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Perspectives of Parents of Black Head Start Graduates Regarding the Black-White Achievement Gap

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Telisa E. Pitts

MA, Ashford University, 2014

BS, Ashford University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The problem of this study was the achievement gap that exists between Black and White children prior to kindergarten entrance. As children continue in school this gap grows substantially; therefore, it was important to understand perspectives of stakeholders regarding this gap. The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the Black-White achievement gap, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. The research questions focused on parents' perspectives and how they believed those perspectives shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. A basic qualitative design was used to capture the insights of 15 purposefully selected parents of Black children who attended Head Start for at least one full year through semi structured interviews. Themes were identified through open coding and analyzed using thematic analysis. The trustworthiness of the study was established through member checking, rich and detailed descriptions, and researcher reflexivity. The findings revealed that parents disapproved of the Black-White Achievement Gap (BWAG) and perceived it as unfair. Parents also felt compelled to focus on various skills that they felt were significant to ensure kindergarten success. This study has implications for positive social change by increasing understanding of perspectives of parents of Black Head Start students regarding the Black-White achievement gap and how those perspectives shaped their actions in preparing children for kindergarten success.

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Dedication

I am thankful for God's presence throughout this journey. I am grateful to be surrounded by so many people who supported me during this long endeavor. I dedicate this work to my children Mareek, Chakori, and Yakora who have patiently endured this journey with me. I dedicate this to my mother, Cheryle Allen, my shero. You are the epitome of fearless. Your wisdom and prayers have helped me persevere. You have been an amazing model to follow. To my father, James Allen, thank you for believing in me. Thank you for your unconditional love and continuous check-ins to see where I was in the journey. Your consistent thoughtfulness means more to me than you will ever know. I hope to continue to make you both proud. To my stepmother, Eartha, thank you for encouraging me to endure until the end.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study, I explored the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the achievement gap that exists between Black and White students. This study was important because perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the Black-White achievement gap (BWAG), and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness, may affect children's kindergarten success. At kindergarten entry, developmental gaps are already significant among minorities and low socioeconomic status (SES) children (Puccioni, 2019), such as those who are overrepresented in the Head Start population (Head Start, 2018a), and achievement gaps between Black and White children exist at the preschool level and are evident at kindergarten entrance. Young children who grow up in middle class homes acquire 60% more words than children who grow up in lower class homes and by the time they enter kindergarten this gap broadens (Hindman et al., 2016). By kindergarten, high SES children score two years ahead of their low SES peers on language development assessments (Hindman et al., 2016). Jarrett and Coba-Rodriquez (2018) suggested that children in African American families are more likely than other children to experience ineffective kindergarten transitions. Low-income children are the target population of the Head Start program (Jenkins et al., 2016), and Black children comprise a greater percentage of Head Start enrollment than their representation in the general community (Head Start, 2018a). There is very little known about parent perspectives regarding the achievement gap that exists between Black and White students and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten

readiness. Recommendations and suggestions derived from study findings may help close the achievement gap between Black and White students. In this chapter, I introduce this basic qualitative study, including the background of the problem, problem statement, the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework, research questions, and the significance of the study.

Background

Bond and Lang (2018) revealed that reading scores at kindergarten entrance for Black students were approximately .32 standard deviations lower than for White students and this gap increased by the spring of the kindergarten year, despite kindergarten instruction. Reading tests among Black children show a trajectory of acquiring 0.6 standard deviations less academic progress than Whites over the same period of instruction; kindergarten mathematics scores showed more than a one-year deficit between Black and White students, and this difference was unchanged on later test scores (Bond & Lang, 2018). Gillborn et al. (2017) found kindergarten mathematics scores reflect the actual gap in educational attainment among Black and White students. Marschall and Shah (2016) added that in the past 24 years, the reading and mathematics gap among Black and White students has only decreased by about 4.9%.

By the time children enter kindergarten, there is a substantial gap in academic achievement between African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups (Downer et al., 2016). The achievement gap that exists between Black and White students dates back at least to the 1940s (Mocombe, 2017). The disparities between Black and White children are evident when children enter kindergarten and are present throughout school (Benner

et al., 2016). Poor kindergarten outcomes among African American children continue to be one of the most difficult barriers for the American educational system to overcome (Downer et al., 2016; Reardon & Portilla, 2016). Although Black children about to enter kindergarten will be affected by or part of the Black-White achievement gap, no study has described their parents' perspectives regarding this gap. A review of the first 100 entries of scholarly articles published since 2017 and retrieved from Google Scholar using the search term "Black achievement gap parent beliefs," returned only one article of Black adolescents' and their parents' perspectives (Benales et al., 2019). My study filled the gap in the literature by exploring the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start students regarding the BWAG.

Problem Statement

The problem that was the focus of this study was the achievement gap that exists between Black and White children even prior to kindergarten entrance. The disparities between Black and White children are evident when children enter kindergarten and are present throughout school (Benner et al., 2016). Bond and Lang (2018) found that kindergarten reading test scores of Black children predict that they will attain 0.6 years less education than Whites and their kindergarten mathematics scores predict over a full year less education than Whites. Because parents' influence in preparing their children for kindergarten is significant (Jung, 2016), parents' perspectives regarding the BWAG may be important. Yet, according to Pucciono (2018), parental beliefs and actions, which are vital components for school academic success, have not received the attention they deserve. Jung (2016) suggested that parents' academic beliefs can vary and can be

influenced by a family's socioeconomic status and race. Although perspectives of parents of Black students regarding the BWAG have been explored for parents of adolescents (Benales et al., 2019), no study has yet been conducted to explore the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG.

Supporting parents in making the transition to kindergarten is part of the Head Start core strategies, along with promoting school readiness (Head Start, 2018a). Black children make up 29% of Head Start enrollment and Black graduates of Head Start experience the same achievement gaps described for Black kindergarteners (Bierman et al., 2014; Head Start, 2018a). Although studies in the past have focused on parental beliefs and perspectives about school readiness (Kaplan et al., 2017; Puccioni, 2019; Wei et al., 2016), there have been very few studies that have asked parents of Black Head Start children directly about the Black-White achievement gap.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. Increased understanding of the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start students regarding the BWAG was important because an academic achievement gap exists between Black and White students who enter kindergarten (Hartman et al., 2016), and parents' beliefs and actions are vital components of children's academic success (Pucciono, 2018). Understanding how parents of Black Head Start children understand the BWAG may lead to strategies that increase academic outcomes of Black students entering kindergarten. This study

contributed to the discipline by increasing understanding of the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start students regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness.

Research Questions

Two research questions (RQs) guided this study.

RQ1: What are perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG?

RQ2: How do parents of Black Head Start graduates say their perspectives regarding the BWAG shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study included the ideas of Bronfenbrenner (1979) to understand the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG and their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that everything in the environment affects human development. He further suggested that an individual's internal and external environment can influence their role-based actions, including actions by parents in their child-rearing roles (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1977) believed environmental factors have a major influence on human development and form an interrelated system of influences in the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem. Microsystems are the direct influencers in a person's present environment, mesosystems include interactions between microsystem elements, and macrosystems include societal, political, and cultural

aspects that affect human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A fundamental notion of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development is that different levels of the environment influence individuals' perspectives and actions in that environment.

The ideas of Bronfenbrenner provided a framework for my study in that they suggest the importance of social, political, and cultural influences on individuals who may be confronted with challenges in their everyday experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). How parents of Black Head Start graduates perceive the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness, reflect the influence of factors identified by Bronfenbrenner that affect human development and actions. The conceptual framework informed exploration of factors that affect how parents of Black Head Start graduates perceive the BWAG, as an element of their macrosystem, and how those perspectives shaped their actions respective to the mesosystem of their child's education, and the microsystem of their interactions with their child in promoting kindergarten readiness. The conceptual framework informed data collection and analysis to establish the relevance and rigor of the study (see Ravitch & Riggan, 2012), and served to highlight insights, discrepancies, and alternatives to create an understanding of the phenomenon under study, as suggested by Maxwell (2013). I present a further discussion of the framework in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I followed a basic qualitative design using semi structured interviews with 15 parents of Black Head Start children. Participants included parents whose children attended Head Start for at least one full year and have transitioned to

kindergarten within the past year. Participants in a basic qualitative research design

reveal how they make sense of the world based on their experiences and how their

experience constructed their knowledge (Bansal et al., 2018). In this study, I sought to

understand the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start children regarding the BWAG

and how those perspectives shaped their actions in promoting their children's

kindergarten readiness. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated qualitative research investigate

the explanations of one's reality through their experiences. Aspers and Corte (2019)

added that basic qualitative studies are effective in helping the researcher to understand a

phenomenon through the perspectives and worldviews of others. This study used

interviews of 15 parents for the data collection process. I analyzed resultant interview

transcripts using thematic analysis.

Definitions

The following are definitions of terms used in the study:

Black: for this study, Black refers to a specific group of people who are

categorized by the complexion of their skin (Davis, 2010).

Head Start: a program designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing

preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their

emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs (Head Start, 2018b).

Parent: for this study, a parent is a caretaker of a child (Barnett, 1985) and may

include biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, and legal guardians.

School readiness: for this study, school readiness is defined as children's mastery

of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later

learning and life such as physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Head Start, 2018a).

Assumptions

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), assumptions are necessary in the context of a study. An interview-based study relies on the truthfulness and representativeness of informants who provide the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this study, I assumed that parents would provide responses that accurately depict their perspectives of the BWAG and how those perspectives shaped their actions in promoting kindergarten readiness in their children. I also assumed that parents are typical of parents of Black Head Start graduates generally, and that their children are representative of Black Head Start graduates generally. These assumptions are typical in an interview-based study, in which data are dependent on the veracity of informants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG and how those perspectives shaped their actions in promoting kindergarten readiness in their children. I sought to increase understanding of how parents of Black Head Start children regard the BWAG and how their perspectives on the achievement gap shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. This understanding may then lead to decreasing the academic gap that exists between Black and White students entering kindergarten.

This study was delimited to include parents of Black kindergarten students who attended Head Start for at least one full year and have transitioned to public kindergarten

within the past year. Parents of children who attended Head Start were the focus of this study because Head Start enrollment is limited to low-income children (Jenkins et al., 2016), and Head Start enrolls a greater proportion of Black children than is present in the general population (Head Start, 2018a). Low-income is a limiting factor in children's readiness for kindergarten (Hindman et al., 2016), and so increases the need for parent action in support for kindergarten readiness. Parents of Black students are more likely to be influenced by the BWAG than are parents of White students. In addition, participants in this study resided in a single metropolitan area in a southeastern state in the United States, which limited extraneous factors of education governance and social and political climate that may vary from state to state and area to area in the United States. Excluded from this study were parents of children who are not Black or who are not attending public kindergarten, parents of children who did not attend Head Start for one full year, and parents who live in other regions. In this study, I addressed explicitly macrosystem factors included in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and included microsystem and mesosystem factors as they are reported as relevant by parents. Microsystem factors included the child themselves and other near influences, such as the child's other parent. Mesosystem factors included the child's teacher and Head Start center administrator and influences from parents' friends or relatives. These micro- and mesosystem factors may be referred to by parents, and thus informed this study. The macrosystem factor of the BWAG, and parents' perceptions of that gap and the factors that create, support, or reduce it, formed the main application in this study of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Interview questions were purposely open-

ended, so parents might suggest factors from the full range of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.

Results of this study may transfer to contexts in which parents of Black Head Start graduates, the BWAG, or support for kindergarten readiness is a focus. Transferability may be less likely for studies of parents of children who did not attend Head Start, parents of students older than kindergarten age, parents of children who attend private schools, and parents of children who are not Black. The transferability of this study may also be limited in geographic regions outside of the American southeast because of cultural and regional factors. I provide thick, rich descriptions of data collection and analysis, so readers may determine transferability to their own contexts.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study was that in the year prior to commencement of this study a deadly pandemic caused childcare facilities and public schools to close altogether or to conduct instruction remotely using online communication tools while children remained in their homes, presumably under their parents' care. Parents' perspectives regarding their child's school experience over that time, the actions they took to support their children's education, and their children's actual academic success all may reflect differences from what would otherwise have been the case had childcare centers and public schools operated as they ordinarily do. In addition, because of limitations created by the ongoing pandemic, I conducted interviews by telephone or Zoom instead of in person, which limited participation in the study by some parents and limited my ability to capture nuances of body language and facial expression. These limitations were

necessary to conduct interviews in a manner that supports public health. According to

Ravitch and Carl (2016), such limitations are necessary when uncontrollable factors

disrupt plans for data collection with informants who are naturally enmeshed in everyday

challenges.

A further limitation was that only parents who have time to speak with me during

daytime hours can be included in this study, which limited participation of parents who

work multiple jobs or overnight shifts, and parents with complex home situations may

have chosen not to participate. These factors may affect transferability of my results,

because the parents from whom I gathered data may represent a limited segment of the

target population. Dependability of results should not be affected by these limitations,

because the veracity of participant reports should remain reliable (see Ravitch & Carl,

2016). These limitations were inherent in this study because I focused on parents of small

children who attended Head Start.

Lastly, my own biases and values influenced study outcomes and caused

limitations. My experience in this field increased the potential for intrusion of bias, bias

which requires vigilance on the part of the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To address

this limitation, I employed reflexivity techniques. I completed a reflective diary of my

thoughts and responses to the research process. This diary included my decisions and the

reasons for them to raise awareness of influences of my interpretations of the data and

their relationship to the research topic (Morrell-Scott, 2018). I also completed field notes

to record the actions of each participant during the interview process. According to

Rettke et al. (2018), reflexivity allows researchers to intentionally bring awareness to

their intentions and actions through self-reflection to increase transparency and credibility.

Significance

This study was significant because the results described perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. The results of this research added to the body of knowledge in the field of early childhood education regarding parents' perspectives of the BWAG and how those perspectives shaped their actions in promoting children's readiness for kindergarten. Parent actions are closely linked to school readiness outcomes (Dettmers et al., 2019). When more is known about parents' perspectives regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's readiness for kindergarten, Head Start teachers and center administrators may be guided in ways to further support parents in their readiness efforts. As a result, positive social change resulted when Black Head Start children begin kindergarten more prepared than before for academic success in kindergarten and the achievement gap for Black children may diminish.

