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Against the Odds: Resiliency and the Fostering of Future Academic Success Among At-Risk Children in Georgia

By

Bentley D. Ponder

Under the Direction of Kirk Elifson

ABSTRACT

Research continues to substantiate the influence of social, economic and family characteristics on students' scholastic achievements. For example, children who are born in economically disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to score lower on tests that measure academic abilities than their same age economically advantaged peers (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005; Rothstein, 2004).

This dissertation examines the relationship between parenting interactions and young children's school readiness and initial academic success for a low-income, at-risk population in Georgia. The inter-disciplinary concept resiliency, defined as a process that encompasses positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity, frames the research (Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003; Henry et al 2005; Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000), p. 543).

This dissertation utilized a subsample from a larger evaluation project, The Georgia Early Childhood Study, which looked at the effects of a state-

funded universal Pre-K program. Participants in this study were at-risk children who attended either state lottery funded Georgia Pre-K or federally funded Head Start.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were used. Quantitative data included norm-referenced test scores, teacher ratings, and parental surveys. Results show that at-risk children categorized as non-resilient scored lower on standardized assessments over a three-year period and were more likely to attend preschools of lower quality than their similarly economically advantaged counterparts. Qualitative data were used to gain an understanding of parental involvement that is not generally captured with traditional survey methods. The qualitative study encompassed in-depth interviews with parents of children classified as at-risk.

The results show that parents report involvement in their child's schooling, but that involvement among the non-resilient populations was more peripheral. Parents of children from the resilient group were more likely to use language that indicated involvement as a partner in their child's education than parents from children in the non-resilient group. Parents from both groups, however, reported the difficulties they face in raising their children and were cognizant of the ways that being from a lower socio-economic group translates into parenting difficulties.

INDEX WORDS: Resiliency, Protective Factors, Georgia Pre-Kindergarten,Qualitative Research

AGAINST ALL ODDS: RESILIENCY AND THE FOSTERING OF FUTURE ACADEMIC SUCCESS AMONG AT-RISK CHILDREN IN GEORGIA

by

Bentley D. Ponder

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2007

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Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2007

This dissertation is dedicated to the two strong advocates in my life:

Dr. Dana K. Rickman,

who has proven to be an invaluable colleague and friend. Her recent “affair of the heart” has inspired me more than she’ll ever know.

And

My mother, Martha Bailey Ponder,

who fosters environments everyday that encourage children, especially her own, to achieve more than even they dare to dream.

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As it takes a village to raise a child, it seems to take a small town to finish a dissertation. I would be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to thank the people who have supported me, especially during times when logic may have dictated otherwise. This has been a long process and I feel honored to have such quality people present in my professional and personal life.

First, I need to acknowledge the sacrifice and support given by my committee. This dissertation would not have been possible without the continued support and persistence of Dr. Kirk Elifson. He has been a tremendous guidance and I am grateful that he accepted the chairmanship and performed a strong mentor role. Dr. Dawn Baunach has quantitatively inspired me throughout my graduate career and I appreciate the extra mile she has undertaken to make sure this process is completed. I have admired the teaching and research, especially the life course approach, of Dr. Elisabeth Burgess. She has impacted this work from both a professional and parental standpoint and I am confident that the work is better for her input.

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Chapter One: Introduction

> Rice's parents were single-minded in grooming her for extraordinary success despite the circumstances of her birth. A daughter of the segregated South and childhood friend of Denise McNair, one of the four girls killed in the 1963 bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Rice would have seemed back then an unlikely candidate for such a high office. Her achievements bear witness to the wisdom of her parents' steely determination that she rise above racism (Tucker, 2005)

This 2005 editorial discussed mitigating factors that superseded Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's birth circumstances and that may have provided an explanation of her achievements. Decades of educational research have shown a relationship of certain demographic characteristics, such as race, family income, parent education, and other measures of socio-economic status (e.g. presence of health insurance) with children's scholastic achievement and their future scholastic success (Shokoff and Phillips, 2000). Studies also attribute family interaction variables, including parental support and parental involvement, as counteractive forces to socio-economically disadvantaged circumstances (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Lopez, Krieder, and Caspe, 2004).

Atlanta-Journal Constitution editorial writer Cynthia Tucker clearly credited such support as the steely determination of Dr. Rice's parents as a mitigating factor in her success. Ms. Tucker states that Dr. Rice's parents groomed her for success despite her disadvantaged societal position. Yet, many questions about such interplays between individual characteristics and

environmental context remain. For example, the extent to which Dr. Rice's success can be attributed to parental influence or other factors in her environment versus her own efforts and abilities.

Research continues to substantiate the influence of social and economic family characteristics as being strong predictors of student's scholastic achievements (Rothstein, 2004). In other words, children who are born in economically disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to test lower and achieve less than their same age economically advantaged peers (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005; Rothstein, 2004). This achievement gap does not begin at formal school entry; rather it starts at birth and accumulates through early childhood and beyond. Evidence continues to show the importance of the extent to which children who enter school are ready to learn. Yet, children differ in school readiness measures, especially when looking holistically at children's development. In addition, these differences are strongly influenced by social class background (Rothstein, 2004).

Case studies involving individuals such as Dr. Rice can lead one to wonder why, despite adverse circumstances, some individuals succeed, as many others are less successful. Current research points to the concept of resiliency as a partial and important explanation. Resilience is used to refer to a child's (or an adult's) ability to overcome adversity or stress in ways that are productive (Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003; Dell, Dell, and Hopkins, 2005; Henry et. al, 2005). The focus is not necessarily on the outcome of success but rather on elements or processes that are inherent in a child and/or her or

his environment and that foster successful adaptation to potentially adverse circumstances. One recent study views resiliency as a balance between “the ability to cope with stress and adversity and the availability of community support” (Dell, Hopkins, and Dell, 2003, p. 2). Over the past few decades, a plethora of research (Conger and Conger, 2002; Howard and Johnson, 2000; Luther, Cicchetti, and Becker, 2000; McCubbin and McCubbin, 1988; Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, and Cadigan, 1987; Seigner, 2006; Werner and Smith, 1992) have used resiliency as a possible explanation for children who emerge from economically disadvantaged situations and yet excel in their schooling.

Resiliency has also been defined as the “dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003; Henry et al 2005; Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker, 2000, p. 543). Others have described it as a bouncing back or rebound process (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1988; Seccombe, 2002). Such definitions assume that resiliency is independent of immutable personality traits or dispositions, but it rather reflects social processes through which individuals adapt to the difficulties in their lives. Furthermore, Davies (2004) contends that “recent conceptualizations recognize that the existence and development of children’s resilience is a transactional process dependent on supportive factors in the environment, especially responsive, protective parenting” (p. 62). In other words, social processes such as parenting styles or other adults in the children’s lives impact the adaptive traits for children and help provide protective environments where children’s resilient traits can be fostered

(Conger and Conger, 2002; Werner and Smith, 1992). The focus of this dissertation is on the social process of parenting and what influences may strengthen certain protective factors that subsequently help the resilience process. Resilient children from high-risk families are not as small a population as one might surmise. In one particular study, these children made up approximately one-third of high-risk children (Werner and Smith, 1992).

The data for this dissertation are from a subsample of at-risk children who were initially enrolled in a three-year study that evaluated Georgia's Pre-K program. At-risk children were defined as being eligible for means tested benefits such as free or reduced lunch, Head Start eligibility, Medicaid, and/or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). A stated goal of many preschool programs, both at the state and federal level, is to help close the gap between at-risk children and their more affluent peers. For example, Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) contend that early childhood interventions, such as Head Start, are crucial in reducing the impact of poverty on children and their specific academic outcomes, specifically school readiness.

Utilizing both the quantitative data collected for the initial evaluation and additional qualitative data from the above subsample, the aim of this dissertation is to address the complex relationship between a child's scholastic abilities and her or his background and/ or societal position. Furthermore, its findings contribute to a growing body of evidence that purports the importance of a holistic or ecological approach in looking at a child's environment.

The interspersion of the qualitative data provides a “real world” perspective to the economic conditions of many Georgia children and their families. This is especially descriptive regarding deterministic, yet personal characteristics, such as parental perceptions of their child’s ultimate educational attainment, and the family’s social position. This research is significant in that it examines the social situation of these families and their environments, in their own words, while being contrasted with data that shows the direct impact of a public program on the children’s abilities and their lives.

The study aims for this dissertation relate the concept of resilience to specific family characteristics such as parenting perceptions, behaviors, and styles of parents of a population of children that would be considered at-risk for academic failure. The study findings can have policy implications, such as the need for high quality preschool environments. Specifically, the five primary study aims are:

1. **to draw comparisons on family characteristics and child outcome measures between children classified as at-risk and children classified as non at-risk;**
2. **to draw comparisons on family characteristics and child outcome measures between children categorized as resilient and non-resilient;**
3. **to study the perceptions and views of parents of children from at-risk backgrounds and how these perceptions and views**

may contribute to protective factors that increase children's chance of academic success;

4. **to examine differences in specific parenting behaviors and styles between parents of children categorized as either resilient or non-resilient;**
5. **to relate differences found in study aims 1, 2, and 3 to the concept of resilience;**
6. **to determine how the differences found in study aims 1, 2, and 3 might reveal policy implications that can aid in the developing of traits that possibly foster future academic success for children categorized as resilient or non-resilient.**

In summary, the findings from this dissertation inform current policy discussions by examining families and the impact of family characteristics and parenting behaviors on children's academic success. Furthermore, the findings may have possible policy implications that foster connections between families, schools, and communities and the way these connections can improve future student achievement. The focus of this dissertation is especially timely as policymakers continue to debate the role of government in addressing social inequalities. For example, at the time of this writing national lawmakers are still debating the reauthorization of the 1996 welfare reform (TANF) along with proposed cuts and changes to programs that benefit low-income families such as Head Start, state funded Pre-K and Medicaid.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Early childhood research has grown exponentially over the past fifty years. Research in this area has ranged from topics such as the development of sophisticated intelligence tests to the impacts of poverty on child development. Much of the research has been done under the framework of developing policy that minimizes racial and social class effects on children's future success and hopefully reduces the achievement gap. Over the past ten years this research has been inter-disciplinary, examining everything from biological and environmental factors that influence parenting styles to the impact of childcare quality on children's development and future academic success. Researchers have a better understanding of the complexity inherent in the early years of a child and the impact that these years have on future academic success. Yet, with regards to what interventions work best for an individual child and/or different groups of children, much still remains to be learned.

The focus of this dissertation is on children born at a socio-economic disadvantage. Typically, children from lower socio-economic classes begin schooling at levels unequal to their same-aged socio-economically advantaged peers (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005). However, averages do not equal certainties. Not all children from lower socio-economic classes will fare poorly, as being a child born to privilege will not guarantee success. However, the complexity of early childhood development highlights the

importance of looking at all facets of a child's development if research is to move forward in the understanding of the propensities for future academic success (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).

The following literature review begins with a general discussion of current early education research and the interdisciplinary approach of the last decade. Research continually shows that socio-economic status measures such as income, mother's education, and race are valid predictors of children's future success (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005). Following a discussion of the impact of such social forces on children's academic achievements is a summary of the research into resiliency and protective factors. Resiliency has become an interdisciplinary buzzword that at times encompasses both individual and social characteristics. Yet, behind the buzz are solid findings that provide a glimpse of how families, schools, communities along with local, state, and federal policies can work together to create environmental conditions that foster future success. Finally, a current, inter-disciplinary overview of research demonstrating the importance of a holistic, systemic approach to children's development and policy implications is offered. This chapter concludes with an example of a state level policy that utilizes current research to formulate concrete measures with a holistic, systematic approach to children.

I. Child Development and Early Experiences

Over the past decade, research into early care and development has acknowledged the rapid development of children from birth to age five, the

importance of early life experiences on children's development, and the central role that a child's relationships play on her or his ability to adapt to potential risk factors (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Much of the preceding early childhood research dichotomized internal factors such as genetics (nature) and external social characteristics such as outside experiences or influences (nurture). Findings from current research assert that this either/or question is a relic of previous disciplinary boundaries that narrowly focused on one facet or a few factors in explaining children's future success (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Was a child's future success better predicted by genetics or by environment? How much did the early experiences of childhood impact later development and future success?

The present paradigm has evolved from the either/or question of biology and environment to the interaction between the two (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Research no longer debates that early experiences, especially family conditions, matter. As Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) state, "the question today is not whether early experience matters, but rather how early experiences shape individual development and contribute to children's continued movement along positive pathways" (p. 6). Even with the scientific evidence regarding the enormous role a child's family background plays in her or his future success, the specific areas within and outside of the family that can be targeted for intervention are still debated (Baker, Scher, and Mackler; 1997; Coolahan, McWayne, Fantuzzo, and Grim, 2002; Evans, 2004; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).

In 2000, Shonkoff and Phillips, working with an interdisciplinary research team, published an important collective of child development research, From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Development. This research synthesized current knowledge of child development in understanding the types of early experiences that matter most for children. This important collective has become a guide for future research and public policy regarding child development between birth to five years. This is especially true for children classified as at-risk. The findings of this synthesis include, but are not limited to, the following core concepts:

1. Human development is shaped by a dynamic and continuous interaction between biology and experience;
2. Culture influences every aspect of human development and is reflected in childrearing beliefs and practices designed to promote healthy adaptation;
3. Human relationships, and the effects of relationships on relationships, are the building blocks of healthy development;
4. The development of children unfolds along individual pathways whose trajectories are characterized by continuities and discontinuities, as well as by a series of significant transitions;
5. Human development is shaped by the ongoing interplay among sources of vulnerability and sources of resilience;
6. The timing of early experiences can matter, but, more often than not, the developing child remains open to protective influences throughout the early years of life and into adulthood;
7. The course of development can be altered in early childhood by effective interventions that change the balance between risk and protection, thereby shifting the odds in favor of more adaptive outcomes (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000, p. 23-32).

There are many facets related to a child's development. Most central to a child would be the relationship that he or she has to a parent and/or other family members. (Amato, 2005; Entwisle and Alexander, 1996; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000) Other environmental factors such as preschool experience

and community life are also important (Harme and Pianta, 2005; Pianta et. al, 2002; Ramey and Ramey, 2002; Sheldon, 2003; Wentzel, 1998). Yet, especially when looking at the propensity for future academic achievement, the specific environmental pathways that lead to success are not always clear (Bogard and Takanishi, 2005). The way these various factors coalesce for individual children during her or his developing years is a conundrum whose complexities researchers still struggle with deciphering (Henry et al., 2005; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).

In an attempt to disentangle the factors that may or may not impede success, some would argue that policy focuses too heavily on academic and cognitive areas without looking at other important facets of children's development. This includes developmental areas such as a child's physical health and her or his social/emotional growth (how children relate to others and their environment). Furthermore, when looking at children's developmental growth, it is more important to look at the process of how she or he is developing rather than certain, specific outcomes (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Specific academic outcome measures may serve as a gauge for appropriate development but only if they are used in a proper, developmentally appropriate context.

The first interactions a child has are with his or her family. Both the quantity and quality of the relationship that a child has with her or his parents and family impacts her or his development and future success. (Entwisle and Alexander, 1996; Rodgers and Rose, 2002; Turner and Avison, 1985) This

may be especially defined in the mother-child relationship. Foster et al., (2005) contend that the mother-child relationship especially shapes the child's social and cognitive development. This creates a day-to-day reality that is solidified in the early years and maintained throughout childhood. The home environment strongly contributes to emerging literary and social competence of a child as well as her or his social-emotional growth (Foster, et al., 2005). These relationships and home environment impact subsequent educational success.

Coolahan, McWayne, Fantuzzo, and Grim (2002) further dissect the parent-child relationship by distinguishing between parenting practices and styles. Parenting practices refer to specific behaviors. Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) divide parenting behaviors into seven factors: nurturing (expressions of love affection and care), discipline (responses to inappropriate or appropriate behavior), teaching (strategies of conveying information or skills to the child), language (how the parent speaks and communicates to the child), monitoring (keeping track of the child), management (scheduling family and child's life), and materials (cognitive and linguistic materials available to the child). It is through these parenting behaviors that crucial parent-child education occurs. Variations in these behaviors have been shown to yield conclusions regarding group differences in child outcomes. For example, differences were found between white and black mothers in the factors of nurturance, discipline, teaching, language, and materials.

The larger context or overall emotional climate in which the behaviors are expressed would be parenting style (Coolahan, et al., 2002). Distinct from specific parenting practices, researchers conceptualize that parenting styles have the broadest influence on child development (Coolahan, et al., 2002). It is through parenting style that the parent conveys his or her attitude toward the child. Specifically, parenting style is a contextual variable that moderates between practices and specific child outcomes (Coolahan, et al., 2002). Diana Baumrind's (1978) classic demarcation of authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting styles provides insight to the importance of parenting styles on children's educational outcomes. An authoritarian parenting style refers to a strict, controlling approach while a permissive parenting style conveys little guidance, though centered on the child approach (Baumrind, 1978). An authoritative parenting style combines the best of the previous two, child-centered and individuated with an appropriate amount of parent guidance. In this model, the authoritative parenting style is seen as superior to authoritarian and permissive. Parents with an authoritative style were found to alternate between strict and relaxed control based upon the need of the child (Baumrind, 1978).

Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) contend that Baumrind's model may not be inclusive to non-white and ethnically diverse families. By examining a particular construct of parenting style that they refer as "control", they separate the parenting style of mothers into four, rather than three, dimensions of parenting style: "authoritative" (high in warm, firm control and

low in negative, harsh control), “authoritarian” (low in warm, firm control and high in negative, harsh control), “tough love” (high in both warm firm control and high in negative, harsh control) and “detached” (low in both warm firm control and low in negative, harsh control). Black mothers, compared to white mothers, were more likely to be in the tough love group. In Brooks-Gunn and Markman’s model (2005), the tough love group was more likely to be comprised of older black mothers with at least a high school education while the classic authoritarian group was mainly teenage mothers both black and white. Children from mothers in the tough love group had higher IQ and vocabulary test scores that the researchers partially attribute to this distinct parenting style gone unmentioned in many of the previous parenting style conceptualizations.

Research directly links the home experience, including parenting style and resources in the home, to children’s educational and behavioral outcomes (Hart and Risley, 1995). Though this is true in all areas of child development, this is especially instrumental in the development of children’s literacy and speaking skills. A study of children’s vocabulary revealed that the strongest factors for language acquisition was frequency of language experiences, language diversity, and economically related experiences in the child’s home (Hart and Risley, 1995). Parent perceptions of reading also correlate to future literary activities. Children from parents who consistently read to them and provide positive literacy experiences are more likely to develop a predisposition to reading more frequently and broadly in later years

(Baker, Scher, and Mackler, 1997). Parenting beliefs about the purpose of reading also related to children's later motivations to reading. Parents who are more likely to speak to their children in conversational style versus simple yes and no questions are more likely to raise children with higher English proficiency scores (Baker, Scher, and Mackler, 1997).

Generally, child development research also notes the importance of parents in influencing their child's social emotional growth and behavioral skills. The influence parents provide in both the environments parents arrange for their child along with the their response to children's interaction with those environments link to social outcomes. Favorable social outcomes are associated with levels of attention to children's development, understanding of rules and norms rather than unthinking obedience, and consistent patience and persistence (Hart and Risley, 1995).

Family structure correlates with children's educational achievement. Single-parent households are less likely to be able to provide both the tangible and intangible resources that are important for children's success. Amato (2005) found evidence that children growing up with two continuously married parents are less likely to experience a wide range of problems related to cognitive skills, socio-emotional growth, and other social problems. Furthermore, the type of employment of the parent strongly relates to early achievement. Mothers with jobs that are more self-fulfilling are more likely to read to their children and have detailed conversations than mothers with more menial or task oriented jobs. Seccombe (2002) notes that the qualities found

as strong influences to child development are also important in a child's extended family. This can include participation in family celebrations, spiritual activities such as church attendance, traditions, and predictable routines.

Young children are spending an increasing amount of time in out-of-home care, an increasing trend over the past thirty years. Factors related to such a shift include the increase of both parents working, work related requirements for TANF participants, and an increase in the knowledge that quality care can benefit children as they prepare for formal schooling (Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 2001). As the number of working mothers continues to rise, more young children are spending time in out of home care. Rough estimates of national data show that parents and government combined spend approximately $50 billion yearly on child care for 12 million children (Besharov and Morrow, 2006).

Research has shown mixed effects of childcare on later outcomes. Though some researchers (Besharov and Morrow, 2006) contend that child care research has been plagued by methodological concerns, most researchers accept the conclusion that children benefit from high quality care; though most care is found to be mediocre at best (Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 2001; Gilliam and Zigler, 2001). One particular study measured multiple factors that relate to eighth grade reading scores, juvenile delinquency, and high school completion for minority youth (Clements, Reynolds, and Hickey, 2004). They found that merely participating in preschool was an important factor on eighth grade reading achievement and high school completion, and

this was independent of any quality characteristic of the program. Meanwhile, other studies have reported moderate effects for some groups, with more positive effects for other groups (Gormley and Phillips, 2005).

Current research findings suggest the conclusion that there are great benefits found in high-quality programs (Harme and Pianta, 2005; Loeb, et al., 2004; Ou, 2005; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997). These benefits are especially pronounced for low-income populations (Loeb, Kagan, and Carol, 2004). Yet, research also shows that quality of childcare for this population is mediocre at best (Loeb, et al., 2004). For many, it is of poor quality. In other words, the population of children who would most benefit from quality are the ones least likely to receive it. Most parents are forced to choose childcare that is of lower quality than what they would like to choose due to access or financial constraints.

There are many factors related to quality of an early education environment. Researchers have cited the importance of a well-trained, educated workforce, individualized, child-centered teaching styles, and regulated health and safety measures (Harme and Pianta, 2005; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Recent research has also looked at the quality of the interactions that occur between children and their instructors in early childhood environments as being crucial influences in later outcomes (Harme and Pianta, 2005). When examining all facets of high early childhood quality, children from lower-income populations continue to be placed in environments of lower quality. There are those that view this as a national

crisis that manifests itself in class differences found in outcome measures as children enter kindergarten (Loeb et. al, 2004; Seccombe, 2002; Zill and West, 2001). Recent policy changes such as improvements in childcare subsidy policies in some states are seen as positive steps to addressing this problem. Many contend, however, that the low quality found is a problem for working poor and lower middle class families as well as lower-class families.

Program quality is also related to interactions with parents. Studies continue to demonstrate the positive impact a program can have when viewing parents as parents rather than simple consumers. This extends throughout a child's schooling as well. Parent-interactions include volunteering, sharing information about children, and teacher's explanations of proper educational techniques. Head Start was founded on this premise and standards of a Head Start program emphasize parent interactions.

Community and neighborhood conditions play an important part in children's development (Chase-Lansdale, Lindsay, Gordon, Brooks-Gunn, Llebanov, 1997; Duncan and Aber, 1997). Neighborhood conditions can impact the parent-child interactions or directly impact children (Chase-Lansdale, et al., 1997, Duncan and Aber, 1997). Conditions that may impact children's development and outcomes include structural characteristics such as joblessness, concentration of poor, minority, female-headed households, and social disorganization factors such as residential stability. Such conditions may lead to lack of adult friendships being formed with also a lack of adult oversight in the neighborhood (Duncan and Aber, 1997). Though

these impacts may extend to young children, they seem to have less influence for this young population (Chase-Lansdale, et al., 1997).

In summary, children's development is influenced by a convergence of individual and structural factors. These factors influence all aspects of a child's development and can be linked to future scholastic success. Neurological, psychological, and sociological research indicate that the period of birth to five is characterized by a rapid developmental pace that exceeds any other stage of life (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). This finding is both inspirational and ominous as this substantiates what many in the field of early education have always argued-early experiences matter. Research continues to examine elements of children's early experiences that impact later success and can be adapted or altered with public policy. For many children and their families, this period is highlighted by both remarkable achievements and serious problems. In other words, development at this time is highly robust and highly vulnerable (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). The conclusion that the early years matter is unambiguous. Yet, the authors' characterization rests not on the early years as restrictive blueprint determining children's fate, but more of a stage where sturdy or fragile props are being built.

II. Socio-Economic and Racial Parenting Differences

Home influence extends to larger social forces beyond simple parenting styles and behaviors. Class and race differences continue to emerge as predictors, both direct and intervening through differences in parenting behaviors and parenting styles, of children's later success. Many

contend that it is impossible to look at the importance of early experiences without examining the complex and interacting roles socio-economic status and race play in family interactions.

Poverty is a problem that plagues many families and perpetuates existing class differences. In 1997, there were an estimated 35.6 million people living in poverty, while 14.1 million of those were children (Arnold and Doctorff, 2003). The latest figures indicate that 20% of children in Georgia were living in poverty in 2005 (Kids Count, 2006). Furthermore, younger children are more likely to face poverty and the impact of poverty is greater during a child's earliest years (Arnold and Doctorff, 2003).

Poverty manifests itself in widespread environmental inequities between advantaged and disadvantaged children (Evans, 2004). For example, poor children are more likely to be exposed to family turmoil, violence, instability, and separation, live in areas characterized by high pollution, and live in households with smaller social networks (Evans, 2004; Seccombe, 2003). Other inequities are documented in parental and family differences. Low-income children experience less cognitive stimulation, are more likely to watch TV, and less likely to have access to books and computers (Evans, 2004). Low income parents know fewer of the parents of their children's friends, volunteer less in their children's schools, and are less attentive to homework and children's assignments compared to their middle-class counterparts (Evans, 2004).

Duncan and Magnuson (2005) demonstrate that socio-economic factors account for a large part of the social class academic discrepancies. They concentrate on four key interrelated components of socio-economic status that appear especially relevant for children's well being: family income, parent education, family structure, and neighborhood conditions.

