EARLY CHILDCARE SETTINGS AND THE PARENTAL
ENROLLMENT PROCESS:
INSIGHTS FROM THE MATERNAL PRIMARY CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN
ATTENDING HIGH-POVERTY URBAN CHILDCARE CENTERS

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ABSTRACT

Every day in the United States, millions of children living in high-poverty

neighborhoods are dropped off at a variety of early childcare settings and arrangements.

When those settings are high quality, early childhood education can produce both short

and long term benefits for this population, including increases in school achievement and

in literacy attainment and decreases in grade retention, the likelihood of early dropout,

and behavioral issues (August & Hakuta, 1997; Barnett, 1995; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan,

1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995; McLoyd, 1998;

Wertheimer & Croan, 2003; Zill, 1999). Early childhood education, however, is neither a

formalized nor mandatory educational level, which gives parents significant latitude in

deciding when and where to enroll their children. Consequently, it is important to better

understand the quality, availability, distribution, and use of non-parental childcare across

different settings. A more nuanced perspective is also necessary because there is great

variation in the types of and tendencies toward childcare enrollment along the lines of

socioeconomic status, race, and geographical location.

This research study presents the findings of a qualitative, interview-based study

that explored what maternal primary caregivers were influenced by when they enrolled

children of color in high-poverty urban childcare centers. Building upon the current

literature, the study explores the ways structural, parental, and child-level factors

intersected in the decision-making process and how choices continued to effect parents

after initial enrollment decisions had been made. This study also addresses parental

satisfaction levels. Through a series of interviews conducted with the maternal primary

caregivers of children enrolled in one of three early childhood centers in a single

metropolitan region, this study captures and describes childcare enrollment as a complex and nuanced process.

The findings of the study speak to the nature of navigating and managing childcare decisions from the perspective of the parent. Specifically, the study found that networks of trust, maternal instincts, and lessons learned from past childcare experiences influenced the choices of the maternal primary caregivers interviewed. Educational value and children's futures were also important, as were logistics and cost. As the mothers in the study made their choices, they also negotiated structural, parental, and child factors. The literature supports these factors as influencing choice, but they have largely been examined in isolation. This study adds to the literature by describing how levels of factors intersected and overlapped with one another. More exploratory findings of the study support that maternal primary caregivers continued to manage their childcare choices long after enrollment and that childcare satisfaction is both subjective and nuanced.

The experiences of the women who participated in this study shed light upon directions for future research and areas of need in terms of resources, information, and support. The mothers in this study made childcare choices based on their realties, using who or what they knew and how they felt. Further, the local governance where this study was conducted proved highly disjointed and participants showed little faith in the system. The greatest area of need, which would stand to most benefit all parents, is for meaningful increases in support, resources, and cohesion at the local level.

For Joyce and John

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As of 2011, 12.5 million children, or 61 percent of all children under the age of 5, attended childcare settings on a regular basis and over one-quarter of all preschool age children were in organized facilities such as daycare centers (Laughlin, 2013). Despite these large percentages, there continues to be a need for a more nuanced and realistic understanding of how, why, and under what circumstances parents select their childcare arrangements, in what ways childcare becomes a management concern after enrollment, and to what degree parents feel satisfied with their choices. What has become increasingly clear from previous research on the impact of early childhood education programs on student populations, however, is that the populations that benefit the most from the ever increasing availability of early childhood education include minority children and children from low-income backgrounds (Dhuey, 2011).

In the first comprehensive multi-study review assessing the long-term effects of early childcare programs, Barnett (1995) found that high quality programs produce both short and long terms benefits. Short-term benefits include gains in IQ, while long-term benefits range from increases in school achievement and ease of social adjustment to decreases in the likelihood of grade retention and placement in special education classes. Crucial to Barnett's findings, however, is that not all children attending early childcare programs reap these benefits. In fact, the level of benefit correlates directly with the quality of the childcare program, specifically high quality programs that are well-funded produce increases in benefits, while low quality programs and programs that lack funding do not (Barnett, 1995). In studies specific to the population of study, findings have shown

that while all children are likely to benefit from high quality childcare programs, minority children living in poverty are the most at risk. This population directly benefits from high quality care because heightened school readiness increases academic performance and literacy attainment and decreases the likelihood of early dropout and behavioral issues (August & Hakuta, 1997; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995; McLoyd, 1998; Wertheimer & Croan, 2003; Zill, 1999). The findings of Winsler and colleagues also suggest that poor children attending public pre-k programs where more funding, a better educated staff, and a systematically implemented curricula are standard make greater academic gains than children in center care, further indicating that program quality does in fact matter (Winsler et al., 2008).

Despite these highest of stakes for an at-risk population, there is a need to more accurately understand the quality, availability, distribution, and use of non-parental childcare along the lines of race, socioeconomic status, and geographical location. In terms of non-parental childcare arrangements, parents have a number of choices, including center care, nonrelative care, and relative care. Further, studies by Queralt and White (1998), Fuller and colleagues (2002), Uttal (1997) and Kim and Fram (2009), all of which have been conducted around the availability of childcare arrangements and the salience of particular factors for parents choosing among childcare settings, have shown that there are three simultaneous sets of factors that impact parents' enrollment practices: structural characteristics and policy contexts, parental characteristics and practices, and finally, parental perceptions of child characteristics. This body of research has further demonstrated that these sets or levels of factors are often in competition, which creates a complex system for parents to navigate. In order to meaningfully add to the research, it

became necessary to examine parental enrollment practices using in-depth interviews. The purpose of this study became to gain insight into the complexities of the choice process based upon the experiences of parents themselves.

Statement of the Problem

Given that children attending childcare typically range in age from 6 weeks to 5 years-old, parents or caregivers largely assume the responsibility for making early educational choices. If high quality early childcare has been found to increase academic performance and literacy attainment and decrease the likelihood of early dropout and behavioral issues for at-risk populations, it is reasonable to suggest that understanding the parental enrollment process for at-risk families is important (August & Hakuta, 1997; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995; McLoyd, 1998; Wertheimer & Croan, 2003; Zill, 1999). However, current research on the decision-making process that parents engage in when placing children in non-parental childcare arrangements has not always been consistent in terms of what prior research has measured, who has been included or excluded, and what conclusions can subsequently be supported. Depending on the data collection and analysis techniques, the results of the studies analyzed in the next chapter show variation in findings and in some cases, findings are quite contradictory.

Further, the selection of non-parental childcare has often been treated as a one-time and static decision, despite the fact that of the 60% of children in such arrangements are actually in a combination of care, which suggests parents are making more than one choice (Mulligen et al., 2005). Additionally, because early childcare is not a mandatory education level in the United States, parents who make the decision to send their children

to a chosen setting do so on a daily basis, as they can just as soon as make other arrangements or remove their children from care without notice, truancy, or penalty. Therefore, it is more accurate to say that parents not only choose an early childcare setting, but they subsequently have to manage that decision day-to-day as well.

Based on the body of work that has been done around parental choice, this study focused on reexamining how parents made and subsequently managed childcare choices using more in-depth measures. A crucial aim of the study was to build on the body of research in a way that lent voice to the experiences of parents actively engaged in and managing the fractured world of early childcare. The most accurate and detailed way to fully understand those processes was to examine the problem using an in-depth interview-based lens. In-depth interviews offered the scope to paint realistic and nuanced pictures of the decision-making and management processes so that our understanding of the phenomena could continue to grow deeper. More specifically, interviews allowed for a more realistic understanding of the ways in which key structural, parental, and child characteristics, which had been identified in and supported by the literature, overlapped and intersected.

The sparse in-depth interview-based work that has been done was conducted before Welfare Reform revamped the system dramatically and increased the funding and subsidies for childcare in 1996. What Uttal's (1997) in-depth interviews showed, however, was that when low-income parents of color, mothers in particular, were given the space to talk about their experiences, they not only reiterated the need to use multiple sources of childcare, but they also expressed difficulty in locating childcare settings when their preferences could not be met or access to care was blocked. (Uttal, 1997) Welfare

Reform increased the funding for welfare and working poor households from 2.8 billion in 1995 to 8.0 billion in 2000, yet less than a quarter of all eligible families use childcare subsidies. To better understand the how and why, there was great need for another qualitative exploration of the parental enrollment decision-making process. (Fuller, et al., 2002) This process is also influenced greatly by exterior constraints, including socioeconomic limitations, minority-status, and geographic location. Still, however, there was not been a post-Welfare Reform, interview-based study that had attempted to understand the experiences of parents making difficult, but educationally significant decisions for at-risk children.

Theoretical Frameworks

Much of the research that has been done on parental choice and early childcare settings is informed by rational choice theories, guided by a positivist epistemology. When parents make childcare choices according to the current literature, parents may weigh various elements of a childcare decision against one another, then make a decision (Blau, 1964 and Hofferth, et al., 1996). Because the guiding theories assume that parents make a trade-off like decision when placing children in childcare arrangements, the methodology used to measure choice typically involves an analysis of a large-scale data set. Within methodological positivism, basing research on reproducible, objective, quantitative value neutral facts thus eliminates human subjectivity, and the subjectivity of the researcher specifically (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). And so, as rational calculators faced with a one-time decision, parents can be surveyed in order to come to a conclusion about how and why they place their children in childcare settings.

Micro-level theorists, phenomenologists in particular, on the other hand, have long argued that in order to truly know why parents as social actors make the choices they do, researchers have to understand the social phenomenon based on the experienced meanings of the parents themselves. In assuming that actors perceive reality as it is, phenomenology seeks to understand and describe the world as experienced by subjects (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The lifeworld concept is particularly relevant to understanding how actors experience a phenomenon. The lifeworld refers to the intersubjective way each human personally experiences the world (Appelrouth & Edle, 2009).

The current literature, however, has not explored this social phenomenon using interview-based methodologies in quite some time. Based in a phenomenological framework, the phenomenological or life world interview aims to describe rather than explains. This semi-structured life world interview likewise seeks to better understand themes within the lived everyday world from the perspective of the subjects' themselves. And while empathetic, the phenomenological interviewer is also understood to recognize an asymmetry of power between researcher and subject, a dynamic that is crucially important to acknowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). And so, for the purposes of exploring and better understanding the process that maternal caregivers were engaged in when choosing an early childcare setting, this study adopted a qualitative interview method based on the semi-structured lifeworld interview.

A qualitative interview-based study methodologically rooted in phenomenology should also consider the circumstances and environments in which parents are making decisions. While parent experiences ground this study, the decisions maternal primary

caregivers are making are not happening in a vacuum. And so, to understand how circumstances affect the childcare choices parents make and manage, this study draws on bounded rationality and family capital literature. These frameworks afford an examination of parents' socio-historical realities, which offer realistic and contextualized insight into the circumstances surrounding pre- and post-choice processes.

First posited by Herbert Simon, the concepts of bounded rationality and satisficing have been called upon to explain decision-making processes since the mid twentieth century. An alternative to the rational choice theories used in economics at the time, Simon posited that when individuals make decisions, it is not possible for them to consider all options or prospects due to limited cognitive resources, limited information, and time constraints. Therefore, human beings can be said to have bounded rationality. Without the time, resources, or abilities to always make optimal decisions in a structured environment, individuals satisfice (Simon, 1986). In satisficing, human beings are "using experience to construct an expectation of how good a solution we might reasonably achieve and halting search as soon as a solution is reached that meets the expectation" (Simon, 1990, 9). Satisficing then considers reasonable, not optimal, choices.

The context within which parents construct choice sets is constrained by the resources, material and immaterial, parents bring to the decision-making process. Bell (2009), for example, reasoned, "Parents do not have equal access to transportation, information, time for school visits, money for tuition, or English language skills. Resources, both material and immaterial, are not distributed evenly among parents of differing social class backgrounds" (Bell, 2009, 193). Cultural capital theory, first posited by Bourdieu (1977), argues that the social and cultural resources of society's members

disproportionately influence the schooling experiences of various populations. Further, when considering educational inequalities, the social reproduction concept explained within the theory suggests that certain kinds of capital are valued differently in certain fields. In the field of education, authors like Lareau and Horvat (1999) have argued that middle class capital is more valued. Consequently, children from middle class families with more valued social and cultural capital will have more opportunity than their counterparts from lower class families with less valued social and cultural capital. Because research has consistently shown that parents of differing classes exhibit differences in attitudes towards school and schooling, cultural capital theory served to inform how race and social class influence the parental choice process.

Recently, the literature has expanded upon cultural capital theory to incorporate other sets of influences, including human capital and economic capital in what Diamond & Gomez (2004) refer to as family capital. A newer and not as widely used multi-dimension model of capital, the family capital model suggests that a family's capital represents the culmination of human, economic, social, and cultural resources, all of which are procured and accumulated by family members and are valued differently depending upon interaction contexts (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Broader in context, family capital does not assume a capital deficit, accounts for the intersection of different kinds of resources, and has previously been applied to studies of parents and school choice. To support the perspectives of the maternal primary caregivers in this study, a family capital theoretical orientation was adopted. It is important to note, however, that the inclusion of family capital was in no way intended as a condemnation of families' parenting-practices. Rather, the goal was to use a framework that both allowed for an

exploration of the phenomenon and could inform more responsive policy-making to meet the needs of this population. If this process can feel demanding and frustrating and is both complex and ongoing, it could be beneficial for mothers who have young children to see an increase in supports and resources.

Purpose and Rationale

While research on this topic has outlined what parents choose and why, there was a need for a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon based in the experiences of the population most actively engaged in the choice process. An interview-based study served to directly benefit the population under examination. Shedding light on the experiences of parents who had made and are continuing to make high-stakes decisions for the most at-risk population in the educational system, the implications of this study are significant. The results of this study serve to better inform policymakers, district administrators, and academics on the state of early childcare and parental enrollment practices for a vulnerable population in the metropolitan region.