Summary

The problem that was the focus of this study was the achievement gap that exists between Black and White children even prior to kindergarten entrance. Perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding this achievement gap that are unexplored. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model suggested that perspectives and actions are influenced by macrosystem factors, such as those reflected by the BWAG, and

perspectives and actions may also reflect microsystem and mesosystem influences, such as those reflected in proximate relationships and relationships with less-proximal individuals. In this study, I explored parent perspectives regarding the BWAG and how those perspectives shaped their actions in promoting their children's readiness for kindergarten. In this chapter, I described the purpose, nature of the study, conceptual framework, research questions, assumptions, and scope of the study. In Chapter 2, I present a literature review that supports and addresses factors about the BWAG, kindergarten readiness, and how parents prepare their children for academic success in kindergarten.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that was the focus of this study was the achievement gap that exists between Black and White children even prior to kindergarten entrance. Perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding this achievement gap were unexplored. The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. Kindergarten reading test scores of Black children predict that they will attain 0.6 years less education than Whites and their kindergarten mathematics scores predict over a full year less education than Whites, according to Bond and Lang (2018). The need for this study was justified since the Head Start enrollment in the target county in a southeastern state in the United States is 82% Black or African American (Head Start, 2018a). In this chapter I provide an overview of the literature search strategy, description of the conceptual framework, and a review of the current literature on the topic. I concluded this chapter with a summary and a transition to Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted a search of the literature concerning parents' perspectives regarding the BWAG and parents' actions in preparing their children for kindergarten. The literature in this review was derived from various electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, and the Walden University library. I primarily sought out articles in peer-reviewed journals that were published in the last five years, from 2016 to present. Key words searched in each database included variations of

achievement gap, Black-White achievement gap, early childhood education, Head Start,
kindergarten readiness, parent's attitudes, parent's beliefs, parent engagement, parent
involvement, parent's role, parent's actions, kindergarten readiness, school readiness,
minority, and *socioeconomic status.* I conducted iterative search actions by finding new
terms embedded in previously located articles, then using those new terms in a fresh
search. Terms applied in iterative searches included *attributions, race socialization,* and
sociopolitical development.

Conceptual Framework

This study was framed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to
explore perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and
how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten
readiness. This theory considered the action of factors in an individual's environment that
affect human development. These factors included the microsystem, mesosystem, and
macrosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner, the microsystem includes influences from
close interpersonal relationships and other factors that directly affect an individual.
Mesosystem factors include less-proximate relationships, such as with teachers, friends,
and coworkers, and everyday settings. Macrosystem factors encompass cultural, social,
and political influences. Bronfenbrenner indicated that how the environment is
experienced provides the foundation that shapes human development across all ages. To
that point, Backonja et al. (2014) used Bronfenbrenner's theory to frame a study of older
adults, and Eriksson et al. (2018) applied Bronfenbrenner's theory to public mental health
policy.

Microsystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem is the immediate surroundings in which there is a consistency of activities, actions, and interpersonal connections through both verbal and nonverbal actions. This environment includes family, friends, school, neighborhood, or childcare environments. The microsystem is the system closest to the individual and where direct contact occurs (Neal & Neal, 2013). The microsystem consists of key individuals that play vital roles and engage in connections and reciprocal interactions. Bronfenbrenner believed the microsystem embodies all entities within a social system, in a specific setting, and the engaged interactions between individuals. Positive reciprocal relationships between parent and child, for example, can influence parent's role identification and support actions taken on behalf of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Mesosystem

The mesosystem is composed of an arrangement of microsystems and focuses on the connections between them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This second environmental level includes interactions between home and school or work, between an individual and their colleagues or peers, or between the family and a community group. Neal and Neal (2013) described the mesosystem as the interactions between two key individuals and their setting. The mesosystem occurs when two individuals in an environment actively participate in forming social connections through formal and informal communication where perspectives and experiences are exchanged (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The relationships that exist within microsystems help regulate the connections between

mesosystems (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). Vélez-Agosto et al. concluded that

microsystems, mesosystems, and macrosystems are dependent of one another through

individual interactions, and due to their fluidity, there is no clear distinction among the

systems.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem involves social and cultural elements and interactions with one

another within the micro- and mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Macrosystem

factors include levels of wealth or poverty, levels of access to opportunity, political

influence, and levels of goods and services indicative of scarcity or plenty

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Neal and Neal (2013) described the macrosystem as the cultural,

economic, and social dynamics that contribute to how a person reacts in their setting. An

example that Neal and Neal used is the role of culture in influencing parenting practices.

In my study, the phenomenon of the BWAG constituted the key macrosystem factor I

explored with participants. I used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a frame

for focusing on factors that contribute to the macrosystem phenomenon of the BWAG,

and to microsystem and mesosystem factors parents identify as contributing or

responding elements in their efforts to promote kindergarten readiness in their children.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

More than 80% of low-income children, such as those who attend Head Start,

enter kindergarten less ready than their more advantaged peers (Peterson et al., 2018).

Parent actions in support of children's kindergarten readiness can have a positive effect

on readiness levels (Roy & Giraldo-Garcia, 2018). However, parents of Black Head Start

students may be influenced by the threat of the BWAG, which is observed even in kindergarten students. This review of the literature included information related to kindergarten expectations for readiness, Head Start support for kindergarten readiness, parent actions in support of children's education, parent actions in preschool, barriers to parent actions, parent actions in Black families, and the BWAG.

Kindergarten Expectations for Academic Readiness

Kindergarten readiness, also referred to as school readiness, is the premise that, before entering kindergarten or first grade, preschool aged children gain appropriate academic and behavioral skills that assist them in being ready to learn upon entering the classroom (Manfra et al., 2016). According to Head Start (2019), children are ready for kindergarten when they can retain the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to become successful in school and beyond. When parents are actively involved in the transition from preschool to primary school, children are more likely to achieve expected learning outcomes (Povey et al., 2017).

Kindergarten success is predicated on specific reading, mathematics, and social-emotional achievements prior to kindergarten entry (Miller & Goldsmith, 2017). For example, at kindergarten entry, children are expected to demonstrate mathematics skills consistently, such as the ability to solve problems using numbers, to use instruments accurately for measuring, to understand graphing activities, and to sort a group of materials by various rules and attributes (Manfra et al., 2016). Literacy expectations typically include the ability to comprehend books read aloud, demonstrate phonological awareness, show alphabetic and print knowledge, and demonstrate a motivation and

appreciation of reading (Shah et al., 2018). Social-emotional expectations include development of executive functions, social interaction skills, communication skills, and approaches to learning (Gottfried & Ansari, 2019). The child at kindergarten entrance must be teachable and ready to learn (Bassok et al., 2016).

Results from two kindergarten cohort of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study revealed that attainment of readiness goals is a major determining factor on whether a child is successful or not in kindergarten (Bassok et al., 2016). The readiness assessment in the target state focuses on a child's mastery of concepts that include phonemic awareness, phonics, general readiness, literary comprehension, structural analysis of story, and vocabulary (School Renaissance Institute, 2001). In the target state, mathematical and social-emotional skills are not a part of the kindergarten entry assessment. The results of this assessment provide detailed reports on the developmental levels of each child during kindergarten entry.

In a study that assessed the parents using the Research-Based Developmentally Informed Parent Program revealed that encouraging parents' understanding of kindergarten readiness skills help them assist their children to acquire those skills (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017). Findings from this research are strengthened by the overall study design, which randomized parents to an intervention and control group, and the use of multiformat, multimethod assessment strategies, including parent-report, teacher-report, and direct assessment of children, whereas a limitation was that parent efficacy was not measured, limiting the degree to which the construct of parent academic expectations can be fully interpreted (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017). Manigo and

Allison (2017) noted that increasing parent knowledge of kindergarten expectations will equip parents to effectively promote those skills. Supporting parents' understanding of kindergarten requirements will improve children's outcomes in kindergarten literacy, self-directed learning, and social-emotional development (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017a).

Head Start Support for Kindergarten Readiness

Head Start is a program that began in 1965 to target low-income families and children who are at risk of entering kindergarten unprepared by providing them with a preschool education (Jenkins et al., 2016). According to Head Start (2019), children are ready for kindergarten when they can retain the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to become successful in school and beyond. One of the Head Start approaches is to collaborate with parents when choosing school readiness goals (Head Start, 2019). When parents are actively involved in the transition from preschool to primary school, it is more likely to have a positive impact on learning outcomes (Povey et al., 2017). In this study, survey data are collected from various schools in various communities, however the research only included the perspectives of school Principals and members of Parents and Citizens Associations.

Head Start was designed to help children build skills that are needed for kindergarten (Wells, 2018). Head Start supports developmentally appropriate milestones that four-year-old children should accomplish before they enter kindergarten (Bauer & Schanzenbach, 2016). The program includes 540 hours of instructional time from August to May, high literacy standards, manageable classroom size, and skilled teachers (Wells,

2017). The focus of this free prekindergarten program is to enhance prereading, math, language, and social skills (Phillips et al, 2016). This free program works collaboratively with each state's department of education, local early learning coalitions, and public and private providers, to ensure all four-year old children have access to high quality prekindergarten education programs (Wells, 2018). The goal of this free program is to produce positive child outcomes based on high standards and accountability (Bauer & Schanzenbach, 2016).

The Head Start program aligns with the early learning standards established in each state, which assist educators in linking developmental trajectories to related state-determined competence levels (Gerde et al., 2018). Within these areas of development are standards regarding what children are expected to demonstrate depending upon their age level (Gerde et al., 2018). These standards are included in Head Start's Child Development and Early Learning Framework and are goal driven to help create a path of success and support teachers as they plan instruction (Head Start, 2019). The areas consist of the following: physical development, approaches to learning, social emotional development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific inquiry, social studies, and creative expression (Paulk et al., 2017).

Children in the Head Start program are assessed three times a year while attending the program: the beginning, middle, and end of the year (Miller et al., 2017). The assessment is aligned with the early learning standards for the state in which it operates. Instructors within the program monitor student progress in four areas: print knowledge, phonological awareness, mathematics, and oral language/vocabulary (Miller

& Bassok, 2019). The results of these assessments allow teachers to periodically analyze how well a child can demonstrate and comprehend various skills (Miller et al., 2017). Use of such assessments also guide teachers on how to plan effectively for their classroom and individual children, therefore promoting differentiated instruction (Miller et al., 2017). The assessment focuses on preacademic skills that promote later reading and mathematical success (Miller & Bassok, 2019).

The assessment aligns with the kindergarten readiness screening used in the state in which the program occurs (Ansari & Winsler, 2016). The kindergarten readiness screener is administered to all children entering kindergarten within the first 30 days of each school year (Ansari & Winsler, 2016). Use of this screener helps educators determine how ready children are for kindergarten (Quirk et al., 2016). Based on the early learning standards of the state, the screening process also evaluates the readiness rate achieved by individual Head Start providers and how well they are preparing four-year-old children for kindergarten (Quirk et al., 2016).

Parent Actions in Support of Children's Education

Parent actions to support children's education include parents' involvement in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of their children (Munje & Mncube, 2018), including working with teachers to improve the learning, development, and health of children (Cutshaw et al., 2020). Epstein (2018) included six categories for parent involvement that foster specific actions in their child's educational environment, including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Additionally, Child Trends (2018) measured

parent involvement by parents' presence in general meetings, parent-teacher conferences, school or classroom events, volunteering, or serving on a school committee.

Traditionally, teachers have limited parent involvement to tasks like assisting children with homework, communicating with teachers, and being actively involved in at-home activities; however, parent actions are based on recognition of the significance of education to children and creating an environment that reflects that significance (Harris & Robinson, 2016). Al-Fadley et al. (2018) revealed that teachers in defined parent involvement as parents actively working as partners in the process of educating their children. Parent actions, therefore, are not merely tasks performed but the mindset that motivates those tasks.

The traditional conception of parent involvement is based in tasks for parent actions in their child's classroom or school that are assigned to parents by the school. For example, Erdener (2016) found that principals defined parent involvement as parents' actions that include attending meetings and school visits, communicating with teachers, and parents participating in social and cultural activities during school. Child Trends (2018) defined parent involvement as a shared responsibility among parents and schools where both parties are committed to supporting and improving children's education. This commitment on the part of parents may not be obvious to school personnel, since it is manifest in an internal mindset and in actions that are unassigned and unmonitored by the school. Educators agree that the involvement of parents is important to children's academic success (Erdener, 2016). In this study, I focused on actions parents take or can

take, which may not be noticed by teachers as parent involvement, but which may

influence children's readiness for kindergarten.

Parent Actions in Preschool

Parental actions in early childhood play a major role in a child's education

(Zeynep, 2016). For example, a focal point of the Head Start program is to ensure

families are ready to support their children's learning (Head Start, 2019). During

preschool, how parents support developmental milestones can influence their child's

learning outcomes (Ma et al., 2016; Zeynep, 2016). The actions that parents take are

relevant to the milestones of early childhood development due to the influence that parent

behaviors have on child outcomes (Zeynep, 2016). Head Start added that parents are

children's first teachers and know characteristics about their children better than anyone

else; therefore, including their own cultures and the role they would like to play in

supporting their children's education is important. This whole family approach to

preparing parents to support their children for kindergarten entry bridges the gap between

parent involvement and kindergarten readiness (Veitch, 2017). However, Herman and

Reinke (2017) reported that daily communication between parents and teachers and

parent involvement in the classroom decrease after children transition to elementary

school; therefore, it is critical that preschool teachers support parent actions and

capitalize on the opportunity to help parents prepare their children for kindergarten.

Han et al. (2017) revealed that reading to their children at home and providing a place for

their children to complete their educational activities were among the parent actions that

were displayed at a moderate to high level during preschool. Additionally, Han et al.

cited parents who took their children to the local library and brought home materials were successful in preparing children for kindergarten entry. Deniz Can and Ginsburg-Block (2016) reported that families that engage in interactive actions like joint book reading, and skill instruction increase children's educational achievement in preschool. Other noninteractive actions parents take at home that support children's learning include encouraging children to read independently, maintaining a regular morning and bedtime schedule, and reviewing schoolwork (Deniz Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2016).

Puccioni (2018) found that children whose parents reported consistent home-based activities, such as telling stories, singing songs, reading books, and playing building games, scored higher on reading and mathematics assessments at kindergarten entry. Some parents also use crossword puzzles and flash cards to help children identify letters and numbers (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriquez, 2019). Parents help children learn to write by encouraging them to doodle and scribble on paper (Deniz-Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2016). Parents take actions at home to increase social emotional skills as well. Kang et al. (2017) discovered that to prevent an uneasy adjustment to kindergarten and children's challenging behaviors that may interfere with kindergarten success, parents initiate conversations with their children about how behavior expectations in kindergarten may differ from those permitted in preschool. Additionally, Kang et al. mentioned that parents connect with people in their community and previous kindergarten parents to receive insight on their experiences and how they prepared their children for kindergarten.