Family economic conditions have been shown to directly correlate with future student achievement (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, and Smith, 1998). Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) contend that family income is singularly correlated with children's academic success. Children from families experiencing poverty conditions are more likely to score lower on academic achievement tests than their non-poor counterparts (Duncan, et al., 1998). Scores for five year olds on IQ tests were related to family income and poverty, even after controlling for education of the mother (McLoyd, 1998). One study found that 30% of the discrepancy between poor and non-poor students could be accounted for by family income. Poverty itself has ranges. Children from families facing the most extreme and persistent poverty had the largest achievement gaps. This is especially true for children who experience family poverty during their preschool years (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005).

Akin to income, parent educational level singularly correlates with children's future success. Parents with lower educational levels are less likely to read to their children, less likely to provide large number of books in the home, and will generally converse with their children differently than parents

with higher educational levels. The link between children's cognitive development and parent education is evident in as early as three months of age (Duncan and Magunson, 1995). Many surmise that the strong correlation between income and education is what keeps families in poverty over several generations and perpetuates class differences. As Arnold and Doctoroff (2003) attest:

> Poor educational attainment is a major cause of poverty, and poverty is a key influence on academic failure. So perhaps it should not be surprising that poverty tends to be chronic, or that poor achievement has massive costs to individuals and society (p. 518).

Differences in outlook or perceptions also reflect social class. Middle-class parents not only read to their children more frequently but also converse with them differently with a wider range of vocabulary (Rothstein, 2004). Middle-class parents, for example, are less likely to drill basic skills and more likely to model adult conversation skills and value literacy while working class parents may typically engage in conversation as if the child is not present (Rothstein, 2004). These skills are more likely to impact test scores as much as early reading.

Melvin Kohn's classic sociological research demonstrated differences between working-class and middle-class parents related to occupation (Kohn, 1977). Middle-class parents were more likely to work in jobs that require autonomy and self-direction; working-class parents in jobs that required conformity. Hence, these values are passed to the children not only overtly but also subtly in the day-to-day interactions. Kohn (1995) further elaborates that working class and middle class parents also see parenting very

differently. For middle-class parents, actual parenting is perceived as being more problematic and they are more likely to search out a wide variety of information and advice. Compared to working class parents, they are more likely to discuss parenting with their friends and neighbors (Kohn, 1995). This propensity for information searching found in middle class parents conveys values of educational self-direction that can impact children's future educational achievement.

Specific demographics, such as single parenthood, related to family structure correlate with lower academic achievement measures such as test scores and proficiency in math and reading (Zill and West, 2000). Duncan and Magnuson (2005) hypothesize that children in single-parent families may fare worse than other children because of the relationship between poverty and single parent families that correlate with additional family life stressors and economic insecurities.

As mentioned previously, neighborhood conditions are highly correlated with poverty measures. Though neighborhood conditions may have less of an isolated impact on younger children than older children, such conditions likely influence parenting behavior. For example, having low-income neighbors predicted higher levels of externalizing problem behavior among five-year-olds controlling for income, poverty status, and other family variables (McLoyd, 1998). Some surmise that this finding may be related to self-defense needs that are greater in low-income neighborhoods and result in different values being taught (McLoyd, 1998). Other findings show less

neighborhood cohesiveness, less parent sharing, and less parent knowledge of their child's friend's parents in low-income neighborhoods (Evans, 2004).

The dimensions mentioned above: family income, parent education, family structure, and neighborhood conditions are strongly correlated to family and parenting experiences available to the children and manifest themselves in readiness gaps that exist at formal school entry (Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey, 1997; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, and Carroll, 2004; Werner and Smith, 1992). Research that looked at the achievement levels of children as they enter kindergarten found that family risk factors such as low maternal education, welfare dependency, single parenthood, and parents who speak a primary language other than English were found to be related to lower proficiencies in general knowledge, reading skills and math abilities (Zill and West, 2000). In some ways more alarming, some research has indicated similar attitudes toward school and self at school entry between low-income and high-income children; however, low-income children are more likely to lose interest within the first years of school (Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003).

Many see good parenting as protection from negative educational outcomes; especially parenting that combines high parental warmth and consistent discipline (Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003). It is argued that parenting is being moderated through socio-economic status. Parenting behaviors are even stronger predictors for students from lower SES backgrounds (Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003). For example, socio-economic status has been found to be a predictor of resources in the home. Differences in resources account for

as much as about half a standard deviation (about 8 points) for certain standardized tests (Duncan and Magunson, 2005). Such resources in the home predict vocabulary and early school achievements. This may be especially true for children who experience family poverty during their preschool years. Hart and Risley (1995) showed that children who are born into homes with fewer economic resources learn fewer words, acquire the words they do know at a slower pace, and have fewer experiences with words in their interactions with other persons. This association accounts for about half of a standard deviation difference between racial and ethnic test scores (Hart and Risley, 1995).

Though highly correlated and related to socio-economic status, family experiences have been shown to uniquely correlate with child educational outcome measures (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005). For example, a longitudinal study that followed a group of low-income children in the Baltimore area showed varying factors that impede and influence success (Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey, 1997). The main outcome was the propensity to drop out of high school before graduation. The researchers found that predictive factors include school experiences from first grade forward, family interactions, and a children's behavior. These factors were found to be significantly influential independent of other socio-demographic factors. The authors of the study conclude by taking a life-course perspective that views dropping out of high school as a culmination of a long-term process of academic disengagement that begins when the children are very young

(Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey, 1997). In other words, dropping out of high school is not just an act but also the result of a long process. One could argue that dropping out is a manifestation of the achievement gaps that begin when the children are young.

Certain research has been able to isolate both family and school impacts and show how the two can interact. For example, consider research on summer learning loss. During the winter months when children are in school, family economic status has been shown to decrease in influence. However, during the summer months when children are not in school, family socio-economic status is an important predictor in achievement (Entwisle and Alexander, 1995a). Similarly, the number of months participating in childcare is positively related to child's achievement for mothers with less education, but not for children with mothers of higher education (Entwisle and Alexander, 1995b).

Socio-economic status and race are strongly related and hence difficult to disentangle (Arnold and Doctoff, 2003). Such research is challenging because of differences within and between racial and ethnic groups (Arnold and Doctoff, 2003). For example, findings from the Head Start Impact Study showed that approximately 69% of black students and 64% of Hispanic students show deficits in reading compared to only 33% of Anglo-American children (Arnold and Doctoff, 2003). In a separate study, both black and Hispanic children scored about two-thirds of a standard deviation below whites in math and just under one-half of standard deviation below whites in

reading (Duncan and Magunson, 1995). These findings are highly influenced by family structure. In this particular study, 15% of white children were in single parent families compared to 24% for Hispanic children and 50% of black children (Duncan and Magunson, 1995). Some posit these differences are related to speech culture differences that are associated with both race and class (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005).

Some researchers surmise that many parenting models do not take into account racial and ethnic differences or the models may demonize the differences. As mentioned previously, when examining differences in parenting style utilizing the classic Baumrind model (authoritarian, authoritative, passive), a fourth group emerges: tough love. Children in this group scored higher on specific measures than did their classic authoritarian counterparts. Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) hypothesize that previous models had confounded two separate groups of black mothers by labeling both authoritarian and attributing the same negative effects that were found for white children to their black peers. Analyses have found that a 12 to 15 point gap between white and black children is reduced to 3 to 9 points when general parenting behaviors and/or styles are considered (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005).

Research has also found a positive impact from parenting behavior interventions that show specific parenting behaviors related to positive child outcomes can be taught to parents. For example, successful early childhood educational interventions have a parent participation component. These

interventions can be incorporated into high quality early education environments and can reduce the impact of societal level factors such as poverty (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005).

Loeb et al. (2004) demonstrated that high-quality, early care education can have a significant impact for low-income populations. Placing high-risk, low-income children into quality early learning environments are a realistic, though expensive, intervention. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program and Chicago Longitudinal Study were two early intervention programs for low-income children and their parents that showed benefits well into later childhood and even adulthood (Shokoff and Phillips, 2000). However, these interventions were long and difficult to replicate on a large-scale basis. Citing the above research, many argue that to reduce the gap, “the most promising strategy is to increase access to high-quality center-based early childhood programs for low-income three and four-year olds” (Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, McLanahan, 2005 p.12).

It is important to note that though the links between socio-economic status and future academic success are strong, propensities do not necessarily lead to absolutes (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). The two aforementioned studies, The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program and Chicago Longitudinal Study, highlighted the impacts of high quality early education on disadvantaged children (Ou, 2005; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997). However, these studies were not cost effective given the great expense and number of children served. Despite the fact that many

disadvantaged children achieve great success, these types of high-quality interventions with a strong parent involvement are not available to most disadvantaged children.

III. Resiliency

The concept of resiliency emerged from studies of children who were able to function competently when exposed to adverse factors. Resiliency "denotes positive adaptation and competence despite the presence of substantial risk" (Smokowski, 1998 p. 338-339). Generally speaking, less competent functionality would have been expected for the children either due to accumulation of a great number or risk factors and/or the severity of such risk factors (Patterson, 2002). Howard and Johnson (2000) define resiliency as the, "capacity some children have to adapt successfully despite exposure to severe stressors" (p. 322). They contend that the strength of the concept has been the identification of both individual assets and structural strengths that provide mechanisms in the child's environment to foster resilience (Howard and Johnson, 2000).

Resiliency research utilizes the concept of protective factors. Protective factors are those that shape a child's (or family's) ability to endure in the face of risk factors (Seccombe, 2002). They mitigate risk by reducing stress and strengthening coping abilities (Davies, 2004). Some research has characterized resiliency relating to processes that are internal to the child and protective factors are the conditions in the child's environment that foster conditions leading to resilient traits.

Similarly, some research also refers to buffering effects. Buffering effects could involve aid from extended family that reduces the connection between economic hardship and economic pressure (Conger and Conger, 2002). If resilience is viewed as a process rather than an individualistic quality, buffering effects are factors that change the relationship from adversity to positive adaptation (Conger and Conger, 2002). Protective factors and buffering effects are inherent in the family environment. This may also include extended kin (Seccombe, 2002).

Resilience and protective factors research has identified consistent factors that increase the chances that children will excel, or at least demonstrate greater competency than would otherwise be expected. These factors include both psychological and sociological variables: good cognitive functioning, positive temperament, high sociability, close peer friendships, internal locus of control, sense of self-efficacy, high expectations for self, close relationship with an adult, strong connections with education, engagement in activities, and access to consistent to warm caregiving (Arnold and Doctoroff, 2003). Seccombe (2002) contends that resilient families have reasonable and clear-cut expectations for children, participate in family celebrations, share spiritual and/or religious connections, and have predictable routines.

Emmy Werner's groundbreaking longitudinal study of children in Hawaii is considered the classic example of resiliency research. This study has followed a group of children into adulthood while monitoring the, "impact

of a variety of biological and psychosocial risk factors, stressful life events, and protective factors" on their development (Werner and Smith, 1992 p.1). According to the researchers, resiliency and hence protective factors are antithetical to vulnerability and risk factors. Furthermore, the environments in which children develop can range from facilitative to non-facilitative, and can include specific learning opportunities as well as the larger culture and social system (Werner and Smith, 1992).

According to Werner and Smith (1992), one out of three children in the study were born with the odds against successful development. One out of every three of the high-risk children, about 10% of the total cohort, developed competent, caring, and confident characteristics by age 18 (Werner and Smith, 1992). It is important to note that as the disadvantages and cumulative number of stressful life events increased, more protective factors were needed to counterbalance these effects. Examining the children as adults, Werner and Smith (1992) identified many of the characteristics of the resilient children. These include both internal and external factors: better reasoning and reading skills, engagement in many interests and activities that were not necessarily sex-typed, no prolonged separations from a primary caretaker during the first year of life, emotional support outside the family, and smaller families with four or fewer children with space of at least 2 years or more between the next sibling (Werner and Smith, 1992). Werner and Smith's findings remain powerful in illustrating the complex interaction between a child's environment, skills and abilities, and his or her academic success.

Resiliency research shows the family unit as a primary influence in developing resilient attributes. Patterson (2002) argues that the recent popularity of the topic relates to trends in family research that emphasize more family strengths and resources rather than family deficits and family pathology. Looking at how families with young children cope with financial hardships, work-family strains, and intra-family strains, McCubbin and McCubbin (1988) identify critical family strengths. These include family life satisfaction, financial management skills, family celebrations and traditions, shared orientation to child rearing for dual parent families, and an overall satisfaction with quality of life. Similarly, they also discuss five basic aspects of family life that guide research on resilient attributes for families:

1. Families face hardships and changes as a natural and predictable aspect of family life over the life cycle;
2. Families develop basic strengths and capabilities designed to foster the growth and development of family members and the family unit and to protect the family from major disruptions in the face of family transitions and changes;
3. Families also face crises which force the family unit to change its traditional mode of functioning and adapt to the situation;
4. Families develop basic and unique strengths and capabilities designed to protect the family from unexpected or non-normative stressors and strains and to foster the family's adaptation following a family crisis or major transition and change;
5. Families benefit from and contribute to the network of relationship and resources in the community, particularly during periods of family stress and crisis (p 249).

Conger and Conger's research (2002) looked at resiliency in relation to influences and support, both inside and outside of the family. The findings from this research demonstrate that resilience is promoted by support and not just from family members. Two specific themes relate to this research:

resilience in relation to economic hardship and resilience to demanding life transitions. Especially relevant to this dissertation, Conger and Conger (2002) note that within the context of the family, there are at least two primary types of positive adaptation: 1) the quality of family relationships; and 2) the functioning of individual family members. Both types are important in fostering children's resilience. It is necessary that a child have good relationships with his or her parents; though this by itself would not foster resilience-the parent has to possess adaptive or buffering qualities. Conversely, a parent who may possess adaptive or buffering qualities may not be able to convey these to the child without a good relationship. Conger and Conger (2002) articulated their conclusions about the relationship between family resiliency and economic hardship:

> Parents experienced considerable resilience to economic hardship when they: a) emotionally supported each other; b) demonstrated effective problem-solving skills; and c) possessed a sense of mastery and self-confidence that allowed them to persevere and reduce their level of economic pressure. These resilience processes increased positive adaptation in the quality of martial and parent-child relationships and in the parents' emotional distress (p. 370).

In addition to resilient qualities fostered at the family level, research also shows the importance of looking at other facets of the child's environment. This includes both out of home experiences and community level factors (Howard and Johnson, 2000). Luther et al. (2002) denote three sets of factors related to the development of resilience: 1) attributes of the children themselves; 2) aspects of their families; and 3) characteristics of their wider social environments. Other environments include school and

neighborhood settings. Harme and Pianta's (2005) research shows that kindergarten and first grade students in classrooms with teachers that display high levels of emotional support score higher on certain academic and cognitive tests. Other classroom attributes related to protective factors include smaller class sizes, appropriately trained teachers, and systemic efforts to include parents as partners in their child's education (Smokowski, 1998). In relation to community, the neighborhoods that provide opportunities for community life participation and connections between peers and adults foster resilience (Seccombe, 2002).

Despite the strength of the concept of resilience, there are those that point out concerns with the way that it has been conceptualized. Luthar, et al., (2000) note that there are ambiguities in the way the construct has been defined. They argue that, "the theoretical and research literature on resilience reflects little consensus about definitions…with substantial variations in operationalization and measurement of key constructs" (Luthar, et al., 2000 p. 544). This can relate to the use of similar but different related concepts such as protective factors and buffering effects. Since the concept crosses academic disciplinary boundaries, there have been variations in how the concept has been operationalized, specifically with concerns with the use of the resilience as a scientific construct (Luthar, et al., 2000). For some it is difficult to quantify resiliency.

Despite the controversy over definitions, there are those that feel that the popularity of the topic has increased its utility. For example, Davies (2004)

contends that recent developments of resiliency recognize that resiliency is a process that is contingent on environmental factors, most notably responsive, protective parenting. For the purposes of the present study, resilience is examined with regard to the outside social forces, including family and parental perceptions of community that influence the children yet with the influence of how parent perceptions and language impact their children's propensity for success.

In reality, children cannot be dichotomized as either resilient or non-resilient. Early experiences can be viewed on a continuum with risk and protective factors. On one end of the continuum are children being raised by families characterized by economic security, family structure stability, and embedded in daily lives and routines characterized by consistency rather than chaos. On the other end of the continuum are children growing up in families that live under constant economic uncertainty, unstable family structure, and days where routines are more chaotic than consistent. The reality is that most children fall somewhere in the middle.

An overall aim of this study is to demonstrate how parents' attitudes and behaviors toward parenting intersect with policy implications such as quality interventions that produce protective environments and resilient factors. Karen Seccombe (2002) argues that focusing on national economic policies rather than the focusing upon individual personality characteristics will better foster resiliency among families, family attributes, or even unique

community features. Research regarding the role of poverty interspersed with race certainly supports this argument.

Davies (2004) suggests that the most destructive scenario occurs when risk accumulates and there are few protective mechanisms. Research concluding that much of children's academic success is already established at such a young age underscores this point. Despite the research showing certain characteristics that may provide protective factors that harbor resilient characteristics and a safe environment among children and families, a clear and honest understanding of the poverty and education is needed to propose policy changes that holistically and inter-generationally impact children. In other words, in order to influence children's outcomes and academic success, poverty has to be addressed.

IV. Systemic and Holistic Policy Approaches

Studies note the importance of taking a holistic approach to young children and hence their development. A holistic approach includes not isolating one particular variable or characteristic but examining varying variables, contexts, and characteristics.

Research often refers to a child's school readiness or potential for academic success. In narrowest terms, these concepts entail a child's academic preparedness. A broad conceptualization would also include the ability of schools, teachers, and parents to prepare children for the rigors of formal education. Yet, despite growing public support for high quality early childhood experiences, general perception still contends that a child's

scholastic or academic career begins upon his or her entry into the formal school system. This perception is in contrast to the growing body of research that attests to the importance of the early years in developing a child's cognitive ability and hence preparing a child for school. It can certainly be argued that a public perception that negates or minimizes the importance of the early years hinders policies that have the potential to significantly impact children and reduce the socio-economic gaps that exist and expand at the beginning of the formal education process.

In 2005, the state department that administers Georgia's Pre-K program conceptualized a working policy definition of the term school readiness. This new conceptualization defines school readiness in the context of a child's abilities, learning environment, the family context in which the child lives, and the context of the community and the services that community is able to provide. Therefore, this holistic approach suggests school readiness includes: 1) special services identified, if needed; 2) curiosity and love of learning established; 3) social skills and ability to recognize others emerged; 4) early literacy skills developed; and 5) a basic understanding of the world demonstrated (Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2006). Therefore, this conceptualization is more than a beginning point of a child's education; rather it is another point on a continuum that acknowledges that learning and development begins for children at birth.

In summary, children do not begin early formal schooling with a blank slate and researchers continue to recognize that even children's early learning experiences are not immune to the family, community, and social class origins from which children originate. A child enters the education system under significantly varying environmental circumstances that impact his or her development. As Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) contend, "the question today is not whether early experience matters, but rather how early experiences shape individual development and contribute to children's continued movement along positive pathways" (p.6).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Perspectives

Whereas previous early childhood research guided the methodology of the present study, theory places the research in context and provides a perspective for the role that various parenting styles, early education experiences and poverty related factors play in the lives of children. Because one theory alone may distort reality by presenting a limited perspective (Winton, 1995), two sociological frameworks are utilized. The specific sociological theoretical frameworks that guide the research in this dissertation are conflict theory and symbolic interactionism. Conflict theory provides insight as to how the inequitable distribution of resources translates into an achievement gap between children with greater access to societal resources and those not as fortunate. Symbolic interactionism illuminates how parent realities are shaped and how parental perceptions translate into specific parenting practices that impact their children. Furthermore, a symbolic interactionist approach suggests ways that the inequities found between families with less access to societal resources and their more socio-economically advantaged counterparts impact parent perceptions and realities and transcend to an even pronounced achievement gap.

In addition to the two sociological theories, Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective is also utilized. An ecological perspective provides a systemic approach to children's development and related future success (Bronfenbrenner, 1988; Kohn, 1995). Children are at the center of various

systemic, interrelated influences. These systems include family, school, and community with each having, within varying degrees, influence on the child.

This dissertation focuses on the family influence, specifically the child's parents or guardians, on a child's potential for future academic success. Yet, families do not exist as stand-alone entities and are influenced by the world around them. Such influence impacts the quantity and quality of a child's interaction with the educational sphere. The two sociological theories, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism, along with Bronfrenbrenner's ecological approach provide differing, though related perspectives, into how the social process of parenting is influenced by the world around parents and how both directly impact the child.

I. Conflict Theory

Conflict theory provides an understanding of ways that social class, manifested in inequities related to societal resource allocation, impact and shape a child's future success. Societal resources are unevenly distributed and such distributions perpetuate existing class differences. When societal inequities affect one child, it is a tragedy. However, conflict theory suggests that societal inequities do not impact just one or even a few children; rather such inequities impact large groups of children and greatly hinder chances for social class mobility.

Conflict theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between high quality early education experiences and the educational experiences of children from low-income families. Three basic, connected

assumptions can be connected to conflict theory (Wallace and Wolf, 1995). First, conflict theorists suggest that in all societies there are basic things that people want and attempt to acquire. Low-income children benefit the most from high-quality early education experiences, yet are the least likely to be placed in such early educational environments. Access to high quality early educational experiences is an unevenly distributed resource and those who would benefit the most have the least power to advocate that their children receive such experiences. Second, conflict theorists posit that power is the core of social relationships and is scarce, unequally divided, and essentially coercive. Not all children have the same access to high-quality education with some parents having greater power to influence they quality of education their child receives. Finally, in a conflict perspective values and ideas are used to advance the goals of different social groups within societies. Since social class mobility is seen as an individualistic quality, parents of children who benefit from the experience do not see that this, in many cases a government subsidized benefit, could be an important tool in their child's future success. Parents may only compare their child's early education experience to those of their social peers and may not realize that their children are not receiving the best experiences that could be available to them. Federally funded Head Start is an example of a high quality early education experience that is available as aid to poor families. However, not all children eligible for Head Start receive the service.

The main elements that distinguish the children in the at-risk and non at-risk groups would be factors related to socio-economic status. Children in the at-risk classification were those who were born into circumstances that already placed them at a disadvantage relative to middle or upper class children. For many children in the study, their family income placed them at poverty levels. A conflict perspective illuminates the importance in understanding how such poverty and the socio-economic factors related to and the creation of poverty influences student achievement.

Rothstein (2004) writes that “demography is not destiny, but students’ social and economic family characteristics are a powerful influence on their relative average achievement” (p. 16). Empirical research suggests strong impacts of poverty related to child outcomes with such impacts being greater for younger children and those who remain in poverty for longer periods of time (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 2005). Furthermore, trends indicate that the problem is worsening with young children being among the poorest members of society and are more likely to be poor today than they were 25 years ago. Early education research indicates that as the children grow older interventions are less likely to be successful (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Previous research has found success with Georgia’s Pre-k program but since the children do not begin the program until they are four, there are those that argue that the program starts too late to effectively reduce the achievement gap.

Conflict theory examines ways that societal resources are not evenly distributed among certain social groups and how this uneven distribution snowballs over generations and decreases the likelihood that children will be able to overcome their socio-economic status of birth. Research into resilient children and adults (Werner and Smith, 1992) provides evidence that some children will be able to rise above their social circumstances and excel. Values and ideas are an important component of conflict theory and some may argue that the parents of these children adopt different values and ideas than their similar socially disadvantaged counterparts with parents from children in the other group adopting values and ideas that keep their children at a social disadvantage. In other words, values and ideas of the socially advantaged group are distributed unevenly among families in the socio-economically disadvantaged group.

This explanation may be too simplistic. According to Lewis Coser (1977) the state's role in poverty as perceived by classic theorist Georg Simmel highlights the importance of utilizing conflict theory in understanding resiliency research. Current resiliency research views the topic more from a social structural standpoint rather than as an individualistic quality (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1988). Simmel argued that poverty only became a public issue when a society recognized it as such and assigned persons requiring assistance as being poor (Coser, 1977). Society assigns the poor a particular status that they hence are then subsequently defined by this attribute of "needing assistance." The degree to which social programs

attribute this status to persons and the degree to which they accept such status may explain differences between the parents of children in the resilient category and parents of children in the non-resilient category.

Coser's (1977) description of Simmel's conception of relative deprivation is also useful here. Poverty is a relative term and people always compare their resources to those around them. Thus, even if people who are members of the upper classes have less than their peers, then they are likely to feel disadvantaged in comparison to them. Similarly, persons who are officially considered to be poor, such as those eligible for government benefits such as free lunches, may not seem themselves as poor and be less likely to feel the need to advocate for changes for their children. Simmel felt that government programs aimed at eradicating poverty would never succeed. Even if those at the bottom are elevated, many people throughout the stratification system will still feel poor in comparison to their peers (Coser, 1977).

In summary, conflict theory highlights the importance of power in societies and how this unequally distributed resource advances the ends and means of some social groups at the expense of others. A classic conflict theory approach views economic resources as a way of yielding power. In essence, through economic resources the haves control the have-nots. It can be argued that the education system perpetuates the current socio-economic social structure and many feel that this perpetuation begins even before formal schooling (Rothstein, 2004).

II. Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a social-psychological perspective with a primary focus on the individual and the meanings the individual gives to her or his behavior (Wallace and Wolf, 1995). This theory illuminates the importance of examining how parents see themselves as parents, their position in the social hierarchy and the amount of agency that they attribute to themselves as advocates in their child's life. In this theory, these perceptions have as much importance as the parenting skills that are being employed.

Symbolic interactionism stresses the processes by which the individual makes decisions and forms opinions. An important component of this theory examines the interaction between behavior and individual's thoughts, emotions, and perspective that he provides to his own behavior. Individuals are viewed as active constructors of their environment and conduct. They interpret and define their actions rather than being passive beings impinged upon by social forces (Wallace and Wolf, 1995).