The main purpose of this research was to more accurately understand how parents chose to place their children in non-parental childcare arrangements and to what extent, if any, parents remained actively engaged in managing their choices beyond enrollment. Based on the body of research currently available, this study sought to move the conversation from examining one-time choices to exploring an ongoing and active process. Examining the process that ultimately led to a choice achieved the following: (1) more accurately speaks to choice as an experience, one that once made, must be managed on a daily basis; (2) more clearly describes the ways structural, parental, and child characteristics intersect and overlap in the decision-making process; (3) provides insight

into the most influential factors parents consider when any number of them are at play;
(4) gives insight into how the process leads to outcomes; (5) speaks to the ways bounded
rationality and family capital influence parental choice practices for families in urban
high poverty neighborhoods; and (6) positions parental satisfaction within the greater
policy debate, revealing areas of need, support, and comparison to prior findings.

Significance of the Study

The current literature on the salient factors influencing parental choice at the early
childhood educational level has been conducted primarily using survey-based methods.
While such findings are crucial to the field, making this type of choice involves an
overlay of factors that may differ for every family and may be highly nuanced. And so,
this study proposed to address a great and legitimate need to better understand the choice
phenomenon based on the experiences of parents. This study, therefore, filled in two
critical gaps in the current literature. First, by capturing the experiences of parents, the
study offers deeper insight into the combinations of factors influencing the decision-
making process. And second, the study demonstrates that circumstances change often for
families with young children and choices change as a consequence. Parents then continue
to manage their childcare choices long after initial enrollment decisions have been made.
Further, by focusing specifically on a minority population attending high poverty centers,
the study draws attention to the roles that bounded rationality and family capital play in
the decision-making process.

A second contribution of this study is derived from drawing upon the language of
previous studies in the field. Prior research has delineated three sets of salient factors that
experts say parents are affected by or consider in their decision-making process: (1)

structural characteristics and policy contexts; (2) parental characteristics and practices; and (3) the least researched, parent perceptions of child characteristics. By examining these specific factors within the context of the choice process and by focusing specifically on one at-risk population, the findings and implications of this study serve to better inform policy on the needs of high-risk families. In maintaining the well-established language of the literature, this study adds a realistic understanding of the important ways structural, parental, and child-level factors influence choice. The study also pushes conversations around childcare selection and choice a step farther by exploring the management and satisfaction aspects of childcare from the perspective of the parent.

Research Questions

The study sought to better understand the process that parents, maternal primary caregivers specifically, embark upon when enrolling their children in non-parental, center-based childcare arrangements. This interview-based study aimed to add to the current literature by capturing the phenomenon from the perspective of a population making and managing difficult decisions for an at-risk population. The study asked the following research questions:

1. What factors influenced the choices of maternal primary caregivers who enrolled children of color in one of three urban, high-poverty childcare centers? How did structural, parental, and child-level factors intersect in this process?

2. In what ways does the selection process continue to affect parents once an initial enrollment decision has been made? How satisfied are maternal primary caregivers with their childcare arrangements?

In answering these research questions, the study's findings shed light on the phenomenon from the perspective of those who are living the process. The study also yields insight into the complex interplay of factors that parents considered when enrolling their children in center-based arrangements and speaks to the ways bounded rationality and family capital influenced the decision-making process.

Limitations

There were two limitations to this study that the researcher carefully and purposefully considered. The first limitation dealt with the willingness of the study's participants to speak comfortably and freely to a researcher who would be considered a cultural outsider. In order to purposefully plan for this limitation, the researcher invested time in building a strong relationship with the centers that served the so as to build rapport with participants in the study. A second limitation was that this study was being conducted in one metropolitan region amongst a relatively specific population. Consequently, it cannot be said that the experiences and feelings of the participants involved in the study are reflective of all populations who have engaged or are currently engaged in the process of having a child attend childcare.

Definition of Terms

Childcare - The umbrella term that refers to any non-parental care setting a child may receive on a regular basis. Typically, childcare settings are categorized as center care, nonrelative care, and relative care. Some studies, however, further delineate relative care

to distinguish the differences between father care and care by other relatives (Huston, et al., 2002).

Center Care- Typically center care occurs in a non-home based group setting; serves larger numbers of children using multiple caregivers; is designed for enrichment or early education purposes; requires a program license in all states; and is the most expensive type of care, unless subsidized by public funds. Examples of center programs include Head Start, public or private preschools, pre-kindergarten, daycare centers, or after-school programs (Huston, et al., 2002). Center-based programs may take place in any number of physical locations, including public and private schools, public buildings, places of worship, and buildings designed specifically for childcare services (Swenson, 2008).

Nonrelative care- Occurs in a caregiver's home or the child's home; is often more reasonable in cost; and may have a license, certification, or registration, though many do not. This type of care is sometimes referred to as family care (Huston et al., 2002).

Relative Care- Refers to care provided by siblings, grandparents, or other relatives, if not distinguished as father care; it is care that may occur in the child's home or the caregiver's home; and it is care that parents may or may not have to pay for, depending upon the agreement between parent and caregiver (Huston et al., 2002).

Informal childcare- Typically refers to arrangements that may include activities, babysitters, and nannies. Only rarely is this arrangement included as a type of early care setting in research circles (Davis & Connelly, 2005).

Bounded Rationality- Refers to the idea that in decision-making, it is not possible for human beings to consider all options due to limited cognitive resources, limited information, and time constraints (Simon, 1986).

Satisficing- When human beings, who are lacking in resources and time, use experiences to form an expectation of reasonably achieving a satisfactory or good solution, though it may not be their optimal choice (Simon, 1990).

Family Capital- A newer and not as widely used multi-dimension model of capital; it argues that a family's capital represents the culmination of human, economic, social, and cultural resources, all of which are procured and accumulated by family members and are valued differently depending upon interaction contexts (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

Summary

In the introduction portion of this dissertation, evidence was presented to support the fact that the current research on the decision-making process that parents engage in when placing children in non-parental childcare arrangements could be added to by examining this phenomenon using a more in-depth lens. This study then refocused the parent choice phenomenon as a process rather than a one-time choice. Capturing the experience of the parent and more accurately reflecting how combinations of factors influence parents enrolling their children in non-parental childcare arrangements provides a more detailed and nuanced portrait of how parents make choices. Understanding the process also captures the fact that circumstances often change for young families and childcare may change as a consequence.

The study's research questions, limitations, key terms, and theoretical foundations were subsequently outlined. With these considerations in mind, the following section

continues the discussion by exploring the research that has been done around five key themes, each of which relate directly to the study's research problem, purpose and rationale, and research questions. The five thematic foci include: (1) an introduction to bounded rationality and family capital theories, (2) an overview of the available childcare arrangements and what parents are choosing according to the current literature, (3) a discussion of the salient factors influencing parental choice, (4) a breakdown of structural, parent, and child characteristics as factors, and (5) a discussion of literature on childcare management and satisfaction.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL LENSES AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

With over 60 percent of children under the age of five living in the United States receiving some type of non-parental childcare and the majority of that percentage receiving some combination of childcare, typically a mixture of center, nonrelative, and/or relative care, it is critical to more clearly understand how such arrangements are decided upon (Laughlin, 2013; Mulligen et al., 2005, Early & Burchinal, 2001). The purpose of this literature review is to explore what we do know about how and why parents choose early care settings using a four-part analysis. The analysis begins by arguing that bounded rationality and family capital are the most appropriate theoretical lenses to frame studies on decision-making and the early childcare choice process. A discussion of the study's theoretical framework is followed by an overview of what childcare arrangements are available and a breakdown of what arrangements parents choose. That overview is then followed by an exploration of factors that previous studies have found to be salient for parents as they choose among childcare settings. The review of the literature concludes by presenting the work that has been done around childcare management and satisfaction, two effects of childcare choice.

Literature Guiding Frameworks

The evidence suggesting how and why the parents of children of color living in high-poverty, urban regions make early childcare choices is unclear. It must be considered, however, that this population operates under circumstances that not only differentiate them from their counterparts from other racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, but also raise the stakes for their children. Consequently, a study that

understands the lived experiences of parents navigating and managing the world of early childcare settings had to be framed in a way that spoke to the complex, nuanced, and multi-layered nature of this choice.

Theoretical Frameworks

Nearly all of the research that has been done on parental choice and early childcare settings is informed by rational choice theories, guided by a positivist epistemology. When parents make childcare choices according to the current literature, parents weigh various elements of a childcare decision against one another before making a static, one-time decision (Blau, 1964 and Hofferth, et al., 1996). Because the guiding theories may assume that parents make a trade-off like decision when placing children in childcare arrangements, the methodology used to measure choice typically involves an analysis of a large-scale data set. Within methodological positivism, basing research on reproducible, objective, quantitative value neutral facts thus eliminates human subjectivity, and the subjectivity of the researcher specifically (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). And so, as rational calculators faced with a one-time decision, parents can be surveyed in order to come to a conclusion about how and why they place their children in childcare settings.

These theoretical frameworks, however, have three shortcomings that prevent this phenomenon from being understood on the more detailed, nuanced level that it needs to be. First, a rational choice lens is not able speak to the complex and intricate nature of the lived experience. Early childcare enrollment is a process, not a static one-time decision, and once an enrollment choice has been made, it has to subsequently be managed as the lives and circumstances of families, parents, and children change. Second, the rational

choice theories don't necessarily account for the ways multiple and often competing

factors overlap and intersect in the choice process. When survey questions set the

important factors a priori and then ask parents to weigh them against one another, parents

make a choice based on what is in front of them, which is not necessarily reflective of the

process they are engaged in. And finally, rational choice theories are not able to explore

how the position of mother figures who are racial minorities living and working in high

poverty neighborhoods is unique in terms of power structures and access to resources.

Bounded rationality and satisficing.

In response to the rational choice theories dominating conversations in the mid-

twentieth century, Herbert Simon developed an alternative theory to explain how human

beings make decisions. Presenting the concept of bounded rationality, and later

satisficing, Simon posited that when individuals make decisions, it not possible for them

to consider all options or prospects due to limited cognitive resources, limited

information, and time constraints. Unable to account for every possibility in a choice

process, human beings can be said to have bounded rationality. Without the time,

resources, or abilities to always make optimal decisions in a structured environment,

individuals engage in satisficing behavior (Simon, 1986). In satisficing, human beings are

"using experience to construct an expectation of how good a solution we might

reasonably achieve and halting search as soon as a solution is reached that meets the

expectation" (Simon, 1990, 9). Satisficing then considers reasonable, not optimal,

choices.

The concepts of bounded rationality and satisficing have been recently called

upon to frame discussions of parental childcare choices and school choice (Holloway &

Fuller, 1992; Bell, 2009). Holloway and Fuller, whose work reframed understandings of parental childcare choices, argued that bounded rationality was the most appropriate framework for discussions of early childcare choices. According to the authors, databases and studies operating within rational choice or individual rationality frameworks "fail to consider broader contextual factors that constrain the actions of parents within certain ethnic communities or social classes" (Holloway & Fuller, 1992, 15). Citing that while literature that uses databases to draw conclusions about choice offer valuable insights, it is important to understand that when data sets are constructed, families are assumed to hold a series of preferences and resources and to make an optimal decision. The authors argue that in reality, however, information about choice alternatives is less than perfect and environmental constraints often lead to satisficing behavior.

To explain how parents construct sets of school choices, Bell (2009) explored the relationship between choice sets, which are subjective and parent-made, and bounded rationality. Though her work is not specific to early childhood education, Bell argued that in order to better and more fully understand parental choice processes, researchers have to account for the fact that parents make contextualized choices and for some populations, those choices happen within segregated and stratified contexts. Understanding choice sets and how they are constructed from the perspective of the parent can illustrate how shortcuts are used to make decisions and how satisficing factors into the process. The construction of choice sets, like how parents determine the size of the set and the location, the esteem of schools, and cost of choices, is a way to quantify parents' bounded rationality.

Resources and the role of capital.

Unable to consider all possibilities when searching for childcare due to bounded rationality, parents engaged in the choice process draw upon their resources, material and immaterial, to guide this process. For some populations, including maternal primary caregivers who are racial minorities living and working in high-poverty neighborhoods, the context within which childcare choices are made and managed is constrained by a lack of resources or capital. As Bell (2009) explained, "Parents constructing their choice sets... do so in a segregated, stratified social context. Parents do not have equal access to transportation, information, time for school visits, money for tuition, or English language skills. Resources, both material and immaterial, are not distributed evenly among parents of differing social class backgrounds" (Bell, 2009, 193). The following discussion considers the relationship between school choice literature and theories of capital then argues that Diamond and Gomez's Family Capital Theory (2004), though newer and not as widely used, is the most appropriate way to frame this study.

School choice and theories of capital.

Literature on school choice is typically guided by one of two theoretical models, either the rational choice model or cultural and social capital models. And while the early childcare enrollment process has yet to be incorporated or theorized as a choice, ultimately it is one. Further, similar to access to other types and levels of education, access to early childcare is not equal across class and racial groups. Therefore, a more appropriate and comprehensive lens through which to view the early childcare enrollment process is through theories of cultural and social capital first posited by Bourdieu and then expanded upon by Coleman and others.

A leading and widely cited theorist on capital, education, and society, Bourdieu's conceptual framework is guided by a comprehensive concern for individuals' lived experiences and the ways in which class and race-based social positions get reproduced. Bourdieu theorizes that education is a structured system of social positions ordered through power relations, or a field. Individuals maximize their potential in a field, like education, based on their habitus, or "system of lasting, transposable dispositions" and capital, a form of power in a field (Bourdieu, 1977a). Bourdieu specifically identifies three types of capital: economic capital, money and financial resources, social capital, social networks and connections of an individual, and cultural capital, the status of an individual reflecting cultural knowledge. Different kinds of capital, however, are valued differently in certain fields. In the field of education, it has been argued that middle class social and cultural capital is more valued and becomes particularly advantageous, which in turn yields unequal distributions of power across race and class (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Horvat, 2001). While these theoretical tools have largely been applied to school choice at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, they can be extended to the earliest level of educational choice, early childhood education. Even at this early educational level, families bring their economic, social, and cultural capital to the choice process and theoretically, the mothers of minority children living in high-poverty neighborhoods who participated in this study would be at a disadvantage.

