. What have you learned so far in your methods courses in this program about culturally responsive literacy practices?
2. What do you still need to know to be a culturally responsive educator?
3. Discuss your answers with your table group. Choose a facilitator who will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to share what s/he wrote, and respond to each other. Choose a note taker who will write down a synthesis of the group discussion.

Turn in your individual and group reflections together.

Appendix C

Culturally responsive criteria rubric

Zero: This level is most efficiently described as the *Fundamentalist* orientation (Howard, 1999), in which educators “demonstrate a monocultural and Eurocentric approach to teaching.” And “they resist multicultural education and pride themselves on preaching an assimilationist doctrine.” Some even hold onto beliefs of colorblindness, and “when confronted with the issue of their own racism, respond in anger, denial, or defensiveness” (p. 101).

Novice: This level correlates to Banks’s (2000) levels one and two, the *Contributions* and *Additive* Approaches to multicultural education. Pre-service teachers’ responses could be described as the “heroes and holidays,” or *tourist* approach to culturally responsive pedagogy.

Developing: This level reflects Banks’s *Transformational* and Howard’s *Transformationist* ideas. At this level, culturally responsive pedagogy is expressed as an integration of diverse perspectives into the curriculum, and empathy for diverse cultures is developed. At this level, teacher education students are beginning to deconstruct Western European dominance in the curriculum and confront the notion of White privilege.

Proficient: This level corresponds with Banks’s notion of *Social Action*. There is a marked difference between level three and level four in that pre-service teachers not

only acknowledge and confront Whiteness and cultural dominance in the curriculum, but they are committed to social action. They have moved from thinking about culturally responsive pedagogy as something they can just “tweak” in their teaching lessons to teaching with intentionality toward changing the status quo and becoming agents of change.

Appendix D

Common Assessment of Oral and Written Language: EDEC 4320

Abbreviated Guidelines for Case Study Assignment

Literacy Buddy Portfolio: Arrange to work throughout the semester with a K-1 or 2-3 Literacy Buddy. Gather relevant literacy data, such as observations, parent interviews, an oral language sample, story retellings, concepts about print, motivation interview, etc. Keep the data and analyses in a portfolio; include a final summary of your Literacy Buddy’s development and recommendations. Your portfolio must integrate course concepts regarding children’s language acquisition about reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Your portfolio must reflect knowledge of how diversity in home culture, gender, learning style, etc. can influence language acquisition. References to professional readings support above, and are carefully chosen for their relevance.

Appendix E

Literacy and Humanities Methods Parallel Assignments

Humanities Methods: EDEL 4109—Assignment for Analyzing Texts

- Is it fiction or fact?
- What is the figurative or literal meaning?
- Is it accurate or inaccurate?
- To what degree is the information biased or objective?
- Are there inferred as well as explicit messages?
- Is the author’s message subtle or obvious?
- Is there both cognitive and affective appeal?
- What is the author’s purpose? (Duplass, 2004, p. 189)

Literacy Methods: EDEL 4309—Assignment for Analyzing Texts

- Check the illustrations.
- Check the story line.
- Look at the lifestyles.
- Weigh the relationships between people.

- Note the heroes.
- Consider the effects on a child's self-image.
- Consider the author's or illustrator's background.
- Check out the author's perspective.
- Watch for loaded words.
- Look at the copyright date. (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1980)

Appendix F

Oral and Written Language Development Common Assignment Used by Both Instructors EDEC 4320

Special Topics: Paper and Presentation on Language & Culture

Small groups of students or individuals select a special topic related to assigned reading (readings from Perez or other) in which they have an interest (Perez, 2004). Students demonstrate, guide discussion, mini lecture, or share and show the selected topic in a short 20-minute presentation. PowerPoint presentations are fine. Interactive discussion and participation is required. Collaborative projects must reflect individual and group contributions. An individual paper is turned in. Demonstrate improved skills in research and writing. Use APA appropriately.

Language and Literacy in diverse communities (Perez Chapters): American Indian and Alaska Native Communities (4), Puerto Rican Communities (5), Vietnamese American Communities (6), Chinese American Communities (7), African American Communities (8), Spanish Whole Language Classroom (9)

Appendix G

Course Descriptions

EDEL 4309 (5 credits) Elementary Literacy Education: Encompasses content and pedagogy to develop the reflective practitioner for teaching literacy in the elementary school. Addresses the following themes: curriculum; theory translated into instructional planning and practice; practices that promote effective learning; behavior and relationships and teaching strategies.

EDEL 4109: Phase 3a: Elementary Humanities Education

Content and pedagogy to develop the reflective practitioner of teaching humanities in the elementary school. The following themes are addressed: curriculum; theory translated into instructional planning practice; practices that promote effective learning; behavior and relationships; and teaching strategies. This course focuses

on the role of social studies education and humanities education in the elementary school curriculum. It is based on the premise that these areas of study enhance opportunities to facilitate inquiry, exploration, and understanding of the society and world in which we live. Secondly, it represents the thinking that social studies and the humanities provide equally important contributions to the decisions which students must learn to make as intelligent and socially responsible citizens.

EDEC 4320: Oral and Written Language Acquisition

The general goal of this course is to introduce students to contemporary and historical influences in understanding early language acquisition and to provide students with literacy strategies, knowledge, and resources to use when planning and implementing an effective literacy curriculum for young children. It includes the impact of sociological and cultural factors on literacy development.