Symbolic interactionism goes hand-in-hand with qualitative research. Qualitative researchers seek to develop a theoretical framework that is grounded in the data rather than a theory validation that is common in quantitative studies (Glaser and Straus, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Symbolic interactionism allows for understanding of the meanings that participants give to their own meanings rather than imposing an outsider's view to their own behaviors and perceptions. This fits the open-ended, methodological design of the qualitative study used in this dissertation. As

qualitative research examines the meanings that participants ascribe to their own behavior, symbolic interactionism provides a perspective to the exploratory focus utilized in this dissertation.

Symbolic Interactionism notes that persons do not ascribe meanings to their own behavior in a vacuum. Highly related to such meanings and behaviors would be the individual's perceptions of societal expectations and how she or he perceives others perceive her or him. The qualitative interviews allowed for perceptions and meanings in the parent's own terms. The qualitative analysis shows how such perception and meanings are related to other parents and the parent's view of their social context shapes their parental behavior. Typically, being a member of a group because of a shared social role, such as a parent of a young child, assumes a shared perspective. However, the degree to how this may relate to parents of resilient children and parents of non-resilient children is unclear.

A basic tenant of symbolic interactionism is that, "situations that are perceived as real are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas, 1928, p. 572.) The way that parents see themselves in the role of parents may have the consequence of fostering or not fostering resilient traits and environments. For example, deriving from the parent interviews the way that they see themselves as partners in their children's education versus a being observers in the education highlights differences between the resilient and non-resilient group. Furthermore, their impressions related to the explanations of their socio-economic status may show the way that they view

external family conditions and the messages that they are subtly sending their children. Finally, the perception of a parent's isolationism could possible impact their child's educational experience. Parents who view themselves as isolated from the larger community context may relate a sense of fatalism or lack of values promoting individualistic achievement traits.

The work of Georg Simmel, that for many provides a bridge between conflict theory and symbolic interactionism, suggests that it is an actor's agency that distinguishes him or her from the lower animals (Coser, 1977). According to George Ritzer (1983), Simmel's contribution to symbolic interactionism related to the way that individuals can assess their own options or even behavior and make their own decisions. However, this ability also has the effect of allowing for persons to reify social institutions whereas aspects of social life that are really socially constructed take on a life that makes them seem natural and not social. In other words, parent's ideas on education and advocacy for their child may come to be seen by the parents as "true" or "natural" and not the result of societal factors. This may have the effect of perpetuating existing social class differences.

As mentioned earlier resiliency research had traditionally looked at the concept as an internal factor related to the child, something that the child possessed that was not amenable to any sort of outside intervention (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1988). A symbolic interactionist approach illustrates that resiliency is not something that is unalterable or immune from policy intervention. For example, a Minneapolis based research institute

recently developed a framework for schools to utilize that can help a school measure the collective strengths of their students and to how well their school supports resiliency (Walsher, 2006). The framework uses factors that are both internal and external. The framework includes support from other adults, the perceived achievement motivation of the child, and the parents' involvement in the school. This developed framework shows how the definition of meanings relates to the way they are put into practice. By viewing resiliency as a dynamic process rather than an individual trait, policy interventions were developed that foster conditions that improves individual traits.

For this dissertation, the use of symbolic interactionism includes an understanding of how the surveyed parents view their own parenting skills, their salience in parenting roles, and their perception of being an advocate for their child along with their place in their child's educational experience. Symbolic interactionism shows why some parenting interventions may be more successful than others. For example, a parenting intervention that works to redefine aspects of the parenting role may be more successful than an intervention that simply works at changing behavior.

III. Interspersion of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Perspective

An ecological perspective illuminates the way that particular influences of young children, such as parenting processes and early education experience, impact their scholastic success. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner's perspective utilizes a contextual, system-linking approach to human

development (Seginer, 2006). Such a systemic approach links the interactions of a child's microsystem (interpersonal relationships), mesosystem (home and school) and exosystem (his or her parent's friends and work) and macrosystem (social classes, ethnic groups) to academic success (Seginer, 2006). This contextual, system-linking approach is used to look at the way a child's microsystem, her or his interpersonal relationships, and mesosystem, the type of home and school environments the young child is living under are impacted by larger social forces. More specifically, the dissertation examines ways that parents connect and perceive their parenting is influenced by the world around them. Ann Swidler (1986) writes that individuals, in this case parents, have at their disposal a "toolkit" with various "tools" that they use in their day to day parenting. The ecological approach helps illuminate the ways that research can best examine parent's "toolkits" or their perception thereof, from a systematic, holistic approach.

This ecological perspective notes the influence of the following: 1) interactions at the family level such as parenting strategies and discipline techniques; 2) interactions at the school level such as the degree to which parents understand their child's current educational environment; 3) interactions at the community level that would include the type of work the parent does or their circle of friends; and 4) interactions at the societal level such as the experience of belonging to a racial or ethnic group. The ecological theory provides a perspective to these influences and helps understand the impact of the child's environment. This perspective is used to

add a current child development approach to the conflict and symbolic interactionist frameworks.

IV. Summary

Two theoretical frameworks guide this research, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism. Conflict theory allows for an inquiry into the way that poverty impacts children from both the resilient and non-resilient groups. Symbolic interactionism allows for the meanings that the participants give to their own behavior and perceptions to be viewed as important as the behaviors themselves. Inherent with both theoretical frameworks would be the way that the socio-economic status of both groups impacts parental behaviors and perceptions. Conflict theory provides an overarching explanation to the role of socio-economic status in the children's educational experiences; symbolic interactionism guides how the meanings of the parents are interpreted and placed in the larger social context.

Throughout the dissertation, Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective is used to view children's development systematically and children's outcomes holistically. When examining the various influences on children, it is important to note that these exist in multiple levels (family, school, community) and interact in various ways. Conflict theory and symbolic interactionism demonstrate the importance at the concept of resilience from an individualistic and societal standpoint, for both impact children's development and subsequent outcomes. The ecological perspective provides the bridge between the two.

Chapter Four: Study Background and Methods

I. The Georgia Early Childhood Study

This study is based on data collected for The Georgia Early Childhood Study (GECS), a three-year evaluation of the Georgia Pre-k program designed to measure the impact of the state's universal 4-year-old program. The GECS began in 2001 and compared the development of children enrolled in one of three types of preschool programs in Georgia (Georgia Pre-k, Head Start, and private preschool). Various measures of family environment were used as controls. A final report (Henry, et al., 2005) of the study was issued in December 2005.

Children from 24 of Georgia's 159 counties were eligible to participate. Counties were selected proportionate to the number of four-year-olds in the county that year. Therefore, both urban and rural areas were represented proportionate to their overall populations. Geographically, this purposive sample included all regions of the state.

In each county that was sampled, a population proportionate number of Georgia Pre-k, Head Start, and private preschool sites were selected. Georgia's Pre-k program is lottery funded and is universal (open to children from all income levels). Head Start is federally funded and targets children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Private preschool represents tuition based full day preschool. It is important to note that at-risk children, classified by

the state agency that oversees Georgia Pre-k as category one[1], constituted a slight majority of children who attended the Georgia Pre-k program (51%) in 2001, the year the study began. Within the GECS, students from Georgia Pre-k comprised 56% (n=351) of the sample, while children from Head Start (n=134) and private preschool (n=141) represented 21% and 23% each respectively.[2]

From each site, one four-year-old class was randomly selected.[3] Up to five children from each selected classroom with the appropriate birth date (September 2,1996-September 1, 1997) and who had parents who signed consent forms were eligible for the study.[4] The three programs allowed researchers to achieve a cross-section of socio-economic status: children who were more likely to reside in disadvantaged households (Head Start), children who were more likely to reside in advantaged households (private preschool), and children from households across the total socio-economic spectrum (Georgia Pre-k). A total of 569 children that represent those who had a full year of preschool are included in the final study analysis.

Study methods included assessing directly the sampled children with both standardized and non-standardized instruments, collecting teacher ratings on academic, social, behavioral, and health dimensions of the

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[1] Category one is a distinction used to classify children who are eligible for means tested benefits such as free or reduced lunch.
[2] Final figures represent totals calculated at the end of the study. These figures do not include the seven children who were withdrawn from the study during the three-year evaluation.
[3] Georgia's Pre-k is limited exclusively to four-year-olds. However some Head Start and private preschool programs were mixed aged. For the study purposes, only four-year-olds were selected. However, it is important to note that the dynamics of a mixed aged classroom may be much different than the dynamics of a single aged classroom, especially in preschool. These dynamics could have, though it was difficult to test due to sampling sizes of the Head Start and private preschool population, impacted the preschool experience for the child and hence his or her school readiness.
[4] The response rate for parental consent was 75%.

children, observing the sampled classrooms, and surveying both parents and teachers. Subsequent assessments continued for three years. The children were tested during the following periods: at the beginning of their preschool year (Fall 2001), at the end of their preschool year (Spring 2002), beginning and end of kindergarten (Fall 2002 and Spring 2003), and finally at the end of the third year (Spring 2004). For most of the children, this was their first grade year. Teacher ratings were collected concurrent with the children's testing and parents were surveyed twice the first year and once each subsequent year.

Initial findings of the GECS found that children in Georgia began their preschool year scoring below national norms on three out of four norm-referenced assessments (Henry, et al., 2003). These differences were especially pronounced for children from socio-economically disadvantaged households. Survey data further revealed that these at-risk children emerged from families with characteristics such as mothers with limited education, lower income, greater likelihood of discontinuity in family structure, previous or current welfare receipt, and where federal (Medicaid) or state (Peachcare) insurance was the main form of health insurance for the child.

II. Quantitative Analysis and Research Questions

Socio-economic and demographic variables included as independent variables were race and sex of the child, mother and father's education, family income, type of health insurance, marital arrangement, and whether or not the child had lived with both parents since birth. Over 90% of the sample

was either black or white; therefore race was dichotomized into these two categories.[5] Income and parental education, scored separately for the mother and father, was categorized into four groups (less than $20,000, $20,001-$50,000, $50,001-$80,000, and over $80,001 for income; less than high school, high school diploma, some college or associates degree, and bachelors or above for education). Type of health insurance for the child was dichotomized into those children who received insurance through either Medicaid or Peachcare, a state health insurance plan for children whose families do not qualify for Medicaid but are unable to purchase policies through employment or other means, and those children who are not on those plans. Over 95% of the children in the sample had some type of health insurance. Finally, martial status was dichotomized: those respondents who reported being married versus those who reported being divorced, widowed, or never married. Table 4-1 details the demographic and socio-economic measures, the final coding used in the analyses, percentages in each category, and the respected response rates for each variable.[6]

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[5] The other racial categories were Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, and multi-racial. There were not enough in each of these categories to yield significant results. Therefore, only children classified as white or black were included in the analysis.

[6] Data for these variables were collected at multiple times from various sources over the three-year period. For some measures, contradictory responses occurred. For example, a parent may have classified their child as multi-racial, whereas the teacher may have classified the child as black. Other times, on measures such as parental education, the results could have feasibly changed over the course of the study. For consistency purposes, data were first considered from the preschool year-the year with the highest response rates. If data were not available from the preschool year, but were collected from the kindergarten or first grade year, data from these years were then considered. Similarly, in cases where data differed between parents and teachers, parent data superseded teacher response. This approach allowed for more cases to be included in the quantitative analyses.

Table 4.1: Final Coding and Response Rates of Socio-demographic Comparisons Between Children Classified as At- Risk and Children not Classified as At- Risk.

Variable	Variable Categories	Total # of Responses	% of Responses
Sex:	Male (50.9%) Female (49.1%)	432	97%
Race:	White (53.2%) Black (46.8%)	385	87%
Mother's Education:	Less than high school (16.0%) High School Diploma (25.0%) Some College (35.6%) College Degree+ (23.4%)	376	85%
Father's Education:	Less than high school (17.1%) High School Diploma (34.3%) Some College (25.1%) College Degree+ (23.4%)	350	79%
Income:	$20,000 or less (18.8%) $20,001-$50,000 (41.8%) $50,001-80,000 (21.8%) 80,000 or more (17.6%)	261	59%
Child's Health Insurance:	Medicaid or Peachcare (38.4%) Other or no Insurance (33.7%)	388	87%
Marital Status:	Married (65.0%) Not Married (35.0%)	300	68%
Continually Live with Both Parents Since Birth:	Yes (64.9%) No (35.1%)	319	72%

Quantitative variables used as child outcome dependent variables include standardized test scores and teacher ratings. Standardized test scores included results from the following four assessments nationally normed with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15:

1. Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)-This test measures a child's receptive vocabulary skills. A researcher shows a child four distinct pictures in black and white and asks the child to point to the picture that best resembles a certain word (e.g. cow). The questions increase with difficulty. The tester stops administering the test when a child misses eight out of twelve items in a set. The range for the Pre-k year of the study was 40-137 with the sample average being 91.2 (Dunn and Dunn, 1997)
2. Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-Letter Word Subtest (WJ-LW)-This test measures a child's ability to recognize printed letters and words. The test begins with basic letters and increases to more difficult words. The tester stops administering the test when a child misses six items in a row. The range for the sample on the Pre-k year was 55 to 166 with an average of 100.9 (Woodcock, McGrew, and Mather, 2001).
3. Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-Applied Problems (WJ-AP)-This test measures a child's basic cognitive and math skills. The test is administered similarly to the letter-word subtest in that the test ends when a child misses six items in a row. The test begins with basic

counting skills and increases to word problems of increasing difficultly. The range for the sample on the Pre-k year was 49 to 131 with an average of 95.4 (Woodcock, McGrew, and Mather, 2001).

4. Oral and Written Language Scales-Oral Expression Subtest (OWLS)- this test measures a child's expressive language skills. Children are shown an illustration and then presented with a statement or question. Children respond by completing the statement or answering the question. For example, a researcher shows a child an illustration with two females and one is giving a gift to the other. The researcher says, "Mary gave Sarah a present, what does Mary say to Sarah?" The correct response would be "thank you". The range for the sample on the Pre-k year was 57 to 132 with an average of 89.5. (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1995).

These four tests were chosen for several different reasons. As mentioned previously, the tests are nationally normed. Thus standardized scores were computed and these results were compared to those of similar age peers. Therefore, children's gains were viewed not only in new knowledge or skills that had been learned, but also in the way the gains relating to a nationally representative sample of same aged peers. Hence, the standardization allowed for an examination of gains over and above what would be expected for traditional development. Second, these tests were used in other comparable studies evaluating similar programs at state and federal levels. Third, these four tests represented a more comprehensive

approach to children's learning. The four tests combined to provide an understanding of a child's ability on language and cognitive skills- skills deemed important for later success in school. Finally, these tests were considered to be developmentally appropriate. They allowed an understanding of a child's ability while allowing children to still be children. Children viewed the tests as games rather than "schoolwork" or "tests". However, it is important to note that, at least anecdotally, children's demeanor regarding the tests changed over the course of the study. For many children, test anxiety was visible by the end of the study when the tests were being conducted.[7]

It is important to not only examine scholastic skills, but to look holistically at children's development and assess other areas. Therefore, in addition to measuring language and cognition skills, children's behavioral skills and health status were also assessed. Each year of the study teachers were asked to rate children in these measures. Teachers were given a rating form at the beginning and end of each school year. The rating form (Appendix One) included a series of questions. Among these were items that specified a certain behavioral trait (exhibits ethical behavior), communication skill (speaks clearly), or a measure of general health (seems well-rested). Teachers rated the children on a seven-point scale: one=extraordinarily poor; two=very poor; three=poor; four=average; five=good; six=very good;

[7] It is important to mention that administering the tests required a detailed and strenuous training. All of the assessors over the course of the study attended an annual two-day training with each assessor having to be checked off by an early education specialist before they could officially assess any children in the study. Being that the author had never worked with children, it took him two sessions before he was able to officially assess any child in the study.

seven=extraordinarily good. The scale had been piloted and used in an earlier Georgia State University research study led by the principal investigator: Dr. Gary Henry. Each year the scale remained the same. However, individual items would change to reflect developmentally appropriate expectations for children.

Quantitative measures were used that measured the quality of the preschool program. Specifically, the Early Childhood Rating Scale (ECERS-R) was used to gauge quality in each of the preschool classrooms (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). This widely used 36 item scale measures individual aspects of quality in an early childhood environment over a seven-point scale: one=poor; three=adequate; five=good; and seven=excellent. The items are divided into 6 subscales each representing a different domain of quality in early childhood environments. The six subscales are: 1) Space and Furnishings-which measures aspects such as the organization of the classroom and space for outdoor play; 2) Personal Care Routines-which measures areas such as immunizations, hand washing, etc.; 3) Language-Reasoning-which measures a child's access to literacy materials as well as the language style teachers use with the children; 4) Activities-which measures the type of activities typically available to children such as science, math, and sand/water play; 5) Interaction-which measure how well the teachers and students get along with each other; and 6) Program Structure-which measure how much of the day is spent in whole group versus individual activities that are child chosen. The authors of the scale report an overall

consistency of .92 with a range for the subscales of .72 to .88 (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998).

For this dissertation, it was important to develop a measure that could identify children for whom there may be factors in that child's environment that would indicate whether she or he would, given her or his socio-economic status, academically excel. First, children within the GECS were identified as at-risk or not at-risk. For this identification, two external measures were considered: Head Start participation and classification as "Category One" in the Pre-k program. These were not perfect measures but they denote an external identification of children who were eligible, based on socio-economic status, for mean tested benefits. Because these two measures were only available for children who attended Georgia Pre-k and Head Start, only these two samples are included in the quantitative analysis.[8]

Within the at-risk population, specific child outcome data were then used to develop a measure classifying these children as resilient or non-resilient. To develop this measure, a composite measure derived from standardized test scores that assessed children's receptive vocabulary skills (PPVT), expressive language (OWLS), letter-word identification (WJ-LW) and basic math skills (WJ-AP) was used. This composite score was calculated from an average of the standardized scores of the direct assessments administered at the beginning of their four-year old preschool year. Therefore,

[8] Discriminant analysis that took into account mother's educational level, father's educational level, family income, child receiving health insurance through Medicaid or Peachcare (Georgia's health insurance program for children ineligible for Medicaid but do not have health insurance through their parents), parent's marital status (coded as not married or married) and whether or not the child has lived with both parents since birth statistically confirmed this categorization. The results from this analysis are presented in Chapter 5.

initial differences between the two groups had already been detected. The composite scores were ranked and children who scored more than one-half standard deviation below the national norm were categorized as non-resilient. Children above this point were categorized, for lack of a better term, as resilient.

This categorization was used to only compare children from similar social class backgrounds that began their preschool scoring approximately average or above average and those children who scored more than one-half standard deviation below the national norm on this composite measure. It is recognized that this is not a perfect measure and there are tautological conceptual issues, explaining a measure by its outcome, as well as ethical concerns, labeling children as young as four with such a value laden classification. The terminology used relates to more practical uses in the field rather than sound academic conceptualization.[9]

The quantitative data were analyzed in two ways. First, the data were used to test whether or not an achievement gap existed between the at-risk and non at-risk students based upon their demographics and socio-economic characteristics. Second, the data were used to highlight initial differences within the at-risk group, thus creating the resilient and non-resilient

[9] Miriam-Webster defines resilience as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change”. This definition is used in this instance for classification purposes not labeling. In fact, research techniques were employed so that field staff never knew which children were classified as which.

subgroups. These research questions specifically related to the first two study aims from chapter one:[10]

a. Do the two groups of children, at-risk children and non at-risk, differ in child outcome and quality measures?
b. Do the two groups of at-risk children, resilient and non-resilient, differ in certain family characteristics?
c. Do the differences found between children in the two groups for their baseline testing scores subsist throughout their first three years of formal schooling? Are any such differences found in certain areas, such as literacy, mathematics, or social-emotional skills?
d. How do any differences found over the three-year period relate to the quality of the preschool program?

III. Qualitative Data and Research Questions

Researchers with the GECS felt that the quantitative data may not have been capturing the full scope of these children lives. This may have been especially true for at-risk students. In many instances principals or teachers provided in-depth comments to study researchers who were working with one of the children in a particular school about aspects of that child's environment. Either due to the pressures of the academic accountability environment or a genuine concern for the children, these educational professionals felt strongly that it was important to understand the barrage of influences other than that of the school impacting a child's success. Parents and teachers also wrote comments, at times unsolicited, on their surveys, detailing a more complete view of the child's experience.

[10] Study aims one and two: to make comparisons on family characteristics and child outcome measures between children classified as at-risk and non at-risk; and to make comparisons on family characteristics and child outcome measures between children categorized as at- risk and non at-risk resilient and non-resilient.

Therefore, taking the above considerations into account, a qualitative study utilizing a sub-sample of at-risk children was designed. Initial baseline assessments that were used to create a composite score that categorized children as either resilient or non-resilient served as screening for the qualitative sample. Parents of children selected for the qualitative sample were contacted to obtain consent for an interview. In-depth interviews with parents of at-risk children categorized as resilient or non-resilient were conducted.

Thirty-four qualitative interviews (14 for non-resilient; 20 for resilient) were conducted between January and May 2004. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by members of the research team. Parents of resilient and non-resilient children were interviewed utilizing an interview guide that allowed the respondents to guide the direction and some of the content. The interviews highlighted many of the issues that parents face raising their children while asking questions that gauge parental perceptions on key parenting topics that relate to scholastic success. Specific topics such as reading activities, parent's own schooling, religion, and extended support were included because existing research details the importance of these factors in school success (Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey, 1997; Baker, Scher, and Mackler, 1997, Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005; Werner and Smith, 1992).

As previously stated, the purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an in-depth, comparative understanding of the environment of the at-risk

resilient and non-resilient children enrolled in the study and the complexity of these children's lives. The parent's own words regarding their sense of themselves as parents, their views of their child, and their own participation in the educational system provided insight into certain aspects that may or may not make the difference in their child's academic success. The research questions from the qualitative data relate to study aims three and four:[11]

e. What parenting differences are found between parents of the resilient and non-resilient children? How do the parents of children in both the resilient and non-resilient groups see themselves as parents?
f. How do the parents of children in both the resilient and non-resilient groups see themselves as participants in and owners of their child's education?
g. How do the parents define their position in the social hierarchy? Is there evidence that this impacts the environment that they create for their child? What role, if any, does poverty play in the parents' perception of their child's school experience?

IV. Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The combination of the quantitative and qualitative results provided trajectories of the child's academic and cognitive growth, reliable measures of social-emotional and health, and an excellent understanding of the children's early school experiences. Both the additional qualitative data and initial quantitative data were used to draw conclusions for and make comparisons

[11] To study the perceptions and views of parents of children from high-risk backgrounds and how these perceptions and views may contribute to protective factors that increase children's chance of academic success (Study Aim 3); and to examine differences between parents of children categorized as either resilient or non-resilient children in measures that reveal family characteristics, perceptions of family strengths, parenting perceptions, behaviors, and styles (Study Aim 4).

between the resilient and non-resilient children. The final research question addresses study aim five:[12]

h. Can implications be formed and/or possibly policies created to help families under lower economic circumstances ensure that their children begin school better prepared?

V. Qualitative Sample Utilized for Present Study

For the qualitative interviews, a total number of 46 parents were sampled; and 34 interviews were completed. From the composite measure, the 46 parents were selected from those children who either scored average or above average and those who scored well below (more than a half of a standard deviation) what would be expected for their age range. Overall, 20 parents from the non-resilient group and 14 parents from the resilient group were interviewed. This was not a sampling strategy; rather it simply reflected how the sample had distributed over a 2-year period from when the children were enrolled in the initial study to when the sample for the interviews was drawn. Parents of the non-resilient children were more likely to reside in the state and were more willing to be interviewed. Gift cards for a local large retailer were provided as incentives.

It is important to note several of the conditions that illustrate the complexity of recruiting hard to reach populations (for example, rural, low-income parents without a working phone) and designing a study methodology that should minimize respondent's discomfort. These conditions played an

[12] To relate the differences found in study aims 1,2, and 3 to the concept of resilience and how these differences might reveal certain characteristics that foster future academic success for these children (Study Aim 4).

especially pronounced role in the data collection process, especially in recruitment and interviewing phases.

First, the interviews were extremely difficult to schedule. Many of the phone numbers had changed or been disconnected, some parents were apprehensive of having “state” persons come in to their home, and some parents had erratic work schedules. Researchers with the project had to be flexible and sometimes spontaneous if a parent agreed to be interviewed.

Second, there was some inconsistency in the way the interviews were conducted. Efforts were made in the study design to understand and gauge the environments from which these children were entering. Therefore, it was decided that the interviews would be conducted in areas where the parents or guardians felt the most comfortable. In most cases, two researchers were present, though there were instances where only one was available. Generally, one interviewer conducted the tape-recorded interview while the other served as a note taker. However, in some cases, the second interviewer was needed to watch any children present so the parent could focus on the interview. Most of the interviews took place in the home of the respondent; however, there were also cases where the parent felt more comfortable in a public place such as a library, school, or even a fast food restaurant.

Finally, there was also some variability in the number of parents present. The researcher requested only one parent, yet in a few instances the respondent would insist on both or multiple family members being present. Though one could argue that two persons would add different perspectives to

the process, the interviews with one person were more revealing of the family circumstances. Parents were reluctant to be totally honest if a spouse or other family member were present. It seemed that in cases where there was more than one parent present each person was attempting to impress the other by presenting a more idyllic view of their family. This was especially true if the children could overhear or were present while the interview was conducted. There are two cases where these dynamics seem particularly pronounced; these cases are only used sparingly in the analysis.

In conclusion, even though the circumstances were less than ideal, 34 interviews were conducted. A total of six interviewers conducted the interviews, though the author conducted the most interviews. Following the initial interview period, it was decided that many of the respondents felt more comfortable with a female interviewer.

VI. Data Analysis

For this study, data analysis consisted of analyzing data that were collected for the GECS. Quantitative data included standardized scores from the direct assessments, ratings of the children provided by the teachers, parent interviews, and some data collected from state of Georgia sources.[13] Qualitative data included information derived from in-depth parental interviews.