Vandermaas-Peeler et al. (2017) found that when preschool parents do not receive guidance or instruction, they are unlikely to provide effective at home experiences for children. For example, during science and math activities at home, parents who did not receive guidance or instruction provided low-level interactions that consisted of memorization and closed-ended responses from children (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2017). Marti et al. (2018) found is a significant relationship between parent instruction in strategies to support their children school readiness skills and children's achievement of literacy benchmarks in preschool. According to Hayes et al. (2016), parents are more likely to adopt quality home experiences when they receive feedback on how to improve their interactions with children. Support for parents-as-teachers is particularly important for children in minority and disadvantaged households (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Mendez and Swick (2018) have suggested that parental understanding about school readiness can be related to the level of involvement in preparing their children for kindergarten.

One of the most critical components of educating children is what parents do (Kuru Cetin & Taskin, 2016). Roy and Giraldo-Garcia (2018) stressed that a parent's role is critical in promoting a child's learning process and meeting their developmental milestones. Park and Holloway (2017) used the ECLS-K dataset to examine the relative impact of parental involvement on individual student academic achievement over time in mathematics and reading. The results of this study rendered evidence concerning the effectiveness of school-based parent involvement on increasing school-based parent involvement, however the large dataset did not include information on parents'

assessments of the quality of their school involvement, nor does it tap into diverse types of parent involvement practices that may be particular to certain communities. Holloway (2017), parent action includes parents' active participation in the process of their child's overall development in the school or home setting. This may include reciprocal interactions during volunteering, communication with teachers during parent-teacher conferences, and attendance at school events during the early school years (Daniel et al., 2016), but also may include actions that occur in the home setting, like reading aloud and encouraging vocabulary development. Parent actions should not be mundane but genuine, so that children can observe their parents consistently engaging in supporting their children in their academic development (Roy & Giraldo-Garcia, 2018).

Parent actions are multifaceted, connecting family attributes, home environments, and opportunities for learning (Mendez & Swick, 2018; Robinson, 2017). Using a randomized trial group randomized trial, Herman and Reinke (2017) examined the effects of the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management program on teacher perceptions of contact and comfort with parents. Herman and Reinke found that parents who engaged more with their children at home during preschool and kindergarten were more involved in both community and school settings than parents who were less involved. Additionally, parents who were more active in their children's learning also communicated more with school staff (Herman & Reinke, 2017). Findings from this study suggested that assessing teachers' perceptions of families and providing teachers with the necessary skills to develop and maintain quality interactions with parents, will increase parent actions that support children's academic success (Herman & Reinke,

2017). In grades kindergarten to first grade, collaboration between school and family can help meet the needs of children and develop meaningful relationships between school staff and families (Short, 2018). A key element in stimulating academic outcomes in kindergarten is the enhancement of parent actions in their home environment (Janssen & Vandenbroeck, 2018).

Since children are heavily dependent upon their parents and their environment, the quality of parenting skills and access to learning resources play important roles in children's school success (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2016; Herman & Reinke, 2017). Yamamoto et al. (2016) noted the roles of parents of second grade children are highly influenced by their own beliefs and the beliefs of those around them. When parents practice beliefs that do not necessarily align with school expectations, it may create barriers when attempting to engage the parents (Herman & Reinke, 2017). How families prepare their children for school in their home environment is important and it should closely resemble how a child is prepared at school (Puccioni et al., 2019). There is a strong association between parent actions and student achievement when there is reciprocal feedback between parents and children about everyday school experiences (Barnes et al., 2016). Arce (2019) applied four data collection approaches to conclude that in kindergarten, consistent parental visits at school can prompt children to feel that parents are attentive to their needs and increase student engagement. While this research was composed of small sample size and the findings not being able to be generalized, it was revealed that parents had a strong desire to form partnerships on behalf of their children (Arce, 2019).

Short (2018) used a Response to Intervention framework and discovered parents are disheartened when they lack understanding about school expectations and about what their children are learning in kindergarten to first grade. Through parent involvement, parents can gain a better understanding of school expectations and develop quality connections between teachers and administrators which can also lead to increased parent actions in support of children's education and student achievement in early learning years (Anthony & Ogg, 2019). Understanding the difference between parental and teacher expectations may help increase parent involvement and inspire parent actions (Rattenborg et al., 2019). For those parents who are not familiar with school readiness expectations or how to meet them, parental involvement may overcome this (Arce, 2019). Analyzing data gathered from individual and group interviews, Robinson (2017) stated that parents unanimously agreed on the importance of parental involvement and its effects on school achievements in elementary school; however, they were not certain about what actions to take to be more engaged in their child's education. Kindergarten parents who are knowledgeable about school expectations display higher levels of self-efficacy in promoting their children's academic achievement and have increased home school partnerships, than kindergarten parents who do not (Lau & Ng, 2019). Barnes et al. (2016) uncovered misconceptions about school expectations and policies by parents that create a barrier to parent engagement during early learning years. Barnes et al. (2016) added that barriers such as parent's time, communication, or culture may hinder parent engagement and limit parent actions. Short concluded that barriers do exist that prevent families from being actively engaged in supporting their child's education, even though

his study used self-reported data which cannot be verified. Arce believed that when parents are active in their child's education, this engagement increases the opportunities for parents to make connections between classroom content and out of school experiences.

Parents' attitudes toward education can affect the actions they take in support of their child's education, specifically how they model behavior to children in prekindergarten and kindergarten (Puccioni, 2018). Using focus groups and the inductive approach, Barnes et al. (2016) stated that parents who understand the expectations of their child's education tend to develop higher expectations and believe their child's outcomes can improve. Jung (2016) asserted that a child's attitude about school is directly related to the parent's attitude about school, therefore it is important for parents to become actively engaged and positively connected in the educational process. The early Childhood Longitudinal Study of Kindergarteners dataset used by Jung revealed that parents' readiness beliefs and family activities were significantly related to children's reading skills. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2019) acknowledged that parent educational beliefs can influence their actions in how they promote their child's school readiness.

Han et al. (2017) established a relationship between parent practices and adjustment during kindergarten transition, and that parent actions are related to how a child approaches learning at kindergarten entry. Parent actions are needed to help support children with beginning school education to promote positive school adaption, as this time can be unsettling due to new school expectations and routines (Eisenhower et al., 2016). Eisenhower's et el. pilot study is strengthened by its evaluation of outcomes

across multiple settings; however, no follow-up was administered to determine if the data had changed throughout the school year. During early school transition, parents should foster a home environment that encourages children to become independent and gradually adapt to the classroom environment (Anderson et al., 2018). Parents provide the first experiences for their children; therefore, they should be a part of the transition process from preschool to kindergarten (Janssen & Vandenbroeck, 2018). Many studies acknowledge the need for school administrators and teachers to provide opportunities that promote increased parental actions at every school level (Erdener, 2016; Park & Holloway, 2017). Markstrom and Simonsson (2017) mentioned that when preschool teachers changed their approach to parents by viewing them as proficient assets to their child's education, parent participation and self-regulation increased.

Yingling and Bell (2016) noted a connection between parental actions and decreased behavior problems in the home and preschool setting. Miller et al. (2018) revealed that parents believe that developing high-level social-emotional skills are a necessity and that children need support to reach this goal through the use of surveys, although it is important to note that this was not a random sample of parents, so these results do not represent all parents. Dinallo (2016) reported that parents are interested in early childhood education research when they are exposed to it and are willing to incorporate new routines to increase social emotional development, such as having family discussions about children's feelings. High quality and collaborative caregiving in the preschool and home environment have a significant influence on the social-emotional development during preschool and well into the first grade (Russell et al., 2016). A study

conducted by Thompson and Carlson (2017) revealed in a pilot study that preschool parents were who actively participated in social-emotional development workshops found the information helpful and were eager to use the skills attained to transform their own behaviors as well as their children's behavior, although the data was parent-reported.

Barriers to Parent Actions

Parents understand the long-term benefits of education and the value of adequately preparing their children with skills to ensure kindergarten success, however there are some barriers that can prevent parents from successfully contributing to the development of those skills (Peterson et al., 2018). Peterson et al. indicated that some parents may not be fully aware of school readiness expectations at kindergarten entry or how educators assess their children's knowledge of these skills. According to Curby et al. (2018), due to this gap in awareness, parents' actions may not align with the actions needed for a smooth transition to kindergarten. Elliott and Bachman (2018) also stated that learning enrichment practices that take place in the home are strongly determined by the level of knowledge parents have about specific school readiness skills before entering kindergarten. Data was collected from a dataset of over 18,000 children along with telephone interviews from parents whereas parents only reported on the consistency of their enrichment practices, and so the study does not address whether educational beliefs relate to the quality of these interactions (Elliott & Bachman, 2018). Parents who possess the proficiency of school readiness expectations in preparing their children for kindergarten transition can influence their actions in which they engage in to support their children (Boyle & Benner, 2020).

According to Jezierski and Wall (2017) limited availability of resources is also a barrier to productive parent actions when preparing their children for kindergarten. Morris et al. (2018) stated that essential resources such as transportation, wrap-around services, and access to educational materials may not be as prominent in communities where low SES families reside. Local school services, community agencies, and the local library can all affect a child's school readiness environment (Peterson et al., 2018). Using a self-administered cross-sectional survey, Peterson et al. also found that there was not only a disparity in parental awareness of these local services but also in the utilization of those services to develop school readiness skills. Although this survey assessed school readiness across four domains: parental attitudes and behaviors; barriers; and awareness and use of local resources, only a small sample of Latino parents from a single community were surveyed (Peterson et al., 2018). Many parents agree that increased resources would help them expand their parental actions and become more involved in their children's school (Luet, 2017). Inadequate communication policies, unwelcoming school environments, and a lack of resources are all barriers that can prevent parents from better preparing their children for school (Luet, 2017). Parents from more impoverished backgrounds may face additional challenges related to providing their children with educational materials, due to fewer monetary resources (Li & Fischer, 2017).

Parents may face factors that impinge upon their time to help their child achieve kindergarten readiness such as having to work multiple jobs or long hours (Peterson et al., 2018). Jezierski and Wall (2017) indicated that parents felt that time was an issue that prevented them from assisting their children in developing school readiness skills. Luet

(2017) suggested in a 5-year qualitative study, that low-income parents are often engrossed in day-to-day obligations, which could cause challenges for them to participate in school activities. As much as parents would like to incorporate consistent parental actions, such as nightly story time readings, their work schedule can make it difficult (Peterson et al., 2018).

Parents must maintain a household and pay bills and some homes may only have a single parent responsible for caring for one or more children (Baker et al., 2016). The responsibility of caring for other children, working extended hours, and trying to support children in gaining the necessary skills for kindergarten success can be very challenging for parents (Peterson et al., 2018). Parents who spend 40 hours or more trying to keep their bills paid often have difficulty making time to go to school functions, attending meetings during the work week, or providing quality parent family actions in the home environment (Baker et al., 2016). While the Baker et al. study was designed to have multiple focus groups across six schools, only one focus group of families was held in some schools, due to the inability to recruit enough participants. Some opportunities may not be easily accessible to all parents due to economic hardships, which can create barriers for parents to participate or gain knowledge about school readiness requirements (Luet, 2017). Supporting parents in preparing their children for academic success in kindergarten is a foundational tenet of the Head Start program, which serves low-income children.

Parent Actions in Black Families

Parents of non-Hispanic Black students in grades K-12 have lower rates of parental involvement compared to parental involvement of non-Hispanic White students (Child Trends, 2018). Even though research has stressed the benefits of parents being actively involved in school and at home, preschools continue to struggle to develop quality family involvement programs that serve minority students and engage their parents (Marschall, & Shah, 2016). According to McWayne et al. (2018), there is low parent involvement among Black Head Start families because they do not feel welcomed, they feel their input is not appreciated, and they are affected by memories of their own negative school experiences. Similarly, some elementary school teachers assume that parents who encountered unfavorable occurrences in school have an unfavorable outlook on their child's educational experiences in preschool and beyond (Baker et al., 2016).

Clifford and Goncu (2019) revealed that the actions of African American parents in their child's education can be limited due to barriers that prevent high levels of parent engagement. Clifford and Goncu found that parents' work commitments interfered with actively participating in their child's education. Lechuga-Peña and Brisson (2018) added that low-income mothers who are the sole caregivers for their children have very little time to participate in school-based activities. Parents of color also report not feeling welcomed in their child's school setting and that their thoughts or concerns were dismissed when attempting to seek information about their child's education (Baker et al., 2016). Transportation issues and financial concerns may also be barriers for low-income parents when participating to school events (Baker et al., 2016).

How educators view a student's race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status can affect their expectations related to family engagement (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). Liou et al. (2019) added that when educators develop unfavorable views about students of color, it increases the likelihood that they will reinforce low academic achievement for these students along with low engagement from their parents. Logan et al. (2018) discovered that Black parents believe that White educators should have knowledge about African American history to better assist Black children with their education. Axt (2017) stated that there is a significant relationship between an educator's low standards for Black children and their decision-making as it pertains to educating Black children. Mahatmya et al. (2016) explained that when a high level of cultural awareness exists among teachers of Black students, educators are more likely to have a positive impression of the ability of Black students to obtain academic success.

According to Allen and White-Smith (2017), preschool systems that broaden their cultural view of parenting styles and actions will increase Black parent involvement over preschool systems that make no such effort. When preschools make efforts to provide parents with opportunities to get involved along with resources and incentives for actions undertaken at home, this can increase parent engagement among Black parents (Latunde, 2018). Preschools in which there is a need for increased parent actions are the preschools that struggle the most with engaging parents, therefore it is necessary to tailor parent engagement opportunities and supports that reflect various cultures, beliefs, and ethnicities represented in the student population (Povey et al., 2017).

Quality parent actions at home may help close the achievement gap among minorities and White students and supporting parental actions at home during the preschool years may increase kindergarten success for minority children (Han et al., 2017). However, Puccioni (2018) discovered that Black preschool parents believe that focusing on behavioral skills is critical when preparing their children for kindergarten, unlike Asian-American and White preschool parents, who focus more on meeting reading and mathematics expectations. For this reason, Black parents should be informed about the kinds of quality parent actions that promote kindergarten readiness through classroom visits and interactions with their child's teacher (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019). Vandermaas-Peeler et al. (2017) added that parents who receive guidance are more apt to provide experiences at home that develop the necessary skills for kindergarten readiness.