Chapter 7

Righting a Wrong: Rural Early Childhood Education in South Africa

Janeula M. Burt

The South African government has increasingly recognised the significance of investment in early childhood development services of different kinds to help address the rights and needs of all children. Racially discriminatory colonial and apartheid policies have left socioeconomic imbalances between black and white, and between rural and urban South Africans.... Low levels of literacy among many primary caregivers make it difficult for them to fully support their children's early education. (Biersteker, 2010, p. 3)

It is a well established fact that providing an equitable education for children who reside in rural settings can be a significant challenge—regardless of whether they are living in “developed” or “developing” countries. Often, challenges that schools face in developing countries such as South Africa include providing *basic* needs such as running water or electricity. However, shared similarities between rural education communities in

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developed and developing countries include high resident poverty, significant geographical barriers, scarce teaching and learning resources, lack of adequate professional development opportunities, shortages of qualified teaching professionals, and limited access to modern technology. Therefore, in spite of their differences (and similarities), whether in Holly Springs, Mississippi, or KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, education communities have concluded that the educational outcomes of preschool education were significantly important not only to parents and families but also, more importantly, in the impact and effect that early childhood education has on the social and economic future of each nation. Approximately 40% of young children grow up in conditions of abject poverty and neglect (Department of Education, 2001). Children raised in impoverished situations are most at risk of infant death, low birth-weight, limited cognitive and physical growth, poor school adjustment, increased grade repetition, and school dropout (Department of Education, 2001). In 2003, only 30% of the South Africans over the age of 25 had completed Grade 12, and less than 20% of South African schools had libraries. Also, an estimated 3 million South African adults are illiterate, and another 8 million are functionally illiterate.

With these facts in mind, the South African Department of Education found that it was imperative to develop a plan of action to address the early learning opportunities of all learners, particularly those for children living in poverty. Research (Department of Education, 2001) has demonstrated that timely and appropriate interventions not only can reverse the effects of early educational opportunities deprivation but also can maximize the development of student academic achievement potential. Therefore, the challenge for the South African government was to help break the cycle of poverty by increasing access to early childhood development (ECD) programs, particularly for poor children, and to improve the quality of ECD programs (Department of Education, 2001).

Brief History on the Education of Black South Africans

There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live.

—H. F. Verwoerd, Minister of Education (in Clark & Worger, 2004)

Similar to the “separate but equal” United States education policies of the early to mid-20th century, under the apartheid system, Black South African children had access to a “Bantu education.” As the architect of the *Bantu Education Act Number 47 of 1953* (Hartshorne, 1992; Hyslop, 1999; Kallaway, 1984) under former South African President H. F. Verwoerd, Bantu education was viewed as being a part of the overall apartheid system. The goal of Bantu (African) education was to direct Black or non-White citizens into the unskilled labor market. The rationale for this dual system of education was that Black South Africans had a different culture, separate from that of the Whites, and should be educated accordingly (Hartshorne, 1992; Hyslop, 1999; Kallaway, 1984). The Bantu education system approached the practice of Black education using a strong missionary focus, particularly in the rural areas. There was an intention and expectation of goodwill among inspectors and teachers of different races. However, the rigid and paternal manner in which the policy was implemented eventually led to more discontent and hardship within the Black South African community (Hartshorne, 1992; Hyslop, 1999; Kallaway, 1984). In 1959, similar to the Morrill Act of 1890, which created many of the U.S. Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the Bantu system of education also extended a dual “separate and unequal” system of postsecondary education for Black South Africans. The *Extension of University Education Act of 1959*, extended the Bantu education system to “non-White”

colleges and universities (O'Malley, n.d.).

Although the introduction of the Bantu education system was largely underfunded by the South African government, it was strongly controlled by the South African Department of Education. For example, during the 1970s, the per capita governmental spending on the education of Black South Africans was one tenth of what is spent on White education. In other words, for every dollar that was spent in the Bantu education system, 10 dollars would be spent on the education of White students. Thirty percent of Bantu schools did not have electricity, 25% had running water, and less than half of Bantu schools had plumbing (Williams & Samuels, 2001). In 1953, after the Bantu system was established, Black South African teacher salaries were dropped significantly, causing many teachers and teacher trainees to seek other forms of employment (Williams & Samuels, 2001). And of the teachers who remained in the profession, two-thirds of the Black South African teachers were unqualified to be teachers (Biersteker, 2010; Williams & Samuels, 2001). Meanwhile, Black South African students educated under the Bantu system routinely received significantly inferior resources (e.g., curriculum, books, equipment, administrators, buildings, teachers, equipment, etc.). Again, it is essential to note that there are significant similarities between the United States in its previous dual system of education and the South African Bantu system of education. One difference, however, was that the education for Black South Africans, and for its Indian and Colored citizens, was not free. Schools reserved for South Africa's White students were similar to Western standards of education and provided both mandatory and free education.

Post-Apartheid South African Education

Although informally introduced during the colonial era, the system of Apartheid, or separation of the races, was formally enacted in 1948.