The first stage in the quantitative analysis was a general comparison between children who classified as at-risk and those classified as non at-risk. Differences between these two groups on family background measures, child

[13] Data collected from state of Georgia sources were only used to make the at-risk distinction.

outcome assessments, and preschool quality were made. The second stage of the quantitative analysis compared at-risk children categorized as resilient and those categorized as non-resilient on the same measures mentioned above. Both stages of the analysis looked at the child outcome measures for the duration of the study. This was done to examine if any of the initial differences found at the beginning of the study remained at the conclusion of the study.

For the qualitative analysis, the grounded theory approach articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and further clarified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used. In a grounded theory approach, the specific language that is used and the meanings that respondents apply to their own behavior is examined. From this examination, codes and categories (sometimes referred to as variables) are formed, subsequent propositions are developed, and from the way that the propositions relate, theoretical development is employed (LaRossa, 2005). A grounded theory analysis is scientific in its approach but allows for meanings and perceptions from respondents to be used, rather than quantifiable language that may or may not accurately reflect the respondents' true ideas to be forced into previously established measures.

Grounded theory analysis allows for both data collection and data analysis to occur simultaneously (LaRossa, 2005). An advantage of this approach relates to flexibility. This further allowed the research team to continually address whether or not the most salient themes were part of the interview guide. Because initial data analysis occurred as new interviews

were being conducted, the research protocol could be modified. For example, as the data were being analyzed it was noted that the topic of religion was mentioned in many areas of the interview, not just in specific questions. Therefore, the interview guide was amended to include both direct and indirect approaches to religion. A copy of the final interview guide is provided in Appendix Two.

The qualitative analysis mainly consisted of an examination of the interview transcripts. It is important to note that memos written immediately after the interview took place, as well as during the analysis process, informed this examination. The interviews were transcribed, as much as possible, verbatim, using the language from the respondents. Though this proved challenging at times in the transcription process, it did allow for meanings and perceptions to be analyzed in the respondents own words.

For the analysis, all of the interviews were examined to identify what general themes emerged from the data. The software package Atlas TI was used for this stage of the data analysis. The first stage in the qualitative analysis was open coding. This was the stage that was done concurrently as additional interviews were being conducted. In the open coding stage, each interview was examined to see what general themes were emerging from the data. For example, as each parent discussed his or her involvement in the education of the sampled child, topics such as volunteering in the classroom, knowledge about the child's schoolwork, and relationship with the teacher were found. This was to be somewhat anticipated as the interview guide

specifically addressed some of these topics. However, not only were these topics emerging, but variation between parents was also apparent. It was noted that these topics could ultimately explain some of the difference in the children's outcomes. Therefore, these topics were each assigned a code (volunteering in the classroom, knowledge about child's schoolwork, and parent-teacher interaction respectively). The qualitative software allows for the researcher to continually measure how the code was used and pull out text assigned to each code at any given time. LaRossa (2005) notes the importance at this stage of continually stepping back and looking at the phenomena that is being studied. Therefore, at this stage codes were renamed, divided, and even discarded as the interviews were being concurrently examined.[14]

The second stage of the analysis is termed axial coding. During this stage comparisons and connections are made between the categories. For this study, the categories were connected into two interrelated, non-mutually exclusive overarching categories: "education" and "structure." The connecting of the initial categories into the two larger categories allowed for comparisons between and within them. For example, two initial categories were parent's view of their child's education and parent's view of their own education. As the interviews were being analyzed, it became very clear that the way that the parents viewed their child's education was complex and heavily interwoven with their own education. The third stage of the analysis

[14] At this stage, resilient and non-resilient distinctions were not made in the interviews as to not possibly bias the interview or analysis

was the selective coding or the development of a theory that was informed by the analysis as being the main story to emerge from the data. Using the categories created in this second stage, a comparative analysis between the families of children who were categorized as resilient and those categorized as non-resilient was undertaken. The result of that analysis leads to a discussion of differences relating to parenting style. These results are discussed in Chapter Six.

The nature of qualitative research lends itself to challenges related to, though not necessarily associated with, a more quantitative tradition. For example, how authentic was the language being used for this population? As mentioned previously, during the course of the interviews the interview guide was altered numerous times. In addition, constant comparison of the different interviews as well as continual discussions with the various interviewers from the project examined validity issues. There were also different, though related concerns that necessitated alternate approaches to reliability and validity.

Transferability, similar to internal and external validity, relates to the goal of qualitative research to produce information that can be shared and applied beyond the study setting (Malterud, 2001). The purposive sampling frame utilized for the GECS assured that there was the potential for a representative sample frame. The comparison between the qualitative sub-sample and the larger sample demonstrated that many of the same intra-state conclusions reached with quantitative analyses undertaken may be applied to the qualitative sample. Interpretation refers to the science involved in a

qualitative analysis versus researcher superficial conjecture (Malterud, 2001). By using the grounded theory methodology defined by Glaser and Straus (1967) and articulated by LaRossa (2005), this concern was addressed. Finally, the concept reflexivity (the impact of the researchers own background in the findings) is addressed in Chapter Seven. It was evident that the researcher's different professional capacities as a sociology student, project manager in the university setting, and policy analyst at the state level influenced the research. It is argued that the convergence of the differing careers added unique dimensions to the research design and reduced social class, race, and gender influence. This influence was further minimized by the role of multiple interviewers, consistent dialogue between the various interviewers, and verbatim transcriptions of the interviews.

VII. Ethical and IRB Issues

Parental consent was given at least twice during the research process. First, parents were asked to sign a consent form to sign before their child could be enrolled in the Georgia Early Childhood Study (See Appendix Three). The directors or teachers of the specific preschool programs distributed these after a consultation with one of the researchers from the study. A 75% consent goal was set for each classroom and generally reached. After being enrolled in the study, parents were also provided with a legalistic looking parent information sheet that gave more detail about the study. These were provided with the first quantitative parent survey. Both

consent forms and parent information sheets were also distributed in Spanish to parents if requested by the teacher and/or director of the individual site

Second, before the qualitative interview was conducted, parents were asked to sign another consent form specific to the qualitative portion of the study. Parents were also provided a copy of this consent form (See Appendix One). Both the parent information sheet and the second consent form gave contact information for project managers and the university internal review board office. Parents were also advised that they could remove their child from the study at any time. Approximately six parents exercised that option, though none of these parents were included in the qualitative portion of the study. The reasons varied for parents removing their child. One mother attested that she did not like her child being removed from any instructional activity during the school day. Another parent felt that their child became overly stressed during the assessments and a third parent removed their child after their spouse discovered the child was enrolled in a state-funded research study.

The Internal Review Board Office at Georgia State University (IRB) was involved at the onset of the research project. The consent form proceeded through numerous iterations during this process. In fact, the distribution of both the consent form and the parent information sheet was a compromise reached between project managers, including the present author, and the IRB committee. The IRB committee insisted on using language written at an eighth grade level. They also insisted on a second

consent form for the qualitative interviews. The IRB request, the amendment for the qualitative portion, and IRB approval numbers are available upon request.

Parents were compensated for participating in the study. The specific governing agency that funded the research (Bright From the Start: Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning, formerly the Office of School Readiness) requested that cash payments not be used as incentives. Therefore, parents were given a children's book each year and those parents who participated in the interviews received a $20.00 retail gift card. Whereas the children's book did not probably provide much of an incentive for participation, anecdotal evidence indicates that the gift card was effective.

Parents who participated in the interview were not told of the distinction between resilient and non-resilient children. They were informed that the interviews were being conducted in order to understand the issues, concerns, and constraints that parents in Georgia face. Furthermore, the interviewers did not know before the interview into which group the child was categorized. It could be argued that this double-blind aspect constitutes a bit of deception, however, it was felt that if either the researcher or parent knew of the child's distinction, it could bias the interview. A goal of the interview was also to identify the different themes that emerged from the process. A specific discussion of a child's resilient or non-resilient status could have also compromised this process.

A study of this magnitude raises numerous ethical concerns. It was made clear from the onset of the study that test results were for research purposes only. Researchers were not allowed to share individual results with administrators, teachers, parents, or even the funding source. The researchers were not trained to provide any sort of diagnoses that school counselors or other qualified professionals who are trained in some matters may theoretically be able to provide using some of the tests in a diagnoses battery. The interviews themselves broached many sensitive topics. Issues were raised and conclusions may have been reached by the interviewees that resulted from their specific participation in the interview. The consent forms gave specific contact numbers for respondents to call if help was needed. Furthermore, respondents were told that they could refuse to answer any questions though only in few instances was this option exercised.

VIII. Organization

This remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter five includes the results from the quantitative analysis. First, the results of the quantitative comparison between children classified as at-risk and non at-risk are shown. This is followed by comparisons between children categorized as resilient and non-resilient.

Chapter six reports the results of the qualitative analysis. First, differences in the general themes between the parents of children categorized as resilient and children categorized as non-resilient are discussed. These themes include perceptions of the child's future educational attainment,

child's abilities, religion, extended support, and the parent's outlook. The second section of this chapter reports the findings from the final stage of the qualitative analysis and describes the theory that emerged from the data. Quotations from selected interviews are be used to illustrate the findings.

Chapter seven discusses the aforementioned research questions and how the two analyses contribute to how well the questions can be answered. This chapter looks at the contributions to our understanding of early childhood that may be gleaned from this research. This chapter addresses the overall context of the research as well as the contributions to the sociological research literature.

Chapter Five: Quantitative Analysis

This chapter reports the results from the quantitative analysis conducted for two subsets of children enrolled in the Georgia Early Childhood Study: 1) children classified as at-risk compared to their more socio-economically advantaged counterparts (non at-risk); and 2) children from the at-risk subsample who were categorized as either resilient or non-resilient. For the purposes of this dissertation, at-risk is a term used to denote children who would be at a higher risk of scholastic difficulties based upon socio-economic circumstances or particular family structures. The chapter is organized into sections for each subgroup of children.

I. Comparison of Children Classified as At-Risk to non At-Risk Children

Socio-Economic and Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Research continues to show the difference found in children from at-risk backgrounds and their more social-economically counterparts. Even at young ages, differences are found in academic, cognitive, behavioral, and social-emotional measures between at-risk and non at-risk children. This section details how children in the sample were classified as either at-risk or non at-risk and how these different subgroups of children differed on key demographics and child outcome measures for the duration of the study.

There were three groups of children enrolled in the Georgia Early Childhood Study: those who attended Georgia Pre-k (state-funded with

lottery dollars; those who attended Head Start (federally funded); and those who attended private preschool (tuition based). To categorize children as at-risk or non at-risk, only children enrolled in Georgia Pre-k or Head Start were considered (n=444, 78%). This decision was made based upon measures available from these two programs that were not available for the group of children who attended private preschool. The at-risk designation was made using two criteria: designated category one status in Georgia Pre-k or enrollment in Head Start.[15] Georgia Pre-k designates children who are eligible for means tested benefits such as free or reduced lunch and/or transportation as category one. Head Start eligibility guidelines state that programs may have only 90% low-income enrollment, hence 10% of the Head Start population could theoretically be considered non at-risk. However, the data were not available so, for analysis purposes, any child enrolled in Head Start was considered at-risk. Approximately 50% of the sample was considered at-risk.[16]

Discriminant analysis is a statistical technique that is used to study differences between two or more groups with respect to several variables (Klecka, 1980). Therefore, to confirm validity using administrative data to categorize children as at-risk or non at-risk, a discriminant analysis was

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[15] Since the designation was ultimately made using administrative data that could have varied between locations, it was decided to call the comparison group non at-risk rather than low risk. Theoretically, children in the non at-risk group could be in circumstances that would discern an at-risk categorization, but since the data was collected at the program administration level, this would not be known.

[16] This was somewhat lower than expected. However, the criteria used for designating at-risk may have underrepresented this group. The category one status is an administrative designation submitted to the state regulatory agency (in 2001 this was the Georgia Office of School Readiness) from the individual Pre-k programs. It is possible that the parents of children who would be eligible for means tested benefits may not have applied or requested such services. Furthermore, children who were enrolled in Head Start could have been part of the 10% who families had incomes that would be above the income eligibility requirements.

undertaken with eight demographic and socio-economic variables: child's sex, race, mother's education, father's education, income, marital status, type of health insurance, and whether or not the child had lived continuously with the parents since birth.[17] The results of this analysis are shown in Table 5.1. Overall, the placement of children into these two categories was verified. For the analysis, the lambda was .536 and statistically significant at the .001 level. The closer the lambda is to zero, the more the variables discriminate (Klecka, 1980). The midway range is sufficient if not ideal. Another way of judging the utility of the analysis is to examine the canonical correlation. The closer to coefficient is to 1 the stronger the relatedness between the groups, at-risk and non at-risk, and the discriminating variables (Klecka, 1980). Again, the mid-range value, .685, was sufficient to show that the variables effectively discriminate between children in the at-risk and non at-risk group. Hence, the classification was verified.

Table 5.1: Discriminant Analysis for At-Risk Classification.

	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	Sig.
Overall:	.685	.530	124.080	.000

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to detect whether or not significant differences were found between the two samples on these key

[17] Sex: male=1, female=2; Race: African American=1, White=2; Mother/Father Education: less than high school=1, high school diploma=2, some college or associates=3, and bachelors or more=4; Income: less than $20,000=1, $20,001 to $50,000=2, $50,001 to 80,000=3, over $80,001=4; Marital Status=married=1, not married=0; Type of Health Insurance Medicaid/Peachcare=1, other=0; Lived continuously with the parents since birth: 1=yes, 0=no.

measures. ANOVA analysis tests whether or not the group means of dependent variables are identical (Bohrnstedt and Knoke, 1994). For each group, the frequencies, percentages, F-test, and eta^2 is provided if the f-test was statistically significant. The f-test is used to test the hypothesis that none of the variance in the dependent variable is due to being in either the at-risk or non at-risk group. The eta^2 is used to show how strong the relationship is between the variable. The closer eta^2 is to 1, the more the sample means differ from one another.

The results shown in Table 5-2 indicate that there were differences between children from the at-risk group and children from the non at-risk group on the demographic and socio-economic variables. Specifically, significant differences were found between the two groups for seven of the eight variables. Significant differences were not found for sex of the child between children classified as at-risk and those not classified as at-risk, though the at-risk group had slightly more males than females. Children in the at-risk group were more likely to have been black, received Medicaid or Peachcare as a source of health insurance, had lower reported family income, had parents more likely to not be married, and to not have lived continuously with both parents since birth. Children from the at-risk group were more likely to have parents with a reported lower educational attainment than children from the non at-risk group, though the average for both groups was between some college/Associates and high school diploma. The average for the at-risk group was barely over a high school diploma. Almost

30% of both fathers and mothers of children in the at-risk group reported an educational level of “less than a high school diploma” compared to 4% of children from the non at-risk group. Mother’s education and income were the variables were the differences between the at-risk and non at-risk groups were most pronounced. The eta^2 was strongest for income, mother’s education, and child’s health insurance status meaning that 29.7%, 21.8% and 20.2% of the variance in these variables can be accounted for by being classified as either at-risk or non at-risk.

Table 5.2: Socio-demographic Comparisons Between Children Classified as High Risk and Children not Classified as High Risk

Independent Variable	**At- Risk**	**Non At-Risk**	**Total**	**F- Value eta^2**
Sex:				
Male:	110 (52%)	110 (50%)	220 (51%)	F=.086
Female:	103 (48%)	109 (50%)	212 (49%)	
	(N=213)	(N=219)	(N=432)	
Race Recoded:				
African American	122 (65%)	58 (30%)	180 (47%)	53.6***
White	67 (35%)	138 (70%)	205 (53%)	eta$^{2=}$.122
	(N=189)	(N=196)	(N=385)	
Mother’s Education:				
Less than high school	51 (30%)	9 (4%)	60 (16%)	104.5***
High School Diploma	56 (32%)	38 (19%)	94 (25%)	eta$^{2=}$.218
Some College or Associates	54 (31%)	80 (39%)	134 (36%)	
College Degree	12 (7%)	76 (37%)	88 (23%)	
	(N=173)	(N=203)	(N=376)	

* p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 5.2 (Cont)

Independent Variable	At- Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value eta^2
Father's Education:				
Less than high school	45 (29%)	15 (8%)	60 (17%)	83.1***
High School Diploma	68 (44%)	52 (26%)	120 (34%)	eta$^{2=}$.193
Some College or Associates	31 (20%)	57 (29%)	88 (25%)	
College Degree	10 (7%)	72 (37%)	82 (24%)	
	(N=154)	(N=196)	(N=350)	
Income:				
$20,000 or less	42 (40%)	7 (5%)	49 (19%)	109.5***
$20,001-$50,000	52 (49%)	57 (37%	109 (42%)	eta$^{2=}$.297
$50,001-$80,000	10 (9%)	47 (30%)	57 (22%)	
$80,001 or more	2 (2%)	44 (28%)	46 (18%)	
	(N=106)	(N=155)	(N=261)	
Child's Health Insurance:				
Medicaid or Peachcare	111 (62%)	38 (18%)	149 (38%)	97.6***
Other	68 (38%)	171 (82%)	239 (62%)	eta$^{2=}$.202
	(N=179)	(N=209)	(N=388)	
Marital Status:				
Married	54 (45%)	141 (78%)	195 (65%)	39.6***
Not-Married	66 (55%)	39 (22%)	105 (35%)	eta$^{2=}$.117
	(N=120)	(N=180)	(N=300)	
Continually Live with Both Parents Since Birth:				
Yes	60 (45%)	147 (80%)	207 (65%)	46.8***
No	74 (55%)	38 (20%)	112 (35%)	eta$^{2=}$.129
	(N=134)	(N=185)	(N=319)	

* p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Overall, these results were not surprising. Since income would be used to make determinations of Head Start eligibility and Georgia Pre-k category one status, one would have expected to find significant differences

between the groups on these two measures. It is important to note the strong relationship between the groups for both mother and father's educational level. This statistically significant difference in parental education between the two groups revealed the probability that differences surmised between the two groups on key child outcome measures would be found in this study. As previous research demonstrates, children from parents with low educational levels are at a clear disadvantage upon entering school. Parents with lower educational levels are less likely to read and communicate with a more limited range of vocabulary than parents with higher educational levels. Previous research indicates that these differences translate into further differences between the two groups when child outcome measures are considered.

Standardized Assessments

The analysis detailing differences between children in the at-risk group and the non at-risk group on the standardized assessments over the three-year period are presented here. As mentioned earlier, the four standardized assessments used were the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (measures receptive language skills), the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement Letter Word subtest (measures letter-word recognition), the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement Applied Problems (measures cognitive and basic math skills), and the Oral and Written Language Scales (measures expressive language).[18]

Table 5-3 details the results for each of the four tests over the three-year period. Mean standardized averages are reported for each group for the

[18] Further detail is provided in Chapter Four

individual tests for the four testing periods. F-values and eta^2 is also reported. This three-year period represents four specific testing periods: Fall 2001 (Baseline data), Spring 2002 (End of Preschool), Spring 2003 (End of Kindergarten), and Spring 2004 (End of First Grade).[19] The differences for both groups were statistically significant for each test and each testing period.

At the beginning of either their Pre-k or Head Start year, children in Georgia scored, on average, below the national norm on three out of four standardized tests. Only in letter-word recognition skills did children in Georgia exceed the average of their same age national peers. The scores relating to general math skills indicate that children started their preschool year behind while making little gains over the course of their preschool experience. The results were disconcerting with regard to the language skills measured by the PPVT and OWLS. At the age of four-years-old, children in Georgia were substantially behind in both expressive and receptive language skills.

For children in the at-risk group, the results were particularly alarming. These children, on average, began their preschool year over one standard deviation below (SD=15) the national norm on important language skills. They were not as behind on the cognitive skills measured by the WJ-AP, but they still lagged behind their more socio-economically counterparts. Similar to the non at-risk group, this group scored highest on the letter-word subtest. The eta^2 were strongest for the PPVT and weakest for the Letter-Word

[19] Not all of the children were on grade level at the end of the study. Approximately, 97% of the non at-risk children were on grade level at the end of the third year compared to 92% of the at-risk sample.

subtests. This means that greater variation in the means for receptive language skills, children's vocabulary knowledge was better explained by the at-risk classification than simple letter-word recognition.

Table 5.3: Comparisons Between Children Classified as At-Risk and non At-Risk on Standardized Assessments

Standardized Assessment/Testing Period	At- Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value eta^2
PPVT:				
Fall 2001	84.4 (N=220)	98.0 (N=220)	91.2 (N=440)	108.4*** eta$^{2=}$.198
Spring 2002	88.4 (N=200)	101.0 (N=216)	95.0 (N=416)	102.4*** eta$^{2=}$.198
Spring 2003	93.9 (N=174)	104.0 (N=179)	99.0 (N=353)	78.3*** eta$^{2=}$.182
Spring 2004	90.6 (N=183)	101.6 (N=183)	96.3 (N=366)	74.3*** eta$^{2=}$.169
WJ-LW:				
Fall 2001	96.5 (N=220)	105.2 (N=221)	100.1 (N=441)	39.2*** eta$^{2=}$.082
Spring 2002	97.9 (N=201)	106.5 (N=218)	102.4 (N=419)	49*** eta$^{2=}$.105
Spring 2003	107.3 (N=174)	115.7 (N=181)	111.6 (N=355)	43.8*** eta$^{2=}$.111
Spring 2004	106.4 (N=181)	113.2 (N=184)	109.8 (N=365)	31.6*** eta$^{2=}$.080

Table 5.3 (Cont):

Standardized Assessment/Testing Period	**At- Risk**	**Non At-Risk**	**Total**	**F- Value eta^2**
WJ-AP:				
Fall 2001	90.1 (N=220)	100.5 (N=221)	95.3 (N=441)	64.8*** eta$^{2=}$.129
Spring 2002	91.7 (N=201)	101.2 (N=218)	96.7 (N=419)	67.8*** eta$^{2=}$.140
Spring 2003	99.5 (N=172)	109.8 (N=180)	104.7 (N=352)	64.7*** eta$^{2=}$.156
Spring 2004	103.4 (N=181)	112.7 (N=184)	108.07 (N=365)	41.4*** eta$^{2=}$.102
OWLS:				
Fall 2001	84.5 (N=218)	94.5 (N=219)	89.5 (N=437)	69.2*** eta$^{2=}$.137
Spring 2002	87.8 (N=197)	96.9 (N=217)	92.6 (N=414)	54.7*** eta$^{2=}$.117
Spring 2003	88.6 (N=173)	100.9 (N=180)	94.8 (N=353)	81.8*** eta$^{2=}$.190
Spring 2004	91.5 (N=182)	103.2 (N=183)	97.4 (N=365)	70.3*** eta$^{2=}$.162

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

It is also important to look at the trends in the test scores over the course of the study. Regarding general cognition and math skills, the children began preschool below the national norm, made little gain throughout the preschool year, but made tremendous gains in their kindergarten year. This

trend, though not as pronounced, continued through first grade and held true for both groups. In fact, at the end of their first grade year, children in the high-risk group exceeded the national norm in this skill. Children in both groups made continual gains in letter-word recognition, though the gains decreased between kindergarten and first grade.

Over the course of the study the gains decreased in receptive vocabulary skills for both groups. Children in the non at-risk group ended their first grade year slightly above the national norm. Children in the at-risk group followed the same trends as their more advantaged same age peers in the study. The gains made by this group certainly indicated that their educational experience was making a difference in their lives. This trend indicated that once the children are exposed to an intervention, they were able to begin the process of making gains. Yet, they were still behind, especially in regard to expressive language, than their same aged counterparts. They gained six points over the course of the study, but they began sixteen points below the national norm. This finding implies that, for at-risk children, interventions beginning at four-years old may be too late. In other words, when examining how far they have to come, the gains, though significant, were not enough to keep them on an equal footing with other more socio-economically advantaged students.

In summary, the comparison of the two samples on these four standardized assessments revealed significant differences persisting over the course of the study. Children from at-risk backgrounds, especially in skills

measuring receptive and expressive language, began school lagging behind their more socio-economically advantaged counterparts. These differences continued over the course of the study and though the children from the high-risk group continued to make gains, these differences persisted through first grade.

Teacher Ratings

Table 5.4 reports the average of teacher ratings for the two groups for the preschool year. This table details the ratings from the child's Pre-k teacher. The four measures represent four specific domains that were created from averaging specific items into one variable: academic (two rated items: math and language arts), behavior (three items: ethical behavior, refusal skills, and respect for authority), communication (three items: making conversation, communication skills, positive expression), and wellness (three items: general health, overall appearance, appears to be well-rested). The items are scaled from one (extraordinarily poor) to 7 (extraordinarily good). [20]

The average for both groups exceeded 4 for all measures at both the beginning and end of the preschool year. This means that preschool teachers rated children in their classes at least average for both times. The differences between the at-risk and non at-risk groups were significant for academic, communication, and health measures at the beginning of preschool. This finding is important because it indicates that preschool teachers detected differences between children in the two groups as children were beginning preschool. It is not known if teachers adapted any curriculum or classroom

[20] Further detail is provided in Chapter Four.

practices based upon their perceptions of their children's needs. What the finding does show, however, is that children were already being perceived as being different up to a year before elementary schooling began. The children made gains in all four areas, though significant differences continued to exist between children in the at-risk and non at-risk group for wellness and behavioral items. However, the differences in academic ratings were no longer significant by the end of preschool.