Another way to theorize the interplay of capital, education, and society was posited by Coleman who differs from Bourdieu on a number of points. In "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," Coleman (1988) broadened social capital as a conceptual tool in the field of education. In this new model, Coleman theorized that in

addition to economic and social capital, individuals possess human capital, or intangible skills and abilities that are passed from one generation to the next based on a family's level of social capital. In education, human capital is measured by parents' education levels and "provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning" (S109). However, when parents have low levels of social capital or when parents are not involved in their children's lives, the strong affect that human capital has on children's learning outcomes becomes irrelevant. Human capital theory is relevant to this study first because this is a study of mothers engaged in the process of choosing and managing their young children's educational outcomes and the transmission of human capital will be evident. And second, parents with more human capital have been shown to both be more actively involved in their children's education and demonstrate more overall knowledge of and a greater ability to navigate their children's educational situations (Useem, 1992).

The best fit: Family capital theory.

Recently other scholars like Diamond and Gomez (2004) have conceptualized the role of capital in the field of education using the family capital multi-dimensional model. The family capital model is unique in that it at once incorporates aspects of human, economic, social, and cultural capital to frame how populations with varying levels of capital think about school choice. Unlike most social or cultural capital theories, family capital does not assume a deficit of resources. Rather, the model argues that a family's capital represents the culmination of human, economic, social, and cultural resources, all of which are procured and accumulated by family members and are valued differently depending upon interaction contexts (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

For example, the family capital model can account for the fact that parents with higher human capital have been shown to intervene more readily in their children's education and demonstrate more knowledge of their children's educational circumstances (Useem, 1992). The model can also explain why low-income and working-class parents possess less economic capital than middle and upper class families, which limits their access to choice that are not seen as financially possible (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Family capital likewise has the latitude to recognize that social capital's interactions and norm of trust impact information parents collect about schools, trust levels in neighborhoods, the willingness of parents to enroll children in neighborhood schools, and the support systems among adults within communities (Anderson, 1990; Hofferth, Boisjoly, & Duncan, 1998; Wilson, 1987, 1996). And finally by encompassing cultural capital, the family capital model can account for the fact that social class impedes access to high-culture habitus, which is problematic because educational institutions are reflections of middle and upper class high-culture habitus. The habitus of families from lower social classes has proven disadvantageous and less valued within educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

While the family capital conceptualization is newer and not as widely used, it has been applied to the literature on both school choice within low-income, minority families as well as parent-school involvement. Diamond and Gomez (2004) found that working class African-American parents, the population of interest for this study, are faced with "more challenging educational contexts (i.e., lower quality schools that parents perceive as less responsive to their involvement) and engage these educational contexts with fewer valued resources than their middle-class African American counterparts" (385). Having

fewer valued resources, these parents have educational orientations that have already influenced their perceptions not only of schools, but also of school choice and later parental participation. As parents embark on choosing schools for their children, the family capital of working class African American parents, which is a reflection of prior social-class and race, family resources, and the educational environments available, proves particularly salient in defining their educational orientation and thus their perceptions of choice (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

The family capital multi-dimensional model was the best way to frame this study because it provided a lens to examine all aspects of a family life without focusing specifically on resource deficits. It had the latitude to look at once at race and class, social position, power dynamics, values, the intersection of competing factors, and all of the nuances and intricacies that make navigating and managing this choice the complex process that it is. While parents placing children in early childcare settings faced a distinct set of circumstances, which were different from when they placed their children in formalized schooling or became involved in school, parents still brought their individual level of family capital to this decision-making process. The interplay of family capital, which uniquely encompasses human, economic, social, and cultural capital, was still relevant in informing parental perceptions of and orientations toward childcare settings. Further, because of the complex, inconsistent, in flux nature of early childcare, the family capital model proved to be the best fit because it allowed for the most accurate and all encompassing picture of parents' lived experiences.

Informing Phenomenological Methods

While the methods chapter speaks more about the use of phenomenological interviews as this study's primary methodology, it is important to connect the theoretical framework of the study to its the methodological framework. As has been argued, navigating and managing the world of early childcare is a complex process, not a static choice. In the last section, it was argued that parents have bounded rationality and are subject to limitations in resources, or family capital, in decision-making processes. These frameworks require a methodological lens likewise capable of examining all of the nuances and intricacies parents experience when making and managing childcare decisions. Like the bounded rationality and family capital models, phenomenology is also interested in and capable of capturing the lived experiences of individuals. By likewise seeking to paint an all-encompassing picture of individuals' experiences, the phenomenological framework too focuses on understanding the human experience as a social one, whereby linking the individual and the collective, the human actor and the social scene, the private and intersubjective, and the natural and the cultural, though this framework does so through language and shared interpretive schemes (Appelrouth & Edle, 2008).

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Review of the Literature

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Childcare Arrangements and Availability

The availability of childcare arrangements is often influenced by supply, and childcare availability varies greatly across this country. Swenson (2008) found that rural children, birth to five, are just as likely as urban children to receive non-parental childcare, but they are more likely to receive relative care and less likely to be in center

programs because center programs are not readily available. Davis and Connelly's (2005)

study of the influence of local price and availability on parents' choice was conducted

across local childcare markets within the state of Minnesota. Though the authors readily

admit that markets vary greatly state-to-state, they isolated county-level data in

Minnesota to uncover patterns of childcare usage, which also varied greatly. And more

nuanced still, other researchers, like Queralt and White (1998), however, have argued that

the availability of childcare varies greatly even at the neighborhood level. Small-area

analyses, which are now possible due to GIS systems, are the most accurate to assess

actual supply because even within an urban county or zip code, the supply of childcare is

likely to be limited by unaccounted for factors, such as zoning codes.

Thus, parents may have many choices. The studies that describe this phenomenon

vary in the population surveyed, in the independent and dependent variables selected, and

in units of analysis isolated. These studies and all other studies related to early childcare

settings, however, have to be categorized as pre- or post- welfare reform. The reform,

which took place in 1996, revamped the system dramatically and increased the funding

and subsidies for childcare greatly. The funding for welfare and working poor households

increased from 2.8 billion in 1995 to 8.0 billion in 2000. Despite these large increases,

however, less than a quarter of all eligible families use childcare subsidies, and usage

varies greatly across states and local areas (Fuller, et al., 2002).

Parental choice patterns.

When Mulligan et al. (2005) analyzed National Household Education Survey data

from 2001, the authors found that childcare arrangements vary according to (1) poverty

level, (2) geographic region, and (3) age group. NHES data can be analyzed on two

levels, by comparing children who receive non-parental care to children who do not receive any outside care at all and by comparing children in centers, nonrelative care, and relative care. Within the first level of comparison, it was found that children's participation in non-parental care increases with both a child's age and a mother's education level. Furthermore, children living in households with incomes over $50,000 are more likely to receive non-parental care than children in homes with incomes lower than this level. However, children in households with an income of above $75,000 are the most likely to receive non-parental care. Subsequently, children living below the poverty threshold and in the West are least likely to be cared for by a non-parent on a weekly basis. Children whose mothers work outside the home, either part or full time, are more likely than children whose mothers are not in the labor force to receive non-parental care. And finally, racial and ethnic differences show that Black children are the most likely to be cared for by a non -parent on a daily basis, while Hispanic children are least likely.

Variation within arrangements.

Within non-parental care arrangements, a second look at NHES data showed a larger percentage of children overall receive non-parental care in centers than from relative or nonrelatives. Age groups, however, show marked differences as older children were more likely than younger children to be in centers. Racial and ethnic differences are such that Black children are more likely to be in relative care or in centers than White or Hispanic children. Analysis along the poverty line shows that children living at or above the line are more likely than those living below it to receive nonrelative care or center-based care, but are less likely to receive relative care. Geographic region also matters because while preschoolers are more likely to receive center care over either nonrelative

or relative, preschoolers living in the West are less likely than preschoolers in any other area of the country to receive center-based care.

In terms of the location of early care settings, children cared for in centers are most likely to be in a center with its own building, compared to other locations like in a school, community center, or library. Also among children in centers, care provided in public or private schools is more common when children come from homes with lower incomes, when they are poor, when they belong to a racial or ethnic minority group, and when their mothers have lower levels of education. Children in home-based settings are more likely to be cared for in someone else's home than in their own, regardless of if the care is by a nonrelative or relative. (Mulligen, et al., 2005)

The number of hours spent in care is another area of difference within non-parental care arrangements. While children on average spend 31 hours in non-parental care arrangements, children in nonrelative care spend more time there than they do in centers. However, the population of children who spend the most time in non-parental care tend to be Black, come from families with lower household incomes, have mothers with lower levels of education or who work, and live in the South (Mulligen, et al., 2005). Swenson's (2008) findings on hours spent in care prove to be slightly different. That study reports that nationally, the average number of hours a child typically spends in childcare is about 29 hours for all children. Swenson, however, further distinguishes that the number is likely to rise to 32 hours for children with employed mothers, and to 38 hours for children with employed single mothers (Swenson, 2008).

Finally, it has been shown that the cost of non-parental childcare differs across populations and settings, which impacts parental choice (Mulligan, et al., 2005; Swenson,

2008). It is important to note, however, that out of pocket costs may vary in part due to parental self-reporting and according to child, family, and community characteristics. On average, families spend $69 a week, approximately $3 an hour, for childcare. Statistically, relative care proves the least costly of the three forms of non-parental childcare. Families with younger children are found to pay more on a weekly basis than those with older children. Further, families with more highly educated mothers and/or mothers who work full time pay more, as do families living in the Northeast and West when compare to those living in the Midwest and South. Race and ethnicity-based cost differences show that Black families pay the least for center-based care, compared to White and Hispanic families; Black families also pay less per hour for care overall than the families of White children (Mulligen et al., 2005). Additionally, when urban and rural children are compared, urban families are more likely than rural ones to make out "of" pocket contributions toward the cost of their care (Swenson, 2008).

This examination of childcare arrangements and availability supports this study on minority families who have chosen high-poverty center-based care settings in a number of ways. First, while there are any number of childcare arrangements for parents to choose from, NHES data shows that children whose mothers work outside the home, either part or full time, were more likely than children whose mothers are not in the labor force to receive non-parental care. Therefore, mothers are an important, relevant population whose bearing on the findings of the study is well established. Second, since Mulligen and colleagues (2005) showed that the population of children who spend the most time in non-parental care tend to be Black, come from families with lower household incomes, and have mothers with lower levels of education or who work, there

was a research-supported need to understand the nuanced experiences of low-income

minority families specifically. And third, because minority children are the population

most likely to be enrolled in center care specifically, there was also a need to examine

how and why low-income minority mothers were choosing this particular type of care.

(Mulligen, et al., 2005)

Salient Factors Influencing Parental Choice

Identifying and measuring the salient factors in parental choice patterns is a

complex and nuanced process. The majority of the research conducted on this

phenomenon uses a rational choice theoretical lens, which while applicable, only captures

pieces of what is actually happening. The following section will serve to detail three tiers

of salient factors, namely structural, parental, and perceptions of child-centered factors,

that prior literature has already identified as influencing choice before arguing that these

tiers needed to be expanded upon using a wider lens than rational choice theory allows

for.

Again, the current literature on the salient factors in parental choice for early care

settings has been conducted primarily using survey-based methods, which can and should

be built upon. Where the current literature has been successful is in identifying and

describing three sets of salient factors that parents inevitably consider when deciding on a

childcare arrangement: (1) structural characteristics and policy contexts; (2) parental

characteristics and practices; and the least researched (3) perceptions of child

characteristics. The drawback of having such rigid and stringent groups of factors is that

these levels of factors need to be understood in a more nuanced, fluid, and realistic way.

The best way then to build upon prior research on how these three sets of factors intersect

then was to give parents the space to explain their manifestation in the choice process. Therefore, an interview-based study that adopted the language and findings of prior research, yet asked parents to describe their intersection is a realistic and nuanced way was needed.

Structural characteristics and policy contexts.

Structural characteristics and policy contexts largely dictate the availability, perceived or otherwise, of childcare because of the deep-seated relationship between the welfare system and the early childcare system. As previously discussed, the availability of childcare is often cited in terms of pre- and post- Welfare Reform. Prior to the 1996 major reform, the federal childcare (FCC) tax credit was paramount to choice of care. Johnson and colleagues (1996) found that the greater the potential for an FCC tax credit, the more likely mothers were to choose that type of care. A significant limitation at the time, however, was that data could not measure the availability of childcare in local areas or the effect of cost in any direct way. And so, availability was often "crudely" measured. Despite such limitations, some researchers used proxies, like rural areas, large cities, smaller cities, and regions of the country for estimation purposes. The belief at that time was that the entire range of childcare settings were available to those families living in large cities so long as they were willing to travel and/or pay for it. The same could not have been said about populations in smaller cities and rural areas. (Johansen, et al.,1996)

Post-Welfare Reform, the "there is a range of availability" sentiment has changed due in large part to a spike in literature on this phenomenon. Queralt and White (1998) researched the relationship between availability, supply, and demand, which the authors argue is a little understood and under researched aspect of parental choice patterns. Citing

prior research, which indicated an uneven supply of childcare based upon socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, parental education, single parenthood, and child's age, the authors found variation of supply across geographic areas, and even within neighborhoods. Queralt and White suggest that "latent" demand plays a role in the context of availability, but it's a role that few seem to understand. Citing the work of Kisker and colleagues (1989), the authors note that in one survey, 40 percent of all nonworking mothers and 57 percent of the nonworking, low-income mothers questioned said they would seek employment or job training if they could find and afford childcare services. Consequently, because of structural forces, like federal, state, local, even neighborhood economies, the welfare system, and the relationship between supply, demand, and availability, there is a population who does not currently use early childhood education programs or child-care services, but might if they were available or perceived as available to them. (Queralt & White, 1998)

Though the welfare system received an overhaul in 1996, it is still being reported that less than a quarter of all eligible families use childcare subsidies; and usage will vary significantly across states and local geographic areas. Therefore, in order for welfare to achieve it's ultimate goal of disrupting the cyclical nature of intergenerational poverty and dependence on government benefits, there should be a focus on promoting learning and development among children in welfare and poor working families by increasing access to high quality child care in low-income neighborhoods. Though it has been long proven that children from low-income families benefit most from high quality childcare, they still constitute the population least likely to be enrolled in such programs when compared to their counterparts from more affluent families. Again, however, structural

factors related to issues of access and lack of options within given neighborhoods presents a barrier, essentially keeping the cycle in tact and depriving parents of true choice. (Fuller, et al., 2002)

The subsidies provided by the government have been designed to facilitate parents' employment by reducing the cost of childcare. However, conversations about subsidies among researchers show considerable disagreement about their effectiveness for low-income families (Fuller, et al., 2002). Furthermore, this disagreement stems from a dual issue. First, research has shown that states were serving only small portions, as low as 17 percent even, of all federally-eligible children as of 2000 (Collins, Layzer, & Kreader, 2000). And second, research has also shown that families who are eligible for subsidies are not using them. However, when subsidized care is available and parents are aware of such availability, low-income parents increase their use of center care (Fuller, et al., 2002). Some experts say these contradictions are due to the fact that current subsidy policies are not fulfilling the needs and/or values of many families. And even though states are supposed to give parents leaving welfare a priority for subsidies, it is possible that subsidies in reality are just being used to reduce childcare costs for already employed parents (Huston, et al., 2002).