However, in the historical election of 1994, the system of Apartheid was officially dismantled with the election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first Black South African president. Nevertheless, after more than 40 years of apartheid-based education (and hundreds of years of colonial-focused education), addressing the huge achievement gaps in addition to meeting the academic needs of Black South African children continues to be a challenge. Although the government has been working to rectify the imbalances in education, the remnants of the apartheid legacy remain. South African illiteracy rates remain fairly high, at approximately 24% for adults over age 15 years. Approximately 6–8 million South African adults (primarily Black and colored) were functionally literate (Biersteker, 2010). Similar to the pre- and post-segregation schools in the United States, teachers in the Bantu education system schools are the least trained, and the student pass rate remains significantly lower than that of their White and colored counterparts (Biersteker, 2010). Although 65% of Whites over the age of 20 years and 40% of Indians in that age group have a high school or higher qualification, the corresponding percentage is only 14% among Black South Africans and 17% among the colored (caste system) population (Department of Education, 2001).

Previous to 2009, the South African Department of Education was split into two separate departments, the Department of Basic Education¹ and the Department of Higher Education and Training.² However, in 2009, similar to the United States, South Africa's national Department of Education, is currently headed by a single minister of education, which provides the national framework for school policy and is responsible for education across the country as a whole.

1 The Department of Basic Education oversees primary and secondary education in South Africa.

2 The Department of Higher Education and Training oversees the education and training in South Africa comprising postsecondary schools and universities.

In light of the importance of education to the overall development of South Africa, it was believed that there needed to be a specific focus on improving education in schools, and that what was needed to do this was significantly different from the principles applied at the higher education level. The key strategic objective of the Department of Basic Education is to ensure that quality education is provided to all learners in the South African schooling system. This is achieved by ensuring that the department's policies and the approved curriculum are effectively implemented and reviewing and refining those areas that do not contribute to quality education. (National Treasury, Republic of South Africa, 2009, p. 2)

Each of South Africa's nine provinces³ has its own province-level education department, which handles the administrative implementation of national- and province-level education policies—similar to the state-level education systems in the United States. Decision making is further decentralized at the formal school level through local elected school governing boards, which have significant influence over the day-to-day running of individual schools. Formal schooling covers a total of 10 years, beginning at the “Reception” (Kindergarten) year, or Grade R, through Grade 12. However, school is compulsory only from Grades 1 to 9 in South Africa. Formal schooling is available to all South Africans (Biersteker, 2010). However, the current and previous inequitable distribution of federal funds (e.g. teacher salaries, school resources, school uniforms, etc.), continues to make it difficult for previously disadvantaged groups (e.g. Black, Indian, Colored, etc.) to benefit from compulsory education. As late as the 1990s, the national graduation pass rate was approximately 40%; however, since 2005, the rate has increased to over 68%. Approximately 20% of total South

3 South Africa's nine provinces (states) are (1) Eastern Cape, (2) Free State, (3) Gauteng, (4) KwaZulu-Natal, (5) Limpopo, (6) Mpumalanga, (7) Northern Cape, (8) North West, and (9) Western Cape.

African government expenditure was targeted toward education. For example, in the 2006 national budget, education received approximately \$13 million, or approximately 18%, of total government spending (Biersteker, 2010).

One of the greatest challenges facing the South African government lies in the poorer, rural provinces like the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (Biersteker, 2010). In 2007, 40% of South African schools were identified to be located in the country's most poverty-stricken areas and were not well resourced. Conversely, schools in the more affluent provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape were generally better resourced. Therefore, recent education legislation from the South African government (Department of Education, 2001) has been targeting education for the poorest of the poor, with two notable programs: (1) Fee-Free Schools, a program through which South African education institutions are now receiving all of their required funding from the province through the national Department of Education, so schools no longer have to charge school fees and (2) the National Schools Nutrition Program, which feeds 1.6 million South African schoolchildren every day, including all those attending primary schools in 13 rural and 8 urban poverty districts. Under the national schools nutrition program, the Department of Education also has established 1,924 school gardens with the support of the Department of Agriculture, local government structures, and a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Other educational priorities in South Africa include ECD, HIV-AIDS awareness programs in schools, and adult basic education and training.

As stated in the Preamble of the Constitution of South Africa, one of the primary goals of the new democratic government was to "heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights" (Williams & Samuels, 2001). To achieve this goal of democracy, the nation of South Africa had to build policy that would be inclusive of all of its citizens, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, culture, or disability. Therefore, some of the specific

goals of the South African Constitution (Williams & Samuels, 2001) were to

- Prioritize historically disadvantaged communities within the nation of South Africa;
- Empower historically disadvantaged parents, families, and communities, particularly those that had little or no access to basic resources that would enable them to foster the care and development of their children;
- Create effective and high-quality childhood development programs, implementing integrated and collaborated social and economic resources;
- Create opportunities for all South African children, including those with disabilities, to fully participate and develop to their full potential;
- Actively participate in the planning and provisioning debates of all education stakeholders, including Departments of Education, Health, Social Development, Population Development; parents; NGOs; RTOs [registered training organizations]; and CBOs [community-based organizations];
- Form democratic governance structures that involve parents and communities; and
- Develop allocation policies that aid in social and economic reconstruction and redress in South Africa.