The Black-White Achievement Gap

By the time children enter kindergarten, there is a substantial gap in academic achievement between African Americans and other racial groups (Downer et al., 2016). White students score an average of 1.5 to 2 grade levels higher than Black students in the average school district (Reardon et al., 2019). The achievement gap that exists between Black and White students dates to the 1940s (Mocombe, 2017). Reardon et al. mentioned that the achievement gap encompasses the differences among ethnic groups within a community in the average availability of opportunities to acquire school readiness skills. Standardized test scores reveal the gap in achievement between Black and White students as early as kindergarten entry (Gopolan, 2019).

Gillborn et al. (2017) revealed that kindergarten mathematics scores reflect the actual gap in educational attainment among Black and White students. In 2017, the results of the Assessment of Educational Progress assessment in mathematics and reading revealed that by the time children reach fourth grade, White students score 26 points higher in reading than Black students and 25 points higher in math (NAEP gaps – Achievement gaps, 2020). Marschall and Shah (2016) stated that in the past 24 years, the reading and math gap among Black and White students has only decreased by about 4.9%. Kindergarten reading test scores of Black children predict that they will attain 0.6 years less education that Whites and their kindergarten math scores predict over a full year less education than Whites (Bond & Lang, 2018). Bond and Lang added the math test score gap is as large as the gap in educational attainment. Furthermore, Curran and Kellogg (2016) indicated that there is a large gap in achievement for science among Black students in the early years of school.

Joshi et al. (2016) explained that because more Black children than White children live in poverty, household income also contributes to racial and ethnic gaps in school readiness outcomes. For example, in 2013 Black children represented only 14% of the population but 26% of Black children lived in poverty (Joshi et al., 2016). There is a significant relationship between poverty and achievement gaps because poverty influences every facet of children's lived experiences (Duke, 2016). Students from higher socioeconomic households have more advanced executive functioning and higher school readiness skills than students from low socioeconomic households (Micalizz et al., 2019). There is a significant relationship between race, wealth, and low academic achievement

in the United States (Duke, 2016). Poor kindergarten outcomes among African American children continue to be one of the most difficult barriers for the American educational system to overcome (Downer et al., 2016; Reardon & Portilla, 2016).

Black children make up 29% of Head Start enrollment (Head Start, 2018), yet Black graduates of Head Start experience the same achievement gaps described for Black kindergarteners in general (Bustamante et al., 2018). The disparities between Black and White children are evident when children enter kindergarten and are present throughout school (Benner et al., 2016). Achievement gaps between Black and White children are about two-thirds of a standard deviation when they begin kindergarten (Valentino, 2017).

Summary

The BWAG has been studied extensively, as has parents' role in supporting children's kindergarten readiness. However, no study so far has explored perspectives of parents of Black Head Start students regarding the Black-White achievement gap, nor how those perspectives might affect how parents support their Black children's readiness for kindergarten. Although Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory suggests parents may be influenced by macrosystem factors like the BWAG, the implications of the BWAG for parents' support for children's kindergarten readiness remains unexplored. In Chapter 2, I described literature pertinent to this study, regarding parents' actions in developing children's kindergarten readiness and regarding the BWAG. In Chapter 3, I describe the method by which I conduct this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, and instrumentation. I explain the recruitment, participation, data accumulation, data analysis, ethical procedures, and issues of trustworthiness. I also provide a summary of the key points of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

I used the following two RQs to guide my study.

RQ1: What are perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG?

RQ2: How do parents of Black Head Start graduates say their perspectives regarding the BWAG shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness?

The central phenomena explored in this study were the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. Using semi structured interviews, I explored perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. I followed the narrative tradition (Aspers & Corte, 2019), by providing descriptions of the experiences of others to better understand

their behaviors, as described by Alase (2017). Studies that follow the narrative tradition paint a picture of how people experience the world by collecting stories of their encounters (Bruce et al., 2016). I considered following the phenomenological tradition, which, according to Sloan and Tuffour (2017), is used to study phenomena as they appear to one's consciousness. Phenomenology provided descriptive contexts of human experiences with a focus on contexts (Sundler et al., 2019). The narrative tradition aligns more with my study purpose, because I intended to understand perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness, which, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested, may be affected by parents' life experiences, but may not describe the phenomenon of preparing children for kindergarten in general. In support of the narrative tradition, I employed a basic qualitative design using interviews. Basic qualitative research is used to explore experiences of the participants and their meaning of those experiences (Merriam, 2015).

I rejected other qualitative methods, such as observation of parents and children, as impractical, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic that was ongoing at the time of my study, and because observation did not align with my study purpose. I considered a quantitative method, like a survey, which would have permitted me to gather data from a larger number of participants than I can interview (see Hammer, 2017). Although administering a survey could lead to quantifiable data perspectives of the BWAG, its use would not properly grant me the opportunity to ask participants clarifying questions (see Hammer, 2017). The purpose of my study was to explore perspectives of parents of Black

Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents'

actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. Parents have this

information, which I do not have; therefore, a qualitative approach using interviews was

appropriate.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative approach, there is a cohesive relationship between the researcher

and every aspect of the study (Yates & Leggett, 2016). The researcher plays an important

role in the data collection process from collecting the data to safeguarding it (Bansal,

Smith, & Vaara, 2018). In this study, I acted as an observer as I sought to understand

perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how

those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten

readiness. As a researcher, I was responsible for the research setting, facilitating the

interviews, analyzing and interpret the analysis (Yates & Leggett, 2016) to produce the

findings.

I have been an employee of Head Start for four years. I have held positions as a

Head Start teacher and early learning specialist, and I am currently an education manager.

The Head Start program where I am employed provides only Early Head Start services,

for children ages six weeks to two years old. I have worked in the past at centers that

provide Head Start services for older children (3- and 4-year-olds); however, these

centers were not in the same jurisdiction as the location of the study. Head Start services

in this area for the older children (3- and 4-year-olds) of parents who participated in this

study are provided by a different program that was not affiliated in any way with the

program where I am employed. I did not recruit any parents from any of the centers I have worked, or any parents who I know personally. I avoided a possible power dynamic that could interfere with my study's validity and there were no incentives for participating in this study.

In this study there was potential for bias due to my position with Head Start, close proximity to the problem, and experience in the field. According to Creswell (2016), bias occurs when one outcome is favored over another, causing inaccuracies within the study. To minimize any potential bias, I reflected on the experiences of my various positions to identify any attitudes or beliefs that may have contributed to bias within the study. I kept a reflective journal to provide a mechanism by which to collect my ideas as they occur during the interviews, transcription, and data analysis processes, and kept these separate from the data itself (see Meyer & Willis, 2019). In addition, I asked participants to review my transcription of our interview, as recommended by Creswell (2016), to ensure my transcriptions were complete and accurate representations of participants' views.

Methodology

In this section, I describe the methodology I used in conducting my study. I first describe the logic by which I selected participants, then my interview instrument, and procedures I used for participant recruitment and data collection. I describe how I analyzed the data. In describing the method by which I conducted this study, I hope to increase transferability by providing the reader with complete information.

Participant Selection Logic

The target population for this study included parents of Black Head Start students who reside in a single metropolitan area in a state in the southeastern United States, attended Head Start at least one full year, and have transitioned to kindergarten within the past year. I used purposive sampling to select participants. Purposive sampling allowed me to gain access to participants based on the qualities that they possess (Etikan et al., 2016). A purposive sampling strategy is justified when the researcher strategically chooses participants through a connection of experiences, participants can adequately respond to the research questions in a reflective way, and general conclusions can be drawn about the specific population based on those experiences (Campbell et al., 2020). Purposive sampling uses the available resources to gain in depth information from individuals and groups who are well rounded with the phenomenon (Etikan et al., 2016). Additionally, Etikan et al. suggested that the sampling strategies are justified by participants availability, competence, and ability to articulate their experiences.

I selected a sample of participants using the following criteria: (a) participants were parents of Black Head Start students, (b) the participants' children were enrolled in public kindergarten, (c) participants' children attended Head Start for a minimum of one year, and (d) participants' children transitioned to kindergarten within the past year. Because the race of the students is the key element of the BWAG, participant selection focused on the race of the children, not the race of the parents, because it is possible that adoptive or foster children of White parents may be Black and may be affected by the BWAG. Parents of children who attended Head Start were the focus of this study because

Head Start enrollment is limited to low-income children (Jenkins et al., 2016), and Head

Start enrolls a greater proportion of Black children than is present in the general

population (Head Start, 2018a). Low-income is a limiting factor in children's readiness

for kindergarten (Hindman et al., 2016), and so increases the need for parent action in

support for kindergarten readiness. Parents of Black students are more likely to be

influenced by the BWAG than are parents of White students. Parents of Black Head Start

students who are in grades other than kindergarten were not recruited, because it may

have been difficult for them to recall detailed readiness experiences due to the lapse in

time. To help ensure that parents met the criteria, I asked them to confirm the criteria as

each potential participant contacted me.

The sample size for this study was 15 participants. I anticipated 10 to 15

participants would be needed to reach saturation of data; however, if new concepts

emerged even in the final interviews, I planned to seek more participants until saturation

was achieved. Moser and Korstjens (2017) revealed that over 90% of all the themes

developed in analysis of interview data were provided within 12 of their 33 interviews.

Moser and Korstjens added that 15 is an adequate sample size to receive sufficient data

from which to draw conclusions and to reach saturation. According to Hennink and

Kaiser (2019), the number of participants can be determined when the data from the

study can be replicated, and no new information is attainable. I determined data

saturation as I collected and analyzed the data through an open coding process and

answered my research questions (Hennink & Kaiser, 2019). According to Blaikie (2018),

research should provide data from enough participants to adequately address the research questions.

I asked a former Early Head Start center manager, who currently serves as a center director in another state, to introduce me via email to parents of former Black Head Start students. This former Early Head Start center manager resigned from Head Start in 2018 and no longer works for Head Start in any capacity. This individual has maintained communication with Early Head Start parents in the target state whom she knew prior to her departure from Head Start, and she has agreed to introduce me via email and provide parents my contact information. I sent a flyer to this former Early Head Start center manager that she could send or give to her parent contacts to help answer questions that may come up. As prospective participants emailed me as a result of this former manager's outreach, I responded by sending them the same flier and also a consent form. The former manager was not apprised of who contacted me or who decided to participate or not participate in the study. In the event that more than 15 parents agreed to participate in the study, I would have selected the first 15 to offer their consent by replying via email with the words, "I consent." I thanked parents for their interest in my study whose consent was received later than that of the first 15 parents, and held their names in reserve, in the event that any of the 15 withdrew. If I was unsuccessful in achieving my minimum intended sample of 10 parents, I would have asked the former manager to resend the flier to the entire list she emailed before.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument I used in this study was questions to guide semi structured interviews. Semi structured interviews are composed of various intentional questions that are closely connected to the area that needs to be explored (Kallio et al., 2016). This method of data collection was appropriate for understanding the perceptions of participants about sensitive or complex issues (Summers, 2020). The use of semi structured interviews allowed me to probe for more clarity in conversation with participants about their experiences.

I used four central interview questions that included seven possible follow-up questions (Appendix A). I developed the interview questions based on the findings from the literature review and conceptual framework. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), a researcher should develop interview questions that expose and clarify detailed experiences. To help establish the validity for this study, I asked an individual who has a doctorate in education to review my interview questions considering the study problem, purpose, and research questions. Based on their input from this review, I added an interview question about the skills the parent believes a child needs to do well in kindergarten.

To answer RQ1, about parent perspectives of the BWAG, I began with interview question 1, which was intended to establish the participant's level of awareness of the BWAG. Depending on how the participant responded to this question, I offered clarification or information to support the existence of this achievement gap. Interview Question 2 asked about participant perspectives regarding the BWAG. I prepared three

follow-up questions to use if the participant seemed to need more specific detail upon

which to respond with perspectives about the gap.

To answer RQ2, on how parents' perspectives regarding the BWAG shaped their

actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness, I first relied on answers to

interview Question 3, about how the BWAG might have affected the parent's efforts to

prepare their child for kindergarten. I continued with interview Question 4, which asked

the parent to put their child's preparation for kindergarten in the context of their actual

kindergarten experience. I prepared two follow-up questions to use that helped focus the

participant's response.

I also was an instrument for data collection, since the interview questions, the

conduct of the interviews, and how data are selected and analyzed, all followed from my

personal interpretation of the study problem and purpose (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As

an instrument for data collection, I needed to control my own biases and preconceived

notions throughout the research process. To helped manage the influence of my own

perspectives, I used a reflective journal in which to record my thoughts and feelings, so I

can better recognize and manage them, as described by Alt and Raichel (2020). A

reflective journal can expose the researcher's thought process and assist with managing

those thoughts (Meyer & Willis, 2019).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board

(IRB), I contacted the former Head Start teacher who has agreed to help me locate

participants. I emailed her the flier (Appendix A) she used to describe the study for

parents who fit my criteria whom she knows. The flier included my contact information, including email address. Once potential participants emailed me, I emailed them back, reminding them of the criteria and including the consent form. Participants who wished to participate in the study sent an email back confirming they fit the study criteria and stated, "I consent." Once this was received, I set up the interview. The former Early Head Start center manager who introduced me via email and provided contact information did not know who contacted me, who qualified to participate, or who agreed to participate. I created a code for each participant who returns a consent form. I used the code of P1, P2, P3, and so on. The codes were logged on the consent form and entered on a spreadsheet.

I used as participants the first 15 individuals who replied with "I consent." I thanked subsequent people who replied and advised them that I had enough participants for the study. I retained the unselected names to use in case a selected individual withdrew from the study. If I had not reached the desired minimum of 10 volunteers, I would have contacted the former Head Start center manager and requested additional assistance in introducing me to former parents of Black Head Start students via email.