The recent recession, in the late 2000s, is another structural characteristic that has impacted parental choice. This recession has dramatically affected the amount of funding allotted for state-funded Pre-K programs due to budget cuts. As a result, fluctuations in Pre-K funds have affected both the quality and supply of childcare, which in turn limits parents' ability to choose this type of early care setting. There has also been a double decrease in subsidy funding for early childcare: first, because the recession has reduced

the number of state childcare subsidies and second, because state childcare subsidy

reimbursements have also declined. As a result, fewer parents are able to enroll their

children in state-funded Pre-K programs across the country (Schilder, et al., 2011).

Variability in policy and legislative contexts is yet another structural

characteristic, one that also dictates how much choice parents actually have. Even at the

district and county levels, great variation in early care policies has been shown to exist. In

the state of New York, for example, the state grants Pre-K funds to districts, who in turn

contract childcare providers or community-based organizations for care. Factors like the

timing of funds, classroom availability, relationships between program directors, and

enrollment fluctuations subsequently then impact the number of slots open to children.

Within community-based programs, substantial variation in Pre-K services over time and

within counties has been found because of these factors. In Ohio, on the other hand, pre-

K funding is awarded through a competitive grant process, resulting in the Early Learning

Initiative being the largest Pre-K program in the state, followed by school-based Pre-K

programs. Because the competitive grant process requires a high level of organizational

agency, the factors affecting New York's Pre-K slots are not impacting Ohio's slot. As

this example shows, the interpretation of state laws and regulations amounts to huge

variety in Pre-K services not only between states, but also across counties and within

districts, depending upon how a given state awards funding. (Schilder, et al., 2011)

The structural characteristics outlined above, which include subsidy use and

Welfare Reform, the recent recession, and variability in policy and legislation across

local, state, and federal entities, have important bearing on the context of this study's

findings. As this discussion demonstrated, each of these structural characteristics played

distinct and important roles that could perceivably have impacted how families choose childcare settings. However, this discussion also showed that these characteristics had been examined largely in isolation as there was no cumulative study that at once considers the overlap of subsidies, recession, and perceive availability based on one metropolitan region's policy context. Additionally, these structural characteristics had also not been considered along with parental and perceptions of child characteristics, which are outlined in the following two sections. Therefore, the completed study was a necessary one as it allowed for the latitude to more fully understand the intersection of structural characteristics in and of themselves along with parental and child characteristics.

Parental characteristics and practices.

Before engaging in a discussion of parental characteristics and practices, it is important to note that just who constitutes a "parent" has not been entirely consistent in the previous literature. In fact, great variation exists in terms of the populations of parents surveyed to answer questions regarding early childcare choice. Few studies have surveyed the same population in terms of "parent," which could be a mother, father, a stepparent, a grandparent, an adoptive parent, a foster parent, a caregiver, and so on. Further compounding the "who constitutes a parent" problem is the fact that most studies also vary their subjects based on socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, geographic region, education level, gender, and/or use of the welfare system. The consequence of such variation has, not surprisingly, resulted in considerable variation in findings and a fractured picture of how parents locate and select care arrangements.

The current literature on parental characteristics typically explores one or more of four categories that impact the choice of childcare setting: parent or family values, parents' positionality in society, parental agency, and family structure. Values generally account for center quality, general perceptions, the importance of education/educational value, class sizes and ratios, proximity, price and/or cost, parenting practices, reliability, location, whether or not sick kids will be taken, whether or not after hours care and/or weekend care is an option, and family values. Issues of positionality in society are typically related to aspects of culture, race and ethnicity, including preference for religious teachings and preferred language. In terms of parental agency, parents make choices based on their employment or occupation, education level, socioeconomic status, the perceived availability of subsidies, their welfare-to-work participation or status, and their knowledge of the market. And finally, family structure is likely to depend on the availability of relatives, having a one or two parent household, whether a child has siblings and if so, how many, and also who makes the education-related decisions in the family.

Few studies actually explore all four of these categories of parental characteristics. Using data from the National Household Education Survey of Early Childhood Program Participation in 2005 and seven indicators of child care priorities, specifically location, cost, reliability, learning activities, spending time with other children, operation hours, and number of other children, Kim and Fram (2009) reported finding 4 classes or categories of parents. It's important to note too that the parents in this study are defined as a child's mother, father, stepparent, adoptive parent, foster parents, grandparent, other relative, or even a non-relative. Class 1 parents, 35 percent, rank all

seven indicators as very important, while Class 2 parents, 18 percent, prioritize practicality factors, Class 3 parents, 9 percent, do not rank any indicators as highly important, and Class 4 parents, 37 percent, emphasize the importance of learning and quality-related factors. The Class a parent falls into is largely related to the child's age and race/ethnicity and the parent's gender, age, employment status, and socio-economic status. When demographics are controlled for, however, the learning-focused Class tends to choose center programs while the practicality Class chooses home-based non-relative or relative care arrangements.

More specifically, the parents of Class 1, who consider everything to be important, are usually the most socio-economically disadvantaged and are more likely to be ethnic minorities, less educated, on welfare, and single parents. Parents in Class 4, the learning-focused group, typically have older children, higher incomes, higher levels of maternal education, and a two-parent household. On the other hand, parents from Class 2, the practicality-focus group, are most likely working mothers with younger children. According to the authors, Class 3 differs but not according to any clear-cut patterns. Women, however, are more likely than men to be in Class 1.

Further, child's age is an important factor because parents with older children are more likely to be in the learning and quality-focused Class. Race and ethnicity likewise matter in that White parents are less likely to be in the "everything-important" Class when compared to Black and Hispanic parents. Mother's education, work status, and household income, all variables related to family socioeconomic status, also appear to matter. As mother education level increases, parents are more likely to base choice on practicality or learning and quality. Working mothers are more likely to prioritize

practicality-focused or everything important choices. And finally, higher income is also an indicator of a parent being in learning and quality focused Class. Worth noting also is that no significant links between parental choice patterns and child's gender, parent age, an Asian/Pacific Islander ethnicity, the number of parents in the household, and previous or current subsidy use was found. (Kim & Fram, 2009)

Looking at all four sets of parental characteristics in a markedly different way, Buriel and Hurtado-Ortiz (2000) focused on the childcare preferences of native born versus foreign-born Latina mothers and Euro-American mothers in Southern California. In this localized, ethnicity specific study, it was found that a spouse/partner or relative constitutes the most common childcare arrangement across all mothers. Foreign-born Latina mothers tend to rely on their spouse for care, while native-born Latina mothers rely more on relatives. More foreign-born Latina mothers use neighbors, while Euro-American mothers use licensed childcare settings at higher rates than both Latina groups. In terms of the availability of relatives, native-born Latina mothers have significantly more relatives available to provide care, while foreign-born Latina mothers prove to be the least satisfied with their current care condition.

If these groups of mothers were able to choose their ideal care arrangement, Euro-American mothers report they would increase reliance on their spouses or partners. Foreign-born and Euro-American mothers both say they would increase their use of relative care, although foreign-born Latinas would rely less on neighbors and would increase their use of licensed care arrangements. Finally, only in native-born Latina mothers do the authors find contentment with their current childcare arrangement. (Buriel & Hurtado-Ortiz, 2000)

With no other literature examining all four characteristics of parent characteristics simultaneously, there are pockets of research that isolate combinations of such characteristics. Parental values, social position, and parental agency, three of the four identified sets of characteristics affecting parental choices, constitutes the most looked at pocket. Addressing patterns of racial and ethnic difference specific to welfare leavers' childcare preferences, Shlay and colleagues (2007) use a unique vignette data collection method to capture the interaction of parental values, social address, and parental agency. When vignettes, spanning 17 White, 28 Hispanic, and 48 African American parents, were used both similarities and differences were found to exist in welfare leavers' choices. In terms of similarities, all groups of parents value safety, suggesting that no parent would knowingly or willingly put their child in an unsafe setting. Other convergent values across all groups include the warmth and actions of the provider, the regulation of child-staff ratios, use of planned of activities, and the Pennsylvania childcare rating system of the Keystone Stars. Preference for higher Keystone Stars ratings is interesting, if not problematic finding, because no correlation has yet been found to exist between the number of stars a setting receives and that setting's quality. Also seemingly problematic is the convergent finding that parents are indifferent to whether or not childcare settings have been accredited.

In terms of differences, it was determined that relative care is worth less than neighbor care for African American families. African American and Hispanic parents are also more similar in their preference structures to each other than to White parents. Both African American and Hispanic parents report they would pay more for licensed care, higher Star ratings, and the availability of computers, while White parents show

indifference to all of these values. White parents are unique in that they place value on having known a provider for a length of time, children learning letters and numbers, and exposure to the holidays of other cultures and groups. White and Hispanic parents overlap in their valuing of finding care close to work and of providers accepting subsidies for their children, while White and African American parents value their children being spoken to in English, not Spanish. African American parents are further unique in the value they place on the incorporation of religious teaching into care. And finally, the authors make the argument that African American and Hispanic parents appear to "be more tuned into" childcare as a government regulated system, while White parents do not seem to give it similar attention. (Shlay, et al., 2007)

When values, social position, and parental agency were looked at qualitatively in research on racial, ethnic, and class-based preferences in employed mothers' childcare choices, it was found that twenty-three of the thirty parents interviewed were using multiple sources of childcare and that class and ethnic-based cultural practices and beliefs were centrally valued. Notably, the mothers highlighted the difficulties they found in locating their preferred childcare settings when their preferences were not met or access to care was blocked. (Uttal, 1997)

More specifically, some mothers viewed their childcare provider as substitutes for them in their absences, and in a related manner, several mothers cited finding out whether a potential care provider would support her childrearing practices as the first step in the search for care. For Black and Latino mothers, cultural similarity as a shared value proved particularly salient. Latino mothers tended to suggest they wanted their child exposed to the same food, language, and people, while Black mothers stressed the

importance of their children having racially similar images around them, though they had much more difficulty in finding providers of the same race. (Uttal, 1997)

When values were not shared with providers, mothers would reject the possibility of that provider. In doing so, mothers often inquired directly about providers' childrearing practices or relied upon popular reputations to determine if values were in fact shared. Mothers often made value assessments based on their own socioeconomic status and upbringing, referencing providers as having "low class" values if the provider spoke too loudly or shouted or low class discipline practices if the provider slapped children or took toys away without explanation. Mothers of color also proved to have a heightened awareness of the racial composition and nature of in-setting interactions, often showing great concern over the possibility for the unfair treatment of their children. Consequently, it was found that race is a highly salient value for mothers of color in choosing childcare settings. (Uttal, 1997)

Finally, while mothers searched for a fit between shared values and preferences, often their search was shaped by the larger social context. Time, economic resources, the structure of the childcare market by race and ethnicity, and class conflicts in childrearing philosophies and practices often forced parents into a situation of negotiating and prioritizing differences. Noteworthy, however, is that research found the "ideal setting" for these mothers, had it been available, *would* have been a racially and ethnically diverse care setting with middle-class values on educational content, child-adult interactions, nutrition, and discipline styles. Culturally knowledgeable, competent childcare providers would staff this ideal setting. Based on these divergent findings, Uttal found that viewing childcare arrangements as a highly individualistic choice by policymakers has to be

reconsidered given the salience of the race and class systems in the United States. (Uttal, 1997)

Still looking at this combination of parental characteristics, but focusing specifically on the associations between family factors, quality, and satisfaction in choosing childcare, other research has found that demographic and family process factors have the most substantial impact on the type and quality of care children receive. It has to be noted, however, that the population surveyed was largely white. When the mothers of 3-year olds, 78.7 percent white, 10.3 percent Black, 6.5 percent Hispanic, and 4.5 percent other, were surveyed it was found that 84.5 percent lived in two-parent households and only about a quarter could be classified as low income. In terms of maternal education, 5.8 percent had less than a high school education, 18.7 percent had a GED or high school degree, 33 percent attended some college, and 42.5 percent had a college degree. About 86 percent of the mothers surveyed were employed, 60.8 percent worked full-time and 25.4 percent worked part-time, and 14 percent did not work at all. (Peyton, et al., 2001)