Another subgoal of the development and growth of ECD programs in South Africa was to address the issue of the need to empower South African women. “The provision of community-based ECD services is seen as a part of the broader goal of women’s empowerment by allowing women, who have historically been solely responsible for the care and nurturing of children, the freedom to choose and develop their own lifestyles and careers” (Williams & Samuels, 2001, p. 15). As in many developed and developing countries around

the world, "it has been well documented that professions where women are over-represented are also those that are devalued with respect to status and salary" (Williams & Samuels, 2001, p. 166). Finding ways in which to help women, particularly working African women, be able to contribute to the productivity of the community and the economy of the nation would be an essential outcome of the ECD policy (Williams & Samuels, 2001).

Early Childhood Education Policy in South Africa

Preprimary education was first examined after a research study was conducted by the De Lange Commission of Inquiry Into Education in the Republic of South Africa (Human Sciences Research Council, 1981), which cited "environmental deprivation" (Biersteker, 2010, p. 14) as the main reason why Black South African children were not ready for formal schooling (Biersteker, 2010; Williams & Samuels, 2001). The De Lange Commission went on to recommend that there needed to be a "bridging period" of education where students could be prepared for formal education in a "partially institutionalized" manner (Biersteker, 2010; Williams & Samuels, 2001). In 1988, the South African government piloted the Bridging Period Programme (BPP), which was a 10–12-week orientation program to Grade 1. The BPP was designed to prepare and introduce disadvantaged students to what would be expected in formal classroom settings. In 1991, the *National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) Early Childhood Educare* report (NEPI, 1992) similarly investigated the possibility of including preprimary education into formal primary education for children from birth to age 6. Therefore, both the BPP and NEPI studies provided the framework for what would later be implemented, after the end of the apartheid system, as the Reception Year (Grade R) program.

The care and development of infants and young children must be the foundation of social relations and the starting point of a national human resource development strategy. The national and provincial Departments of Education will have specific roles to play in this

field. They cannot undertake the full responsibility for ECD, which is a multi-disciplinary field. Instead, the national Department of Education will liaise with the Departments of National Health and Welfare in order to establish an interdepartmental committee or working group to develop their joint interests in policy for the infant and young child. (Evans, 1995, p. 4)

Unfortunately, however, there was little money available for funding ECD programs, and what monies were available through the South African government were primarily distributed to White South African early childhood programs (Williams & Samuels, 2001). Therefore, it would not be until the official end of apartheid that ECD would be implemented as a strategy to improve the schooling opportunities for all South African children.

After the historic democratic election in South Africa in 1994, President Nelson Mandela pledged to make the needs of South African children a priority for the nation (Williams & Samuels, 2001). For example, 6 out of 10 South African children live in poverty, and for those living in rural areas, the likelihood of living in poverty is even greater (Williams & Samuels, 2001). "An analysis of provincial differences shows a disparity that indicates that children in predominantly rural provinces are particularly vulnerable" (Williams & Samuels, 2001, p. 7). The North West, Free State, and Eastern Cape were reported to have the highest number of children living in poverty (73%, 73%, and 78%, respectively), while the Western Cape (Capetown) and Gauteng (Johannesburg), which have the significant urban centers, reported the lowest number of children living below the poverty line (35% and 20%, respectively) (Williams & Samuels, 2001). Therefore, the remnants of apartheid would be an obstacle that would take time to dismantle.

In a post-apartheid study on education (Evans, 1995), it was noted that the high rates of grade repetition and dropout in education for a large percentage of the population were among Black South Africans. In this

study of the status of children and the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) program, “[i]t was recognized that once the new government came into power there would be political demands to level the playing field. Therefore the new South African government would need to consider how to ensure that all children were ready to enter the first year of primary school” (Evans, 1995, p. 20). An international study team, which consisted of eight ECCD specialists from South Africa and an international consultant, examined the status of young children in South Africa. The purpose of the study was to examine the kinds of supports available to South African preschoolers and to make recommendations on how they could more effectively benefit from basic education. The ECCD study team was specifically asked to make recommendations with regard to the value and feasibility of creating an early childhood education program for 5-year-olds (Evans, 1995). Again, South African schooling is compulsory beginning in Grade 1 (Williams & Samuels, 2001).

While the study team did in fact conclude that an essential part of the strategy for upgrading education is to bring five year olds into the education system, the team felt that if this were to be the sole focus of state input to early childhood development, it would be too little too late for the majority of young children. Furthermore this policy fails to take into account the particular vulnerability of the first three years of life and the needs of working parents. (Evans, 1995, p. 21)

The ECCD study also found that a preschool year for 5-year-olds could be effective only if it was part of a larger strategy designed to address the roles that government, nongovernmental agencies, the private sector, communities, and parents should play in supporting children’s growth and development (Evans, 1995). Therefore, in an effort to be proactively engaged in not only the development of new education policy regarding early childhood education but also the education of a majority of South Africa’s citizens, the ECCD study was able to make specific recommendations to the incoming

Box 1. Selected Recommendations for Early Childhood Education in South Africa, 1995