I collected data through interviews conducted by telephone or Zoom teleconferencing, using open ended questions. I allotted about 45 to 60 minutes for each interview. I assigned a code to each participant at the point of transcription. When I began each interview, I asked participants to confirm their consent. I advised participants of the interview process including the purpose of the study, and I also made them aware of their right to opt out at any point of the interview. Immediately before each interview, I informed participants that they would be audio recorded to make sure I received a

complete record of their responses, and to free me to talk with them without trying to write what they say. A key aspect of the research process was the recording of the conversations during interviews as ongoing reflection was required during this part of the process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For Zoom interviews, I recorded the audio portion of each interview only; I did not record video. I also kept field notes to record my thoughts as the interviews progress (see Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). I followed the interview protocol precisely, making sure the wording and sequence of the questions were identical to eliminate various responses due to inconsistent wording, as described by Summers (2020). I was alert to discrepancies during the interview process and employed member checking in the moment, by asking follow-up questions and probing for understanding and clarification if I received any responses that seemed confusing or contradicting to previous statements. I also regularly provided participants with my interpretations of what they have said, by recapping their responses back to them (see Bengtsson & Fynbo, 2017). At the end of the interview, I gave participants an opportunity to address any concerns or questions they may have had. I let them know I would send them a transcript of their interview, so they may review it for accuracy. I thanked them for their time and advised them to contact me if they have any questions.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews as they are completed, using the Zoom transcription function, and reviewed each transcription for errors. Once each transcription seemed accurate, I emailed the transcripts to participants for their review, as described above. If I noticed a discrepancy in the data a participant provided, I asked the participant when I

emailed them their transcript to clarify the response in question. To help participants assess the accuracy of their transcript, I emailed each transcript to participants within 48 hours of the completion of each interview, when the conversation was still fresh in a participant's memory. I incorporated any changes indicated by participants in the transcripts. When I received transcription revisions, I began data analysis using the revised transcripts as the data set.

I analyzed the data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of classifying similar occurrences in data that address the research or issue (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The first step I took was to become familiar with the data (see Nowell et al., 2017), which I did by reading the transcripts several times. I put all the transcripts into one table using Word. This table included a wide center column for transcriptions, a column on the right to insert my codes, and a column on the left for any field notes I made during each interview. I labeled each transcription by participant code. In this process of data organization, I familiarized myself with what participants said, and noticed similarities and differences of perspectives.

The second step was generating initial codes. Open coding allows researchers to separate large quantities of data into small portions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), and identify predictable patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I read through the transcripts and highlighted key words or phrases. I then copied and pasted these codes in the right column. I read through the material at least twice since new codes might have appeared in later transcripts that I did not notice early on but then realized are significant.

The third step was generating categories. This was done by identifying and analyzing the relationship among similar things (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I created a new table in an Excel file to organize the codes. I created two columns. The first column was used for all the codes and the second for the categories. I moved codes that are similar to form categories of like codes, so key ideas offered by participants began to emerge from the data.

The fourth step was determining and defining the themes. I chunked the categories to produce overall themes. During this step, I asked myself the question: "Do the themes make sense?" (see Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This question determined if I needed to make any modifications to the themes. Following Maguire and Delahunt (2017), I asked questions of the data that yielded the suggested theme, the connectedness of subthemes with the main theme, and the connection of subthemes to one another. I added a third column to the new table in the Excel file. I then moved the codes and categories around to have coherent themes in this column. The themes were supported by categories and the codes that are associated with the categories. My goal was to arrive at no more than five or six themes. After the data analysis was complete, I had an expert with a doctorate degree review my analysis to increase the validity of my study.

During the coding process, discrepant data arisen. This happened if a participant said one thing at one point during the interview, then contradicted themselves later, without noticing it. I already resolved or attempted to resolve any discrepancies I noticed during transcription, by asking the participant to clarify their responses when I emailed them their transcript. Following receipt of participant-reviewed transcripts, I was left with

discrepancies that I did not notice at the time of transcription but noticed while coding.

These discrepant cases I addressed on a case-by-case basis and reported my response to

these discrepancies in my report of my results.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The criteria used in this qualitative study to establish trustworthiness included

credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Satisfying all the criteria ensures rigor and that there is confidence in the data (Korstjens

& Moser, 2017). Demonstrating trustworthiness consists of not only selecting the most

appropriate method of data collection but also the process of how the data was collected

(Elo et al., 2014). The section below describes how I established the trustworthiness of

the findings and quality of the analysis. When trustworthiness is compromised, it

diminishes the integrity of the research (Elo et al., 2014)

Elo et al. (2014) suggested that credibility is displayed when participants

responses are truthfully and accurately portrayed by the researcher. Polit and Beck (2012)

also mentioned that credibility involves how the researcher interprets and relays

participants' views. Credibility can be established when the researcher is transparent by

sharing their involvement with the research (Cope, 2014). To increase credibility, I used

member checking through participant review of transcripts, to confirm the accuracy of

the data (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability can be met if the results of the study have meaning to individuals

not in the study (Cope, 2014). With transferability, it is the responsibility of the reader to

assess the findings to determine if there is an association between those findings and their

own experiences (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). To improve transferability, I supported this decision-making process for my reader by providing them with complete information about the study participants and the setting, what was asked of them, and what they said. I also provided thick descriptions which include the behaviors, experiences, and contexts of participants to better assist the reader in making meaningful connections to their own lives (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Dependability occurs when there are descriptions of the research process which result in future studies arriving at similar conclusions of the data (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Whittemore et al., 2001). Dependability occurs when there is consistency over time in similar situations (Cope, 2014). Misco (2007) suggested dependability speaks to future situations in various communities. Dependability depends on researcher reporting the data as reliably and precisely as possible (Creswell, 2012). This is determined when a future researcher replicates the study within a similar condition, using the same method and type of participants, and receiving the same outcome. To improve dependability, I provided an audit trail to increase transparency in my interpretations, data analysis, context of the study, and methodological decisions (Wolf, 2003).

Confirmability occurs when participant findings are not skewed by the thoughts or biases of the researcher (Elo et al., 2014). Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the data (Shenton, 2004). The researcher can establish confirmability when data are derived directly from the perspectives of the participants and not from the perspective of the researcher (Cope, 2014). One key factor for confirmability is the honesty of the researcher in revealing their own biases (Shenton, 2004). Cope also suggested that

confirmability exist when there is a clear connection between the interpretations and the findings. I recorded the process of the study from start to finish using a reflexive journal to increase confirmability. All data was stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. After the 5-year timeframe as required from Walden University's IRB, I will destroy all digital data and audio files. I will also shred all paper data.

Ethical Procedures

According to Ngozwana (2018), ethical principles prevent harm to participants while protecting human rights. Putting participants at harm is unethical (Watts et al., 2017). The researcher must reduce any opportunities that may jeopardize the confidentiality of the study participants (Mills, 2019). Additionally, Sibinga (2018) suggested that the researcher ask questions in a way that avoids harm to participants, avoids coercion, and preserves participants' confidentiality, to maintain the integrity of the study. I ensured I followed the procedures as described in this study and took care to protect the rights and interests of my participants.

To ensure this study was conducted with integrity, I submitted my study to the Walden University's IRB for approval. I did not need to gain permission from anyone at my Head Start location, because the participants are former parents of the Head Start program and was approached through their personal contact information, not through Head Start records. I also sent a consent form to every participant. The consent form provided participants with the expectations and benefits of the study. It clearly explained that the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time (see Watts et al., 2017). It also explained how the data was collected and archived.

To ensure confidentiality is maintained, all data was stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. I referred to participants by an assigned code and not by their name. After the five-year timeframe as required from Walden University's IRB, I will destroy all digital data and audio files. I will also shred all paper data. I provided written transcripts for all participants to increase transparency, accuracy, and ethical standards.

Summary

In this chapter I provided a description of the basic qualitative research design, the rationale for selecting the design, and my role as a researcher. This chapter included the description of the methodology of the study with regards to participant selection, instrumentation, and my plan for collecting and analyzing the data. I described issues of ethical procedures and trustworthiness related to qualitative research. After implementing the study, I describe the data outcomes in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study is to explore perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. Two RQs guided this study.

RQ1: What are perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG?

RQ2: How do parents of Black Head Start graduates say their perspectives regarding the BWAG shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness?

This chapter includes sections describing the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, the results, and a summary of answers to the research question.

Study Setting

This study included participants who reside in a single metropolitan area in a southeastern state in the United States. I collected data during a deadly pandemic which caused Head Start centers and public schools to close altogether or to conduct instruction remotely using online communication tools while children remained in their homes, presumably under their parents' care. The pandemic disrupted families as well as educational delivery. One parent noted "I am in the process of being evicted due to COVID-19 and I will not be able to participate." In addition, because public schools conducted instruction remotely, this affected the responses of parents as they reflected in their child's kindergarten experience. Another parent mentioned that his daughter did

average in kindergarten. He compared this experience to the experiences he had with his other children. He stated, "she did average but my other two children excelled very well. I think it was a combination of her not applying herself, the pandemic, and online schooling."

Demographics

All 15 participants met the criteria of the study. The criteria included: parents of Black Head Start students who reside in a single metropolitan area in a state in the southeastern United States, attended Head Start at least one full year, and had transitioned to kindergarten within the past year. Thirteen parents were female, and two parents were male. I assigned an alphanumeric code such as P1, P2, and so forth for parents.

Data Collection

I ensured that the data collection process aligned with the study research questions and data collection plan. The data collection process began after I obtained Walden University's IRB approval (06-11-21-0666664). I collected data from 15 participants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted interviews as video conferences using Zoom technology and as phone interviews. The use of Zoom or telephone for data collection was based on the participants' preference; three parents preferred phone interviews and 12 preferred conferencing using Zoom. One participant withdrew due to being evicted and moving but I was able to recruit another participant for a total of 15.

The interviews were scheduled within 5 days after initial contact. One participant's interview occurred outside the 5-day schedule because at the start of the interview their baby was crying, so we rescheduled the interview for the following day.

Participants were reminded 24 hours before the scheduled interview via email of the time

and day. All interviews were completed in 6 weeks. The length of each interview varied

based on the amount of information each participant shared and lasted 30 to 45 minutes. I

conducted each interview in one session in a semi structured format. During the

interviews, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure each participant

received the same information and I asked the questions in order per the protocol. All

participants received a transcript of their interview within 48 hours of the interview,

along with a request they confirm the accuracy of their transcript. There were no changes

indicated by participants after review of their transcripts. I used a reflexive journal to

record my personal thoughts throughout the entire study to control for researcher bias.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of

classifying similar occurrences in data that address the research or issue (Maguire &

Delahunt, 2017). The first step I took was to become familiar with the data (see Nowell et

al., 2017), which I did by reading the transcripts several times. I put all the transcripts

into one table using Word. This table included a wide center column for transcriptions, a

column on the right to insert my codes, and a column on the left for any field notes I

made during each interview. I labeled each transcription by participant code. In this

process of data organization, I familiarized myself with what participants said, and

noticed similarities and differences of perspectives.

The second step was generating initial codes. I read through the transcripts and

highlighted key words or phrases. I then copied and pasted these codes in the right

column. I read through the material at least twice to notice new codes that might appear in later transcripts that I did not notice early on but realized are significant. I identified 293 codes. Some of those codes were:

> I think it could affect the children if, in fact, it's not caught or the parents are not paying attention to where it's going to be—the kids are going to be struggling to get caught up to their other peers in their classrooms.

Additional codes included: "I feel like it's the resources, because at some schools, they have access to computers and printing and some schools they don't in the Black community, and it's just, that's not right;" and "I feel like I had to push him more. Like I had to—I had to make sure that he was learning more."

The third step was generating categories. This was done by identifying and analyzing the relationship among similar codes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I created a new table in an Excel file to organize the codes. I created two columns. The first column was used for all the codes and the second for the categories. I moved codes that were similar to form categories of like codes, so key ideas offered by participants would begin to emerge from the data. I created 20 categories: Black children treated differently, children unmotivated, children not prepared for KG, not enough access to resources, lack of money to support KG preparation, unfairness of the BWAG, equal treatment for Black children, Black parent experiences due to the BWAG, comprehension for KG preparation, reading for KG preparation, colors/numbers for KG preparation, letter recognition for KG preparation, make learning fun/hands on, importance of SE skills, sight words for KG preparation, encouragement/motivation before KG entry,

familiarization w/ expectations, utilized siblings, utilized resources, and researched

resources.

The fourth step was determining and defining the themes. I chunked the

categories to produce overall themes. During this step, I asked myself the question: "Do

the themes make sense?" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This question determined if I

needed to make any modifications to the themes. Following Maguire and Delahunt, I

asked questions of the data that yielded the suggested theme, the connectedness of

subthemes with the main theme, and the connection of subthemes to one another. I added

a third column to the new table in the Excel file. I then moved the codes and categories

around to have coherent themes in this column. The themes were supported by categories

and the codes that were associated with the categories. My goal was to arrive at no more

than five or six themes, and I arrived at five. The fives themes were negative effects of

the BWAG on Black children, lack of access to opportunities/resources, disapproval of

the BWAG, parent actions for KG readiness, and pressure of the BWAG on KG

preparation. Not all themes that emerged from the data were relevant in answering the

study RQs but suggested additional findings. The categories and themes are depicted in

Figure 1.

Figure 1

Themes with Associated RQs and Categories

Themes - RQs	Associated Categories	
Negative effects of the BWAG on Black children - RQ1	• Black children treated differently • Children are unmotivated • Children are not prepared for kindergarten	
Lack of access to resources and opportunities - RQ1	• Not enough access to resources • Lack of money for kindergarten preparation	
Disapproval of the BWAG - RQ1	• Unfairness of the BWAG • Equal treatment for Black children • Black parent experiences due to the BWAG	
Parent actions for kindergarten readiness - RQ2	• Comprehension skills • Reading skills • Colors/number recognition • Letter recognition	• Make learning fun/hands on • Social-emotional skills • Sight words • Encouragement/motivation
Pressure of the BWAG on parents for kindergarten preparation - RQ2	• Familiarization w/ expectations • Utilized siblings • Utilized resources • Researched resources • All skills are important	• Parent involvement in school • Parent responsibility • Parents communication with children
Positive kindergarten experience - AF1	• Satisfaction of kindergarten experience • Satisfied with kindergarten preparation at home	
Awareness of the BWAG - AF2	• Awareness of the BWAG from personal experience • Awareness of the BWAG from child's experience	
BWAG in Black adult experience - AF2	• Effects of the BWAG on Black adults	

After the data analysis was complete, I had an expert with a doctorate degree review my analysis to increase the validity of my study. The expert applauded me for coding my data manually. She suggested I elaborate on the commonalities and differences within the data, to display a balance that can easily be understood by the reader. She added that the codes, categories, and themes painted a clear picture of the participants responses and most importantly the research questions were answered. According to Maxwell (2004), a discrepant case occurs when two or more sets of comparable data are not the same. I detected no discrepant data in the perspectives of

parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, I used member checking through participant review of transcripts, to confirm the accuracy of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I checked the accuracy of the information during the interview process and at the end of the interview. I had each participant review their transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the information and to make any changes or additions to their transcripts. All transcripts were confirmed by the participants and there were no participants who wanted to add details or make any changes to their responses. To enhance transferability, I thoroughly described the study's framework and assumptions which were essential to the study. I also provided detailed information about the study participants and the setting, what was asked of them, and what they said, as indicated by Cope (2014).