Within this specific population, 55.9 percent or more than half of the mothers stated quality of care was the most important factor impacting their selection, with a breakdown of 275 mothers reporting quality of care providers most important, 23 reporting quality of the environment most important, and 56 reporting quality of the program most important. Of all the mothers surveyed, 21.7 percent considered practical factors most important with a breakdown of 40 citing cost, 21 citing hours, 64 citing location, and 12 citing availability. And finally, 22.4 percent of mothers reported a preference for a type of care as dictating choice, with 19 preferring centers, 42 preferring home or family care, and 81 preferring relative care. Variables including family

variables, income-to-needs, hours mother works, mother sensitivity, and parenting stress were all including assessed via multi-nominal logistic regressions, which uniquely accounted for the inclusion of maternal sensitivity and parenting stress. The results indicate that mothers whose family incomes were lower and who worked more hours reported practicality to be more important than quality in choosing a child care arrangement. Further, mothers influenced by high stress levels were also influenced more by practicality. On the other hand, mothers from high income families and those who worked fewer hours were more likely to select a child-care arrangement based on quality than on practical concerns such as cost, hours of operation, or location. (Peyton, et al., 2001)

Based on these findings, Kontos and colleagues (1995) concluded that mothers' primary reasons for choosing care, as they themselves reported, were directly related to the type of care they selected. For example, mothers who ranked quality most important, did not choose relative care, which has been previously reported to be of lower quality than the other types. Mothers who reported quality as the most important factor in choosing care selected high quality arrangements, a finding the authors argue has serious implications for those mothers constrained by income, work hours, or family situations. Mothers with lower incomes or who worked more hours were found to have curtailed choice of care and a greater likelihood of care being of low quality. (Peyton, et al., 2001)

Finally, still examining parent values, social position, and parental agency as parental characteristics, Early and Burchinal (2001) specifically studied the relationship between family characteristics and preferred care characteristics. They found that ethnicity, not poverty, is related to parents choosing relative-care. When care

characteristics were examined, few income, ethnicity, or age differences were in fact

reported. In addition, choice in care was directly related to whether a family values a

setting that will care for sick children or having a provider with training. Using data from

the 1995 National Household Education Survey, a data set that sampled mostly White

parents, 4,604 out of 7,133 total, and considering variables including primary care

arrangement, infants/toddlers versus preschoolers, child's ethnicity, family's poverty

status, hours of care per week, number of care arrangements, and preferences for care, it

was found that preschoolers are less likely to be cared for by their parents and are more

likely to be in center-based care when compared to infants and toddlers. Further, the not-

poor children are the least likely to be cared for by their parents and to be in center-based

care.

More specifically, Black preschoolers are 40 percent more likely to be cared for

exclusively by their parents, however, when classified according to poverty status, 60.7

percent of not-poor Black children are in center-based care, which is 25 percent higher

than the figures for poor, 46 percent, and near-poor, 47.8 percent, Black preschoolers. For

both Hispanic and White parents, the not-poor parents are more likely to use family care

than the near-poor or poor, while among Black parents the near-poor were most likely to

use family care. Of all ethnicities, Black children are more likely to be in non-parental

care than other ethnic groups and are also most likely to be in centers. In terms of hours

spent in care, not-poor children spend more time than near-poor children who spend more

time in care than poor children. Overall, Black children spend the most hours in care,

several subgroups of which spend over 40 hours in care per week. Furthermore, children

in relative-care spend more hours, 38.7 on average, than those in family care, who

average 35.6, and those in center-based care, who averaged 30.6 hours. Poor preschoolers also spend about 10 more hours in care weekly if they are with relatives and not centers.

On average, children were in at least two simultaneous care settings with preschool age children averaging even more care arrangements. When parents were surveyed about their preferences for care characteristics, the most important characteristics were a caregiver who spoke English, followed by a caregiver who had special training in childcare. Poor parents were found to value caregivers willing to accept sick children more than not-poor parents. In terms of family income, which was linked to cost, parents with higher incomes valued reasonable cost less than all other families. In terms of predicting care for preschool children, no ethnic or poverty group differences were found to predict the likelihood of using center care. The less valued sick-care and the more valued specialized training was, the greater the likelihood of choosing a center-based care arrangement. White preschoolers were more likely to be in family care than Black or Hispanic preschoolers, though poverty-level was not found to be a specific predictor. Family care was also chosen when sick-care was valued and having a teacher with specialized training was not. With regard to relative care, neither ethnicity nor poverty level was significant, though the more highly valued sick-care is and the less valued specialized-training is the more likely a child is to be in relative care. (Early & Burchinal, 2001)

Only one line of research, which was conducted pre- Welfare Reform on choice characteristics and parents' childcare decisions, assessed values alone. In estimating models of choice based on measures of price, quality, and availability, the research added to the literature of the time by taking not only individual characteristics, but also

characteristics of the alternatives not used to improve the precision of estimates on the association between price and choice. To determine the quality of a childcare arrangement, analysis was conducted based on the child-staff ratio, a determination that has since been questioned. This line of research found that based on rational choice models, it remained unclear whether parents' childcare choices were simply reflections of the trade-off between quality and cost. (Hofferth, et al., 1996)

As many studies have since indicated, however, the choice is more complex than a simple trade-off. Beyond the structural characteristics that have already been explored, this discussion has demonstrated that parental characteristics are likewise a complex and intricate balance, one that is severely fractured in the literature. There are no two studies discussed above that measure the four sets of parental characteristics, namely values, social position, parental agency, and family structure, in the same way. These studies also do not always account for the structural characteristics that were just shown to be highly relevant to parental choice enrollment practices. Therefore, the literature supported a continued need for a study to more deeply and fully understand how complicated the overlap was between and among not only parental characteristics, but also structural and child-based factors as well.

Perceptions of child characteristics.

With the vast majority of the literature focused on parent or family-centered characteristics, child-centered characteristics, which may include a child's gender, race/ethnicity, spoken language, disability, potential, behaviors, needs or ultimate educational goals, have been a lesser explored area of study. The purpose of the following discussion is to examine the current literature with regard to how these child-

centered characteristics, as perceived by parents, may factor into the childcare choices parents make.

Of all the available literature, there are only two studies, Kim and Fram (2009) and Uttal (1997), which identify children's gender as a factor in childcare choice. Kim and Fram (2009) did not find a significant link between child's gender and whether parents fit into a specific Class for selecting childcare arrangements. A by-line in Uttal's study, on the other hand, notes that one African American employed mother mentioned she was considering putting her child, a boy, in one specific family care setting. According to this mother, Peter Rabbit's Garden "was the place of choice for boys in this neighborhood." While Uttal tied this mother's statement to mothers' relying on a care arrangement's reputation, it could also speak to the intersection of gender and race, a largely unexplored factor of parental choice (Uttal, 1997).

Race and ethnicity are a more commonly considered child-based factor, usually because parents and children share this characteristic. However, the vast majority of the literature on parental choice holds children's race and ethnicity as a single, constant descriptive variable. There is little, if any, discussion of children from multi-racial and ethnic backgrounds or how the intersection of racial and ethnic background and the value placed on culture or multi-culturalism affects parental choice. The best study for insight into how racial or ethnic background translates into parental choice for childcare arrangements again comes from qualitative research. Uttal (1997) found that mothers of color were vocal in their desire to find a childcare provider who could provide children with an extension of their cultural heritage and practices. For Mexican American mothers, language, food, discipline, and treatment of their children were particularly

salient. All mothers of color expressed a desire for their children to be "racially safe,"
meaning that their children were not being treated differently or maltreated because of
their race or ethnicity. When dealing with predominately White childcare providers and
settings, mothers of color suggested they had to navigate cross-racial interactions, making
sure settings were not overtly hostile, their children were not racial mascots, and that their
children were emotionally and physically safe (Uttal, 1997).

Also adding to discussion of a child's race and/or ethnicity, Buriel and Hurtado-
Ortiz (2000) explored the relationship between ethnicity and acculturation. However, the
mothers acculturation level, not the child's, was examined. Nonetheless, it's important to
note that acculturation was assessed using a questionnaire that measured (1) ethnicity of
mothers' friends, (2) the language spoken in the home, (3) language spoken with friends,
(4) language of preferred radio stations, and (5) language of preferred television stations.
An examination of acculturation found that native-born Latina mothers are more
acculturated than foreign-born Latina mothers. However, acculturation was not shown to
be significant with regard to mothers' perceived success of childcare arrangements. When
acculturation was included in the model, only number of children and successful
childcare arrangement showed a statistical significance level for foreign-born Latina
mothers. (Buriel & Hurtado-Ortiz, 2000)

Closely related to children's race and ethnicity, children's language has only
sporadically been examined as a factor of parental choice. Uttal (1997) found that
Mexican American mothers engaged in a purposeful process to find childcare
arrangements in which the caregiver spoke Spanish, which the mothers tied to their
cultural preferences for care. In terms of availability for Mexican American mothers,

however, the daycare centers which did offer cultural continuity and bilingual services

tended to serve low-income children, have higher ratios, and have teachers receiving on-

the job training, which were not desirable to the mothers. As one mother attested, she was

forced to choose between class-based opportunity and cultural and language continuity.

In the end, she chose quality of care over ethnic heritage (Uttal, 1997). And second, as

discussed above, Buriel and Hurtado-Ortiz (2000) used language to define four out of

five measures for their acculturation variable. Again, however, this measure was a parent-

centered characteristic, not a child-centered one. Nonetheless, acculturation could be seen

an important child characteristic in future research (Buriel & Hurtado-Ortiz, 2000).

  A fourth child-centered characteristic that parents use to choose childcare settings

relates to disability, more specifically consideration as to whether a child has special

needs and/or challenging behaviors, or not. Only Glenn-Applegate and colleagues (2010)

have thus far distinguished parental choice for children with disabilities, breaking down

this population's preferences for structural, process, and familial quality factors. Their

research found that many parents choosing preschool programs for their children with

disabilities felt that their current preschool was their only option. Data shows that parents

harbor concerns that preschools will either turn them away due to disability or that their

children's needs will not be met. These parents considered multiple and heterogeneous,

often highly personal preschool selection factors, but were not found to demonstrate a

clear preference for structural, process, or familial elements of quality. (Glenn-Applegate,

et al., 2010)

  The last and the least researched child-centered characteristic is one that has not

been named officially in the literature. For the purposes of discussing it here, it will be

referred to as "potential." Potential refers specifically to how parents view the purpose of putting their child in childcare and what their ideal end goal or outcome is. For example, is childcare viewed as babysitting? Daycare? An educational jumpstart? A means-to-an-end for work? And so on. The closest that the parental choice literature comes to addressing the potential factor lies in the valuing of quality. Some studies include the importance of having learning activities and quality-focused factors in their analysis, but the variable is not specific to how parents view their child's academic, behavioral, etc. potential nor their goals for their child's future (Kim & Fram, 2009). Others include measures for quality, including quality of the provider, quality of the environment/equipment, and quality of the program, but discuss neither parental end goals nor child potential specifically (Peyton, et al., 2001). Consequently, the realm of child characteristics remains the most underdeveloped when considering the salient factors affecting parental childcare choices.

As this exploration has demonstrated, perceptions of child-centered characteristics have consistently been the least researched set of factors that parents inevitably weighed when considering where to enroll their children. There has been little, if any, understanding of how and in what ways parents considered the gender, race, language, disability, potential, behaviors, needs, and educational goals of their children as they were engaged in the process of choosing and managing childcare arrangements. This study then became a necessary one because again it had the latitude to more fully and deeply understand the role that child characteristics played in the choice process. The study also allowed for an exploration of how and in what ways child characteristics intersected with the equally important structural and parental characteristic factors.

Post-Enrollment Effects of Childcare: Literature on Management and Satisfaction

A second and more exploratory aim of this interview-based qualitative study was to examine the effects of childcare choices after enrollment decisions had been made. More specifically, the study's second research question was interested in more fully understanding the ways maternal primary caregivers found themselves managing their childcare decisions and to what degree, if any, mothers were satisfied with their current childcare arrangements. Literature examining the management and satisfaction sides of the choice process is somewhat sparse. Further, the research that has been done on management is largely situated in psychology disciplines and literature has not yet simultaneously examined the choice process and the lasting effects of enrollment for one set of participants.

Childcare management.

Research on maternal primary caregivers conducted in other fields, psychology in particular, overlaps in some ways with management aspects of childcare. Authors including Romich (2007), Kimmel and Connelly (2007), and Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) have all examined how mothers balance the demands of work and family life and how mothers manage the demands of their households. Romich (2007), for example, found that low-income, employed single mothers often rely on their older children, when available, to provide childcare for their younger children outside of formal childcare settings so as to ease the stress of meeting the needs of young children and working. In addition, Romich found that relationships between mothers and their children are paramount in managing households. Specifically, high quality mother-child relationships moderate the negative impacts of maternal employment for the family. Kimmel and

Connelly (2007), on the other hand, focused their work on the relationships between mothers' time choices and socioeconomic factors. The authors found that mothers' caregiving time increases with the price of childcare and the number of children, but decreases with the age of the child.

Another line of research, which has previously been discussed, examines parents used of multiple childcare arrangements. The use of multiple childcare arrangements speaks to the nature of childcare management to a certain extent. This line of research supports that parents manage combinations of care, but lacks the depth to more fully understand the reasoning behind why and how combinations are decided upon and subsequently managed. Morrissey's (2008) research has explored characteristics of mothers who have chosen various combinations of care settings and offers insight into trends for center-based care families. Morrissey found that mothers who have chosen center-based programs are less likely to supplement care because centers are typically full-time care arrangements and offer some educational value. In addition, the more hours mothers worked, the less likely they were to have the children in multiple care arrangements, which suggests that these women are able to secure single arrangements like centers to meet all their needs. While these findings are significant in terms of choice, they still don't explain how mothers are monitoring and managing the centers they have chosen for their children.

Methodologically, this study aligns closest to the work of Grant-Vallone and Enscher (2011). In their qualitative study on how professional mothers make decisions about balancing work and family, the authors used in-depth interview-based methods to explore the balances between decision-making processes and household management.

Though the authors focused on professional women, all of whom had college degrees, the findings of the study speak to the significant insights that qualitative methods can offer. Specifically, the findings of the study were that mothers' decisions about how to balance and manage their work and family were highly personal in nature. Further, mothers reported doing whatever they felt to be necessary, even if it was unconventional, to make the balances work for their families.