- Support for the development, expansion, management and funding of early childhood provision is the joint responsibility of the state, provincial and local governments, the private sector, the community and parents.
- Responsibility for the development of policies and guidelines for the implementation of early childhood development programs should be the responsibility of central (local) government.
- A Department of Early Childhood Development⁴ (ECD) should be created within the Ministry of Education and Training, responsible for creating policy and guidelines.
- Curriculum guidelines for early childhood development should be established by the National Institute for Curriculum Development (NICD), taking into consideration children's needs in health, nutrition, education, and psychosocial development.
- Responsibility for interpretation and implementation of guidelines and policies for ECD programs should be based at the Provincial (state) level.
- Implementation of ECD programs should be the responsibility of local authorities and ECD management committees. They would be responsible for stimulating the development of ECD programs, registering and monitoring the activities of individual early childhood programs, and they would be involved in direct provision.
- At the program level, parents will have responsibility for management of early childhood provision. They would be responsible for establishing and maintaining the facilities and paying the teachers whose salaries would be provided through a combination of state subsidies, local funding and parent fees.
- An Inter-ministerial ECD Committee should be created to promote integration across sectors of services in support of young children and their families.
- A Reception Class (Kindergarten) for five-year-olds should be created. This is to be phased in over a period of five years. By the end of the fifth year 100 percent of the five-year-olds should have access to a Reception Class.
- Resource and Training Centers (RTC) should be established in each Province (state) to provide training and support to ECD programs. Current NGO's can be accredited and contracted to serve as RTC's. These should be subsidized by government.
- A Reception Year for five-year-olds should not be implemented in isolation. It must be linked to (align with) reform within junior primary schools.
- Alternative ways of reaching those under 5 need to continue to be explored.

4 South Africa's nine provinces (states) are (1) Eastern Cape, (2) Free State, (3) Gauteng, (4) KwaZulu-Natal, (5) Limpopo, (6) Mpumalanga, (7) Northern Cape, (8) North West, and (9) Western Cape.

post-apartheid government (see Box 1).

In 1996, the *Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development* was launched by the South African Department of Education, which again focused on the education of children from birth to 9 years (Biersteker, 2010; Department of Education, 1996; Williams & Samuels, 2001). However, it was the combination of the *Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development* (Department of Education, 1996) and the *White Paper on Education and Training* (Department of Education, 1995) that developed the framework for the legal and policy-related issues for how ECD would be implemented. Again, the purpose of the Interim Policy for ECD was to formulate a plan for how ECD programs could be implemented at the national, provincial, and local levels (Williams & Samuels, 2001). For the first time, the issue of student readiness for schooling would be formally addressed by the national requirement that, by 2011 (later revised to 2014), all South African children would be required to enter compulsory public schools during a Reception⁵ year of education: “Provisioning for all children over five years of age in the Reception Year of an integrated four-year Foundation Phase Programme (Grades R, 1, 2, and 3)” (Williams & Samuels, 2001, p. 16). Therefore, it was the intention and purpose of the South African government, through a joint collaboration of resources with the Department of Education and the Department of Social Development,⁶ not only to prepare all South African 5-year-olds for schooling but also to lay the foundation for integrating all children under the age of 5 (i.e., ages 0–5 years) for schooling.

In addition to scaling up the implementation of ECD among South African children, families, and communities, it was the responsibility of the South African governmental entities to develop and enhance the educational

⁵ Reception year, or Grade R, is similar to the Kindergarten year in the United States.

⁶ The partnership of the South African Departments of Education and Social Development is similar in scope to the partnership between the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (e.g., Head Start, etc.).

experiences and training of ECD teachers (Williams & Samuels, 2001). Therefore, national guidelines for accrediting ECD educators and educator trainers had to be developed. For ECD educators, accreditation would be based on the knowledge, skills, and abilities as defined by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).⁷ Therefore, there would be a need to develop a series of standards to identify who would be qualified to teach in the ECD programs.

In 1997, a National Pilot Project for ECD was initiated to examine how the ECD policy could be implemented at the national, provincial, and community levels. Participants in the pilot project were awarded subsidies (grants) for 2–3 years to fund and develop (or enhance) a number of ECD programs within each province (Biersteker, 2010; Williams & Samuels, 2001). The objective of the Pilot Project was to

- Research the most effective means of delivering the Reception year program;
- Build capacity at the provincial (state) level in collaboration with education training providers;
- Develop and test innovations related to the training and accreditation of teachers, teacher training organizations, resource allocation, and other policy-related issues; and
- Promote outcomes-based ECD that is aligned with the NQF (Williams & Samuels, 2001).

Findings from the initial pilot project determined that it would take approximately 5 years to phase in and implement the compulsory Grade R policy at the provincial level (Williams & Samuels, 2001). There was also evidence that it would be possible to link many of the community-based ECD programs

⁷ “The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister [of Education] for the classification, registration, publication, and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications” (Department of Education, 2008, p. 21).

with other primary (public) schools or to classify or register these private programs as independent schools, applying the same national and provincial standards for accreditation for teachers, schools, and training programs. Probably the biggest challenge in implementing the ECD policy framework is the fact that there are finite resources (e.g., money, infrastructure, teachers, buildings, etc..) (Biersteker, 2010; Williams & Samuels, 2001). Williams and Samuels (2001) sounded a warning with respect to this challenge:

Policy developments and implementations, no matter the extent to which they are based on sound, social and pedagogical tenets, are likely to fail in the absence of accurate, broad-based and verified empirical information. Finite resources tend to undermine fine policies. (p. 20)