Table 5.4: Comparisons Between Children Classified as At-Risk and non At-Risk on Teacher Ratings (Preschool Year)

Rating Area and Testing Period	At-Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value eta^2
Fall 2001: Academic	4.13 (N=201)	4.59 (N=194)	4.36 (N=395)	18.32***
Spring 2002: Academic	4.54 (N=176)	4.74 (N=168)	4.64 (N=344)	2.30
Fall 2001: Behavior	4.63 (N=212)	5.07 (N=210)	4.85 (N=422)	14.49***
Spring 2002: Behavior	4.82 (N=176)	5.13 (N=172)	4.97 (N=348)	5.65*
Fall 2001: Communication	4.56 (N=212)	4.86 (N=210)	4.71 (N=422)	8.16**
Spring 2002: Communication	4.92 (N=176)	5.07 (N=173)	5.00 (N=349)	1.79
Fall 2001: Wellness	5.23 (N=212)	5.68 (N=210)	5.45 (N=422)	21.89***
Spring 2002: Wellness	5.40 (N=177)	5.71 (N=173)	5.55 (N=350)	6.99**

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 5.5 reports the averages on the same items at the end of the kindergarten year.[21] It is important to note that different teachers were rating the children although the items for the measures remained unchanged. Despite the inevitable inconsistency between years, the table suggests that

[21] Teacher rating results are only reported through the kindergarten year. Ratings were collected during the first grade year, but due to the changing emphasis on academics, the specific items substantially changed. Furthermore, the response rates were lower in this third year of the study.

the differences between the two groups, at least in teachers' perceptions, widened over the course of the study. The averages were still between "average" and "good" for the two groups, but the differences between the non at-risk and at-risk groups were more pronounced with greater statistical significance being detected. The differences between the two groups were significant for all four measures with larger F values than were found during the preschool year. This finding substantiates previous research that details widening academic differences between children from lower socio-economic statuses and their more advantaged counterparts.

Table 5.5: Comparisons Between Children Classified as At-Risk and Non At-Risk on Teacher Ratings (Kindergarten Year)

Rating Area and Testing Period	At- Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value eta^2
Spring 2003: Academic	5.23 (N=116)	5.98 (N=133)	5.63 (N=249)	28.95***
Spring 2003: Behavior	4.76 (N=115)	5.68 (N=133)	5.25 (N=248)	36.06***
Fall 2003: Communication	4.86 (N=116)	5.75 (N=133)	5.34 (N=249)	35.47***
Spring 2003: Wellness	5.39 (N=116)	6.04 (N=133)	5.73 (N=249)	22.74***

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Though using teacher ratings as objective assessments of children's skills and attributes may be less than perfect, the ratings do indicate that teachers perceived differences in different domains between at-risk and non at-risk children at very young ages. From a theoretical standpoint, these

differences can have real consequences for the children. It is not known if these teachers' behaviors and practices were altered based upon their perceptions of the students. However, results from previous studies indicate that teachers treat students differently, in both positive and negative ways, based upon their perceptions of their abilities. This finding reveals the need for more research in this area.

Classroom Quality

The above-mentioned findings reveal that, on average, children from at-risk family circumstances and children from more socio-economically advantaged family circumstances differed significantly on standardized assessments and teacher ratings of their skills and behaviors. These differences existed as they began their preschool experience and persisted through their first years of elementary schooling. Research shows that effective tools in combating this achievement gap are efficacious interventions at the youngest ages, such as full-day preschool. As mentioned earlier, previous studies with much smaller samples, have found that high-quality interventions can reap benefits far beyond children's early elementary experiences.

Table 5.6 reports differences found between the two groups' preschool environments during the first year of the study. The table displays means for the classrooms. Overall, the means for the classrooms fell between adequate and good for each of the subscales for both groups. These means were higher than the overall means found in previous studies and possibly reflected

the emphasis placed by both programs on improving quality at the classroom level. In light of the findings from the standardized assessments and with the teacher ratings, the fact that significant differences were found between the two groups of children attending classes in the same program is important because both Georgia Pre-k and Head Start emphasize quality improvement.

The two groups significantly differed on five of the six subscales and on the overall total mean, although the eta^2 indicates little variance in classroom quality was explained by the at-risk classification. The subscale that did not reveal significant differences (Subscale 2: Personal Care Routines) reflected health aspects such as immunizations, hand-washing, etc. Albeit, these are important for early childhood classes, but they do not necessarily comprise the quality interactions that need to exist between teachers and children for the achievement gap to narrow. Subscale 3 (Language-Reasoning) demonstrates specific language arts interactions and materials that may be present in the classroom. On average, children in the non at-risk group were in classrooms that scored above a four on this subscale, whereas children in the at-risk group were in classrooms that scored below four. The subscale with the largest difference in means for classrooms between the two groups was program structure. This indicates that children in the non at-risk group were more likely to be in preschool classes that emphasized child choice and less whole group instruction. In other words, these classrooms were more likely to reflect values found in middle-class families versus their working class counterparts.

Table 5.6: Comparisons Between Children Classified as At-Risk and non At-Risk on Preschool classroom quality

Classroom Quality Subscale	At-Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value eta^2
ECERS 1: Space and Furnishings	4.58 (N=218)	4.75 (N=221)	4.66 (N=439)	5.52* eta$^{2=}$.012
ECERS 2: Personal Care Routines	4.58 (N=218)	4.67 (N=221)	4.62 (N=439)	.61
ECERS 3: Language-Reasoning	4.65 (N=218)	4.99 (N=221)	4.82 (N=439)	16.77*** eta$^{2=}$.036
ECERS 4: Activities	3.75 (N=216)	4.01 (N=219)	3.88 (N=435)	18.71*** eta$^{2=}$.041
ECERS 5: Interaction	5.17 (N=218)	5.66 (N=221)	5.42 (N=439)	15.98*** eta$^{2=}$..035
ECERS 6: Program Structure	4.87 (N=216)	5.50 (N=218)	5.19 (N=434)	34.67*** eta$^{2=}$.074
ECERS: Overall Average	4.47 (N=214)	4.77 (N=216)	4.62 (N=430)	23.28*** eta$^{2=}$.052

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

These findings suggest that the differences in skill levels between the non at-risk and at-risk group continued into their early childhood environments. In other words, the higher quality in the early childhood classrooms may indeed have helped the at-risk children make gains relative to their same age peers. However, the high quality experiences available were not equally distributed. The significant between the two groups on quality showed that the same system that was helping at-risk children

improve test scores may have also been perpetuating the achievement gap between the two groups.

The analyses reported in this section show significant differences in important socio-demographic and socio-economic factors, standardized test scores, teacher ratings, and classroom quality experiences between children Classified as at-risk or non at-risk for children enrolled in either Georgia Pre-k and/or Head Start. These results, though disconcerting to find among children at such a young age, are not surprising. Research continually documents differences in educational attainment and educational achievement for children in different social classes. However, because such differences are found in four-year-olds in programs that specifically target achievement gap discrepancies suggests a need for further analysis. The next section details the quantitative analysis that looks within the at-risk group for further explanations and policy implications in reducing this gap for children just beginning their elementary school experiences.

II. Comparison of At-Risk Children Classified as Resilient and Non-Resilient

This section reports differences found between the groups of at-risk children categorized as either resilient or non-resilient. Children from the at-risk group were categorized based upon a composite measure created from their mean baseline scores on four standardized assessments: PPVT, WJ-LW, WJ-AP, and OWLS. Children with scores more than one-half standard deviation below 100 (the national mean for all four tests) were categorized as

non-resilient while those with scores above a 93 (also one-half standard deviation below the national norm or higher) were categorized as resilient.

There are both methodological and ethical concerns with this categorization.[22] This categorization was used as a demarcation for a group of children who were considered at-risk for academic difficulties. Therefore, resiliency was primarily used as a theoretical construct to highlight that, despite the socio-economic propensity for potential of academic difficulty, there were children beginning their preschool experience already bucking the trend. Werner and Smith's (1992) groundbreaking research surmised that approximately one-third of her sample fit this pattern. The category cut-off used here (93 or above on the composite measure) placed 40% of these children with the potential to possess "resiliency" traits, either within themselves or within their environments. Terms that may better reflect this demarcation are discussed in the final chapter.

Table 5-7 reports the means for the two groups on the composite measure that was used as a demarcation for the two groups of children. This composite measure was created for four separate testing periods, though only the baseline year was used to categorize the children as either resilient or non-resilient. Since the variable that is being reported was also used to make the initial categorization between the two groups, this table is presented for descriptive purposes only to show trends between the two groups. As

[22] The term resiliency denotes an ability to succeed despite adverse circumstances. Labeling a four-year old child as resilient or non-resilient certainly conjures images of a tracking system that most early childhood advocates would find disturbing. Second, using a group of tests that were not developed to create such a measure violates the rigorous standardization and norming procedures that each of the assessments underwent before widespread use. Finally, higher test scores would be expected to be a product of resiliency, to use the product as the definition of a concept is a tautological fallacy.

expected, the differences between the two groups were significant throughout the duration of the study. It is also important to note that for both groups the mean for the composite score increased over the course of the study indicating that children from both groups gaining relative to their same aged peers as they begin their elementary school experience. In fact, children in the non-resilient group gained, on average, approximately 11 percentage points.

Table 5-7: Comparisons Between Children Categorized as resilient and non-resilient on Composite Classification Measure

Composite Measure	Non-Resilient	Resilient	Total	F- Value eta^2
Fall 2001 (Baseline)	82.6 (N=130)	98.1 (N=87)	88.8 (N=217)	318.6***
Spring 2002:	86.4 (N=109)	98.6 (N=82)	91.7 (N=191)	157.7***
Spring 2003:	92.9 (N=97)	103.3 (N=69)	97.2 (N=166)	119.4***
Spring 2004:	93.9 (N=105)	104.2 (N=71)	98 (N=176)	76.0***

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

The remainder of this section reports the differences between the two groups on the socio-economic and socio-demographic factors highlighted in the previous section. As with the previous section, F-values are reported along with the eta^2 if the F-value was significant.

Socio-Economic and Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Table 5-8 compares children in the resilient group to children in the non-resilient group on the key demographic and socio-economic variables used in the aforementioned analyses. Though significant differences were not found on children's sex for between the at-risk and non at-risk group, this analysis suggested that gender did differentiate the non-resilient and resilient groups. Males were significantly more likely to be in the non-resilient group rather than the resilient group. Mother's and father's education was also significant. The eta^2 for these variables was low, indicating that little of the variance was explained by the resilient and non-resilient categorizations. Because the categorizations were made by utilizing the outcome scores, this finding was anticipated. The finding regarding children's sex possibly indicates that more research needs to further explore gender differences as children begin their preschool experience.

Table 5-8: Comparisons Between Children Categorized as Resilient and non-Resilient on Socio-Economic Measures

Independent Variable	**Non-Resiliency**	**Resiliency**	**Total**	**F- Value eta^2**
Sex:				
Male:	75 (60%)	32 (38%)	110 (51%)	11.0**
Female:	49 (40%)	53 (62%)	104 (49%)	eta$^{2=}$.050
	(N=130)	(N=85)	(N=215)	
Race Recoded:				
African American	74 (68%)	46 (60%)	123 (65%)	1.1
White	35 (32%)	30 (40%)	67 (35%)	
	(N=109)	(N=76)	(N=185)	

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 5-8 (Cont.)

Independent Variable	Non-Resiliency	Resiliency	Total	F- Value eta^2
Mother's Education:				
Less than high school	38 (40%)	12 (16%)	57 (29%)	11.2***
High School Diploma	29(31%)	27 (36%)	51 (33%)	eta$^{2=}$.062
Some College or Associates	23 (24%)	29 (39%)	54 (31%)	
College Degree	5 (5%)	7 (9%)	12 (7%)	
	(N=95)	(N=75)	(N=170)	
Father's Education:				
Less than high school	31 (37%)	14 (21%)	45 (29%)	8.0**
High School Diploma	36 (43%)	30 (44%)	69 (45%)	eta$^{2=}$.051
Some College or Associates	13 (16%)	17 (25%)	31 (20%)	
College Degree	3 (4%)	7 (10%)	10 (6%)	
	(N=83)	(N=68)	(N=151)	
Income:				
$20,000 or less	27 (46%)	14 (32%)	42 (40%)	2.0
$20,001-$50,000	27(46%)	24 (55%)	52 (49%)	
$50,001-$80,000	4 (7%)	5 (11%)	10 (9%)	
$80,001 or more	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	2 (2%)	
	(N=59)	(N=44)	(N=103)	
Child's Health Insurance:				
Medicaid or Peachcare	34 (26%)	33 (45%)	68 (38%)	2.3
Other	68 (52%)	41 (55%)	112 (62%)	
	(N=102)	(N=74)	(N=176)	
Marital Status:				
Married	38 (55%)	27 (56%)	66 (55%)	.02
Not-Married	31 (45%)	21 (44%)	54 (45%)	
	(N=61)	(N=48)	(N=109)	
Continually Live with Both Parents Since Birth:				
Yes	41 (52%)	32 (61%)	74 (55%)	1.2
No	38 (48%)	20 (39%)	60 (45%)	
	(N=79)	(N=52)	(N=131)	

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Standardized Assessments

Table 5-9 reports the results from ANOVA comparisons on the standardized assessments between the two groups of children. Because these assessments were used to create the overall composite measure, it would be expected that significant differences would be detected on the individual assessments, further substantiated by the strong eta^2. As the table shows, children from the resilient and non–resilient groups differed significantly on all four assessments throughout the duration of the study. Children in the non-resilient category began their preschool experience an average of 22 points below the national norm in receptive language skills and 17 points below their resilient peers. At the conclusion of the study, they closed the gap to 9 points, but were still 13 points below 100. The results were similar with regard to expressive language; the gap between the two groups narrowed over the course of the study but children in the non-resilient group were 14 points below the national norm while their counterparts were right at 100. There was a consistent 5-6 point difference in letter-word recognition and both groups ended the study above the national norm. Similar results were found between the two groups on cognitive skills.

The significant differences in baseline scores would be expected. However, it is important to note that significant differences remained between the two groups throughout the three years of schooling, although they narrowed somewhat. These findings indicate that these differences were

fairly well established by the age of four and though the interventions may have impacted this difference, the difference was not eliminated.

Table 5-9: Comparisons Between Children Categorized as Resilient and non-Resilient on Standardized Assessments

Standardized Assessment/Testing Period	**At- Risk**	**Non At-Risk**	**Total**	**F- Value eta^2**
PPVT:				
Fall 2001	77.02 (N=130)	95.16 (N=87)	84.3 (N=217)	139.8*** eta$^{2=}$.281
Spring 2002	82.2 (N=113)	97.2 (N=82)	88.5 (N=195)	83.3*** eta$^{2=}$.032
Spring 2003	90.0 (N=99)	99.6 (N=70)	94.0 (N=169)	44.9*** eta$^{2=}$.212
Spring 2004	87.1 (N=106)	96.7 (N=73)	91.0 (N=179)	45.0*** eta$^{2=}$.203
WJ-LW:				
Fall 2001	91.1 (N=130)	104.1 (N=87)	96.3 (N=217)	61.0*** eta$^{2=}$.221
Spring 2002	94.2 (N=114)	103.0 (N=82)	97.9 (N=196)	31.1*** eta$^{2=}$.138
Spring 2003	103.8 (N=99)	112.3 (N=70)	107.3 (N=169)	25.6*** eta$^{2=}$.134
Spring 2004	102.7 (N=105)	110.9 (N=72)	106.1 (N=177)	20.7*** eta$^{2=}$.106

$p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table 5-9 (Cont)

Standardized Assessment/Testing Period	**At- Risk**	**Non At-Risk**	**Total**	**F- Value eta^2**
WJ-AP:				
Fall 2001	83.9 (N=130)	99.5 (N=87)	90.2 (N=217)	84.2*** eta$^{2=}$.281
Spring 2002	86.2 (N=114)	99.7 (N=82)	91.8 (N=196)	97.5*** eta$^{2=}$.335
Spring 2003	95.4 (N=98)	105.6 (N=69)	99.6 (N=167)	44.2*** eta$^{2=}$.211
Spring 2004	99.2 (N=105)	109.7 (N=72)	103.4 (N=177)	30.4*** eta$^{2=}$.148
OWLS:				
Fall 2001	78.5 (N=130)	93.7 (N=87)	84.6 (N=217)	149.6*** eta$^{2=}$.410
Spring 2002	82.7 (N=110)	97.2 (N=82)	88.5 (N=195)	73.0*** eta$^{2=}$.278
Spring 2003	83.0 (N=98)	96.5 (N=70)	88.6 (N=168)	110.7*** eta$^{2=}$.400
Spring 2004	86.4 (N=106)	99.1 (N=72)	91.4 (N=178)	63.6*** eta$^{2=}$.266

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Teacher Ratings

The differences in teacher ratings between the two groups reported in Table 5-10 and Table 5-11 continued to corroborate the trends found between the previous analyses. Similar to the at-risk and non at-risk comparisons,

children categorized as resilient were significantly more likely to be rated higher than their non-resilient counterparts throughout their preschool and kindergarten years. Both preschool and kindergarten teachers rated, on average, children in the non-resilient category significantly higher on academic, communication, and health items than their non-resilient counterparts. The ratings on behavior items were significant during the preschool year, but not at the end of the kindergarten year.

Table 5-10: Comparisons Between Children Categorized as Resilient and non-Resilient on Teacher Ratings (Pre-k Year)

Rating Area and Testing Period	At- Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value eta^2
Fall 2001: Academic	3.84 (N=117)	4.57 (N=82)	4.14 (N=199)	28.96***
Spring 2002: Academic	4.11 (N=102)	5.17 (N=69)	4.54 (N=171)	32.57***
Fall 2001: Behavior	4.47 (N=126)	4.86 (N=84)	4.62 (N=210)	6.43*
Spring 2002: Behavior	4.65 (N=102)	5.05 (N=69)	4.81 (N=171)	4.80*

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 5-10 (Cont)

Rating Area and Testing Period	At- Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value eta^2
Fall 2001: Communication	4.32 (N=126)	4.92 (N=84)	4.56 (N=210)	17.99***
Spring 2002: Communication	4.70 (N=102)	5.21 (N=69)	4.90 (N=171)	9.46**
Fall 2001: Wellness	5.03 (N=126)	5.50 (N=84)	5.22 (N=210)	12.65***
Spring 2002: Wellness	5.25 (N=102)	5.61 (N=70)	5.40 (N=172)	4.90**

Table 5-11: Comparisons Between Children Categorized as Resilient and non-Resilient on Teacher Ratings (Kindergarten Year)

Rating Area and Testing Period	At- Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value eta^2
Spring 2003: Academic	4.80 (N=59)	5.72 (N=53)	5.24 (N=112)	18.20***
Spring 2003: Behavior	4.63 (N=58)	4.85 (N=53)	4.73 (N=111)	.933
Spring 2003: Communication	4.55 (N=59)	5.26 (N=53)	4.89 (N=112)	10.88**
Spring 2003: Wellness	5.10 (N=59)	5.69 (N=53)	5.38 (N=112)	6.89*

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Classroom Quality

Though significant differences were found on six out of seven classroom quality measures between the at-risk and non at-risk groups, there were no significant differences found when using the same measures used to compare the resilient and non-resilient children. This finding indicates children categorized as resilient were no more likely to be in classrooms that emphasized quality practices than their non-resilient peers. Because the categories were established at the beginning of preschool, this finding is not surprising.

Table 5-12: Comparisons Between Children Categorized as Resilient and non-Resilient on Classroom Quality

Classroom Quality Subscale	At- Risk	Non At-Risk	Total	F- Value
ECERS 1: Space and Furnishings	4.56 (N=128)	4.59 (N=86)	4.57 (N=214)	.063
ECERS 2: Personal Care Routines	4.44 (N=128)	4.47 (N=86)	4.57 (N=214)	2.92
ECERS 3: Language-Reasoning	4.57 (N=128)	4.77 (N=86)	4.65 (N=214)	3.05
ECERS 4: Activities	3.71 (N=126)	3.79 (N=86)	3.74 (N=212)	.776
ECERS 5: Interaction	5.14 (N=128)	5.21 (N=86)	5.17 (N=214)	.150
ECERS: Program Structure	4.90 (N=126)	4.87 (N=86)	4.89 (N=212)	.020
ECERS: Overall Average	4.42 (N=124)	4.53 (N=86)	4.47 (N=210)	1.18

p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

III. Summary

This chapter examined differences between two groups of children: 1) children classified as at-risk compared to their more socio-economically advantaged counterparts (non at-risk); and 2) children from the at-risk subsample who were categorized as either resilient or non-resilient. As previous studies have found, the results indicated that at-risk children enrolled in either Georgia Pre-K or Head Start differed significantly from their more socio-economically advantaged counterparts. The children not only differed on demographic and socio-economic variables, but they also significantly differed on standardized assessments, teacher ratings, and the quality of the classroom where they attended preschool, although the differences were not as pronounced for these last classroom measures. In summary, these results suggest that, even at young ages, social class differences at individual, family, and classroom levels are detected. Utilizing an ecological approach, the differences found at all three of these levels suggest that they may be influencing each other. Higher-level statistical modeling may be able to further discern the strength of each influence. In other words, it is not known from these analyses whether or not lower classroom quality, family characteristics, or individual attributes contribute the most explanation as to why such pronounced differences were found between the two groups. However, the strength of the ANOVA associations suggests that the family demographics contribute more of an understanding to the differences than the classroom quality measures.

When the at-risk group of children was categorized as resilient or non-resilient the results were not as striking. Because the groups were categorized based upon a composite assessment score, these differences were strong. However, from a theoretical standpoint, that matters less because it was the differences that were used to categorize. As expected, similar results were found between these two groups on teacher ratings. The teacher ratings were not used in the categorization, but it would be intuitive that they be strongly related to the assessments. The strong differences found between the groups of at-risk and non at-risk children on demographic and socio-economic measures and preschool classroom quality were not found here. This suggests, especially with the classroom quality measures, that the test score differences cannot by these quantitative measures. Hence, the qualitative study was designed.

Chapter Six: Results of the Qualitative Analysis

This chapter describes the results of a qualitative analysis of semi-structured, in-depth interviews (n=34) with a select sample of parents of children enrolled in either Georgia Pre-k or Head Start. These interviews and the subsequent analysis were used only for exploratory purposes to gauge what extent, if any, differences emerged between parents of a group of children categorized as either resilient or non-resilient. The goal was not to conclude definitive areas of difference between the two groups, but to examine themes that emerged from the interviews that could be used for further study. Findings from this exploratory component of the study provided initial and contextual explanations for differences between the two parental groups of at-risk children.

The preceding chapter detailed the differences between children considered at-risk and their more socio-economically advantaged counterparts for three years. Data were collected from the beginning of their 4-year-old preschool program, either Georgia Pre-K or Head Start, through first grade. As the results showed, children considered at-risk began their 4-year-old preschool experience well below the national norm and continued this pattern throughout the study. This was most pronounced on academic and cognitive measures; however, the trend was also apparent on physical health and other behavioral skills. Many of these children began and

continued their initial schooling testing at levels that minimized hope for future academic success.

Yet, not all children from the at-risk group followed this pattern. Many started well above national averages and even for some who did not begin at this level, evidence of great gains persisted throughout the study. The interviews and subsequent analysis were designed to glean possible evidence of environments that foster academic success among children who would be considered at-risk. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with parents of at-risk children who began preschool scoring as expected and with the parents of at-risk children who defied expectations.

This was not a probability sample and the interviews cannot be generalized to the population of at-risk parents. The interviews were designed with the hope of finding differences in general themes that revealed possible differences between two groups of low-income parents. Different interviewers, some novice and some experienced, conducted the interviews. Furthermore, this analysis utilized data derived from a participant-led interview. The interview process worked better with certain respondents and constantly evolved.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section details the demographics and testing trajectories of the qualitative sample. The second section reports general themes that emerged during the analysis and how these themes differentiate the two groups. This section goes in-depth to the crux of the qualitative analysis. Two concepts, “valuing education” and

“maintaining parent-child appropriate structure” are used to frame the differences uncovered with this qualitative analysis and how these differences may impact child outcomes and future educational success. These two concepts were grouped with categories such as “knowing child’s current educational experience” and “perceiving and disciplining child.” Throughout the description of the analysis, direct quotes from the parents serve as indicators. The two concepts inform the third section of the chapter that provides the conclusion from the analysis, that the two concepts represent two distinct, though inter-related dimensions of an emerged variable, “parenting style.” Differences between the two groups in this emerged variable reflect possible explanations to the differences in child outcomes found in the quantitative analysis.

“Parenting style”, as discussed in chapter two, refers to the larger context or overall emotional climate in which parenting behaviors are expressed (Coolahan, et al., 2002). Quantitatively speaking, it is not known and cannot be computed from the qualitative analysis, the extent to which “parenting style” explains between the two groups. However, the qualitative analysis reveals that the two concepts, “valuing education” and “maintaining appropriate parent-child structure” do partially explain differences between the two groups and subsequently should be used as catalysts to further develop measurement of “parenting style.” Ideally, more exhaustive qualitative and quantitative testing would follow measurement development. However, for present purposes, results from the qualitative analysis are

utilized to provide general conclusions about resiliency and the fostering of protective environments among this population of parents of at-risk children. The following table presents a visual presentation of the overall qualitative analysis:

Table 6.1: Creation of Variable and Related Categories from the Qualitative Analysis

Variable	Concepts	Categories	Indicators
Parenting Style	Valuing Education	Knowing child's current education experience Defining parental role in child's current educational experience Conveying knowledge of child's abilities Articulating child's future educational attainment	Direct quotes included throughout analysis description
	Maintaining Appropriate Parent-Child Structure	Using religion Relating perceptions of child to discipline techniques Transcending outlook	

I. Sample Characteristics

Demographics for the sample are reported in Table 6.2. Due to the small sample size, tests of significance were not conducted. As the table shows, a greater percentage of the non-resilient group were boys, black, with

lower reported family income and less likely to have lived with both parents since birth. Neither group had any parent reporting a college degree, however, a greater percentage of mother and fathers in the non-resilient group reported “less than a high school education.” Interestingly, a higher percentage of children in the resilient group reported being on Peachcare or Medicaid. However, considering that the total sample was considered at-risk, the parents of these children may have been more likely to enroll their children in these government subsidized plans. It is also surprising that a greater percentage in the non-resilient group reported being married; however the quality of the marriages and whether or not the marriage was between the child’s biological parents was not known.