Childcare satisfaction.

Unlike childcare management, literature on childcare satisfaction has been conducted within the field of education. A number of studies have drawn a similar conclusion, namely that parents are generally satisfied with their childcare settings. Holloway and Fuller (1992) examined literature on the relationship between satisfaction levels and parent demographics and found that parents are not only satisfied with their arrangements, but there are not significant differences in satisfaction levels along demographic lines. More recently, Knoche and colleagues (2006) have argued that there are few current studies focused on parental satisfaction. One plausible explanation for why so little research has been done recently is that across time and surveys, parents consistently have reported feeling generally satisfied with their childcare arrangements (Cryer, Tietze, & Wessels, 2002; King, Teleki, & Buck-Gomez, 2002; McWilliam et al., 1995). Knoche and colleagues, however, point to contradictory research that has found that low-income parents and parents who have children with disabilities are less satisfied with their childcare due to heightened concerns about children's development and safety (Wall, Kisker, Peterson, Carta, & Jeon, 2006).

In their own research, Knoche and colleagues (2006) used survey-based methods to explore childcare satisfaction among parents of children with disabilities and found that differences in ratings between parents of children with and without disabilities were not statistically significant. Their findings also supported that parents of children with disabilities felt more satisfied with the quality of their center-based care arrangements when compared to parents who had chosen family care arrangements. An interesting interaction that the authors unexpectedly found was that parents who were reliant on subsidies and had children with disabilities experienced higher stress levels related to their childcare services and working conditions. Knoche and colleagues called for more research to explore this finding, which supports the need to examine and better understand the post-enrollment effects of childcare.

Additional studies that shed light upon the nuances of parental satisfaction with childcare come from the work of Morrissey (2008) and Drugli and Undheim (2012). Morrissey (2008) examined the use of multiple, concurrent childcare settings among employed mothers. The results of this study indicate that when mothers were dissatisfied with their primary childcare arrangements, they became more likely to supplement that care with multiple arrangements. The same study also found that mothers who had chosen center-based care settings were least likely to have their children enrolled in multiple arrangements. What correlation, if any, there was between choosing center-based care and having higher satisfaction levels was within the bounds of the study. The international work of Drugli and Undheim (2012) offers insight into how parents gauge and measure their personal satisfaction levels. Surveying parents in Norway, the authors found that the relationships between parents and caregivers are crucial to daycare

satisfaction levels. More specifically, daily communication among parents and childcare providers proved key to determining satisfaction levels.

Summary

In this review of the literature, five themes related to the study's theoretical orientation, purpose, research problem, and research questions were explored. The purpose of this literature review was to explore what is known about how and why parents choose early care settings. The analysis began by framing the study within bounded rationality and family capital theoretical contexts. This analysis was followed by an overview of what childcare arrangements are available, a breakdown of what arrangements parents are choosing, and an exploration of factors that previous studies have found to be salient for parents as they choose among childcare settings. Specific consideration was given to structural characteristics and policy contexts, parental characteristics and practices, and the least researched realm of parents' perceptions of child characteristics. The chapter concluded by examining the limited research that has been done around the management of childcare choices and parental satisfaction levels, two post-enrollment effects of the decision-making process.

In the following chapter, which has been informed by both the introduction and literature review sections, the methodology of the study is outlined. Key components of this portion of the research proposal include an introduction to the shifting theoretical and methodological constructs, a discussion of the study's design and participants, an overview of the data collection and analysis processes, consideration of the role of the researcher and the study's generalizability, reliability, and validity. The chapter

concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations that were taken into account

during the data collection and analysis processes.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative interview-based study was to more fully understand the process of choosing early childcare programs from the perspective of maternal primary caregivers. The study's intent was to add to the literature by exploring the decision-making experiences of caregivers who enrolled children of color in high-poverty, urban centers. Understanding their experiences sheds light on the process itself, the intersection of underlying factors, the roles of bounded rationality and family capital, and the post-enrollment effects of the decision-making process. While research on this topic has provided a crucial foundation, this study identified a legitimate need to explore and better understand this phenomenon on a deeper and more nuanced level. A qualitative, interview-based study was proposed to shed light on the experiences of a group of parents making high-stakes decisions for a vulnerable population. The results of this study serve to better inform policymakers, district administrators, and academics on the state of early childcare and parental enrollment practices.

This study was necessary for a number of reasons; first, the phenomenon had not been explored using in-depth interviews in some time; second, more women have entered the workforce; third, welfare reform has expanded access to childcare for some, while limiting it for others; and fourth, federal and state policies are increasingly recognizing and funding formalized childcare as an important step in the educational ladder. The results of previous research also indicated a need for a more detailed and realistic understanding of the parental decision-making process. Specifically, it was necessary to

consider the following: (1) over 60% of parents place their children in non-parental childcare arrangements with one-quarter of that population in organized facilities like daycare centers (Laughlin, 2013; Early & Burchinal, 2001); (2) placing children in an early childcare setting is a process that is on-going and involves the intersection of various structural, parental, and child factors; (3) families from varying social classes and racial backgrounds have bounded rationality and bring different sets of resources, or family capital, to the process; (4) The circumstances influencing choice criteria change and parents are not always satisfied with their choice and may change settings.

Based on gaps in the literature and with the intentions of fulfilling its original purposes, this study asked the following research questions:

1. What factors influenced the choices of maternal primary caregivers who enrolled children of color in one of three urban, high-poverty childcare centers? How did structural, parental, and child-level factors intersect in this process?

2. In what ways does the selection process continue to affect parents once an initial enrollment decision has been made? How satisfied are maternal primary caregivers with their childcare arrangements?

Guided by these research questions, this study used a phenomenological interview-based design in order to better understand the experiences of 40 maternal primary caregivers who had enrolled their minority children in one of three high poverty centers.

Shifting Theoretical and Methodological Constructs

The literature on how and why parents choose early care settings has built the foundation for this study. However, the two greatest areas of need have been for more interview-based work and for more research that explores the childcare choice process

and its post-enrollment effects from the perspective of the parent. Interview-based studies remain scarce in the work that has been conducted around the phenomenon; this type of work has not been used to add a depth of understanding in some time. Consequently, this study identified the need to understand parent experiences in a realistic and nuanced way and to examine choice as a multi-dimensional, complex process, without determining which variables might be important to measure a priori.

A second area of need was for more research on the intersection of the structural, parental, and child-level factors, which previous literature has been shown to influence parental choices, and on the lasting effects of the decision-making process. In terms of child-level factors, the intersection of child-centered characteristics around gender, race/ethnicity, language, disability, and potential were largely unexplored and warranted further exploration. Likewise warranting further exploration were considerations of the ways that parents monitored and managed their childcare settings after enrollment and how satisfied parents felt with their choices. The addition of this interview-based study to the existing literature addressed both areas of need. The purpose of the following discussion is to analyze how current theoretical constructs inform the methodological practices in the current literature, and then propose an alternative theoretical lens that could both inform and improve upon the methodology to more accurately capture the phenomenon.

Much of the research that has been done on parental choice and early childcare settings has been informed by rational choice theories and are guided by positivist or neopositivist epistemologies. Rational choice theories assume that (1) the basis of society is an individual's need for fulfillment; (2) the nature of a person is at once self-interested,

rational, and calculating as individuals seek to minimize costs and maximize emotional or practice rewards; and (3) the nature of individuals makes macro, meso, and micro-level analysis possible. (Keith, 2011) When parents make childcare choices according to the current literature, which has been informed by this theoretical lens, parents weigh various elements of a childcare decision against one another. The literature therefore assumes that parents weigh elements of quality, proximity, affordability, agreement with parenting practices, beliefs, child needs, child limitations, and personal and family values, against one another and then prioritize them before making a static decision on where to place their child. (Blau, 1964; Hofferth, et al., 1996)

This theoretical lens in turn validates the methodological practices used to conduct the vast majority of the quantitative research conducted around this phenomenon. Because the guiding theories assume that parents make a trade-off like decision when placing children in childcare arrangements, the methodology used to measure choice typically involves an analysis of a large-scale data set which has surveyed parents or asked them to rank childcare considerations. It must be understood, however, that such large-scale data sets are the product of formalized quantitative research, which itself is the product of the evidence-based practice movement. Within methodological positivism, basing research on reproducible, objective, quantitative value neutral facts can eliminate human subjectivity, and the subjectivity of the researcher specifically. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) While quantitative analysis has the capacity to examine how and in what ways factors intersect, these types of analyses have not yet been done around choice.

When considering parents as rational calculators faced with a one-time decision, researchers are then able to rely on positivistic statistical tests, which vary in sophistication, to come to a conclusion about how and why parents place children in childcare settings. These methodological practices, which reflect both epistemology and theory, consequently assume that (1) scientific methods produce facts; (2) as rational choosers, the decisions parents made or will make is in fact reflected their survey answers and/or preference rankings and visa versa; (3) survey questions or preference rankings are posed in such a way as to elicit one, consistent response from parents as variation according to questioning method will not occur; and (4) the parental state of choosing and therefore the decision that is made is static and can be treated as such because circumstances are not subject to change. It can be argued, however, that these assumptions result in missing a part of the picture. Therefore, the following discussion will explore how a different set of theoretical constructs can better inform methodological constructs to more accurately capture the scope and nature of the phenomenon.

Micro-level theorists, phenomenologists in particular, have long argued that in order to truly know why social actors, parents in this case, make the choices they do, researchers have to understand this social phenomenon based on the experienced meanings of the parents themselves. In assuming that actors perceive reality as it is, phenomenology seeks to understand and describe the world as experienced by subjects (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The lifeworld concept is particularly relevant to understanding how actors experience a phenomenon. The lifeworld refers to the intersubjective way each human personally experiences the world, while bracketing refers to the system used to make sense of the lifeworld. Since humans experience a

world made of meaningful objects and relations, understanding reality then requires focusing on meaning structures as they relate to individual perception. At the same time, however, the human actor is assumed to be a socialized member of society. As such, the lifeworld in some ways comes already organized and results in an unquestioning, natural attitude. Therefore, phenomenologists argue that more focus ought to be on understanding the human experience as a social one, whereby linking the individual and the collective, the human actor and the social scene, the private and intersubjective, and the natural and the cultural through language and shared interpretive schemes (Appelrouth & Edle, 2008).

Largely absent from the current literature on this social phenomenon, however, are interview-based methodologies founded on the phenomenological perspective. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the phenomenological interview describes rather than explains so as to arrive at an investigation of essences. A semi-structured life world interview, in particular, aims to better realize themes within the lived everyday world from the perspective of the subjects' themselves. Aspects of the semi-strucutre lifework interview, as outlined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), at once explore qualitative meaning in the lifeworld through a descriptive, specific, deliberately naive, focused, ambiguous, changing, sensitive, interpersonal, positive experience for the subject. (See Appendix 1 for definitions) And while empathetic, the phenomenological interviewer is also understood to recognize an asymmetry of power between researcher and subject. While there is no clear or easy solution to resolving the asymmetry of power dynamic since the interviewer is conducting a professional interview, phenomenologists agree that the dynamic is important to acknowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). And so,

for the purposes of exploring and better understanding the process that maternal

caregivers are engaged in when choosing an early childcare setting, this study will adopt

a qualitative interview method based on the semi-structured lifeworld interview.

Phenomenological Interview Study

A multi-site interview-based study allowed the researcher to capture the

phenomenon as experienced by the study's participants, a population of women raising

children of color in urban, high poverty neighborhoods. Interviewing the maternal

primary caregivers of children currently enrolled in early childhood centers allowed the

researcher to more comprehensively explore and understand the phenomenon from the

perspective of participants with overlapping circumstances. The phenomenological

interview itself was conducted as a semi-structured, professional research interview

which sought to "understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects' own

perspectives. This kind of interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees'

lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena"

(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, 27). The interviews conducted for this study were guided by

a protocol that reflected the identified themes of the participants' everyday worlds.

The interview protocol and methodology were also guided by Kvale &

Brinkmann's (2009) seven research stages, beginning with the thematizing stage. The

thematizing stage considered the cost/benefit ratio for participants involved. The benefits

of the study included giving parents a platform to talk in realistic ways about their

experiences with finding and managing childcare settings and using those experiences to

better inform the policies and practices that currently guide this field. As a low risk study,

it was not anticipated that the interview process would be unnecessarily or excessively

taxing for participants. Further, the projected benefits of the study were to better inform policymakers, district administrators, and academics on the state of early childcare and parental enrollment practices for a vulnerable population in the metropolitan region.

Stage two of the study's design considered both that interview knowledge reflects an intertwining "produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic" knowledge and that there are ethical and moral implications for this study (53). Consideration of the remaining stages of Kvale and Brinkmann's seven research stages, including interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting, are outlined in further detail in the following sections of the chapter. Briefly, however, in accordance with the authors' guidelines, interviews were conducted using an interview guide and were acknowledged to be a reflection of knowledge in an interpersonal situation; the transcribing stage acknowledged that interviews were audio recorded and that audio recordings are subject to some level of interpretation by the transcriber; analysis was conducted by meaning coding, a process which recognizes that multiple meaning interpretations are often an issue; the verifying stage acknowledged that checks of generalizability, validity, and reliability for findings needed to be conducted; and finally, the study's findings have been rendered in a report that takes both research criteria and ethical considerations into account. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009)

In order to produce the most authentic study possible, participants' confidentially was protected according to the ethical guidelines of the field, which will be outlined in the final section of this chapter. The researcher likewise acknowledged the rights of those individuals who voluntarily participated in the study and obtained informed consent prior to beginning interviews. Because qualitative researchers cannot separate personal views

from interpretation, the researcher remained engaged in personal reflection as part of the research study. The purpose of this reflection was to maintain an awareness of personal biases and the product of such reflection was noted in a series of conceptual memos that were written in accordance with this process. (Creswell, 2008)

Overview of Data Collection

Data collection took place across multiple phases with each phase ranging in length from approximately three weeks to three month's time. The data collection process was laid out so that the researcher would be able to collect data from multiple sources, later enabling her to validate the study's finding via triangulation. Phase I of data collection consisted of recruitment and rapport-building, an integral part of establishing strong relationships with the centers and the study's participants. At the onset, this study aimed to recruit 3 to 4 centers of varying quality as measured by the state's rating system where parent recruitment would take place. Ultimately, three centers with varying STAR quality ratings, a one STAR center, a two STAR center, and a three STAR center, joined the study. Indications of quality were based on the Keystone Stars rating system and will be explained in further detail below. Once contact had been established with centers and after participants had been invited to join the study, additional participants were recruited via purposeful snowball sampling.