To pilot some of the policy recommendations from the ECCD study, in 1997, the Gauteng Department of Education developed its own comprehensive, coherent, multidisciplinary, and integrated policy for South African children from birth to age 9 (Minaar & Foster, 1997; Williams & Samuels, 2001). Using the funds and resources of the National ECD Pilot Project (NPP), the Impilo Project was introduced to meet the unique needs of the Gauteng Province in South Africa and “consisted of a series of linked pilot projects aimed at developing new multi-service approaches to early childhood care and development” (Biersteker, 2010, p. 18) The primary goal of the project was to facilitate the coordination of ECD partnerships between governmental and NGOs and to help target resources to those communities most in need. The new system of ECD delivery was designed not only to focus on center-based ECD programs but also to focus on broadening the delivery of early childhood services and to provide high-quality training for early childhood educators. At the time of the Impilo Project’s implementation, only 2 of every 10 children were enrolled in preschool programs (Biersteker, 2010; Minaar & Foster, 1997; Williams & Samuels, 2001).

The Impilo Project involved the development of relationships with a

broad spectrum of stakeholders such as parents, families, and communities who affected the successful implementation of ECD. Through the Impilo Project, extra funding also was added to NPP federal funds to provide additional training and salary subsidies for practitioners above the federal funding formulas. It foreshadows the National Integrated Plan for 0–4-year-olds in many respects. Similarly, the Province of KwaZulu Natal also deviated from the suggested NPP implementation by providing additional salary compensation for practitioners, supplementary classroom resources, and satellite ECD sites linked to primary schools (Biersteker, 2010).

Preliminary data from the Impilo Project indicated that, although there were typical specific internal and external challenges, there were also four clear benefits. The benefits:(a) creating a delivery system for ECD education that includes not only community-, center-, and family-based classrooms but also NGOs, government agencies, families, and communities; (b) establishing standards-based early childhood curriculum; (c) training and certifying all early childhood educators; and (d) accrediting all ECD service providers has provided the South African government (local and national) with a framework that will help to strengthen a previously unequal system of education, particularly for those students who were most at risk for failure (Biersteker, 2010; Minaar & Foster, 1997; Williams & Samuels, 2001).

Meanwhile, research on South African ECD also highlighted the need to train ECD teachers in addition to accrediting the teacher-training service providers (Biersteker, 2010; Minaar & Foster, 1997; Williams & Samuels, 2001). Overall, the average ECD educator was a woman, aged approximately 38, and African (approximately 66%). Also, nearly 70% of the African ECD teachers had never received ECD training. While only 5% of all African ECD teachers were “qualified” ECD teachers, nearly 35% of White ECD teachers were considered to be “qualified.” In the late 1990s, nearly half of all ECD training providers were NGOs who were not accredited by the

South African Department of Education. However, it was also determined that the areas that primarily served White South Africans tended to be over-resourced in ECD training while those sectors that primarily served Black South Africans were significantly underresourced (Williams & Samuels, 2001).

It was not surprising to find that the remnants of apartheid still had an impact on the inequities facing the education of Black South African ECD students and families. It also was not surprising to find that, across all ECD indicators (e.g., support, infrastructure, program, and teachers), the White ECD sites ranked higher than the African sites (Williams & Samuels, 2001). Although racial segregation and apartheid was dismantled, it was clear that vestiges of the policy would continue to make it difficult to redress the conditions that continued to place African children at a disadvantage, not only for ECD but also for later learning opportunities.

In 2008, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act was passed (Department of Education, 2008). (See Box 2) The objectives of the NQF were to

- (a) create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements; (b) facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths; (c) enhance the quality of education and training; (d) accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.
- Another objective of the NQF was designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large. (*Government Gazette*, 2009, p. 6)

NGOs and Early Childhood Development: Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE) Program

Before the current focus on ECD in South Africa, NGOs were actively working to provide ECD opportunities (Biersteker, 2010). Due to limited government resources, inequitable funding, and legislative restrictions, most

ECD programs were connected to NGOs (Biersteker, 2010; Williams & Samuels, 2001). Therefore, most of the previously developed ECD programs were community based or were private programs (Biersteker, 2010). NGO-backed ECD programs operated on limited governmental support and often relied on fee-based structures, most frequently in African centers that received significantly fewer subsidies from the South African government (Williams & Samuels, 2001). However, despite the early challenges of limited government involvement and resources, NGOs have managed to find innovative ways to implement ECD programs in rural and urban areas within South Africa.

Since its formation in 1984, TREE (Training and Resources in Early Education) has worked toward a vision of assisting adults (mostly women)

Box 2. Preamble to the National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008

Whereas the advancement and recognition of learning is an essential attribute of a free and democratic nation and a prerequisite for the development of well-being of its citizens;

Whereas the National Qualifications Framework has been developed and implemented in terms of the South African Qualifications Act, 1995;⁸

Whereas the National Qualifications Framework has won wide acceptance as the principal instrument through which national education and training qualifications are recognized and

quality-assured; and

Whereas a review of the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework has necessitated changes to the governance and organization of the framework so that its objectives may be more effectively and efficiently realized.

BE IT THEREFORE ENACTED by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, this Act is called the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008, and comes into operation on a date determined by the Minister by notice in the Gazette.