Table 6.2: Comparisons between Children Categorized as resilient and non-resilient on Socio-Economic Measures (Parents who Participated in the Qualitative Interviews) [23]

Demographic	Non-Resilient	Resilient	Total
Sex:			
Male	15 (75%)	6 (43%)	21 (62%)
Female	5 (25%)	8 (57%)	13 (38%)
	(N=20)	(N=14)	(N=34)
Race:			
African American	14 (70%)	6 (46%)	20 (61%)
White	5 (25%)	7 (54%)	13 (39%)
Hispanic	1(5%)		
	(N=20)	(N=13)	(N=33)

[23] Where the totals do not add up to 34, data were missing for some of the families.

Table 6.2 (Cont):

Demographic	Non-Resilient	Resilient	Total
Mother's Education:			
Less than high school	5 (36%)	2 (16%)	7 (28%)
High School Diploma	4(29%)	2 (36%)	6 (24%)
Some College or Associates	5 (36%)	7 (39%)	12 (48%)
College Degree	0	0	0
	(N=14)	(N=11)	(N=25)
Father's Education:			
Less than high school	9 (64%)	4 (40%)	13 (54%)
High School Diploma	4 (29%)	5 (50%)	9(38%)
Some College or Associates	1 (7%)	1 (10%)	2 (8%)
College Degree	0	0	0
	(N=14)	(N=10)	(N=24)
Income:			
$20,000 or less	7 (47%)	2 (29%)	9 (41%)
$20,001-$50,000	6(40%)	4 (57%)	10 (45%)
$50,001-$80,000	2 (13%)	1 (14%)	3 (14%)
$80,001 or more	0	0	0
	(N=15)	(N=7)	(N=22)
Child's Health Insurance:			
Medicaid or Peachcare	5 (28%)	4 (36%)	9 (31%)
Other	13 (72%)	7 (64%)	20 (69%)
	(N=18)	(N=11)	(N=29)
Marital Status:			
Married	7 (47%)	2 (29%)	9 (41%)
Not-Married	8 (53%)	5 (71%)	13 (59%)
	(N=15)	(N=7)	(N=22)
Continually Live with Both Parents Since Birth:			
Yes	8 (50%)	4 (66%)	12 (55%)
No	8 (50%)	2 (33%)	10 (45%)
	(N=16)	(N=6)	(N=22)

All the children of the parents who consented to the interview were considered at-risk. A composite measure was created from the initial baseline standardized assessment scores and children who began their preschool year scoring more than one-half standard deviation (sd=15) below the national norm were categorized as non-resilient. The range for this group on this composite measure was 63-88. Parents of at-risk children who scored at least average or above average on the same assessments were categorized as resilient. The range for this group was 93-112.

Table 6.3 details the individual trajectories on the composite measure for the 34 children. Children categorized as resilient are presented in bold and the table is ordered from the lowest baseline score to the highest baseline score. This trajectory demonstrates the possibility of volatile trends that occur when testing young children. These individual trajectories indicated that learning trends were not always linear, as some children lost ground against the national norm over time. However, all children who began the study above 100.00 remained above this score on their final composite measure created from the final testing period in spring 2004.[24]

As the table indicates, many of children began the study in one category but ended the study in the opposite category. For example, child 13 had the third lowest composite baseline score at the beginning of the study but ended the study with one of the highest scores. This particular child is of

[24] Again, it is noted the methodological challenges in dividing a group of children using a composite score that is based on assessments conducted at four-years of age. This categorization is sufficient for an exploratory qualitative analysis with a main goal of examining themes for further study using parent's own language.

Hispanic origin and this particular interview, the only one, was conducted with a family friend translating. Because the assessments were only conducted in English, it is intuitive that after three years of exposure to a second language in a school setting his scores on tests conducted in the new language would rise. Similarly, child 6 began the study barely at the threshold, excelled through preschool and kindergarten but then dropped to an 88.75 at the end of first grade. For him, his father was in a motorbike accident at the end of the child's kindergarten year and the family's income changed. This resulted in a family move that meant the child changed schools. Therefore, it is also intuitive that he might struggle at that point. The last testing period was spring 2004; it would have been optimal to conduct further testing at later periods to see if this child was able to recover.

Table 6.3: Trajectory of Children's Composite Measure Scores over the Course of the Study[25]

Child Number:	Assigned Name	Fall 2001	Spring 2002	Spring 2003	Spring 2004
3	Joshua	63.00	---	83.25	80.50
26	Alexander	69.25	70.75	90.00	88.50
13	William	69.25	80.75	94.00	110.50
1	Jacob	71.00	79.00	81.75	82.50
2	Michael	71.00	68.25	77.75	73.50
4	Matthew	74.25	93.50	90.75	87.50
27	Tyler	74.25	72.75	90.25	82.50
17	Abigail	74.50	78.00	86.75	92.00
22	Nicholas	75.00	75.00	91.75	86.00
18	Isabella	76.50	88.50	91.00	91.00
34	Caleb	76.75	79.75	89.00	89.00
10	Christopher	80.25	84.50	86.75	95.25
15	Hannah	80.25	---	84.75	88.50
16	Anthony	82.00	75.50	94.00	85.50
9	Joseph	83.50	79.25	91.50	91.25
23	Alexis	83.50	71.75	83.25	74.75
19	Ashley	86.25	86.25	89.25	92.75
32	Logan	87.00	79.75	82.75	90.75
30	Dylan	87.25	---	87.75	85.00
28	James	88.25	89.75	93.25	105.75
11	**Daniel**	**93.00**	**---**	**88.50**	**94.25**
5	**Dolly**	**93.25**	**91.25**	**91.50**	**90.50**
6	**Ethan**	**93.25**	**104.25**	**100.25**	**88.75**
8	**Andrew**	**93.25**	**95.25**	**---**	**108.25**
31	**Nathan**	**94.00**	**87.50**	**---**	**86.75**
14	**Olivia**	**95.75**	**95.00**	**---**	**---**
33	**Brianna**	**97.75**	**102.50**	**---**	**95.75**
21	**Samantha**	**98.50**	**101.00**	**---**	**103.50**
20	**Ryan**	**100.75**	**106.25**	**106.50**	**110.75**
29	**Sophia**	**103.25**	**108.25**	**---**	**117.25**
24	**Grace**	**105.00**	**---**	**110.25**	**109.25**
7	**Emma**	**106.00**	**102.50**	**109.75**	**112.00**
12	**Madison**	**107.00**	**105.75**	**112.25**	**113.25**
25	**David**	**112.00**	**111.00**	**116.75**	**119.75**

[25] Pseudonyms were randomly assigned to the children. The website: http://www.top10000babynames.com/index.htm was used for a list of American baby names. The website separates boys and girls names, so the names were assigned based upon the sex of the child with the most popular names, according to the website, used first.

In summary, the demographics indicated differences between the two groups and the trajectories revealed that children's academic performance varied over the course of the study. Using the initial categorization criteria with ending test scores, 85% of children who began the study categorized as non-resilient would continue to be categorized as such at the end of the study. Similarly, 86% of the resilient sample would also continue to be categorized as resilient. Therefore, the trajectory of standardized scores show that though movement occurred throughout the study, children were generally in the same category after at least three years of formal schooling.[26]

II. Concept Creation

The in-depth interviews were structured to capture the perspective from the parent. Hence, the questions were open-ended and, depending on the responses and associated interviewer, some topics were discussed more elaborately in a number of the interviews and less in others. A symbolic interactionist approach notes the importance of using language to frame context. Because social life is defined by language (LaRossa, 2005), the particular meanings that people give to their own behavior and the perceptions of their behavior are as important as the behavior itself. It was important that the interview process and subsequent analysis be constructed in ways that facilitated using parents' own language.[27] From the parents' own

[26] Children may have begun formal schooling before their four-year-old preschool experience, such as Early Head Start. This data was not available for this analysis.
[27] The constant comparison method common in Grounded Theory analysis was utilized in the qualitative analysis process. This process analyzes participants' own words and meanings to generate theory about the social process in study.

words, a complex picture of parenting emerged that revealed perceptional differences between the two groups of parents.

As is common in qualitative research, data collection and data analysis occurred almost simultaneously. This allows the interviewer to identify main probes and emerging themes and include those in the subsequent interviews. The first stage of the analysis, open coding, was undertaken with general codes being noted by carefully examining the verbatim transcripts of the text line by line.[28] Many of the various codes that emerged during the open coding phase were connected together under general groupings now referred to as concepts. Codes used to create the categories were not mutually exclusive and a code could be included in more than one category.

As the categories were subsequently grouped, during the axial coding phase, two distinct though interrelated concepts emerged: “valuing education” and “maintaining appropriate parent-child structure.” Reflected under these two concepts would be, for example, categories such as “articulating child’s future educational attainment” and “relating perceptions of child to discipline technique.” In both concepts, macro-level and micro-level themes that revealed parental perceptions of their economic position, extended family or community support, and living situation with a spouse or partner emerged.

For the following two subsections, categories and appropriate indicators that illustrate the concepts are provided but percentages of resilient

[28] It is important to note that even though comparisons between resilient and non-resilient children are reported, at the initial stage of the analysis, such comparisons were not made. Those comparisons were done at the second and third stages of the analysis. As the analysis yielded codes, the interview guide for subsequent interviews was altered. A copy of the final interview guide is provided in Appendix B.

and non-resilient responses are not. Because of the great variation in style with each individual interview and the changing interview guide, computing accurate percentages and/or means, etc is not feasible and the results would not be valid. It is also important to note that the examples provided as indicators are direct quotes from the respondents.[29] This decision was made so that the analysis would be framed in the respondents' own words-an important tenet of grounded theory methodology. Respondent quotes are presented in bold-faced type. Where appropriate, interviewers' quotes may also be included. These are also single-spaced, but they are not bolded.

III. Valuing Education

The concept "valuing education" reflected parental ideas and perceptions about the parent's knowledge and role in the child's current educational experiences, the child's scholastic abilities and future educational attainment, and the parent's educational past. Parents of children in the resilient category displayed concrete knowledge that they were aware of their child's particular school and classroom experiences, specified particular scholastic interactions with their child that provided evidence of themselves as partners in their child's education and relayed a multi-faceted view of their child's abilities and future educational attainment. They also expressed regret about decisions in their own past but reported that they hoped to use such experiences to inspire their children. In contrast, parents of the children in the

[29] There were discussions that due to the sensitive nature of the topics as well as a potentially disenfranchised population that by including quotations without editing for regional dialects and/or grammatical errors certain stereotypes may be perpetuated. Furthermore, such perpetuation could lead to adverse effects on the population that is being studied. The intent of including direct quotations is for research purposes only; it is not the researcher's intent and sincere hope that any examples provided will not be used out of this research context.

non-resilient category seemed overwhelmed or disinterested by what their specific role should be regarding their child's education, spoke in general or non-descript terms about their expectations regarding their child's abilities and future educational attainment, conveyed a disconnection to the educational system and to their child's current school and classroom experience. Most of these parents also regretted past educational decisions they made for themselves, but were less likely to use language that indicated they hoped to use such experiences as inspiration.

Knowing Child's Current Educational Experience

A strong indicator of how parents were valuing their child's education was found in the discussions of the degree to which parents were able to specify elements of their child's current educational experience. Some parents were able to relay in great detail aspects of their child's current experience, while others only indicated a cursory knowledge of what was going on in the child's classroom and school. Parents of children in the non-resilient category spoke in more general terms about their child's abilities and future educational attainment and indicated little ownership in their child's education. Whereas, parents of children in the resilient category conveyed greater familiarity with their child's classroom activities and used language that indicated a general sense of ownership in their child's education.

For example, Madison is a white female with a single mother who reported an income of less than $20,000 a year. The living circumstances for this parent were different than many of the other parents since she was living

with her parents and was currently attending school. Therefore, her reported income was not an accurate indication of the resources provided to the child. This child scored above average on all four of the standardized tests at the beginning of preschool (PPVT=100, WJ-AP=110, WJ-LW=104, and OWLS=114) and she continued to improve. At the conclusion of the study, her combined standardized assessments averaged 112. When asked about her child's current school and what the mother liked and disliked the mother was able to report in detail her thoughts about the child's teachers, principals, and even discuss with great specificity some discipline techniques that the school uses:

> **I mean it's really structured, the teachers are really good, I love all the teachers, I liked her teacher better last year. She just had so many things organized and had everything- this one's just as organized, but I don't feel as close, maybe it's because I'm not volunteering as much as I did last year… the principle's pretty good. Some things that like, you know when she gets in trouble they make them write out these action plans, they're like what would you do next time you did this, how would you react, what should we take away?**

Not only did the parent demonstrate a detailed knowledge of what is going on in her child's school, she imparted a sense of recognizing her own agency in the discussion. In other words, she viewed herself not as a passive observer of her child's educational experience, but rather an engaged participant. This was indicated in her placing some of the responsibility on herself for not liking this year's teacher as much. Rather than just assume that the teacher the child had the previous year was better, she actively wondered if her bias was related to her not volunteering as much that school year.

Contrast the above quote with the following one from parents of a child in the non-resilient category. Jacob is a white boy living in a rural area who began the study with a baseline average of 71.00, which increased to 82.50 by the end of his first grade year. His scores were particularly low in expressive language skills (OWLS=62), though his parents indicated that he had recently been assessed for speech difficulties and was now receiving services. Neither parent had graduated from high school and only the father worked. Both parents were present for the interview. When the mother was asked about her son's teachers, her response was less detailed, "**Yeah, I like his teachers. He's got a good one right now. I like her."** The interviewer probed a bit and asked how the first grade teacher compared to the kindergarten teacher to which the mother simply responded, "**She's good too."** At this point the interviewer paused to see if the mother would elaborate and after a moment the mother did continue her train of thought: **"She's real sweet to 'em, real sweet. I went o'thar and talked to her. I like her,"** but again did not go into detail other than to say that the teacher was sweet**.** Furthermore, when the interviewer asked about the principal or other staff, the mother responded that she hadn't met her or him. Finally, the interviewer asked how she knew the teachers. The mother responded, "**"Well, she has a parent conference thing…She has it like I think twice a year to go over his work and what he's done and everything."**

To contrast the two parents, the mother of the second child detailed a surface level knowledge of her child's school. She did not go into any detail

about any activities there, nor did she know the principal and only reported that the teachers are nice. The language she used in referring to the parent conference was also interesting. In what could be interpreted as partially dismissive, she referred to it as a parent conference “thing.” In essence, she objectified what theoretically should be an important interaction between the teacher and child.

The parent of the first child, Madison, indicated she knew her child’s teachers. Rather than just provide a general description that the teacher was nice or sweet, she also described the teacher in terms of a professional attribute: organization. She also stated that she knew the principal and even knew some of the school’s discipline activities. Other than what the parents reported in the interview, which was related to the style of the different interviewers, it is impossible to gauge the full level of knowledge from these quotes. However, the analysis suggested that there were differences in the knowledge that the parents were able to convey between the parents of children in the resilient category and children in the non-resilient category.

Defining Parent Role in Child’s Current Educational Experience

Related to parental knowledge of the child’s current educational experience would be the perception regarding the role that the parent plays in his or her child’s schooling. Parents of children in the resilient category were more likely to report that they took an active role in their child’s education compared to parents of children in the non-resilient category. Differences

were not only found between the groups in this category, but also within groups, especially with the non-resilient group.

For example, though not as commonly found as other indicators in this category, the specific language used and response to certain questions, suggested that the role the parents took in their child's classroom experience was more of a hindrance than a help. "Alexis" is an African-American female living with her mother and her mother's boyfriend. Both asked to be present for the interview. The child began the study with a composite average of 83.5 and ended the study 9 points below. She was repeating kindergarten at the time of the interview. The child had been placed in special education. The mother was asked about her perceptions of her child being placed in special education:

I: So she is in Special Ed classes? …Is that okay with you?

Mom: It's fine with me because, I was in Special Ed too.

This quote just merely suggested that the parent did not question her child's placement in a special education classroom environment, without a further probe it was impossible to know. However, a later conversation demonstrated that the child's mother and the mother's boyfriend did not take an active role in assuring that the child was regularly attending school. In fact, they allowed the child to miss school, which considering that they admitted this to an educational researcher, suggests that there may be more similar behavior enacted by the parents concerning their role in Alexis's education:

I: Okay. Do you feel like she is learning at school?

Mom: Umm huh.

Mom's Boyfriend: Umm huh. She's doing better than what she done last year.

I: Do you feel like they are teaching her good things?

Mom: Yeah…Sometimes she likes to play hooky though (laughter).

I: Umm. How often does she play hooky?

Mom: I would say about once out of the week (laughter).

Mom's Boyfriend: Naw not that much. She don't play hooky that much.

I: Umm huh. Once every two weeks? (laughter)

Mom: Umm huh.

Mom's Boyfriend: Somewhere about that much.

This exchange with parents of a struggling student repeating kindergarten raised concerns. It suggested a cavalier attitude about the child's school attendance and that the parent's sense of the parenting role did not encompass a high value on education. However, it is possible that the parent was feeling guilty about the child "playing hooky." The parent mentioned this without being prompted, though the quotes also showed that she laughed as this was discussed. This may have reflected an acknowledgment from the parent that she had a role in her child's decision to miss school and was feeling, at least, ambivalent about it.

It is also important to note that not all, or even most, parents of children in the non-resilient category spoke of themselves in their parenting role undertaking activities that could be as detrimental to their child's education. In

fact, about half of the parents of children in the non-resilient group spoke in the similar activist language that the parents of children in the resilient category used. Isabella is an African-American female living with both parents. Both of her parents worked, their combined family income was above $20,000, and they each had high school diplomas. Nevertheless, this child was categorized as non-resilient based upon a low baseline test score (76.5) that did, however, substantially improve over the course of the study (91 at the end of first grade).[30] These next two quotes from the child's mother detailed several aspects of how serious she and her husband, the child's father, took their parental role of helping their child through school. First, the mother talked about working with the child on her schoolwork, especially the work that the child struggled with:

> **It seems like when she get home and we explain it to her, like she kind of gets it. But when she's at school, cause um, cause she just brought a paper home yesterday, she was like she having trouble adding 10 to like a number, like, you have like 14 add 10 to that and get 24. And she didn't get it and I was like, I put it down for Isabella, this the only thing you have to do right here, and she was like, and I put it on the table to let her to do it and she did every last one of them.**

This second quote confirmed the parent's frustration with the educational system. Not only did the parent report the she was feeling overwhelmed, she also reported that the child was feeling the stress:

> **I have just wanted to cry sometimes, god, it's rough! I mean, I know she can do it, it's just, bringing it out of her I think she a little overwhelmed with some of it because I'm like, I be thinking like Isabella, you should know this.**

[30] Statistical testing of significance was not done with the composite measure or with the interview sample.

Examining the quotes from the two parents indicated that the second parent felt strongly that she needed to work with her child with her child's homework. The mother spoke of a sense of ownership in her child's education. She talked of her own pain and frustration and used first person plural when talking about working with her child indicating that she saw it as both her and husband's role to influence the child's education.

There was evidence throughout the interview and through the other quantitative sources that this child had behavioral issues that could have been hindering her academic performance. In fact, the mother reported that the school had suggested that she medicate the child. Even though she acknowledged the child had behavioral problems, she was adamantly against using medication. In this final quote reported from Isabella's mother, she demonstrated her role as a parental advocate as she defended her child:

> **She tell us a lot, she mentioned a couple of times about us taking Isabella to the doctor. I was like, for what? You know, ain't nothing wrong with Isabella, it's just Isabella. And we figured she was kinda hinting to the Ridilin or whatever, and I stopped her right then, I'm not going to do that right there, I'm not going to put her on that medicine.**

The language used by the second mother was similar to the language used by the parents in the resilient category; in fact it showed a frustration level not normally found in that group. Compared to the mother in the first quote, the way that this mother perceived her involvement with her child's education was remarkably different. Similar to Madison's mother, this particular mother spoke with a sense of ownership or a recognition of her own agency regarding her child's education, especially as the child was struggling

through first grade. The mother's frustration further conveyed her sense of herself as active, not passive, in this educational role. Though this child was categorized as non-resilient, her test scores were improving since preschool. Despite the indicated frustration on the mother's part, she may not be seeing the fruits of her labor.[31]

Specifying Child's Current Abilities

Similar to the ways that parents articulated their knowledge about their child's current educational experiences and expressed ways that they took or did not take an active role in their child's education, parents also demonstrated varying degrees in specifying strengths and weaknesses regarding their child's current abilities. This was an important finding because the degree of specificity and/or the amount of detail that the parents provided about their child's abilities was strongly connected to their sense of what their roles as parents entailed.

For example, Michael is a black male living in a household with a single mother reporting high school completion with no college. The household income was under $20,000 and the child was currently under a government subsidized plan for health insurance coverage. The child was categorized in the non-resilient group. He had an average of 71 on the four baseline standardized measures, scoring especially low on the PPVT and OWLS (60 and 63 respectively). At the end of first grade, the child's standardized scores had improved but his scores on the OWLS and PPVT were still in the lower 70's, almost 30 points behind the national average.

[31] For IRB and ethical reasons, assessment scores were never shared with parents and teachers.

When his mother spoke of his abilities, she related this in terms of basic, elementary skills: "**He likes to write his name, address and phone number. He has passed all of that. Now he is doing numbers and times tables.**" Furthermore, when asked about the types of books he reads that were present in the home, the mother displayed little knowledge of what he was reading: "**The books he gets from school. Like the little books, I don't know what they are called."** When asked further questions about the books in the home, the mother again indicated limited knowledge about what constitutes appropriate books for children**: "Some dealing with the home and the Bible. We just get decorating books and stuff like that."**

When asked similar questions, the mother of Madison was able to articulate in greater detail aspects of her daughter's abilities. Whereas the mother above spoke in terms of elementary skills, this mother spoke more broadly and specific. She conveyed a sense of understanding subject areas where her child needed to improve. She also demonstrated a clearer understanding of the types of books her child was reading and needed to read:

> **She gets math, she loves math, but reading and, or comprehending, she reads good but to read it and then comprehend it, it totally throws her and I had trouble with that, too, so you know, stuff like that, they're trying to get her to comprehend it already. I can not believe it. ….They bring home now, I mean, it takes us like 35 minutes to get her stuff accomplished, and it's actually worse when they first started the year off, it would take us an hour. They would send so much stuff, it's like "good lord!" It's like a book, you have these little "Hop n' Pop" things where you have to read the words really fast to see how many you can get in 60 seconds. Then the math homework.**

> **You've got the story page you have to read and then answer questions. And then you have math facts to go over.**

In these quotes and other parts of the respective interviews, very different levels of detail and understanding about the particular child's abilities and current educational experience were revealed. First, the last mother discussed with specificity the types of books her child was bringing home, whereas the first mother did not know the types of books coming home with her child from school. Second, the last mother talked about her child in terms of abilities (reading comprehension), whereas the second mother talked in terms of basic skills (writing his name). From the first mother, there was little indication that the first mother works with her child at all on his homework. The first mother talked about when *he* does his homework, whereas the last mother talked as if *they* do their homework together. The last mother spoke in terms of her child's homework as more of a partnership; the first mother spoke in terms of it being something that the child likes to do.

Generally speaking, parents of children in the resilient category were able to speak in greater detail about their child's abilities while being specific about areas that needed work. These traits were especially pronounced for parents of children in the resilient group. When these parents spoke of their child's abilities, they spoke in terms of partnerships or at least working together. Their child's ability was something that they assumed responsibility for and therefore worked with the child. For example, Ethan is a black male living with both parents and he lives near to many extended family members. At the time of the interview, his mother was working full-time and the father

was on disability. Their income was unreported but the child was receiving government subsidized medical insurance. This child was categorized as resilient, but his abilities were hard to classify as he tested inconsistently throughout the study. When asked about his abilities and areas in which he needed to work, the mother, like most of the mothers in the resilient category responded with specificity indicating subject matters and skills within those subject matters:

> **For this year right now it is reading, getting him to read more. Get him to understand what he is reading real good, reading comprehension…His time, telling his time. I would say he is pretty good with math. …. Um, "Ethan" just like I say he needs that extra little help, he do. He give up too fast. If he don't know it and he gets frustrated then he just gives up. So, lately [Ethan's sibling] has been here helping him out. I have seen that was working.**

The category, "parent knowledge of child's ability" demonstrated the level of knowledge expressed about their children for parents in the resilient category. Looking at the mother above, even when talking about the child's general attitude toward work, she was bringing it back to herself by relating how *she* had seen that working. This distinction between being partners in their child's education versus being observers was found throughout the interviews and it extended beyond volunteering more hours in the school or even knowing the child's teachers. It related to a parent's general knowledge about their child and what was needed for his or her educational success. Not all the parents felt successful and there were many parents in the non-resilient groups who articulated the specificity found with the resilient parents. However, the parents of children in the resilient category were more likely to

articulate the detail needed to sufficiently partner with their child in her or his education.

Articulating Perceptions of Child's Future Educational Attainment

The last category reported under this concept examines how parents discussed their value of education from a different angle. During the interviews, parents were asked about their educational expectations for their child. The findings in this area connected to those found in the other areas. For instance, parents who were able to specify and go into great detail about how their child was doing with his or her schoolwork spoke with greater realism about what they expected their child to achieve. For example, Ethan's mom, discussed in the preceding section, articulated that she was optimistic as to her son's educational future. However, she also spoke in terms of realism:

> **Basically my long-term goals is to get Ethan through high school. If I could get Ethan through high school, that's a big accomplishment. And try to force college, because he might be the one to go to college. If I could just get him into a vocational program. That is my long term goal, just to get Ethan through school.**

As mentioned in the previous section, even though he was categorized as resilient, Ethan was struggling through school and his test scores reflected some inconsistency. His initial baseline composite score was barely over the threshold, but the composite score jumped over 100 at the end of Pre-K and Kindergarten, only to fall below 90 at the end of first grade. Perhaps conveying an awareness of her child's inconsistent academic performance, this mom was hesitant about her hopes for her son's future, but optimistic.