The researcher sought permission from two center directors and one school principal prior to collecting observational and interview-based data. As Phase I of data collection continued, the researcher remained committed to spending time weekly at each center getting to know the community, the center administration, the staff, and the parents, when accessible. Having had experience as an early childhood teacher in an

urban center, the researcher sought to balance drawing upon prior knowledge of this educational community with remaining open to the uniqueness each center displayed.

The start of Phase II of data collection coincided with the later stages of Phase I, though Phase I took significantly longer than anticipated and pushed the timeline of the study back by two months. Due to unanticipated recruitment difficulties, Phases I- IV of the study were completed in succession at one center prior to starting the process over at the next. After successfully completing Phases I through IV at the first recruited center, The Christian School, the researcher then returned to Phase I and recruited the second center, Celebrate Kids Academy. After Phases I through IV were completed at Celebrate Kids Academy, the researcher again returned to recruitment efforts and completed Phase I through IV at the final center, Children's Town.

Phase II of this study consisted of site observations, which were detailed in a series of field notes and were structured using an observational protocol that the researcher developed. Based on the ECERS and Arnett quality assessment rating tools, which are standard in the field of early childhood center assessment, the researcher created an observational protocol that would better lend itself to the nature of qualitative field notes. During Phase II of data collection, the researcher observed at each of the 3 sites over 5 visits. Site observations lasted between 2 and 3 hours per visit. Field notes with thick, rich descriptions of each center were used to capture and provide background information, as well as insight into the center, its community, and its quality. Initial quality assessments were retrieved from the Keystone Stars rating system as well as accreditation information from the city and the state where centers were located. The observational protocol was adopted from the quality assessment ratings of the ECERS

and Arnett quality rating scales, but is the researcher's own. Observations did not include any children, rather the researcher focused on capturing descriptions of the following: (1) the educational resources available in classrooms to children, (2) time spent on teaching and instruction, and (3) the relationships between the administration, staff, and parents. (See Table 3.1) It is important to reiterate, however, that observations at no time focused on children, who are considered a vulnerable population according to Creswell (2008).

Phase III of the data collection process consisted of 40 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the maternal primary caregivers of children enrolled in each of the three centers. This phase was anticipated to last approximately three months time, however, more time had to be allotted due unanticipated recruitment issues. From each of the 3 centers that participated in the study, the researcher aimed to interview approximately 10-15 maternal, primary caregivers. Ultimately 9 maternal primary caregivers were interviewed from The Christian School, while 15 and 16 mothers were interviewed from Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town respectively.

An equal distribution of caregivers with male and female children was recruited and the racial distribution of participants reflected the centers racial and ethnic composition. All three centers served between 99 and 100 percent Black families and were located in neighborhoods occupied primarily by African-American families. Thirty-nine of the study's 40 participants were Black and all 40 participants had either Black or bi-racial children. Parents were offered a small incentive to participate and were asked to sign a consent form prior to the start of the interviewing process. (See Appendix V)

Table 3.1

Indicators of Quality: Adapted for Qualitative Observation from the ECERS and Arnett Rating Scales

Level	Indicator	Evidence
Center	Atmosphere	Neighborhood description, physical description, reception/security, hallway displays, personnel/staff interactions
Classroom		
	Ratios	Ratio of staff to students
	Space and Furnishing	Indoor space: furniture, room arrangement, privacy, children's displays Outdoor space: gross motor equipment
	Personal Care	Greeting/departing, meals/snacks, nap/rest, bathrooms, health and safety
	Classroom Resources	Fine motor, art, music/movement, blocks, sand/water, dramatic play, nature/science, math/numbers, technology
	Teaching and Learning	How are students spending time (class schedule), group learning/individual learning/free play, language/communication, literacy/books, math, accommodations for students with disabilities
	Interactions	Learning interactions, staff-child interactions, supervision, discipline
	Parent Involvement	Evidence of parental involvement, provisions for parents, parent/staff interactions

The majority of interviews took place on-site unless participants requested that the interview take place at an off-site location. In accordance with the formatting of semi-structured phenomenological interviews, interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and were guided by an interview protocol with relevant themes. (See Appendix IV)

Interviews were audio recorded and parents were asked to consent to this audio

recording. (See Appendix VI) Interview recordings were then sent to an accredited and

recommended source for transcription services. The researcher can ensure that during the

transcription phase, participant confidentiality was protected at all times by using only

participant initials. All data was housed in a password locked computer and the computer

and audio recording device were locked in a safe in the researcher's office. (See Table

3.2)

The final phase of data collection consisted of follow-up interviews and

observations when they were deemed necessary to validate the study's initial findings.

Because the researcher could not anticipate what, if any, issues would arise at the study's

onset, an additional two weeks of data collection time was set aside to conduct follow-up

interviews. Ultimately, follow-up time was used to revisit center sites for additional

interviews with administrators and staff. The perspectives of owners, directors, teachers,

and staff offered additional insight into and perspectives on each of the centers. (See

Expected and Actual Timelines)

Table 3.2
Data Sources

Site	The Christian School	Celebrate Kids Academy	Children's Town	Total
Interviews				
Parents	9	15	16	40
Administrators	2	2	3	7
Observations				
Number	5	4	5	14
Hours	16	16	18	50

During each phase of data collection, evaluations of the data were conducted in a

series of reflective memos. The purpose of writing memos was twofold: first, memos

presented the opportunity to work out methodological concerns with particular attention being paid to the quality of the interview protocol; and second, memos were used to highlight and explore emerging themes, which were determined based upon reviews of field notes and transcriptions. Data collection was adjusted when it was deemed necessary to address methodology concerns. For example, after the observation periods, a small set of additional interview questions was added to address the unique qualities of each center. Memos also served to search for any evidence that would prove contradictory to emergent themes. And finally, in keeping with the nature of qualitative work, data collection was also adjusted to more fully explore emerging themes not accounted for at the onset of the study.

<div align="center">**Participants**</div>

Participants for the study were recruited from 3 childcare centers across the metropolitan region and maternal primary caregivers were invited to participate based upon fit with the study's design. African-American families primarily occupied the three neighborhoods where centers were located and the centers' racial composition reflected neighborhood demographics. More specifically, interview participants were identified as eligible for the study when the following criteria were met: (1) There was a child in the household of between the ages of 3 and 5; (2) Their child was either African-American or bi-racial; and (3) Their child attended a center in a high poverty neighborhood within the metropolitan region. In total, the researcher interviewed the maternal primary caregivers in 40 households, including 9 from The Christian School, 15 from Celebrate Kids Academy, and 16 from Children's Town. The study recruited an even distribution of mothers and a grandmother who had boys and mothers who had girls. The racial

distribution of the study's participants directly reflected the racial distribution of each center. (See Table 3.3)

In order to fully answer the study's research questions, it was necessary to recruit parents from multiple center sites that varied in quality ratings according to the state. The quality of each center, which was assessed at the study's onset using the Keystone Stars rating system, was further assessed using the researcher's observational protocol and field notes. The nature of each center's quality was fundamental in speaking to what parents were looking for in centers and what aspects of quality were important to them during their search processes. Including centers that varied in quality also shed light on whether or not parents were influenced by quality ratings during the decision-making process and offered a basis to differentiate between each of the centers.

Table 3.3
Demographic information for all participants

	# Participants	# Participants	# Participants
Race			
Black	39	-	-
White	1	-	-
Childcare Payment Method			
Subsidy/Financial Aide*	-	31	-
Private or Full Pay	-	9	-
Occupational Status			
Full-time Employed	-	-	26
Part-time or In School	-	-	8
Not Working	-	-	6
Total Participants	40	40	40

*The Christian School did not accept subsidies, but did offer scholarships, tuition remission, and fundraising opportunities as financial aides.

Participants were recruited from 3 centers, the one STAR Christian School, the two STAR Celebrate Kids Academy, and the three STAR Children's Town. In the

metropolitan region where the study takes place, this rating system is used to gauge the quality of childcare arrangements. Each letter of the stars specifically stands for a benchmark of quality: Standards, Training and professional development, Assistance, Resources, and Support (STARS). Based in researched best-practices, this rating system is linked to a set of performance standards (See Appendix II). According to the Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality (2012) centers that earn 4 stars are considered to be of highest quality, while centers that earn 3, 2, or 1 STARS have demonstrated lower levels of quality and are in need of improvement. Each level is structured to build on the previous level for the promotion of quality early learning environment and positive outcomes. The STARS rating system is co-managed by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning and the state and regional STAR Offices.

Each of the participating centers were independently run childcare facilities, meaning that they were not part of a larger chain of centers and the owners/directors of each had sole charge of each site. Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town were daycare centers. Each was privately owned as a business venture and was open between 6 or 6:30 AM and 6 or 6:30 PM, all year round. Parents were able to enroll their children at any point during the year, including during the summer. Each center accepted infants, toddlers, and pre-k age children and both also provided after-school care for school age children. Celebrate Kids Academy was housed in a storefront in a high poverty neighborhood north east of the city center while Children's Town operated from a row home on the impoverished west-side of the city.

The Christian School was different in that it was not a daycare center. Though it was classified by the state as a one STAR center, in actuality, the program operated as a Pre-k. Housed in a K-8 school on the north side of the city, the program was technically overseen by the school's principal. In practice, however, two lead teachers assumed the majority of this grade level's administrative duties, differentiating it from the rest of the school. The center was open from September through June, coinciding with the traditional school year, and the program's daily schedule corresponded with the school's K-8 schedule. Doors to the program opened at 7:45 AM and closed at 3:10 PM. For parents who needed extra care hours, an on-site summer program was available at a cost. Before and after school childcare was also provided on-site, extending the schedule for childcare from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Parents had to apply and enroll children the spring prior to the school's fall start date and the program only accepted children who were four year olds. Almost all children who attended the program transitioned into the school's kindergarten the following year; many children stayed through the eighth grade.

Upon invitation to join the study, parents were offered a small incentive in exchange for their time. Recognizing the delicate line that offering incentives to participants creates, a line which if crossed would taint the study and its findings, ten-dollar gift certificates to a coffee house chain were given to participants in exchange for an hour of their time. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, maternal primary caregivers were asked to formally consent by filling out an informed consent form. (See Appendix) This form detailed the purpose and the features of the study's design; potential risks and benefits were also outlined. Parents who agreed to participate did so voluntary and the consent form let them know that they were free to withdraw from the study at any

time. When consent forms were signed, the researcher verbally briefed all participants about the form and its significance. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009)

The Role of the Researcher

During the data collection process, the researcher's role was primarily limited to that of non-participant observer and interviewer. Phase II of the study's design called for observational assessments of center quality. During this time, the researcher conducted observations at each site, recording rich, thick descriptions and withholding preemptive judgment in a series of field notes. In Phase III of the study, phenomenological interviews were conducted with those parents who agreed to participate and who gave their informed consent. The researcher acknowledged that the integrity, both of the researcher and that of the study, was paramount. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), the researcher had to exhibit moral responsibility in order to conduct morally responsible research. Such responsibility includes a cognizance of "value issues, ethnical guidelines, and ethical theories" that must guide the researcher through the navigation of ethical choices that may develop during the study (74). Further, it was the onus of the researcher to ensure all findings were accurate and representative; because qualitative research is interactive, transparency is crucial. Throughout the study, the researcher remained committed to transparency, which was accomplished through reflection and reflective memos, and remained independent as a researcher, disallowing the co-opting of findings by any party. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009)

In the name of transparency, the researcher self-discloses that she is a white, upper-middle class female from the suburbs of the metropolitan region where the study was

conducted. Currently, the researcher is a full-time doctoral student at a local, public university where she teaches a class on the history of public education in the United States. Previously, the researcher was a Head Start teacher at a publicly funded, bilingual early childhood education program in a Mid-western city. The researcher also more recently taught kindergarten at a charter school within the public school district where the study was conducted.

Being white and upper-middle class, the researcher acknowledges both the delicacies and the challenges of conducting interviews across cultures, an issue that had to be considered for this study because participants were African-American. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) recommend that when interviewing subjects across cultures, time should be taken to establish and build familiarity with both the culture and the study's participants. The researcher remained aware that "difficulties in recognizing disparities in language use, gestures, and cultural norms may also arise within a researcher's own culture when interviewing across gender and generation, or social class and religion" (145). To aide in accounting for any cross-cultural differences, the researcher spent, on average, three to four weeks building rapport with center staff and parents prior to recruitment and interviews. Having prior experience and up-to-date early childhood certifications and background checks, the researcher spent time weekly during the first weeks familiarizing herself with the each community and culture.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

Data analysis took place during all four phases of the data collection process. During Phase I, the researcher worked closely with center directors and staff to analyze enrollment data provided by the center in order to identify eligible participants.

Participants needed to have a child in the household of between the ages of 3 and 5 enrolled in the center, be of African-American or Hispanic decent, and finally, live in the metropolitan region. An equal distribution of boys and girls was recruited and the racial composition of the study reflected the composition of each center. Additionally, the data available on the quality of each center gathered from the Keystone Stars accrediting system was collected and analyzed during initial analysis. Additional paperwork that was collected included each center's enrollment or application packet and information on the distribution of subsidies or financial aide across eligible families.