Dependability of qualitative study involves the reliability and precision of the data (Creswell, 2012). To ensure dependability, I created an audit trail that includes a clear plan of action and a detailed description of the methodology used for the study. Including an audit trail provides the rationale for why decisions were made within the study the logical path of the analysis. Confirmability helps to establish that the findings are based on participants' responses and not the researcher's own preconceptions and biases (Elo et al., 2014). To increase confirmability, I kept a reflexive journal to record how I made decisions throughout the study with regards to data interpretation, analysis and the presentation of results, and conclusions. This reflexive diary provided insight into

background knowledge about the phenomena, my thought process, and highlighted my experience and values as an educational researcher.

Research Results

The results of this study are organized and presented using each of the two RQs. The first RQ includes themes related perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG. In the second RQ, the results reveal themes related to how their perspectives regarding the BWAG gap shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. The results are as follows.

Results for RQ1

RQ1 asked, what are perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG. Participants in this study indicated disapproval of the BWAG, concern for associated lack of resources for Black children compared to White children, and concern for negative effects of the BWAG on their Black children. The themes associated with this RQ are *parents expressed disapproval of the BWAG, lack of access to opportunities and resources,* and *negative effects of the BWAG on Black children*.

Theme 1: Parents Expressed Disapproval of the BWAG

Parents seemed eager to state their dislike of the BWAG. They used the words "don't like" and "not fair" 13 times throughout the interviews to describe how they felt. P3 said, "It's unfortunate, I don't like it, it's not fair, but it's just where we are." Twelve of 15 participants described some type of disfavor of the BWAG. P7 stated,

> For Black people we work hard for everything we have, so if you don't strive to
>
> get what you want that's on you whereas White people, it's kind of like the doors

for them are opened immediately, whereas for us we gotta kinda shove them

open, so I feel like the BWAG is not fair but it's our life.

P9 said,

The BWAG is unfair. It should be even across the board, and it shouldn't be just

because you are a certain race or come from a certain background or ethnicity that

you should have any different options that the next person. If it is something out

there that is being given, it should be given to everybody not just one certain race

or culture.

P10 expressed their sentiments by stating, "I think the BWAG is unfair. Just because

someone is born of a different race doesn't mean they are more qualified or deserve

more."

P8 spoke the same sentiments by stating, "Glaringly, it's [BWAG] unfair, but it's also, it

just is what it is." P8 elaborated,

The one that I'm dealing with is a lot of legacy systems that I wasn't invited to and

am not…still not invited to. So, when I come in, um, you know, there isn't a place

of achievement. Like there isn't it's like, there has to be a place for you and then

you are allowed in, but if there's no place for you, um, you're an intruder to

the…the hierarchy of things.

P11 said, "I just feel that it isn't fair." P12 mentioned, "I don't like it and I want to make

sure that my kids can beat the gap like I did." P14 expressed, "I wish it wasn't too much a

color I just feel like it shouldn't be too much of a color like black and white. It should be

just one as a whole." P6 added,

We really shouldn't treat no kids different one from another whether they're Black, White, blue or green. I think that all kids should be treated equally. It has to be taught to them for them to know the difference in it.

These statements indicated disapproval, but they also provided the notion of being treated differently because of race or ethnicity.

Theme 2: Lack of Access to Opportunities and Resources

Nine participants shared their belief of the lack of opportunities and resources being the reason for the BWAG. P3 described the need for technology in the classrooms, saying, "it's the resources because at some schools they have access to computers in PreK and some schools don't in the Black community and it's just not right." P9 characterized how poverty may affect the well-being of children and how they learn: "it's hard for a child to take in information when the shoes they have on their feet are too little and hurting their feet or when their hungry." P15 said of Black citizens,

> They are getting the bare minimum, that's what they are taking, and that's what they go with. They just don't see outside of what it is they are being given and this leads to a lot of Black families and communities being in poverty.

P12 said,

> Black and brown families have always had to survive so you know momma was too tired from working to help with homework. She was too tired to sit down and look over syllables [the number of sounds in a word].

Four participants specifically mentioned the word "money" as a reason for the gap. P7 explained,

They have been putting up money for years for their children where the Black

person can barely save a paycheck. Black people work hard for everything we

have whereas White people, the doors are open for you immediately. For us, we

have to shove them open, so I feel like it's not fair but it's our life.

P2 said, "White parents and their parents have money to send their children to these

privilege schools and the budget for public schools are not as equal as those at the private

school." P6 mentioned, "Black families don't have the opportunities or money to like get

the resources or go to college." P10 added, "if I was able to make more money, I'd put all

of my children in private school to minimize the achievement gap as much as possible."

Parents also commented on the differences they believe exist in the educational

opportunities available to Black and White children. P11 stated,

Once my kids got in the school system, I realized my kids did not have as many

opportunities as White kids and there was a lack of opportunities as far as what

they could get and the things they could do versus White kids.

Four parents added to the aspect of opportunities to include the factor of demographics.

P10 said, "I think that the demographics and locations of schools as far as where children

live play a part in the BWAG. I believe the eastside and westside are the areas with the

highest BWAG." P13 noted, "if you're in a better side of town you get better services,

you get more resources." P8 agreed, "I would not send my children to any Head Start on

the westside, they don't have as many resources at the Head Starts in other areas."

Parents saw differences in educational opportunities extending throughout their

children's academic careers. P5 added, "Black people don't have the opportunities or money to like get the resources or go to college." P7 concluded,

> There is a lot of catching us they seem to have to do. You have kids that are exposed to reading and things like that or they may come from different kind of background or different demographics so it's not as much as a struggle but for those kids that do not, they have to get all of that in the time they're at school. Some kids get it at home and in school, so it puts that gap there and the gap is widened by different factors such as demographics.

Theme 3: Negative Effects of BWAG on Black Children

All parents agreed that the BWAG has negative effects on Black children. P1 described how Black children just give up due to the BWAG. They said,

> little White kids were told that they're getting everything right and it makes the Black kids feel like they're not as smart, so they wanted to play and not participate in school activities. I feel like it makes the kids want to give up and not participate.

P3 spoke the same sentiments by stating, "it makes the kids wanna give up and not participate. "P3 elaborated,

> It leads to children in Black and brown communities feeling inadequate and it sets a tone at an early age that we are not worth the extra help or worth the extra resources to achieve what those of other races are able to achieve.

P7 described how the BWAG can cripple children's outlook on learning:

The Black-White achievement gap discourages learning and puts children in a

place where they don't want to try, especially if they don't have a good support

system. They feel like it's never going to happen for them and that's why we have

a continuous cycle.

P4 and P10 both discussed the struggles that Black children endure because of the

BWAG. They explained how this gap prevents children from meeting the trajectories

needed to excel in school. P4 stated, "Black children have to work a little bit harder when

they get into education and there is a lot of catching up, they seem to have to do." P4

continued by explaining the struggle Black students face with passing state tests and how

the results of those test can prevent children from being promoted to the next grade level.

P4 said, "It's not the teachers, school, or parent's decisions to pass the student to the next

grade level, it is solely based on whether or not children pass the state test." P10

expressed similar thoughts, "The BWAG causes children to be late learners and not on

their correct grade level. It also leads to a lack of learning and that's not good."

Summary for RQ1

Results for RQ1 indicated that parents in this study overwhelmingly expressed

their disapproval of the BWAG. They felt it was unfair and unfortunate for Black

children and their families. Additionally, participants believed that the reason for the

BWAG is lack of access to opportunities and resources, such as money and technology in

the classrooms and homes of Black children. Participants vocalized this belief and how it

affects the learning of Black children. Participants concluded that the negative effects the

BWAG has on Black children prevents Black children from developing the desire to succeed and reaching the expected milestones for kindergarten success.

Results for RQ2

RQ2 asked, how parents of Black Head Start graduates say their perspectives regarding the BWAG shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. Parents in this study described feeling pressure from the BWAG to be proactive in preparing their children for kindergarten, and they described extensive support they provided their children in focused skills they believed are important for kindergarten readiness. Themes of *parent actions for kindergarten readiness* and *pressure of the BWAG on kindergarten preparation* emerged in answer to this RQ.

Theme 4: Parent Actions for Kindergarten Readiness

Parents described focusing on specific learning domains in an effort to reduce the BWAG for their child. These learning domains included academic skills associated with reading and mathematics, and on social-emotional and life skills. For example, more than half of the parents spoke about the high importance they placed on social skills and their children being able to express themselves. P15 said,

> I know my son would be one of the few minorities at the school he attended for kindergarten, so I wanted to make sure his social-emotional and social skills were at a level where he could clearly express his needs and get along with others.

P2 stated,

> I focused on his verbiage. Every time he talked, and he said something wrong I would just correct him like hey no say it like this or helping him process his

thoughts. I know they say moms always know what their kids are saying but I

wanted to make sure others knew what he was saying too so I kind of helped him

talk it out so when he is not around me, he knows how to process his thoughts.

P1 said,

I focused on the way he talks and expressed himself to others along with his

attitude. I didn't want him to be labeled as you know the angry Black kid, so I

taught him ways to verbally work through things.

P5 mentioned,

Due to my son being the only child, he was very whiny and didn't like to share

and stuff like that. I knew he needed help with developing his social-emotional

skills so that's what I focused on. It was a struggle when he was in kindergarten."

P12 shared the similar sentiments, "I focused on social skills and being social

because he was the only child, and he didn't know how to do things by himself.

P14 acknowledged,

I focused on the social-emotional part. Letting her know that it is ok to speak her

mind but also being respectful with it. Letting her know that it's ok to have

friends and not to have friends because my daughter is a people pleaser so she

will get her feelings hurt thinking that everybody is supposed to be her friend."

While there were many parents that believed social-motional skills were

important as they were getting their child ready for kindergarten, some parents

shared a different perspective.

P3 stated,

People skills and communication skills were less important. I think that just

comes naturally once you start being around people. I wanted them to be able to

articulate how they felt and be able to say if they needed something. That wasn't

as important as comprehension in the beginning. I needed them to understand and

retain information. I will work with you on how to speak and use your voice and

use your words. I just needed them to comprehend more so than anything.

P8 agreed by adding his daughter's social abilities were not as important as her academic

preparation because she got those skills at home from interacting with her brothers.

Two parents described play as something they believed was not an important

focus for their efforts in getting a child ready for kindergarten, because they felt play was

not important or because they felt their child already had the play skills they needed. P11

expressed, "I did not focus on playing with my child. I felt like she received too much

play time in prekindergarten." P2 stated, "I would say I focused less on his physical

skills. He is a child; he is very energetic, so I didn't have to worry about preparing him to

play on the playground."

Academic skills of mathematics and reading were mentioned by several parents,

as part of their focus in preparing children for kindergarten. P4 explained,

His [their child's] weakness was actually math and so he would get frustrated a lot

so making sure he had different manipulatives and different tools, so he knew it

wasn't just one way to get his math answer and that he was enjoying the learning

process even though it was something challenging for him. I wanted him to know

that no matter the challenge in education or whatever he was learning, he could figure out a way to get over it.

P1 and P6 also mentioned how they focused on reading and making sure their children were able to do simple math. P1 mentioned, "Another skill I focused on was math and making sure he understood counting." P6 added, "I focused on making sure she was reading and writing correctly. I also focused on counting without skipping numbers and identifying numbers."

Letter recognition and letter sounds was mentioned 16 times by parents in this study, as key skills that were their focal points of getting their child ready for kindergarten. P4 reported,

First and foremost, I wanted him to be comfortable with reading. I didn't want him to feel like school or learning was a punishment or have a negative connotation to it, so I wanted to make sure he had fun doing it and enjoyed doing it. Making sure he knew those sight words, making sure he could identify his letters, making sure he knew the correct letter sounds, and making sure he could self-correct himself when we were reading or when he was reading to me. I made sure we had time reading together and were in a comfortable position enjoying the book that we were reading.

P13 said, "Recognizing colors, recognizing shapes. Learning how to spell and write his first and last name. Recognizing upper case and lower-case letters. Just common stuff like that." P14 elaborated and stated, "I focused on recognizing letters, numbers, colors and things like that. That was my main focus." P10 added, "I used to read him

stories and show him like the pictures. Teaching him how to talk in complete sentences."

P5 concurred, "I read books and stories to my daughter to help with her reading

comprehension and to make sure was understanding the words." P8 concurred as well, "I

made sure I read at home with her every night before she went to bed." P6 went on to

say, "I noticed my daughter was lacking in reading so made sure I focused on that." P12

said, "I focused on letter recognition, common core math, understanding their name,

making sure they know what letter certain sounds made." P11 concluded, "I focused on

reading and letter sounds."

Although many parents focused on academics, two parents emphasized the

importance for their child to know personal information about themselves before entering

kindergarten. P3 said, "I started focusing on geographical. Making sure they understood

where they were, where mom and dad lived, and our phone numbers. Making sure the

basics were down pat." P12 add similar sentiments, "I focused on what my name was, his

dad's name was, and where he lived but we moved so much it was kind of hard to do

that." P8 identified academics as area he focused on the least saying, "The skills that

were less important were my daughter's social abilities and academics. It was really the

academic's part. Those things were less important for her because she is really smart." A

summary of the domains parents believed they needed to teach to their children to avoid

their child being part of the BWAG, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Parent-supported Readiness Skills by Frequency of Mention

Skills	Parent mentions
Social-emotional skills	9
Letter recognition/sounds	9
Reading	7
Mathematics	6
Colors	6
Demographics (where they live)	4
Personal information	4
Communication skills	4
Shapes	3

More than half (10) of the parents felt as though all skills were important when

preparing their children for kindergarten. P15 stated, "I didn't think that any skills were

unimportant. He needed as many skills as possible to be successful especially as an

African American child. He needed everything to be successful." P1 expressed the same

sentiments and explained,

> I don't think like there is any skill that's not important. I tried to cover all the
>
> basis because if it's one skill they lack then that's where they're going to be
>
> judged on, so I tried to teach them all of the skills that I feel like were important.