She displayed what could be termed as "realistic optimism." This "realistic optimism" could have empowered the mother to better identify areas of need that would help Ethan meet his potential.

Jacob was discussed at the beginning of this section. His mother did not convey a sense of herself being a partner in her child's education. She barely knew her son's teachers and could only talk to them in terms of being nice and sweet. Jacob's father was also present in the interview and he spoke of his expectations for Jacob as an adult. Like most parents who participated in the interviews he expected his son to complete high school and he hoped that Jacob would go on to college.[32] However, his first response regarding his son's future, was he hoped Jacob would, "…**become a doctor."** Yet, when asked to clarify, his tone changed and he was unable to convey a sense that he knew whether or not his son could be a doctor or what a doctor's training entailed: "**Yeah, I mean really, to graduate high school, maybe have interest in college."**

Note the difference between the first response and the latter response from the dad. He would like Jacob to become a doctor, but only has the expectation to finish high school. The "realistic optimism" articulated from the first mother was articulated in the same manner with this quote. The optimism was found in the father's comments, but not the realism. A few moments later, with some prodding from the interviewer, the father elaborated in more detail and connected his own educational experience to his hopes for Jacob:

[32] Not completing high school was a fear that resonated throughout the interviews, especially with parents who themselves had not completed high school. Overall, Georgia's high school completion rate is estimated around 60% (Kids Count, 2006).

> I: If you could just wish, you know for where he would be in say twenty years from now, where do you see him being? How would you visualize him as a twenty-seven year old?
>
> **Anywhere but a mill, like me. You know, stuck in a mill…. Yeah, yeah, I mean, if a mill is what he wants to be, you know that's fine by me. …You know, just to give him the option, you know, other options.** *[The mother had interjected that Jacob wants to be a policeman.]*

Having options for your child other than college is not unexpected or necessarily inappropriate. However, their responses to the questions and the hesitancy in their language implied that they were basing their expectations on their own personal worldview and not on any available information about their child. In contrast, Ethan's mother also connected her and her husband's educational attainment to her expectations. She wanted her and her husband's education to influence her son in meeting her hopeful expectations:

> **I look at it as I give my kids the motivation to go to school and get an education. You know, don't drop out of school Mom and Dad got a diploma. Mom and Dad went to College; well my husband went to Vocational School.** *[The mother had not finished her degree.]*

Connecting the parent's own educational experience to their child was a common thread throughout the interviews, especially for parents who had dropped out of high school. The difference between many of the parents of children in the non-resilient and resilient categories was the way that they reported using the previous experience. Parents in the non-resilient group merely stated that they hoped the child did not make the same mistakes; whereas parents in the resilient group stated that they hoped to use their

experience, even if their experience was negative, to inspire their child.

Summary of Valuing Education

This concept refers to the activities and perceptions reported by the parents that demonstrate different attitudes and behaviors reflecting their role in their child's education. In short, the parents of children in the non-resilient category related more support rather than activity in their child's education. Using a sports analogy with school being the playing field, parents of children in the resilient category participated on the team, while parents of children in the non-resilient category supported from the sidelines. In summary, parents in the resilient category were more likely to refer to themselves in active tones when discussing educational aspects related to their child.

Looking within categories, not much difference was seen within the category of parents in the resilient group. Their activism in the child's education suggests the possibility that this parenting behavioral trait can translate into differences for their child. However, for the parents of children in the non-resilient category, findings indicate that the position the parent takes on the sideline could impact the child's academic career. For example, the child whose parents continued to let her miss school had scores that continued to drop throughout the study, whereas, the scores of Isabella, the child with the active but frustrated mother, climbed substantially throughout the study.

IV. Maintaining Appropriate Parent-Child Structure

Whether or not they realize it, parents actively shape their children's environment. Some parents structure an environment where the child is able to thrive; the environment that others create may be more conducive to the parent's needs. The concept "maintaining appropriate parent-child structure" reflected discussions where parents articulated, in both subtle and non-subtle language, ways they created and maintained a sense of a structured environment for their child. This concept was used for analytic and theoretical purposes. Analytically, this concept was applied in the analysis when parents used language that revealed aspects of the way that they were shaping their child's environment.

Theoretically, the concept derived from a symbolic interactionist approach noting that reality is not an objective, physically separate entity into which children are passively born. Rather, reality is something that is continually being shaped and reshaped based upon current experiences or perceptions of those experiences. Furthermore, an ecological approach would suggest that the relationship parents have with their children influence and are influenced by aspects of the social world. This extends to parental perceptions of the social world. As the tenant "definition of the situation" suggests, perceptions that are perceived as real are real in their consequences. The way that parents perceive their social world and their perceptions of their place in it has enormous consequences for their child.

For the purposes of this research, the word structure referred to the total environment where the child experienced her or his day-to-day reality. Structure reflected the detailed interactions between the parents and the child as well as the role of religious beliefs in the family and child's life. The use of "maintaining" in the concept denotes the important role parents play in creating and recreating their child's environment. In other words, how to parents maintain consistency. "Appropriate parent-child" does not demarcate specific behaviors that early childhood specialists would classify as developmentally appropriate or inappropriate, rather this language denotes the context and represents a systematic approach to reported behaviors between parents and their children. In other words, this wording denotes behaviors and perceptions holistically, not in isolation.

Parental language is evidence of the structure that children live under every day. Inherent in parents' language are references to the "tools" that are available for them as they create structure for the child (Swidler, 1986). It is not only the type and amount of "tools" that parents have in their "toolkits" that impact parenting; it is also the parents' perceptions of how to use these "tools" that may have direct consequences for children.

Specific categories of this concept reported in this section include reports from parents regarding their religious beliefs and indicators of how parents use their beliefs in maintaining structure, perceptions of how they see their child and if their view of the child is consistent in their reported discipline techniques, and the parent's general outlook on life regarding evidence of

how this may influence their child's environment. Results suggested variation in the above-mentioned facets between the two groups. Parents of children in resilient category provided evidence that using tools related to this concept that enabled them to create a thriving environment for their child.

Using Religion

Out of the 34 children whose parents participated in the interview the composite score for David was highest at all four testing periods. His standardized scores on the WJ-AP, for example, were more than one standard deviation above the national norm at each time the assessment was given (120, 124, 121, and 125 respectively). Yet, with regard to behavior, David was consistently in trouble. In fact, on the day of the interview he had been suspended from the bus.

David's mother was well aware of his behavior problem and she reported that it was a constant source of concern. According to his mother, she felt the need to heavily structure her son's day-to-day environment. However, this structure was not constraining, rather the structure was embedded in the family's reported routines. The mother reported that religious discussions were central to their routine. Each night, they had a family meeting: "**Our family meeting is at 5:30…. Yeah, and we talk about the Bible...we discuss that, that's the big plus in our family."** According to the mother's quotes, her religious beliefs underpinned the family meetings. Religion helped provide a purpose for the family meeting and was a daily part of the family interaction.

Religion was a common theme throughout many of the interviews with parents reporting that religion was a key facet for much of their belief systems.[33] Similar to David's mother, the role that parents conveyed religion took in their life provided a good example of differing ways parents maintained structure in their child's environment. For example, Emma is a white female living with both of her married parents. The family income was higher than many others in the study, though the child's medical insurance was subsidized through the government. This child's composite measure exceeded 100 for each assessment period. At the conclusion of the study, her score was 112 showing strength in cognitive and math skills (WJ-AP=125) and expressive language (OWLS=113). Her mother reported that the family was active in their church and religion was the center of their family and social life. Furthermore, to the mother, the church framed her overall belief system as indicated by her statement: "**I am not on the PTA or anything, it is not religious."** The following quote further elaborated the strong role she reported religion having in her life:

> **We go to church 3 times a week. Thursday nights, Saturdays and Sunday mornings. They [the children] sit with us every meeting. We have what we call conventions we have them all weekend long. Our kids stay with us and they do fine. She loves it. She loves to go. It is very important in my life. That is prominent in my life and then everything else surrounds that…. We go out to find what the history behind it [religion], what it is really about and what it is based on. For them to grasp that concept, they don't get it right now…..I feel that is how we should grow. She should take hold of the truth…To me that would make her well rounded in**

[33] For this part of the analysis, the actual religion or domination was not considered. Rather, the analysis uncovered the differing ways parents talked about religion and the way that they use religion to encompass their belief system that impacts and relates to the environment that they provide their child.

> **even finding a job and her whole life putting him first. It teaches her about how to be as a person and how to treat others.**

At face value, these quotes implied a devout family that spent a large amount of their time away from home attending religious services. Yet, as the mother elaborated, it became apparent that religion was more than just activity for this family; it was a way of life that shaped not only what they saw, but also shaped the way that they processed the world around them. According to Emma's mother, her family's religious belief system provided a foundation and structured their environment. Using her religious beliefs as a catalyst, she added a higher level of thinking to her child's environment. The deeper discussion that the mother referred to provided avenues for possible intellectual interaction within the family. She wanted her child to be a part of her faith, but it was also important to her that her child understands the faith. Whether intentional or not, this mother demonstrated ways that she used religion as a "tool" to facilitate higher level thinking skills in her child.

Emma's mother used her religious beliefs to frame her and hopefully her child's belief system and expectations for her daughter. For many other parents, however, religion was articulated as a tool to dictate in concrete terms the way that the child should see the world. In other words, religious beliefs were being handed down as what the parent, and subsequently the child, should believe.

For example, Dolly was categorized as resilient with a composite score barely over the threshold (93.25). By the end of the study, her composite score had dropped to a 90.00. In fact, at the end of the study, this child was

scoring particularly high on her letter word recognition scores (WJ-LW=113), but lower on her expressive vocabulary (OWLS=83) and general math and cognition skills (WJ-AP=76). Her standardized scores decreased or remained stagnant throughout the study. For Dolly's mother, religion was a major part of her belief system and played an active role in her reported child raising activities. Dolly's mother reported her religious beliefs encompassing a higher power being physically present in her life. This physical presence provided absolute explanations for her day-to-day reality:

> **God gave her to me for a reason, that I know… Baptist born, Baptist reared, and when I'm gone I'll be Baptist dead! (laughter) Had to go! And I'm glad I went, because, it made me the person I am today. So I'm glad I went, and I thank God for my mother, who took us diligently, every Sunday, if not twice a Sunday. And we're better for it… And that's how I learned to live with my father's death.**

Religion for this family did not necessarily necessitate the type of higher level thinking skills reported by Emma's mother. This mother's conception of a higher power played an active role in her life and the life that she was shaping for her child. However, these quotes suggest the religious beliefs discussed in the quotes above were used more as an influence in the mother's toolkit, rather than something that was actively shaping Emily's intellectual skills.

Parents reported varying ways of "using religion" to shape their child's environment. As mentioned previously, religion was a common theme throughout the interviews for both parents of children in the resilient category and children in the non-resilient category. However, the analysis uncovered variations not in whether or not religion was used but in the ways that parents

used their religious beliefs to structure the child's environment. Both the mothers of David and Emma, two children in the resilient group with high scores, reported ways that demonstrated a use of religion that extended further than merely passing on a belief system; they articulated ways that they used religion to maintain a consistent structure for their child. This suggests that for some children religion can be used as a tool, not necessarily with regard to the actual beliefs that can help children thrive.

Relating perceptions of child to discipline techniques

Heavily interwoven with religious beliefs were parental discussions about the way that they viewed their child and how their discipline techniques connected or did not connect to these reported perceptions. Parental view of the child and parental discipline techniques provided a glimpse into ways that parents were maintaining the structure that their child was living under. In some cases, it was evident that the subtle interactions with the child could lead to inconsistencies in appropriate discipline techniques with the possibility of providing a structure that is less stable for children, especially those in the non-resilient category.

The subtle language that parents used in describing interactions with their child, including discipline techniques, provided perspective on how parents see themselves in the specific parenting role. Examining the parental discussions of their interactions along with discipline techniques revealed degrees of consistencies or inconsistencies in the parent-child interactions. Some parents spoke of their interactions with their child from a "friend" or

"pal" point of view while some spoke in terms of a strict disciplinarian. Many parents in the non-resilient category spoke in ways that showed a volleying back and forth between the two. Others, primarily in the resilient category, were able to speak in a manner that implied a balance between those two extremes. These parents relayed evidence that they recognized the importance of consistency and the need to guide their child in her or his life.

Alexander began the study well below the national norm on three out of four standardized tests (67 on the PPVT, 51 on the WJ-AP, and 65 on the OWLS). Though he did make gains throughout the course of the study, he was still below the national norm on the three aforementioned tests at the end of his first grade year (91 on the PPVT, 87 on the WJ-AP, and 70 on the OWLS). His mother never graduated from high school, their income was less than $20,000 a year, and his father was only intermittingly present in his life. In many places of the interview, the mother spoke of her interactions with her child as if he was more of a playmate rather than her child, "**No, everywhere I go, I take my baby with me. I take my Alexander with me… we'll just sit at home…you know, watch the little cartoons and stuff."** Yet, when talking about how she disciplined her child, her language and tone changed, "Well, I whip him… **I whips him and umm that's about it, I whips him. I mostly try to keep him out of trouble."** Note how the mother's interactions with the child implied a friend like role, while her interaction in "keeping him out of trouble" was more of a disciplinarian. The mother only indicated that she disciplined in a punishment role, not using discipline techniques to guide

her child or teach him to think in levels that transcended basic ideas of good and bad.

This language that the mother used revealed much about the “tools” that she possessed in dealing with her child and reflected an inconsistent interaction style. The only discipline technique the mother reported using was spanking, yet her daily interactions with her child reflected little other than television watching. This friend type role was also revealed when she discussed a particular interaction with Alexander’s school. The mother reflected genuine concern with her child’s behavior and was justifiably upset at the way she felt the school was treating her child, however her discussion reflected a possible disconnect from reality that possibly hinders her ability to prepare an environment where her child can thrive. This quote detailed the problem from her standpoint:

> **he got a paddlin.. she had told him two days in a row you know to not bring the school material home. He been bringing home crayons and glue and umm.. school scissors…I said he didn’t take it out, you know, he didn’t use it, right? He was just bringing it home you know, maybe because it was his, you know, and he was just bringing it home, so she took him down to the office and had him paddled for that, and so I dislike dat because I said it didn’t make no sense to me, you know, and she said the reason why she did that is because she don’t want him, you know, to be, stealin, you know, taken stuff that don’t belongs to you. I told her that I disagree with that, I told her cause he was just bringing, umm, the next time Alexander do something, and before you take him down to the office to paddle him, I axed them to give me a call, because now he’s getting too many paddlin for unnecessary stuff.**

It is understandable that the mother would be upset about her son being paddled. However, the mother did not indicate that she ever considered the

possibility of her son taking materials home that did not belong to him.[34] Furthermore, her language showed a response that may be more typical of a friend vouching for another friend rather than a mother working with the school to confront her first grade son's potential behavioral problems.

Similarly, in this next quote, Caleb's (black boy, scored low throughout the study though scores improved) mother spoke about imagining him as an adult yet the language revealed ways that she expects him to be dependent on her when reaching adulthood:

> **Yeah, he always wanted to be a police, he pretends to be a police, but I'm like, baby, be a FBI! You'll have the benefits, make a lot more money, move if you have to. But I can see him bein' one, with his wife and his kids, comin' to visit me. My mom tells me all the time, my brother be like, get off your mama, you gotta be a big boy. And my brother says, 'Caleb, you gonna get married?' -'I'm gonna have me a wife and 3 kids!' That's what he say. And I'll say, 'But wait, who you gonna live with?' -'Mama.' 'Who's gonna cook for you?' -'Mama.' 'But you can't stay with mama!'....And he thinks he's supposed to stay with mama forever.**

This mother's discipline style was also similar to the other parents:

> **So I turns around and hit him square on his little behind, and said, 'Pick it up, pick it up, Caleb, I'm not playing with you, d'you want a whipping?' 'No, ma'am'. He doesn't even cry, you know, when I whip him, he just gets very tough. So he starts picking it up, and I heard him in the other room, 'I don't care, I don't wanna go outside anyway!' I said, 'OK, Caleb, you don't want to go outside, but you want to go down to daddy's don't you? If you can't listen to what I say, then that means you can't go down to daddy's for a day.' He'll have to stay with me one day out of the weekend he's with his daddy if he acts up. He knows it**.

These two quotes reflected inconsistent interactions from the mother. On some levels she was attempting to prepare him for adulthood. On another

[34] This quote also illustrates the possibility that this child may have been being treated differently due to his socio-economic status. Since the principal was not interviewed and the mother did not make that connection, this possibility was not fully explored in this analysis.

level she indicated that she hoped he stayed dependent on her. These two different types of interactions were interspersed with what she reported as strict discipline styles, even going as far as to threaten to not let her son see his father.

Contrast the mothers of Caleb and Alexander with Emma's mother, mentioned previously. She reported using a different disciplining technique:

> **Honestly, I yell unfortunately. She doesn't get popped too much anymore. It is a different kind of relationship that we have now because she understands… I will apologize to my kids and I know that I have made mistakes. I don't think it is beyond a parent to show that we can make mistakes too.**

Notice how the mother was describing what, in her eyes, was an inappropriate discipline style. Rather than excuse or justify, the mother reported that she used her mistakes to teach her child.

This mother's style of response is similar to David's mother, also reported in the previous subsection. She reported the way that he was being disciplined at home:

> **Well, when he disrespects me, he has to tell me out loud, or he has to write me a letter to tell me that he's sorry and he won't do it again, and how will he make it a better...you know, in his own words, you know, I don't care if it's not spelled right...you know, he writes me a letter.**

This mother reported being proactive with regard to her child's behavior. The activities that she discussed the family doing showed an environment that consistently revealed the mother to perceive her role as a guide in her child's life, not as a friend and not only as a strict disciplinarian. These next quotes describe the specific interactions that this mother reporting

undertaking with her son:

> **we talk about the night before [in the morning], they call it the AR book, Accelerated Reading, we talk about that.., we talk about his homework from the previous night, like his math, phonics, you know, stuff like that. Kinda getting refreshed for that day, that's what we do, every morning.**

This mother reported her son needs consistency and the quotes reveal that, at least from the mother's responses, the child's environment met that particular need. She further described the interactions and family meetings as not being negative or focused on things like television cartoons, but as "tools" for her to help guide her son throughout his day.

The last mother in this subsection represents, demographically speaking, a typical "welfare" mother- stereotyped and sometimes demonized by policy makers and the media. At the time of the interview, she had three different children by three different fathers. She spoke of her children in relation to where each child stood in her or his paternal pecking order. In other words, the child enrolled in the study was number four out of twelve children by the same father.[35] This child scored particularly low at the beginning of the study (baseline composite=74.25), though similar to other children he did show gains at the end of the study (composite=87.50), making particularly strong gains during his year enrolled in Georgia Pre-k (composite=93.50). Her perception of her child demonstrated an outlook to

[35] In 1989, Elijah Anderson published "Sex Codes and Family Life Among Poor-Inner City Youths." The ethnography detailed the way that men and women in the inner city use sexual behavior to improve their status in the community. For men, the number of conquests that they achieve without settling down is a form of status, whereas for women, starting a family even at young age, becomes a rite of passage that further ingrains them to the community. Anderson connected these competing motives to the decimated economic conditions many inner-city communities were finding themselves in the late 1980s.

life that was more laid back and less activist-oriented. The following quote, her response about how her future expectations for her child, indicated her low expectations while showing how she saw her child as more of a friend:

> **I don't know, because I am going to give him that decision. I tell him I don't set his standards really high. Because I feel like that if I do he will hide things from me thinking that my momma going to be mad at me, you know.**

This quote delves into the mother's outlook and the way that she sees her child. The mother did not have high expectations for herself and, in turn, did not set high expectations for her children. Subsequently this impacts the way she views him. Elsewhere in the interview she stated that he only had to make sure that he came inside when it was dark and possibly keep his room clean.

Transcending Parental Outlook

Parental outlook can have an enormous impact on the type of the environment a parent is providing for his or her child. For example, this quote and others from the interview, from the mother of David, mentioned above, indicates an outlook that is more actively oriented and focuses on how to turn negatives into positives:

> **My mom, she was never involved. And I always made a promise, if I ever have kids, I'm gonna be there.**

Contrast this quote with the quotes from this particular mother, Hannah. The composite averages for this child ranged in the mid-80s for the duration of the study. These quotes showed this mother's feelings of isolation:

> **That's about it, I don't know. I am at home; I stay in the house and don't get into nobody's business**.

> **I like the security. Like I said I stay in my house and I don't go out there, I stay in my house. The only time I go outside is if I am going to the store or going to work or something like that. I try not to get into people's business and I don't want them in my business.**

In the case of Caleb, mentioned above, the mother's general outlook was influenced by her view of her economic circumstances.

> **It's a little town, a very little town. There's a lot of bad things goin' on in certain parts. But it's not...I don't have to worry about a lot of crime, a lot of drugs…I can leave my back door unlocked, and not worry about anyone comin' in, stealin' anything…, But, what I don't like about [the town] is there's not a lot of opportunities. You know, I wish they would build up a variety of jobs....but it's a nice place to work, it's kinda quiet, everybody knows everybody.**

In this quote the mother displayed a real sense of how the economy and dynamics of her small town impacted her son's life chances. She sees both the benefits and costs of living in a small town. Furthermore, this particular quote showed that she thinks of her child's future and sees him as someone who will one day be an adult.

This quote illustrated several points about aspects of the environment for the child that were created and reinforced by the mother. First, she saw the connection between larger social-forces and the choices her son will have to make. She articulated economic difficulties inherent in their community and noted differences between being employed by either the local or federal government. However, in the same quote, she called her son baby and said things that over time reinforced his dependence on her. The quote further implied that this was not something specific to her relationship with her son;

the same dynamics were working with her brother and her mother. These quotes imply that the mother sees her child in two different, inconsistent ways. This inconsistency, though probably not uncommon, may influence ambivalence for the child as he gets older and thinks about his future.

Much of the research into resiliency looks at factors inherent in the child. Though the assessments may provide some proxy measures into a child's intelligence, the study did not examine any internal, psychological factors in the children. However, occasional aspects from the interview were revealed that possible internal traits within the children that may be facilitating their success. For example, Olivia had a composite score of 95 on both testing assessments in her preschool year- she was unable to be tested in her kindergarten and first grade year. Despite her resiliency categorization, her mother's general outlook reveals a fatalistic outlook with possible depression:

> **we don't have a ride, we go nowhere, we are stuck in the apartment. I take her to the park or playground in the apartment, that's about as far as we go. If we get a ride we go somewhere like Chucky Cheese, but that was when my mother was in town. Now I don't have a ride. We don't have anybody.**
>
> **[when asked if there was anything else she would change]. My life, my lifestyle. I wouldn't have quit going to school, I would have stayed in school. Maybe my life would be better than it is because my life really do suck.**

Yet despite this fatalistic outlook, Olivia was doing well for at least the first two years of the study. Without the benefit of psychological testing, it is impossible to make some definitive conclusions. However, in other places of

this particular interview the mother details aspects of the child's behavior that indicate that the child may have developed her own coping mechanisms:

> **She used to tell us she came and talked to her. She told my momma when she talks to herself that she be talking to her. She said she talks to my mommas sister and she wasn't even thought of when my mommas sister was alive.**
>
> **She'll come in and eat and I ask her if she has any homework. She does that and goes in her room. She'll turn on the TV and she will be in her own little world…She don't got nobody to play with, she'll play games in her room.**

These quotes give the impression that despite the fatalistic structure being provided to the child, the child has possibly developed coping mechanisms to help her continue to achieve. Again it is unknown whether or not this is the case, but the mother's discussion of her child talking to imaginary people or relatives that are deceased, and developing her own activities gives credence to this possibility.

Summary of Maintaining Appropriate Parent-Child Structure

In summary, "maintaining appropriate parent-child structure" implies more than the foundation. The narratives indicate that parents of the non-resilient children were more likely to speak of perceiving a better variety of tools and using them in more of an active sense. The parents of children in the non-resilient category talked about "tools" in more of a passive sense. For the purposes of this research, "structure" can analogized as the blueprints for a new building. For the building to be ultimately profitable, more than the foundation is necessary. The developer has to consider the walls, the electrical and plumbing systems, and aesthetic qualities of the building.

Furthermore, the surroundings of the building impact its profitability. Similarly with the children in the study, “structure” implies more than the foundations that the parents imply, it includes the child’s total environment encompassing more than just the physical area and socio-economic characteristics.

V. Summary of Analysis: Parenting Style

Using a grounded theory approach, results from the exploratory qualitative study suggested that the way the parents saw themselves in the parenting role and how they perceived they should act on it, provided insight into differences between the two groups of children categorized as resilient or non-resilient. In other words, it is the way that they constructed their parenting style. Parenting style is the variable that ultimately emerged from the analysis and reflected the overall emotional climate that the parents provided for the child.

The results suggested that two concepts reflect two distinct, though interrelated, dimensions of parenting style. The concepts “valuing education” and “maintaining appropriate parent-child structure” provided two different lenses or outlooks into the way that parents actively create and recreate their own parenting style. It is important to note that in the instances here, the parents were generally speaking of one child. Theoretically, a parent could construct a different parenting style for each child.

As argued in the first part of the chapter, it is not known and cannot be computed from the qualitative analysis, the amount of variation that “parenting style” explains between the two groups. However, the qualitative analysis

reveals that the two concepts, “valuing education” and “maintaining appropriate parent-child structure” do partially explain differences between the two groups and subsequently should be used as catalysts to further develop measurement and possibly categories of “parenting style.”