8 The South African Qualifications Act of 1995 (SAQA) was repealed with the passing of the NQF Act.

from disadvantaged communities to provide their young children with access to quality ECD programs that promote the child's holistic development, support, health, and welfare in South Africa (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007). TREE's integrated, holistic ECD training programs are supported by a number of corporations such as D. G. Murray Trust, Jim Joel Education & Training Fund, Zenex Foundation, National Lotteries Distribution Fund, LexisNexis Butterworths, and Momentum (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007), and they provide the following services:

- Training of ECD practitioners from a cluster of 10 ECD sites per area
- Skills training for committee members
- HIV/AIDS and children elective training
- Toy making (training practitioners to make educational toys and equipment out of recyclable materials)
- Parenting programs
- Providing of educational toy kits for each ECD site
- Training of an ECD coordinator to assist with co-coordinating all ECD activities and to ensure continued stability of the ECD sites in these areas

In 2007, TREE was recognized as the largest ECD RTC in the eastern region of South Africa. TREE's head office is located in Briardene, Durban, and has regional offices in Port Shepstone, Pietermaritzburg, and Ladysmith, South Africa (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007). The TREE program has played a major role in creating an awareness of ECD among disadvantaged communities in South Africa and in lobbying for the providing of greater resources toward ECD from the state and private sector (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007). TREE's primary mission is to promote and support quality holistic ECD for children from birth to age 7 years in disadvantaged communities by

- Providing access to quality training in ECD;

- Providing access to a range of exciting low-cost ECD resources; and
- Establishing partnerships with communities, government, and NGOs to access resources to improve the conditions in which our young children can develop.

Every year, TREE trains approximately 3,000 women throughout KwaZulu-Natal and the adjacent Eastern Cape in South Africa to implement quality ECD programs for the young children in their communities. The training provided by TREE improves the educational potential of approximately 80,000 young children annually. TREE has trained in excess of 20,000 people, mostly women, since its inception in 1984, with an estimated impact on 600,000 young children. Many of these young children are living in remote and impoverished rural areas (Personal interview with Tennille Moodley, Director of Marketing, Training and Resources in Early Education [TREE], Durban University of Technology, South Africa, May 21, 2007).

In addition to affecting the early childhood education experiences of preschool children, TREE training also affects women's education, women's empowerment, and community development (Personal interview with Tennille Moodley, May 21, 2007). For example, the TREE program is implementing programs by holistic ECD cluster communities to improve the quality and sustainability of the ECD site in their geographical areas. The TREE program targets the ECD practitioners, principals, parents, committees, and community as well as ensures that ECD sites have suitable educational toys and equipment to run stimulating educational programs for their children (Personal interview with Tennille Moodley, May 21, 2007).

The TREE program has been accredited by SAQA and has provided various levels of contemporary curricula, materials, and training to Educare teachers (practitioners) as well as on-site support and monitoring, access to low-cost resources, and educational equipment (Personal interview with Tennille Moodley, May 21, 2007). TREE recently added a food and nutrition

component into their programs to help combat the effects of malnutrition among children who are nutritionally compromised. In some instances, enrollment at TREE ECD sites that have nutrition programs has increased significantly. The “spin-off effect” of the nutrition program is that parents and committee members are able to use the nutrition program skills to generate an income within their communities (Personal interview with Tennille Moodley, May 21, 2007).

TREE family-based programs include six main types of programs (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007). Each is briefly described here.

1. Parenting Programs. These programs are run in partnership with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. The main objective of this project is to continue making a better life for vulnerable children in the context of family, community, and the ECD site. The parenting program strengthens elderly caregivers and helps young parents who are heading households to become better parents. The response from parents/caregivers has been very positive. Families frequently comment on how the program has given them a better understanding of their young children’s rights and needs as well as how to provide children with necessary developmental strategies, which includes the right of play (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007).

2. Siyafundisana Programs. These programs are run in partnership with the Bernard Van Leer Foundation. With emphasis on meeting the psychosocial needs of children, the Siyafundisana Program is based loosely on a playgroup format, where the mother/caregiver and her children gather under the leadership of community women (Abaholikazi) and play with a wide variety of interactive toys and equipment. After refreshments, the children continue to play while the parents/caregivers have an opportunity to explore and discuss important issues relating to their roles and responsibilities as primary caregiver as well as the developmental rights and needs of their young children and how they can respond to these. There is considerable community participation. The Abaholikazi are selected by the community

and undergo training with TREE in a non-didactic approach to facilitating parent/caregiver involvement; they also provide a forum for discussing the challenges that face them. Communities are encouraged to identify networks and resources that could be useful and are assisted to access state resources (for example, the Child Support Grant) where possible (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007).

3. Izingane Zethu Program. This program is run in partnership with the Nelson Mandela's Children Fund, the Valley Trust, and Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education (LETCEE). The Izingane Zethu Program is involved in an exciting early childhood intervention project in the Centocow and Kranskop areas of South Africa. The project's mission is to improve the lives of orphans as well as vulnerable young children and their families through a comprehensive community-based intervention, involving all stakeholders.