P5 reported,

I don't think there are [any] skills that are less important in school because you want them to know everything they have to have in school as far as their subjects. You want them to know them. You don't want them to get in class and ack like it's not important because if you're in school, its important.

P7 shared,

I wouldn't say there is anything that is less important. Everything matters even the small things like expressing herself. As a child I didn't have the ability to express myself. That is a big thing for me, I want you to express yourself. I want you to speak up. I want you to speak your mind but like I said before always be respectful.

P9 revealed, "I don't really think that I thought anything was less important. I just tried to get them as prepared as we thought they needed to be, so we didn't focus on one area more than the next."

Theme 5: Pressure of the BWAG on Parents for Kindergarten Preparation

The parents' narratives revealed their perspectives of how the BWAG created an urgency for them to prepare their children for kindergarten. P3 expressed,

It just made me really drill down on my children. It baffled me that they were not equipped for kindergarten even after leaving Head Start. It put me in the mindset that I have to do this at home. I have to educate myself on the new math algorithms and how their teaching language arts these days. It put me in survival mode. I have to do this at home because I can't ensure that they are going to get the adequate help they need at the institution because of the color of their skin.

P6 concurred,

> For me personally, one of the things I try to do is bridge that gap with my
> children, so I have had to work additional jobs to pay tutors and pay for additional
> resources to ensure that gap is very minimal. It has also caused a burden in trying
> to coordinate study time and for me just trying to be more intentional. It has
> affected my children with them seeing others achieve certain things because I do
> have them around a lot of different individuals. I try to let them be around diverse
> people. It has caused, in my opinion, us to have to work twice as hard to get the
> things that is typically so easy given to other races. It has caused me to go into
> overdrive sometimes I find myself being burnt out trying to ensure they have all
> of the essential tools to minimize that gap.

According to P15,

> I know that there were certain milestones that my son had to reach by the end of
> kindergarten, and I was paying attention to what he had learned in Head Start and
> how far he would have to go to reach those milestones. I wanted to get him to
> surpass those milestones and look past kindergarten and on to 1st grade so that if
> there was some kind of reason where he fell behind, I could catch it early or it
> wouldn't be so much work to get him back where he needed to be. He wouldn't
> be a part of that achievement gap.

P1 mentioned, "I felt the need to look up different lesson plans and different ways to
teach him to get ready for kindergarten." P9 added,

I would say, it made me do more as far as getting prepared. Even before PreK we

were working on ABCs, numbers, and colors. We started working with writing. A

lot of stuff I just prepared them ourselves. Even now we do outside tutoring. Just

to give them more than what is offered in school or the classroom.

Two parents discussed a technique of sharing the learning older siblings in the

home were working on at school with their prekindergarten children, to help prepare the

younger children for kindergarten. According to P2,

I know most times they teach them stuff in kindergarten and it takes them

throughout the school term but it's like with my youngest I'm teaching him stuff

my oldest is learning so that way once he gets in kindergarten, he's not going to

feel like he is behind on not knowing anything if he doesn't understand it.

P13 said, "When my son was going to kindergarten, I let him sit with my daughter while

she is doing her homework. I also let my daughter read to him."

Looking back, some parents believed they had done all they could to get their

child ready for kindergarten. P1 revealed, "I would not do anything differently. I would

pretty much do everything the same way." P2 summed up their feelings by saying, "I

think I've done all that needed to be done to prepare him when he went to kindergarten,

and it shows. I think we did a good job." P5 and P9 both stated, "I would not do anything

differently." However, other parents described what they could have done differently to

prepare their children for kindergarten. P3 noted,

I would have definitely focused more on reading, teaching them time

management, and staying focused. I noticed in kindergarten they were trying to

read independently and that was something I didn't know they would start that

early on. I would have taught my children how to avoid distractions and also time

management to a degree. When I'm sitting down at this station or to do

something, I'm focused on that. I'm zoomed in on it and I'm getting it done.

P4 said,

I feel like I would spend more time on the things that I did simply because it did

help him, but he wasn't as comfortable with it. What we did was a few times

week. We did a few times a week for 30-45 min. I feel like if we did every day for

shorter increments of time like 10-15 min but every day and being more

consistent with those skills like sight words and letter sounds then he wouldn't

have the few struggles or hurdles that he did have.

P12 suggested that, next time,

I would push him a lot harder. I would work a lot more with him. I would give

him more time than what I've given him already when it comes to school. I would

try to incorporate school a little better into his actual play time. That way he could

put 2 and 2 together. If I tell you to go get that, you're looking at me like what

does that mean. If you're playing and I say, go get that ball and bring it back.

What kind of shape is it? Is it a circle? Is it a square? What color is it? Things of

that nature.

P6 also said,

I would more so spend extra time on educating her a little more on math, reading,

and science. I would be more hands on and doing it myself. My child is currently

in summer school, but I make sure I do it at home. I'm more focused and hands

on instead of leaving it to the teachers to do majority of it. I'm more hands on

now than I was prior to kindergarten.

While parents spoke about various things they would do differently, P8 was the

only parent who discussed the notion of home schooling. P8 explained,

If I didn't have a job, I would home school them. During 2020, I did a lot better

job with getting them ready and all of that. It was really easy to deal with. It

would have been really easy if I didn't have to work all day. Getting them ready

for the next grade and things.

P11 mentioned how the pandemic altered their ability to be actively involved in

their child's education. P11 stated, "I would attend more meetings. I would be more

involved. I was involved but with Covid, I couldn't be involved as much as I liked."

There was a common thread among all parents: they would advise parents of

Black children as they help their child get ready for kindergarten to get involved. Some

degree of involvement was mentioned by all of the parents. P4 noted,

I would encourage [Black parents] to get involved. Talk to the teacher makes

sure they know their child's progress. Ask the teacher what they can do at home.

Ask the teacher maybe something about what they are going to be working on in

the future or is there any extra help they can send home. Just make sure they are

communicating the teacher because that goes a long way, and it helps to allow the

kid to be accountable for their learning because they know that their parents have

a relationship with their teacher. It will also educate the parent on what is actual

happening in the classroom-the learning that is supposed to be going on in the classroom.

P11 said, "Be involved. Take time out to do the homework assignments they send home. Practice it. Get involved. Be more involved. Don't minimize it because its kindergarten. Don't be like oh it's just kindergarten, its ok. Just be involved." P15 suggested "be involved" three times during their response:

Be involved. Be involved in child's education as much as you possibly can. I feel like Head Start and early education is very important. Going into kindergarten is like a step into another world, so I would say be involved as much as you possibly can. There are several resources and scholarships and different opportunities out there for us. Do your research and use every resource that is possible for your child out there. Use your resources.

Although P13 agreed with the perspective of being involved, the word "proactive" was used three times during their response. P13 said,

Don't rely on the school system by itself. Be proactive with your kids learning. Proactive as in you as a parent being proactive, not you as a parent pushing it off on others for them to do it. Be the voice for your child. Pop up and do visits, while your child is learning be there. Question everything.

P8 stressed that there was one key action that he would advise parents to take, and that parents could determine what areas their children need support in the most if they did this one single thing: read at home with your child. P8 summed up his feelings by saying,

Over-communicate. Require teachers to report to you good and bad because they
will only report bad things to you. Follow-up with homework. Do writing and
stuff at home with them. Read at home with them. I think the single best thing you
can do with children is read at home with them. You can figure out pretty much
anything if you read at home with them. You can find out if they are
understanding the words, books, and stories. They're also going to need a lot of
help with reading comprehension as they move forward. That type of interaction
you can with kids at night before the kids go to bed. Just read at home with them.
Read at home with them. Forget all the other stuff just read at home with them.
You can figure out everything if you read a home with them.

As parents reflected on what advice they would give to other parents, four of them
mentioned that they would make learning more fun. P3 provided a detailed response by
saying,

Participate. Be involved. Make learning fun for them. Identify your child's
weakness and start to build on it now. We overlook red flags because we're
working or we're busy or we are trying to hurry up and give them the answers so
we can finish cooking and get them ready for bed. I think being intentional about
being involved and understanding where they are so that you can easily identify
when they are having challenges and get before the problem instead of being
reactive.

P6 went a step further and stated,

I would make learning more fun. Making the learning fun for the kids because I noticed that my daughter liked learning more when I play a game. So, when I put all of the learning um everything pertaining to learning within games she so well. So, make it a little fun. Also, reward them within it. I'm not saying go out and buy them anything expensive. What a normally do is like the monopoly pieces you can give them the fake money and say when you get enough you can buy the snacks in the cabinet. That's what I normally do, reward them. Just make it fun." P7 shared a different perspective as well. P7 concurred and stated, "Find ways to make it fun for your child to learn. Make learning more hands-on. Take them on field trips to the museum, the river, and feed the ducks. Everything is a learning experience.

Summary for RQ2

Results for RQ2 indicated that participants felt a sense of urgency to prepare their children for kindergarten, due to the BWAG. Participants expressed the need to provide more opportunities for learning at home. Participants specified using outside resources in hopes of minimizing the BWAG along with staying abreast on the specific trajectories that needed to be met for kindergarten success. Additionally, participants focused on a wide range of skills such as social skills, math, and reading to support to their children's kindergarten entry. Parents reflected on what they would do differently if they were to help a child again get ready for kindergarten, and they had specific advice for other parents of Black children to help those children avoid being part of the BWAG.

Additional Findings

Two findings resulted from this study that were not related to either RQ but added

important information about the experience of parents of Black children. These findings

concerned the degree of success participants' children experienced in kindergarten, and

how parents already were aware of the BWAG, based on their own experiences and those

of their children. Themes associated with these two findings were *positive kindergarten*

experience, awareness of the BWAG, and *the BWAG in Black adults' experience*.

Children's Success in Kindergarten

Satisfaction with their children's kindergarten experience was expressed by nine

parents. P4 said,

> I feel like he did pretty well. Um, I made sure that he didn't get to the point where
>
> he [wanted] to give up, um, didn't want to try, didn't want to learn anything new.
>
> So, I feel like, once, if you wanted to learn something new and you did, I feel like
>
> you did well, as long as you come out knowing something that you didn't know.

P1 stated,

> I think he did good. His first year at kindergarten was good. Um, he was lacking a
>
> little social skills but you know, that was because of COVID. Everybody was
>
> running virtually. But he's definitely adapted to like, you know being in a learning
>
> environment and just picking up - picking up things. Like he's really good with
>
> numbers and that is like extremely amazing, how like a six-year-old can process
>
> big numbers.

P7 noted,

She was AB honor roll the whole year. So, she got honor roll. She did good in

academics even though like I said earlier, she didn't really like it, but, um,

whereas in her grades and her performance? She was stellar. She excelled.

P6 mentioned, "She did way better than I thought." P11 added, "I think he did great."

P9 reported,

I think he did great for his first year and especially for it to be virtual. When it

came to the learning, he did great. But I think now once, um, once they do go

back in school in August, I think he'll be—it'll be fine then too—the transition.

P11 shared. "Yeah. He did great. So, he came out writing his name, spelling his name,

and adding." P2 revealed,

I think he did good in kindergarten, for the most part he made it to first grade. He

did and I think he done a good job. It was kind of hard for him at first, but we got

over it and he made it to first grade.

Despite the BWAG, parents in this study acknowledged their efforts in preparing

their children for kindergarten and seemed satisfied with the outcome. P2 shared, "I think

I've done all that needed to be done to prepare him for when he went to kindergarten, um,

and it shows. So, I think... I think we did a good job." Although other parents were not as

vocal expressing satisfaction with their kindergarten preparation at home, when asked,

now that their child has been in kindergarten, if they would have done anything

differently to get their child ready, four parents replied with "no" they would not have

done anything differently.

Parents' Prior Awareness of the BWAG

Parents in this study indicated they were aware of the BWAG in advance of their child's entrance into kindergarten, both from experiences in their own adult lives and from experiences in their childhoods and as young parents. Six parents revealed that prior awareness of the BWAG occurred from observations of differences in children's experiences. P7 explained,

> When it came to getting scholarships and everything else, that was on me. I took a year off. And, you know, whereas you have, uh, other—other denominations of people who will set their child up to go to school right after school. Like regardless of a scholarship or what, they've been putting that money for years for their children. By being in it. By actually having to experience it myself, first-hand and, um, being that they get further faster. And we have to work harder. So, you know, that's what I mean experiencing it myself.

P2 elaborated,

> Probably like from my childhood growing up. Noticing like the big difference in the children who went to like private and like, you know, Catholic schools versus us, Black people going to like public school.

P9 concurred,

> I would say it was kind of like a known thing. Like something that was just brought to my attention. It's something that I've kind of known for a while just from growing up and going through the school system myself.

P8 mentioned "I was raised in the rural south, and I basically became aware of it because, I lived it [BWAG]. and P5 said, "actually when I started school. I think that's when I became aware of that."

Parents also revealed that prior awareness of the BWAG occurred from their child's experiences. According to P3,

I first realized just by watching them interact with their friends and, um, again, working in church in ministries around different types of children. Just watching them interact, uh, with each other's obviously knowing that, and me seeing other children, and kind of their developmental stages and, you know, the things they were able to do that my kids were not able to initially. It was really when I was having my children, um, hanging out with peers, um, that I work with and just watching them interact, um, and watching kind of felt like my kids were definitely a little behind than some of their peers. Two parents mentioned they noticed the BWAG while their children were in school. P1 said,

I noticed the achievement gap when my son switched schools. The school that has a majority of White students has more access to different equipment whereas the school he attends now doesn't have much.

P11 added, "Um, uh, in school. So, once my kids got in the school system." P5 also stated,

From what I've noticed, um, when I went to the school to help out, like, they give up, and just because, like, you know, the little White kids, they're told that they're getting everything right, and it makes them feel like they're not as smart.

P6 revealed,

> I noticed a difference with her and my oldest daughter because I put [my
>
> child] in a Black PreK school thinking that it would actually help and be
>
> better. Well, it bit me because she actually didn't get no type of assistance.
>
> I don't mind putting her in an all-Black school or whatever the case may
>
> be.

P8 stated,

> Because how he…he's a dark-skinned boy. So, how he got viewed
>
> in…in…by the faculty of some schools is a problem we don't want to deal
>
> with, and he has been kicked out of some schools because of…of
>
> adjustment problems that he had.