The influence of parenting style is best described by looking at the two different groups. Parents with a more active parenting style and who maintain a structure that is consistent but yet centered on the child’s needs were more likely to be found in the resilient group. Parents who were more passive in their parenting style and inconsistent in the structure that they provided were more likely to be in the non-resilient group. Theoretically, the analysts suggest that the perceptions the parents relayed as to the differing ways they value their child’s education and maintain appropriate parent child structure were impacting their child’s educational career at even this young of age. Conflict theory purports that the difference access provided to parents of at-risk children would detrimentally affect that child. In many ways, this was confirmed. However, for a small group of parents their perceptions provided real circumstances for their children manifesting in variations of parenting style. This exploratory analysis reveals that these parenting style variations may explain some of the differences that were found in the child outcomes between similar socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion

This dissertation reports results from a quantitative analysis that compared socio-economic variables, child and family demographics, and language, cognitive, behavioral, and health outcomes between a group of children classified as at-risk and children classified as non at-risk in Georgia. These results are placed in the context of differences found in parenting styles from an exploratory qualitative analysis. Specifically, the social process of parenting and what influences may strengthen certain protective factors that subsequently hinder or help the resilience processes for children was examined.

This dissertation focused, on children who were, at least at the beginning of their school career, excelling when, the research would suggest that they be academically behind more of their socio-economically advantaged peers. This group was contrasted with a group of similar status peers who were behind their same aged counterparts and conforming to academic trends documented in previous studies.

Specifically, three groups of children were defined for the research: 1) children who were classified as at-risk and their more socio-economically counterparts (non at-risk); 2) children from the at-risk population who were categorized as either resilient or non-resilient; and 3) children from the at-risk population whose parents were selected to participate in an in-depth interview designed to derive aspects from the child's environment that may explain some of the variations in outcomes that was found among children in the at-

risk population. This chapter first reports the results from the research questions for the quantitative analysis, followed by the findings derived from the qualitative analysis, also framed by the research questions.

I. Quantitative Findings

Statistical testing was done between two different sets of groups of children: 1) children who were classified as at-risk and children who were classified as non at-risk and 2) children who were categorized as resilient and children who were categorized as non-resilient. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if the group means were significantly different for both sets. The research questions address differing aspects for each group.

The first research question addressed differences in child outcomes between children in the at-risk group and children in the non at-risk group: Do the two groups of children, at-risk and non at-risk, differ in child outcome and quality measures? Results of the ANOVA analyses indicate that substantial differences exist between these two groups of children on both child outcome and quality measures. The child outcome measures included standardized assessments and teacher ratings. The quality measures included subscale means for a widely used instrument (ECERS-R) that measures overall quality in early childhood environments. Results are reported for four assessment and rating periods: beginning of preschool, either Georgia Pre-K or Head Start, end of preschool, beginning of kindergarten, and end of kindergarten.

Preschool classrooms were assessed, using the ECERS-R during the winter of the child's preschool year.

These results suggested that, as previous studies have shown, that the differences between the means of these two groups were significant throughout the study. First, on four standardized assessments that measured a child's proficiency in receptive vocabulary, letter-word recognition, expressive language skills, and cognitive skills, significant differences were found on all four tests for each assessment period of the study. Overall, children in the two programs began their preschool year below the national average (mean=100, sd=15) on 3 out of 4 standardized assessments. Only in letter-word recognition did the children score above the national average. However, for children in the at-risk group, the means for the scores were significantly lower than their socio-economically advantaged counterparts. Both groups gained relative to their same aged peers but the mean for children in the at-risk group was below the national norm at the end of the study for three out of the four assessments. The means for their socio-economically advantaged counterparts were significantly higher and above the national norm for two of the assessments (WJ-LW, WJ-AP) and approached the national norm for the other two. Results for the teacher ratings followed this trend, while differences in quality measures were also significant, though less of the variance was explained. These results support previous studies and affirmatively answer the first research question. Though the results on the child outcome measures were expected, the differences

found between the two groups on the quality measures were unanticipated. Both programs focus on quality and have additional services for their at-risk populations. The fact that the quality means were significantly different raises concerns that suggest the need for further exploration with additional analyses and policy examinations.

The second stage of the quantitative analysis examined differences within the at-risk population. Children in the at-risk group were categorized, based on a composite measure, created from their baseline test scores as either resilient or non-resilient. Similar tests of differences in the means were subsequently done with these two groups. This second stage of quantitative analysis addressed the next three research questions: 1) Do the two groups of at-risk children, resilient and non-resilient, differ in certain family characteristics? 2) Do the differences found between children in the two groups for their baseline testing scores subsist throughout their first three years of formal schooling? Are any such differences found in certain areas, such as literacy, mathematics, or social-emotional skills? and 3) How do any differences found over the three-year period relate to the quality of the preschool program?

The results indicated that children did not significantly differ in family characteristics, although boys were more likely to be categorized as non-resilient. On measures such as income, mother's education, father's education, and likelihood of being on Medicaid or Peachcare, significant differences were not found. This suggests that difference in means for the

standardized assessments, used to categorize the children, and teacher ratings could not be explained by socio-economic and demographic data. As would be expected, differences were found between the two groups for all four testing periods. Therefore, even though the means for both groups improved over the course of the study, the significant differences used to categorize the two groups of at-risk children persisted throughout the research. Finally, the analysis did not reveal significant differences between the two groups on the classroom quality measures. Therefore, the differences found throughout the study cannot be attributed to the preschool classroom. Though this was a significant finding when comparing the at-risk children to the non at-risk children, the analysis was not expected to yield differences between the children categorized as resilient and children categorized as non-resilient. Considering that the categorization was done with data collected at the beginning of their preschool year, these differences would not be impacted by the quality of the preschool classroom. And since both groups made gains, it would be intuitive that the gains of one group would be impacted by quality while the gains of the other would not.

From a conflict theory perspective, these findings imply that differences between the haves and have-nots are well established before the children begin preschool. This implies that socio-economic differences are already translating into differences in child educational outcomes before the children enter formal schooling. Considering the role that education plays in societal ideology regarding future educational attainment and success, it is somewhat

disillusioning to find such pronounced differences in the outcomes measures being strongly associated with poverty indicators for children at this young age. Furthermore, even though it is not known when the children actually began their preschool experience, some may have begun at younger ages, as the intervention progresses, children from both groups make gains. Yet, the achievement gap documented at the beginning of the study continues to persist. In other words, there is a strong distinction between the haves and have-nots, even though both groups make gains relative to their same-aged peers.

II. Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis was used primarily for exploratory purposes. The study aims state that the purpose of the analysis was to 1) study the perceptions and views of parents of children from at-risk backgrounds and how these perceptions and views may contribute to protective factors that increase children's chance of academic success and to 2) to examine differences in specific parenting behaviors and styles between parents of children categorized as either resilient or non-resilient.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 34 parents of children classified as at-risk. From the larger population of at-risk children, children were categorized as either resilient or non-resilient. This categorization was based upon a composite measure computed from the children's baseline scores. Parents of children who scored well below the national norm on this composite measure as well as children who scored average or just slightly

below were sampled. The final qualitative sample encompassed 20 parents of children categorized as non-resilient and 14 parents of children categorized as resilient.

Three sets of research questions framed this analysis. The first set focused on parental differences found between parents of the children categorized as resilient and non-resilient while the second set focused parental perceptions of themselves as partners in their children's education. Grounded theory methodology was employed to analyze the qualitative data. From the qualitative analysis two concepts emerged: "valuing education and "maintaining appropriate parent-child structure." These two concepts reflected different dimensions of "parenting style." Theoretically, these are not the only dimensions of this variable, but the analysis suggested that the two concepts helped explain variation between the two groups relating to parenting style. Furthermore, it was suggested that variability in parenting style possibly translated into differences in child outcomes. The qualitative analysis was done for exploratory purposes, so without further testing and conceptualization it is not yet possible to discern how much of the children's outcomes in this study can be explained with parenting style or how much of the variability in parenting style is explained by the two concepts.

Differences in the two groups were found for both concepts indicated that parents of children in the resilient group differed in parenting style from parents of children in the non-resilient group. Parents of children in the resilient category were more likely to have reported ways seeing themselves

as activists in their child's lives. Rather than merely supporting their children's education they saw themselves as partners and even accepted ownership in how their child was doing in school. In contrast, parents of children in the non-resilient category used language that implied a more passive role in their child's education. For the most part, they supported their child's education but they supported more from the sidelines rather than the playing field. Maintaining appropriate parent-child structure reflects the consistency with which parents reported ways of providing environments that were conducive to the child thriving. This translated into seeing themselves in the parenting role as a guide, rather than as only a friend or a strict disciplinarian. These parents suggested that as parents they were both and knew the appropriate times to be one or the other. This concept also indicated the ways that parents reporting using the various tools which they had in their toolkits to structure their child's environment. Parents of children in the resilient group were more likely to use language and report behaviors that indicated they were able to create and maintain a structure that reflected consistency and facilitated a foundation where the possibility that their children can thrive existed. This included using religious beliefs as a catalyst for different levels of thinking rather than something to blindly accept. Furthermore, parents of children in the resilient group indicated that they used discipline consistently and parallel with their views regarding their child. Parents of children in the non-resilient group were more likely to have articulated perceptions and

behaviors that indicated inconsistencies in discipline and perceptions of their child while not providing evidence of creating child thriving environments.

In response to the second set of research questions, parents in both groups provided evidence of how they saw their position in the social hierarchy. Many of the parents were high-school dropouts and this impacted their social status position. Parents of children in the resilient group saw this as a tool for inspiration, whereas parents of children in the non-resilient category simply articulated a desire for their children not to make the same mistake. There was less evidence regarding how the position in the social hierarchy impacted their parenting. Parents expressed and reported behaviors that indicated that they were aware of their situation, but would talk less about how this could be connected to parenting

The qualitative analysis revealed ways that language use by parents could indicate variations in parenting style. A symbolic interactionist perspective highlights the importance of language, creating and recreating reality, and how perceptions of behaviors are as important as the behaviors themselves (Wallace and Wolf, 1995). Parents of children in the resilient group demonstrated a more activist perception that revealed a hands-on parenting style. The way that these parents used religion, partnered in their child's education, and created environments that showed a detailed understanding of their child may provide evidence of what types of parenting styles foster academic success. These factors may be especially important when examining children deemed at-risk at such a young age due to socio-

economic characteristics associated with poverty. In many cases, just the opposite perceptions were gleaned from parents of children in the non-resilient category. Symbolic interactionism highlights the importance of language and how the perceptions that these parents have of their parenting roles have real consequences for their children.

In summary, the qualitative analysis definitely discerned differences between the two groups. These differences were reflected in the concepts "valuing education" and "maintaining appropriate parent-child structure." These concepts indicated different dimensions of parenting style that this exploratory analysis yielded as a possibility of explaining variation between the groups of parents of children categorized as resilient and categorized as non-resilient.

III. Conclusion

Utilizing both the quantitative data collected for the initial evaluation and additional qualitative data from a subsample, the aim of this dissertation was to address the complex relationship between a child's scholastic abilities and her or his background and/ or societal position. It was hoped that the findings would contribute to an overall holistic and systemic approach.

This dissertation utilized the term resilience. This term was conceptualized as an interactional term. Resiliency was seen as something that could be fostered by elements in a child's environment. Despite the methodological concerns with categorizing children as resilient and non-resilient, the qualitative analysis indicated that different dimensions related to

parenting style distinguished parents in the resilient category from parents in the non-resilient category. These elements were related to the role that the parents see themselves taking in their child's education and maintaining a consistent structure for their child. The education dimension, "valuing education", was indicated by their current knowledge of their child's education, their articulation of the child's future educational attainment. The structure dimension "maintaining appropriate parent child structure" was indicated by their use of religion as a tool, relationship between their perceptions of their child, and their general outlook. The variation found between the two groups on these two dimensions suggested the possibility that these indicated differences in the parenting style. The exploratory analysis showed that differences in parenting style may be a factor in understanding how the parents of children in the resilient category differed from parents in the non-resilient category.

It is important to note a conclusion from the quantitative analysis that was not specifically stated in the research aim. Though statistical tests were not employed to measure gains through the duration of the study, results indicate that even for children far behind they substantially gained throughout the study. This indicates that the intervention, schooling, was making a difference. However, they were also making a difference in the children who did not begin schooling behind their peers. Therefore, the achievement gap found as the children began school was perpetuated despite the gains the children were making.

Bronfrenbrenner's ecological perspective notes the way that various spheres impact a child's life (Bronfrenbrenner, 1986; Kohn, 1995). This dissertation looked at ways that the parent or family sphere interacted with the educational sphere. The findings suggest two points related to the ecological perspective, both supported by conflict theory and symbolic interactionism. First, both a child's school environment and her or his family environment are greatly influenced by larger economic forces. Even in programs with a focus of quality and enhanced services for an at-risk population do not meet the level of quality found in programs for at-risk children's socio-economically advantaged counterparts. Furthermore, the child outcomes were strongly associated with the poverty measures, even at this young age. Second, interactions, both subtle and overt, between the family and school spheres strongly impact child outcomes. As a symbolic interactionism theoretical perspective would attest, it is not just parental behaviors that translate into differences in outcomes, but also the perceptions of those behaviors. In other words, how parents report their behaviors suggest their overall parenting style which impacts their child above and beyond poverty measures.

In summary, as the children entered quality schooling they continued to make gains for at least three years. However, differences were found between children based on socio-economic measures and parenting styles. Therefore, when examining differences in child outcomes, not only can socio-

economic status, quality of schooling, and parenting style be discounted, but the interaction between them should also be considered.

IV. Study Limitations

As with most research projects, there were study limitations that should be addressed. These limitations impact the overall findings but more important, they limit the degree to which the findings can be generalized to a larger population.

First, the data that were used to classify children as at-risk or non at-risk was administrative at the specific program level. This may have excluded children who would have been eligible to receive those services and thus biased the results. Ideally, more valid measures would have been available. In addition, more measures that perhaps examine different facets of quality should have been used during the preschool year. Subsequently, measures assessing quality at the kindergarten and first grade year would have been of great benefit to the research.

Second, the concept resiliency was used throughout the research literature as a possible explanation for the consistent findings that some children excel while other socio-economically similar children continued to remain behind their same-aged peers. Even though literature supported the use of this term on both an individual level and structural level, the idea of labeling young children as resilient or non-resilient even before they began formal schooling was problematic. Theoretically, there could be facets of the child's school environment that would serve as a catalyst to ignite a child's

resilient trait. However, at this point in a young child's educational career any environmental characteristics that could be used to foster resiliency would mainly be found in the family environment. Therefore, to study differences in "resiliency" with educational outcomes when education may not have had a substantive time to impact the child was also problematic. Research conducted for this dissertation examined family characteristics. However, it was also argued that children's growth should be examined holistically and systematically. By categorizing children as resilient before all aspects of the child's environment could impact her or him was an issue of concern.

Resiliency was viewed as something external to the child. In other words, resiliency was a characteristic that could be fostered within the child's environment. Theoretically, the use of the concept for this dissertation is sound. However, the way that the concept was operationalized is problematic. The concept was used a partial explanation of differences in children's outcomes. Yet to categorize children as resilient, the same outcomes that the concept hoped to explain was used. In other words, resiliency was used in a tautological fashion. Better ways of categorizing children as resilient and then comparing their outcomes would have preferred.

Finally, in addition to the findings, the qualitative analysis also yielded some unexpected results, mainly the great variation style in the interviewers and how this style translated in varying degrees of useable data. Though this was a secondary data analysis, the lack of experience of some of the interviewers coupled with varying degrees of training was something that

impacted the analysis separate from the results. Fewer interviewers and longer training and oversight could have helped with the inconsistencies found.

V. Policy Implications

The results from the qualitative analysis suggested that there were aspects inherent in the parent-child interactions that may well have fostered resilient traits in children. The analysis found these environmental aspects in the many of the most basic interactions that parents had with their children. This includes ways that the parents perceived their child and the activist or non-activist role that the parent undertook in their child's education.

Policy informed by these results can begin by focusing at the parent level. The two programs studied in this dissertation, Georgia Pre-K and Head Start, have parenting education policies in their guidelines. Parenting education classes can focus on more of the micro-level interactions and perceptions between parents and children. Literacy skills and nutrition education are important for parents, but these results suggest that discussions about the ways parents can use "tools" already in their environment could make a difference in the children's outcomes. Furthermore, discussions that focus on how parents can create and maintain a thriving environment for their child could also be useful.

Head Start and Georgia Pre-K train a large number of individuals each year to work with parents and even conduct the type of parenting education classes mentioned above. Such training could also have focused on teaching

family service professionals to be cognizant of how subtle interactions between parents and children may have large, long-term impacts.

Finally, this research corroborated similar studies that also reported differences between children were well established before the children even began their preschool career. This suggested that high-quality interventions that begin at four-years-old may already have been too late. Findings from this research indicated that both federal and state policy should examine ways for high-quality interventions to begin before this young age.

VI. Recommendations for Future Research

Researchers such as Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg Duncan (1997) argue that early childhood interventions, such as Head Start, are crucial in reducing the impact of poverty on children and their specific academic outcomes, specifically school readiness. The findings here suggest that even in federal and state programs that have stated goals to improve quality in early childhood environments for young child may not produce the quality that their more socio-economically advantaged counterparts receive. Future research should examine with higher level of statistical analysis the way that quality, addressed with more systematic measures, differs for children from different social classes.

The concept “resiliency” was used in this research as a trait that can be fostered with appropriate interactions. It was seen as an interactional variable, neither something that was inherent in the child, nor something that existed separate from the child in her or his environment. Rather it reflected

not just “nature” and not only “nurture” but the interaction between the two. Utilizing the ecological model, it was something that transcended the different systems that encompass a child’s environment. This conceptualization, though substantiated in previous studies, may be contributing to the confusion and ambiguity that is found in the terms usage. Therefore, it is argued that future research, perhaps utilizing the grounded theory approach employed here, uncover various facets of this concept and generate theory that adequately capture the various dimensions that resiliency is ultimately gauging.

In closing, the term “realistic optimism” mentioned in Chapter six, should be considered. The findings in this research suggest that subtle variations in parenting styles could possibly translate into differences in child outcomes. However, this research also continues to substantiate the impact of a child’s social class on her or his educational outcomes. Policy that does not realistically take poverty into account, no matter how good the interactional training suggested of is, would be doomed to fail. Therefore, the results presented here do allow us to remain optimistic that policy can make a difference in young children’s lives; however such policy that does not take into account the role that social class, mainly poverty, plays will make less difference and may even be detrimental in taking limited resources that could be used for other means.

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Appendix A: Consent Form for Georgia Early Childhood Study

August 1, 2001

Dear Parent of Guardian:

Congratulations! Your child's classroom has recently been selected to participate in an important early childhood research study by the Applied Research Center at Georgia State University. Only 136 classrooms across the state have been selected for the study.

Five children from each classroom will be randomly sampled for inclusion in the study. Your child may or may not be sampled for the study. Children who are selected will be followed into their first grade school year. We will survey their teachers, interview their parents, and conduct two short, developmental assessments each school year. All data is completely confidential and at no time will you or your child be individually identified in any report. Researchers working with the study have been well trained to work with young children. The assessments take place at your child's school and include game-like activities that require your child to use language, math, and general knowledge skills. Children generally enjoy playing these games. There are not any foreseeable risks to be included in the study.

We are very excited about this study and the potential benefit for Georgia's preschools. Would you please sign below indicating whether you will allow us to include your child's name with the other children in the classroom who may be selected for the study? If your child is selected for the study, we will send home a short survey for you to complete.

Please feel free to call our toll-free number (1.877.272.3820) for more information. You may leave your name and phone number and a research associate will contact you. You may also visit our web site at www.arc.gsu.edu for more information about our center.

Thank you and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Laura W. Henderson　　　　　　　　　　Bentley D. Ponder

- -

Place for signature was here.

Appendix B:
Parent Interview Consent Form
Georgia Early Childhood Study

The Georgia Early Childhood Study conducted through the Domestic Programs office in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University is conducting in-depth interviews with a subsample of parents of children currently enrolled. The purpose of this research component is to understand how family characteristics, aspects of parenting, and interaction with the school systems impact young children's development.

Interviews are expected to last approximately 45 minutes. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Tapes and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location. Interviewees will not be named in any reports or publications without their prior permission. The findings of this research component will be incorporated into the findings of the evaluation. These findings will also be used to construct future parent surveys.

You can find out more about this project by contacting Bentley Ponder, project manager at Georgia State University (404-651-3534). The GSU Research Office (404-651-4350) can give you information about the rights of human subjects in research. You may refuse at any time during the interview to end your participation in this part of the research component. If you decide to refuse or stop, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you are entitled. If you wish to participate in this component of study, please sign below.

Thank you.

Interviewee: _____
Please print your name above

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Interviewer: _____
Please print your name above

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Evaluation Research being Conducted by
Georgia State University, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Field Notes (Completed by Interviewer)

Interview Date: _____
GECS ID:

Guide is structured so that the question you ask is at the top. Possible probes are listed in the boxes. Take note of any additional probes. Notes should be typed out on a blank interview guide following interview completion. E-mail interview guide to bponder2@gsu.edu.

Problems and Issues in Scheduling:

General Notes: How did it go? If you were to summarize it for someone, how would you summarize?

General Questions or Areas of Probing: (What areas emerged?)

Thoughts about specific probes or questions:

Thoughts about the location (especially notes about the home):

Feel free to attach answers to these questions or additional sheets of paper.

Interview Guide (Draft)

13 broad questions with many sub-questions that might be asked
Subsections will expand based upon first interviews
(1 to 1.5 hour interview)

Interviewer can build on questions based on the responses; however the interview should be covered within the 1 to 1.5 hour time frame.

As you know, has been enrolled in the Georgia Early Childhood Study since his or her 4-year-old preschool year. Before we begin the interview I would like to ask you some general questions.

Begin with highlighted portions of the fall 2003 Quantitative Interview.

Remember you should also focus on:

- Building a relationship with the subject
- Getting to know the subject
- Putting the subject at ease
- Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and in the reporting process.

1. **What are the kinds of things does at home?** ***(Things in bold make sure you hit)***

Does he or she watch television? What type of shows does he or she watch? **Hit amount of time, is this family time? Etc.**	
Where does Chandler go after school? (Afterschool programs)	
What are weeknights and weekends like? What are mornings like?	
How does he/she behave at home?	
How are his/her interactions with his/her siblings?	
Other:	
General Comments:	

Try to get a sense if there is a routine or normalcy to child's home life? If home life is chaotic, does parent see it as such? What is the parent's sense of the "chaos"?

2. **Can you tell me what types of activities, besides school, likes to do?**

Do you or your child go to church? Possibly say religious services. Feel free to probe extensively here (with respect)	
What type of activities does he/she do with you?	
Does child like to play any sports? Probe about organized sports.	
Does child help you around the house? Does child like helping?	
What places are you able to take child? Where do you and child go together?	
Other:	
Other:	
General Comments:	

Includes both formal and informal activities, getting away without children

3. Where do you get support?

Who is child close to…e.g.- grandparents….	
Can you think of anybody else outside your family that would have an influence over Chandler	
Is _____father active in his or her life? (biological father or father figure-be sure to distinguish)	
From extended family members….. From non-family members…. From child's father (or mother)….	
Other:	
General Comments:	

We are looking for outside influences in life.

4. How have circumstances in your home changed since was in preschool? Probe. This could be rules, parental employment, moving, afterschool, family illness (even extended family illness), etc.

How has handled the changes? Has anything helped?	
Have any of your rules [for child] changed recently?	
Other:	
Other:	
General Comments:	

5. Can you tell me a little about school?

How do you feel about your child's preschool experience in Pre-K or Head Start? [Note the GECS ID for distinction]	
Why did you choose either Pre-K or Head Start?	
How does your child feel about school?	
Do you like child's school? Do you like child's teacher? Do you like the administrators at the school?	
How are you involved with child's school?	
Do you feel that you and the school are on the same team?	
Do you feel that child is learning at school?	
General Comments:	

The purpose of these two questions is to gauge parental perceptions of their role as educator. Do they see themselves as a school partner or separate from the school?

6. Does ever want you to read to him/her or does he/she like to look at books by himself/herself?

Does child like to read or look at books by himself/herself?	
Where do you get the books? From school, etc.	
Does child like homework? What kinds?	
What books? How many books do you have? Maybe probe on type of books. Some parents are counting paper books that children make from school.	
How often does your child read or do you read with your child?	
Other:	
General Comments:	

Maybe ask for number of books. Try to gauge quality of interaction.

7. Can you tell me a bit about your school experience?

Do you have any regrets about your school experience?	
How were your grades?	
Did you study a lot?	
Were you involved?	
Do you feel it helped you in your life?	
Other:	
Other:	
General Comments:	

8. **Tell me a little bit about your community or neighborhood.**

How would you describe your neighborhood? i.e. Degree of safety, sense of community, etc.	
Do you have any special rules for child playing outside?	
What kind of place is it to raise a child?	
What are some things you really like about your neighborhood? (dislike)	
Do you know your neighbors?	
Do you use any community services here?	
Would you trust your neighbors to sit with your child?	
Other:	
General Comments:	

9. What kinds of things is he/she doing when he/she gets in trouble?

How do you handle him/her when he/she gets in trouble? Does this work?	
What kinds of things can he/she do? What are your rules for Chandler?	
Do you discipline your child differently than other adults? Child's father, child's stepfather, grandparents, other adults	
Other:	
Other:	
General Comments:	

Probe about ideas of child-rearing, discipline, independence/dependence.

10. **What is hard about being a parent? Do you have any regrets?**

Right now, what do you like most about being a parent?	
What is most rewarding about parenting?	
What would you change if you could?	
Would you do things differently? How?	
Other:	
Other:	
General Comments:	

11. **What are your long-term goals for your child?**

As you think about this year in your child's life, what are some of your hopes and goals for your child?	
Other:	
Other:	
General Comments:	

12 How would you want life to turn out?

What would you like his/her life to be like?	
Other:	
Other:	
General Comments:	

13. What type of advice would you give to a new parent?

Other:	
Other:	
General Comments:	