4. IECDI (Integrated Early Childhood Development Initiative). This initiative is conducted in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund, known as UNICEF. The IECDI project started in 2004 in a severely under-resourced, deeply rural area in Southern Africa with a high coincidence of HIV and AIDS. IECDI was born out of a partnership among TREE, the Nkandla Municipality, and UNICEF. The initiative is driven by the vision to make a difference in the lives of young children and their families who have been made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS and poverty in South Africa (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007).

5. Appropriate Paper Technology (APT). One of the major problems identified is the lack of suitable educational equipment for the children to use, particularly in the rural areas. In response to this need, TREE has designed training courses for ECD practitioners, who are given skills to use waste materials such as cardboard, paper, and polystyrene to improvise child-size furniture and educational equipment. These items need to be made in a very specific way to ensure stability and durability. During these

training courses, practitioners are introduced to different techniques and strategies, and after the completion of the courses, practitioners are able to make a wide variety of educational toys and equipment as well as larger items (Personal interview with Tennille Moodley, May 21, 2007).

These programs explore and enable parents and caregivers to have an opportunity to discuss not only important issues relating to their roles and responsibility as primary caregivers but also the developmental rights and needs of their young children and how they can respond to those needs. Parents and caregivers in the program have reported much improved relationships between themselves and their young children through increased interaction and fun play activities. A number of income-generating activities also have been initiated for TREE program participants, for example, poultry fundraising projects and self-help group savings clubs (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007).

The issues of volunteerism and women's battles for survival within impoverished communities, in addition to the rising incidence of children orphaned by HIV and AIDS, continue to be challenges facing rural communities in South Africa. To help combat the rampant problem of HIV and AIDS within the country of South Africa, the TREE program also has integrated information strategies on HIV/AIDS for young children into all of its training courses. TREE, as a leader in the ECD field, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal and the adjacent Eastern Cape, has been through a transformation process to ensure its readiness to face the challenges facing ECD provision in South Africa (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2007).

6. Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education (LETCEE). It is the goal of LETCEE to provide accredited training to ECD teachers in deeply rural areas that will enhance the quality of education for children in remote communities. LETCEE is a social-profit organization with more than 15 years of experience in delivering training and support to ECD practitioners in remote, under-

resourced areas of the KwaZulu-Natal interior. LETCEE worked closely with the provincial Department of Education, Education, Training, and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) and the KwaZulu-Natal Early Childhood Development Consortium. LETCEE provided a unique in-residence, accredited training program for ECD practitioners, helping them to improve the management, services, and resources of their remote centers (South Africa Social Investment Exchange, 2001).

KwaZulu-Natal is under-resourced when it comes to number and quality of ECD centers. The remote, rural communities of the interior where LETCEE operates are extremely poor, with overwhelming unemployment rates. Also, there is a lack of food security, adequate housing, clean water, and sanitation. Additionally, HIV/AIDS prevalence is among the highest rates in this province. The majority of children are vulnerable or at risk, and there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about the benefits and goals of ECD. Despite the national mandate to introduce Grade R into primary schools, the majority of children younger than age 6 do not have access any preschool education. In under-resourced communities such as KwaZulu-Natal, ECD practitioners have limited access to quality training and resources (South Africa Social Investment Exchange, 2001).

Over a 12-month period, the ECD volunteer participants in KwaZulu-Natal attended eight 5-day modules that resulted in a NQF Level 4 qualification.⁹ The training took place at the LETCEE facilities in Greytown, which allowed the trainees to focus on learning, to network with other ECD practitioners, to share knowledge, and to work together to produce quality resources for their centers. The training included the core, elective, and fundamental credits required by the SAQA. During each module, the trainee made or received the teaching materials necessary for the implementation

⁹ Levels 1–3 equal basic education and ECD certificate (some high school); Level 4 equals secondary diploma and national certificate; Levels 5–8 equal postsecondary certificate and diploma in ECD.

of the National Curriculum in her classroom; these modules were designed to ensure that she would be able to deliver a high-quality ECD program. Each trainee also received a minimum of three follow-up support visits to her ECD center to ensure that the ECD training was being applied (South Africa Social Investment Exchange, 2001).

Conclusions

Although the particulars of their lives might differ, millions of mothers and fathers around the world, in both industrialized and developing countries, share the same story: finding and making time, investing energies, and stretching resources to provide for their sons and daughters. Their days are consumed in helping their children grow strong and healthy; protecting, teaching, guiding, encouraging their talents; channeling their curiosity; and delighting in their enthusiasm and their accomplishments. They search for advice and counsel from informal support networks and community agencies as they struggle, often against great odds, to do right by their children. (Department of Education, 2001, p. 3)

Although it may appear to some that issues and concerns of rural early childhood education in a place as far away as South Africa are far removed from their experience, there are many historical, cultural, economic, legislative, social, geographic, and educational parallels between the preschool education of Black South African children and African American children in rural settings. As we attempt to resolve the issues surrounding early childhood education of African American students, it is important to examine the significance, contexts, relationships, and issues that not only hinder but also affect and facilitate the effectiveness of the current systems that serve early childhood education in African American communities. This overview example of how early childhood education is being implemented in

a developing country such as South Africa demonstrates that it is imperative that scholars continue to not only examine but also propose recommendations for how education stakeholders and the education community can continue to enhance the educational experiences of African American and other minority students in rural schools.

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