Two parents associated their prior awareness of the BWAG to the experiences of

other people that they knew. P2 said, "I know a few people who... Who's been affected by

it. Just not having... Not getting you know the right push or right uh, academic uh,

curriculum." P9 further stated,

> I don't know. My thing is I don't—for me personally, it affected my husband per
>
> se because growing up he had, um, a learning disability. Uh, and with him having
>
> that, the options were actually limited to get help or different things that they
>
> would do for him."

Parents in this study described prior knowledge of the BWAG from their own

experiences as Black adults in many different settings. For example, P8 discussed how

even with attaining a degree how he continues to face obstacles with progressing in his

workplace:

> Even getting a degree, I'm kind of stuck being a professional level but never able
> to achieve anything higher. Um, but that's me. I'm a designer, so it's also a little
> dependent upon where you live, where you are. But I have found that it's a lot of
> cronyisms. Coming out of college though, and this is the latter half, the latter part
> of the achievement gap. I ran into issues of abuse in the workplace. Like it doesn't
> matter what your qualifications are. It doesn't matter what your experiences are.
> None of that stuff matters. What matters is that the what's active in determining
> your achievement, your ability to move forward and your ability to move up, is
> just a lot of cronyisms, especially from, you know, the White southerners who
> have been managers over me. And then, uh, and I still deal with that.

P14 mentioned,

> Uh, a lot of people, uh, a lot of White people are scared of change. They want
> everything to be exactly the same as it was even though they never actually
> experienced it. They just heard stories of it. They want to be the one in charge,
> always right, always winning and in order to keep power, you have to keep
> something else below you and that's just Black people. There's a lot of
> stereotypes out there that just aren't true of the African American race that people
> really believe. Like they really—like some of—some of the most idiotic things I
> can possibly think of and I'm like, "Y'all really think that this is true?" --because

it—it has to be true because they was told it was true. Therefore, it will be true and if you think otherwise, then you must be ignorant. So, stay in your place.

P7 explained how the BWAG affected her ability to go to college:

It affected me honestly. Like me personally, I—I'm too far from school where I didn't go to school. Well, I went, but I didn't finish school. I kept getting discouraged. Just like I—I have a support system, but, um, when it came to school, it was like, Finish high school. That was it, just finish high school. It's like she [the participant's mother] feels like she failed. But at the same time, that's not on her. When you have this world where it's just like the glamor and the glitz of the world looks better than school.

Parents in this study described being well-aware of the BWAG and its effects in their own lives and the lives of Black children. P15 summed up these effects and the normalization of the BWAG in American society when she explained that the true effects of BWAG may not be clear to a Black person until later in life:

I don't think that it really affects them until they become older, because as young children going to school, they're just going to school. Um, I don't think that they realize…of course, they don't realize that there is a gap. They don't know what's going on. They're going to school, and they're getting what is being given to them, and what is being given to them isn't the same as what may be given to other kids. So, I don't think they really realize it until they get older, and they start to actually know what's going on and they start to try and go out into, um, into their career fields, or try to apply for colleges and different things like that.

All parents indicated that prior awareness of the BWAG was obtained from their own personal experience, the experience of their children, or the experience of someone else they knew.

Summary

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. In this chapter, I presented themes that emerged from the analysis of data collection via semi structured interviews of 15 participants from a single metropolitan area in a southeastern state in the United States. Three themes emerged that were associated with RQ1: parents expressed disapproval of the BWAG, lack of access to opportunities and resources, and negative effects of the BWAG on Black children. Two themes emerged that were associated with RQ2: parent actions for kindergarten readiness and pressure of the BWAG on kindergarten preparation. In addition, three themes emerged that were not associated with either RQ. Those themes were positive kindergarten experience, awareness of the BWAG, and the BWAG in Black adults' experience.

The results of this study indicated that parents opposed the BWAG. They did not like it and felt it was very unfair. Parents indicated that lack of access to opportunities and resources such as technology and money for Black children and their families were contributing factors to the BWAG. Parents revealed how the BWAG has adverse outcomes on children's self-esteem, and it diminishes their drive to persevere through obstacles throughout kindergarten. I found that parents focused on multiple skills when

getting their children ready for kindergarten and provided various ways to support them. Findings revealed that social skills as well as letter recognition and letter sounds were a top a priority among parents. Due to the adverse effects of the BWAG on Black children, parents felt pressure to take responsibility in preparing their children for kindergarten. Parents described being aware of the BWAG prior to their child's kindergarten entrance, through their own experiences as children and adults, and through experiences they had as parents of young children. Despite the BWAG and perhaps because of the pressure they felt to be proactive in preparing their children for kindergarten, parents in this study were satisfied with their children's experience in kindergarten. In Chapter 5, I offer an interpretation of these findings by comparing them with findings from the literature and elements of the study's conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. I also describe the limitations of the study, provide recommendations for future research, and suggest the study's implications for policy and practice related to positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start graduates regarding the BWAG, and how those perspectives shaped parents' actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. Participants included parents whose children attended Head Start for at least one full year and have transitioned to kindergarten within the past year. In this study, I sought to understand the perspectives of parents of Black Head Start children regarding the BWAG and how those perspectives shaped their actions in promoting their children's kindergarten readiness. The findings from this study revealed, parents of Black Head Start graduates' disapproval of the BWAG along with access to resources and opportunities as contributing factors to the existence of the BWAG. Parents shared how their initial awareness of the BWAG either took place from personal experience or from their child's experience. Parents believed that the BWAG has negatively affected Black children as well as Black adults. The findings also revealed that specific actions were taken by parents, due to the pressure of the BWAG for kindergarten preparation. Parents were heavily involved in preparing their children for kindergarten. While working with their children, they focused specific skills that aligned with kindergarten readiness. Overall, parents felt like they had a positive kindergarten experience.

Interpretation of Findings

According to Downer et al. (2016) there is an academic gap among African Americans and other racial groups that begins before kindergarten entry. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2018) added that closing this gap is a burdensome task that continues to

plague the education system. Parents confirmed the existence of this gap and shared their efforts and actions to minimize the gap. Parents corroborated the findings of Reardon et al. (2019) that the BWAG highlights the inequality of available opportunities between Black and White students. In agreement with Mocombe (2017), parents confirmed that the achievement gap was present during their time in school. Parents confirmed that this gap also has affected their families and friends for many years.

Studies by Luet (2017) and Jezierski and Wall (2017) described barriers that make it difficult for positive parent actions when supporting children during kindergarten. The findings from this study reported that, although parents acknowledged the existence of the BWAG and the limited availability of resources afforded to Black children and their families, parent actions prevailed that promoted kindergarten readiness. Luet found that a lack of resources is a barrier that can prevent parents from better preparing their children for school. According to Jezierski and Wall, there is evidence in the literature that there is a connection between a lack of resources and productive parent actions when preparing their children for kindergarten. This study revealed, parents felt there was a strong connection between a lack of resources and the BWAG.

The readiness assessment expectations in the state where this study took place focus on a child's mastery of phonemic awareness, phonics, general readiness, and literacy comprehension (School Renaissance Institute, 2001). Miller and Goldsmith (2017) found that reaching specific milestones in reading, mathematics, and social emotional domains are significant factors in determining kindergarten success. This study indicated that parents focused on these key areas when preparing their children for

kindergarten. Parents focused on mathematics and social emotional skills, although these skills are not included in the kindergarten entry assessment. According to Manfra et al. (2016), solving problems using numbers, using instruments accurately for measuring, understanding graphing activities, and sorting a group of materials by various rules and attributes are all math concepts that children need to be able to execute; however, parents did not focus on math skills beyond the concept of counting and number recognition. Shah et al. (2018) mentioned the ability to comprehend books read aloud, demonstrate phonological awareness, show alphabetic and print knowledge, and demonstrate a motivation and appreciation for reading are all literacy expectations for kindergarten entry. My findings coincided the research by Shah et al., that parents acknowledged the need to focus on reading along with reading to their children and letter recognition. Despite phonological awareness being a literacy expectation (Gerde et al., 2018) rhyming, blending, segmenting, or manipulating words were not considered areas of focus by parents in this study when preparing their children for kindergarten.

According to Kuru Cetin and Taskin (2016), the actions parents take to support their child's learning form one of most crucial aspects of educating children. This study indicated that parents reading to their children was of high importance and this action was consistent routine when preparing their children for kindergarten. Prior research has documented that, parents consistently displayed the actions of reading to their children and providing a place for them to complete educational activities in preschool (Han et al., 2017). Parents corroborated the findings of Ginsburg-Block (2016) that joint book reading is an interactive action that takes place by parents during preschool to support

their learning. Parents also corroborated the findings of Deniz Can and Ginsburg-Block (2016) that encouraging children to read independently is a noninteractive action parents exhibit when preparing their children for kindergarten entry. My findings confirm parent actions are multifaceted, connecting family attributes, home environments and opportunities for learning, as described by Mendez and Swick (2018) and Robinson (2017).

Miller et al. (2018) wrote that parents believed attaining elevated social-emotional skills would help create for children a successful transition to kindergarten. In this study, parents held the development of social-emotional skills in high regard. According to Kang et al. (2017), parents also thought that low-level social-emotional skills could contribute to negative school experiences during kindergarten entry and throughout the school year (Kang et al., 2017). My findings validated the research by Kang et al. (2017), that parents took actions at home to increase social-emotional skills.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), an individual's internal and external environment can influence their role-based actions, including actions by parents in their child-rearing roles. Parents perceived the BWAG was unfair and understood the negative affects it has on children. Due to this perception, parents felt compelled to put actions in place to lessen the gap as much as possible before their children entered kindergarten. My findings validated the ideas of Bronfenbrenner as the mesosystem focuses on the connections between the microsystems, parents attempted to make a connection between the home (microsystem) and school environment (microsystem). Additionally, my findings coincided with the conceptual framework as the phenomenon BWAG

constituted the key macrosystem in this study. Due to the BWAG, parents focused on various skills that they felt were significant to ensure kindergarten success.

Limitations of the Study

My findings suggested that my sample might have been skewed towards parents who were the most active in their children's education. Parents in this study believed their children did well in kindergarten and had a positive transition experience, which refutes the Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2018) findings that suggested children in African American families are more likely to experience unsuccessful kindergarten transitions. Research using a different sample might yield different results. In addition, there were only two male participants in this study. A more balanced participant pool of males and females may have yielded different results.

Recommendations for Further Research

Two recommendations for further research derive from the study's limitations. If this study were replicated, I would recruit a more equal representation of males and females and would take care to locate a sample representative of all parents of Black children. A focus group with parents instead of interviews might have encouraged parents who were not as vocal as others in the interview to feel comfortable in speaking up and may help them recall ideas they might not have described in their interview. In addition, a study similar to this one but with participants who are Black Head Start teachers might provide additional perspectives about the effect on children of BWAG.

My findings indicated that parents provided actions in various ways to increase readiness skills for their children at kindergarten entry. Further research is needed to

determine the consistency of those actions and how they contribute to positive

kindergarten outcomes. Miller et al. (2018) revealed that parents believe that developing

high-level social-emotional skills are a necessity and that children need support to reach

this goal. Although it was revealed that parents felt high levels of social-emotional skills

play an important role in kindergarten success, this study was unable to determine if

parents understood what social-emotional development entailed. Further research is

needed to make this determination.

Implications

This study found that parents did focus on phonological awareness in terms of

shared book reading with their children, as this was mentioned several times throughout

the study. Parents did not focus on any of the other components of phonological

awareness as they prepared their children for kindergarten such as rhyming, blending,

segmenting, or manipulating words. This is a take-away for administrators, teachers and

parents as these are considered skills needed for successful kindergarten entry. If parents

had a better understanding of phonological awareness and how to teach these skills at

home, it could possibly help close the BWAG. Although there is evidence that parents are

aware of the BWAG and acknowledge the effect of this, parents of Black Head Start

graduates were pleased with their overall experience their children had in kindergarten.

This finding validates the work of Head Start agencies in creating for parents of Black

Head students' positive feelings about their child's kindergarten experience after Head

Start. Head Start agencies could survey parents of Black Head Start students later, after

their children have completed kindergarten, to receive specific feedback on their

experiences. The results from these surveys can be used to modify policies and procedures that better support Black Head Start children and their families. In addition, parents in this study spoke of discrimination in their own lives, as children and as adults, and of the effects of the BWAG on others they know. This points up the importance of addressing systemic racism and lack of opportunity for Black students that is present in education today.

The results of this study support positive social change aimed at broadening the understanding of school readiness goals and kindergarten expectations among parents of Black Head Start students. The study emphasizes the negative effect of resource inequities and diminished expectations for some American children. Positive social change may result when Black Head Start children begin kindergarten more prepared than before for academic success in kindergarten and the achievement gap for Black children is diminished.

Conclusion

Research has shown that poor kindergarten outcomes among Black children continue to be one of the most difficult barriers for the American educational system to overcome (Downer et al., 2016; Reardon & Portilla, 2016). By the time children enter kindergarten, there is a substantial gap in academic achievement between Black Americans and other racial and ethnic groups (Downer et al., 2016). Although this gap continues to plague Black children, no previous study has described their parents' perspectives regarding this gap. My research study has not only started to fill a major gap in the research literature regarding the BWAG, but it has also provided insights that can

be used to develop current policy initiatives that guide parents on best practices to prepare their children for kindergarten success.

Based on this study, parents are aware of the BWAG and have an overwhelming disapproval of this gap. Parents are also cognizant of academic disparities between Black and White children at kindergarten entry and how this contributes to the lack of resources and opportunities afforded to Black children. Parents are willing to support their children in preparing their children for kindergarten by promoting the development of various skills in multiple ways. It is clear, regardless of the BWAG and any barriers related to it, parents provided ongoing support to their children in hopes of reducing the BWAG.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How did you become aware that there is an achievement gap between Black students and White students in this country?

2. What do you think about the Black-White achievement gap?

    a. What do you think are the reasons for this gap?

    b. How do you think this gap affects children?

    c. How has this gap affected anyone you know?

3. The achievement gap between Black and White students starts by kindergarten. As your own child was getting ready for kindergarten, how did your awareness of the Black-White achievement gap affect your thinking about getting your child ready for kindergarten?

    a. What sorts of skills or abilities did you focus on as you prepared your child to be ready for kindergarten?

    b. What sorts of skills or abilities did you think were less important to your child as they were getting ready for kindergarten?

4. Now that your child has been in kindergarten, would you do anything differently to get your child ready?

    a. How do you think your child is doing in kindergarten?

    b. What advice would you give to other parents of Black children as they help their child get ready for kindergarten?