During Phase II of data collection, field notes were analyzed on a bi-weekly basis and analysis was provided in a series of corresponding conceptual memos. Site and classroom observations were conducted using an observational protocol that the researcher developed using well-researched rating tools standard in the field. Adjustments to field note and observation collection were made based on these memos. Again, the aim of the observations captured in the field notes was to provide thick, rich description of the educational resources available and used in classrooms, the time spent on teaching and instruction, and the relationships between the administration, staff, and parents. During data analysis, these field notes were used to supplement data to describe the varying levels of quality displayed by each center.

Following Phases III and IV of data analysis, interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and coded according to theme by the researcher. Observational field notes taken during Phase II of data collection were also analyzed and coded according to theme. In accordance with ethical guidelines in the field, participant confidentiality was protected and all data was housed in a password locked computer and the computer

locked safe in the researcher's office. During the analysis process, the researcher remained committed to writing conceptual memos, also to be analyzed, on multiple occasions during the coding process. A formalized coding scheme was produced based upon emergent themes, both anticipated and unanticipated. The protocol for the semi-structured phenomenological interview has been included as an appendix to the formal research study.

Generalizability, Reliability, and Validity

The researcher recognizes the limitations of conducting one small multi-site study and linking the study's findings to a statistically supported phenomenon. However, because the research study's ultimate goal has been to humanize a research problem and to more accurately understand a process unique to a specific, a small sample size was essential. Therefore, while the study's findings are not universally generalizable, according to Creswell (2008), the findings both support and contradict aspects of previous research on the topic while providing a more in-depth perspective of the phenomenon. Consequently, despite the limited scope of the study, the study's findings still have great implications for the field. Further, the researcher has designed the study in such as way as to capture high-quality description, which can most definitely yield high levels of analytic generalization according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). The authors argue, "analytical generalization may be drawn from an interview investigation regardless of sampling and mode of analysis. Analytical generalization rests upon rich contextual descriptions and includes the researcher's argumentation for the transferability of the interview findings…" (265). And so, the knowledge produced in this specific interview study can be transferable to other similar situations.

Maintaining the reliability and validity of the study was purposeful throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Steps to ensure that the appropriate measures were taken include using document analysis, observation, and interviews with parents, owners, directors, and staff as part of the triangulation process; using audio recording during all one-on-one and follow-up interviews; and using observational and interview protocols to maintain consistency. Furthermore, at all points in the data collection and analysis processes, the researcher engaged in reflective practice to maintain an awareness of subjectivity and potential biases.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that in qualitative, interview studies validity becomes a "quality of craftsmanship" and directly reflects the level of craftsmanship and credibility of the researcher. And so, in addition to the aforementioned steps that were taken to ensure high levels of reliability and validity, the researcher also purposefully followed Kvale and Brinkmann's steps for "validation at seven stages." At the thematizing stage, theory and logic were used to create and support the study's research question, while at the designing stage, the benefits of the study were weighed and the study's methods were purposefully crafted to adequately support the validation of knowledge. Such validation was also purposefully planned for in the remaining stages, including conducting high quality interviews at the interviewing stage, considering linguistic style in the transcribing stage, remaining cognizant of interpretation and bias at the analyzing stage, using reflective judgment during the validation stage, and finally, ensuring that the final report accurately and transparently reflects the findings of the study. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009)

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2008), practicing ethics while conducting a research study is a complex issue and researchers must tailor ethical considerations to individual projects. For this particular study, the researcher had to first and foremost respect the rights, perspectives, and cultural diversity of the study's participants. In addition, because data collection took place in early childhood centers, the educational houses of a vulnerable population, the researcher needed to honor the administrators, staff, parents, and children involved with the center. The researcher viewed herself as a guest in this educational setting. And finally, while it was paramount for the researcher to build rapport with the study's participants, the researcher was also charged with protecting the study and its findings from avoidable biases. The conscientious effort as outlined was made and therefore, the researcher believes herself to be in a position to report the study's findings fully and honestly.

As this was a qualitative, interview-based study, additional consideration was given to protecting the study's site locations and participants. In order to do so, the researcher submitted the study to the Institutional Review Board of the research university for review. All recommendations from the review board were applied and adhered to. As has been mentioned, the study did not proceed without the consent of each center's director or principal, as well as the informed consent of all participants involved. Participants were verbally briefed on the consent form and it was made known that they were free to exit or discontinue the study at any time.

The confidentiality of the site locations and all participants has also been protected consistently throughout the study. The names of the centers and participants were

documented only on consent forms. In all other references to sites and maternal primary caregivers, pseudonyms have been used. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), confidentiality in qualitative studies is more complex than in survey research where anonymity is guaranteed with computed averages. Consequently, the researcher has remained aware of and navigated to the best of her ability the "intrinsic conflict between the ethical demand for confidentiality and the basic principles of scientific research" (72).

Finally, the consequences of this study were weighed carefully on multiple occasions throughout the study's duration; the study's purposeful design reflects this consideration. The researcher assumed the responsibility of considering all possible harms as well as anticipating potential ethical transgressions. Ethical transgressions did not occur, however, if and when they had occurred, the researcher would have suspended the study and appealed to the advice of her committee members before continuing on.

Summary

This chapter outlined the study' methodological design based upon evidence introduced in both the introduction and literature review sections. Consideration was given to the study's general design as a qualitative, interview-based study and to the study's theoretical orientation. Consideration was also given to the study's participants and the role of the researcher. The data collection and data analysis processes were subsequently outlined, followed by an overview of the study's generalizability, reliability, and validity. The chapter then concluded with an outline of the ethical considerations essential to maintaining the reliability, validity, and overall authenticity of the study.

Based upon the methods outlined in this chapter, the following chapter will provide background for the study's sites and participants; a context for each of the study's three center locations will also be presented. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the researcher's recruitment efforts, provide general background and histories for each site, and describe aspects of quality that were observed using the researcher's observational protocol, which was developed and adopted using the ECERS and Arnett rating tools. Per the adopted observational protocol, attention will be paid to each site's resources, teaching and learning environment, classroom interactions, and evidence of parental involvement. The chapter concludes with a presentation of profiles for the maternal primary caregivers from each center.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTEXT OF THREE HIGH-POVERTY URBAN CENTER-BASED
CHILDCARE PROGRAMS

Overview

The populations that benefit the most from the ever increasing availability of early

childhood education include minority children and children from low-income

backgrounds (Dhuey, 2011). The parents, and often time mothers, of these populations

are often solely charged with and responsible for making the choice to place children in

early childcare setting. Yet, the world of childcare has been shown to be highly fractured

and exceedingly complex. How then are mothers raising children in high-poverty urban

neighborhoods navigating a world and a process that has so many layers? Do they have

guidance? Is their idea of quality aligned to that of experts in the field? These are just

some of the questions I thought about when designing this study.

Quality and perceptions of quality were integral considerations driving the study's

design. Observation and an observational protocol were included so that I would be able

to describe what life inside these three centers was like day-to-day. What did the children

do all day? What was the staff like? What curricula were used? How were parents

interacted with? These were some, but not all, of the many questions that I became

interested in, in part based on my own experiences working in a childcare center and in

part based on the literature in the field. I also felt that I could not begin to understand how

mothers came to decide on these centers if I myself did not experience what it was like to

interact with the staff, children, and parents and spend time there on a daily basis.

I conducted a series of observations at each of the three centers prior to

interviewing any of the maternal primary caregivers from the sites. The purposes of my

observations were twofold. On the one hand, I was curious as to the daily activities and happenings at these places and wanted to capture of picture of what went on over time. On the other hand, I was equally curious about quality and perceptions of quality. These centers were determined by experts from the state to have earned different quality ratings and I wanted to know, very simply, what that looked like in practice. Based on the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, I was also curious to see if quality might have a dichotomous nature. Specifically, when experts from the state and parents living in high-poverty urban neighborhoods assessed the same center, did see the same things? To probe this question, I borrowed research tools standard in the field, the ECERS and Arnett quality rating scales specifically, and created an observational protocol that would lend itself to capturing detailed descriptions of what quality from the perspective of the experts would look for. Descriptions of those aspects of quality are included in this chapter. Chapter 5, the next chapter, further speaks to the aspects of quality that mothers felt were important in their evaluations of centers.

Before delving into site-by-site descriptions of quality, I begin the chapter by outlining my own recruitment efforts, a task which proved more difficult than anticipated at the study's onset. Quite naively, I believed that the sheer number of childcare centers participating in the STARS program would afford me access to the three or four centers needed to fit the study's design. I offer insights from my own process negotiating access to centers, which I believe speaks in significant ways to the nature of the early childhood education world. Site-by-site descriptions are then provided based on my time observing at each center. A general background and history are offered, as are descriptions of site and classroom resources, specifically the indoor and outdoor space available, attention to

children's personal care, classroom resources, teacher background and education, and unique attributes of the program. Descriptions also focus on the teaching and learning environments, observed interactions between staff, parents, and children, and evidence of parental involvement. The chapter closes by profiling each of the maternal primary caregivers who were interviewed for the study.

Recruitment Efforts

When I initially designed this study, I did not yet have specific sites from which to recruit parents. Somewhat naively, I believed that the sheer number of childcare centers in the city, 322 in total, would make accessing three to four centers highly feasible. My search for sites, however, proved labor intensive and far more difficult than I anticipated. The purpose of this discussion is to first briefly describe my efforts to find and secure access to centers, and second examine what my own difficulties might suggest about the nature of center-based care in the metropolitan region where the study was conducted. These aspects of the study are important to highlight because they speak to the fractured nature of this system and to the lack of high quality care available to families living and working in high poverty neighborhoods.

Timeline

I first began my search for sites using the STARS website because having a star rating was a first pre-requisite for participation in this study. From a lengthy list of 683 centers, I started conducting basic searches on childcare centers. My intent was to determine the accessibility of centers and whether or not sites would fit with the study's design. Relatively quickly, I determined that most four STAR centers and approximately one-third of the remaining one through three STAR centers did not fit the study's design

because they were either not located in high poverty neighborhoods or did not serve primarily minority populations.

As I searched, I simultaneously set up meetings with contacts in my field, specifically individuals who would have relationships with local centers. It took about two months of reaching out to contacts, first professional and then personal, while continuing my daily searches for information about centers of all STARS before I secured my first center. I gained access to The Christian School, a one STAR center, through a university colleague who oversaw a federally funded outreach program in local early childhood settings. Per the principal's terms, however, I was granted access to only one of the school's two early childhood classrooms. I was able to complete Phases I through IV of the study at this site in the Spring of 2013.

In need of at least two more centers, I returned to my recruitment efforts. Though contacts in my professional and personal networks were initially helpful in referring me to other centers, I found that most often those centers did not enroll the population I was interested in. When they did enroll the study's population, I found it difficult to establish contact with someone inside the centers. In multiple instances, when I called the office and asked to speak to director, I was usually asked to leave a message because he or she was unavailable. In other cases, I was told email would be the best way to get in touch with a contact. Most often, however, I did not get responses.

With my contacts all but exhausted, I changed my approach and reached out to three institutions involved in the early childhood education system: Child Care Information Services (CCIS), the STARS, and the city's school district, which has an early childhood office and runs a number of partnership programs with local centers. In

my efforts to contact the appropriate people via phone and email, I was only successful in meeting with one CCIS office, the county-by-county agency within the state's Department of Public Welfare that manages federal and state funds for subsidized childcare (Department of Public Welfare, 2013). I was interested in meeting with this agency because they solely fund low-income families living in high poverty neighborhoods that are accessing childcare.

On the day scheduled for the meeting in May, however, I was told at the office that the woman I was scheduled to meet with had been laid off the week prior. Feeling out of options again, I changed my approach once more and began contacting two and three STAR centers directly. My list of potential centers had dwindled greatly because I had already completed the study at a one STAR center and one STAR centers constituted about half of the 683 rated childcare centers in the city. Additionally, I had all but ruled out the possibility of recruiting a four STAR center because there were only 62 total and the majority were not in high poverty neighborhoods serving primarily minority families. Consequently, I narrowed my search down to high poverty neighborhoods in the city and used working phone numbers and email addresses, when available, to contact directors. It took a month of approaching centers, approximately fifteen, and requesting meetings before Mr. Marshall from Celebrate Kid's Academy agreed to participate.

As spring became summer, data collection from one and two STAR centers was complete. No data was collected over summer due to centers' tendencies to have fluctuations in population/attendance and to change the daily schedule and curriculum, all of which would affect the study's findings. In July, I reached out directly to five more center directors in anticipation of starting the study up again in the fall. A director from a

three STAR center granted my request for a meeting and signed the consent forms on the spot. Despite my attempts to stay in contact via phone and email with the center, which was open 24 hours, the director and assistant director stopped responding to communication in mid-August. Back at the drawing board, I contacted an additional three centers in early September. A day before I was set to try a door-to-door approach, the owner and director of a different three STAR center accepted my request for a meeting. I met with her two assistant directors twice before I was able to secure access and complete data collection for the study.

Unlocking access to urban center-based care

In negotiating access to centers of varying quality that serve minority children in high poverty neighborhoods, I encountered a number of unanticipated difficulties that speak to the nature of urban center-based care and to a lack of high quality options for families. One of the first lessons I learned about childcare in the city is that it is entirely privatized, excluding Head Start programs and state-funded pre-k programs. All of the centers I approached were run or managed privately by individuals or groups of individuals. The Christian School was a non-profit headed by a religious entity's Board of Trustees with a President/CEO and principal dedicated to serving a high need, at-risk population, while Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town were both for-profit businesses owned and operated by entrepreneurs, though they also served a high need, at-risk population.

In researching the agencies involved in funding and regulating center-based care, specifically CCIS, the STARS program, and the school district, I also learned that this system is absent any true, formal governing body. Unlike school districts, which unify

and oversee the formalized K-12 school system and operate under superintendents, the early childhood education system is run by a variety of individuals, groups, organizations, and entities for a variety of purposes. In addition, unlike K-12 schooling, families are responsible for incurring the cost of childcare. In this study, only The Christian School did not accept welfare or CCIS subsidies. Rather, families from this site were charged a small fee for attendance, which was comparable to a subsidy. Parents could also negotiate for scholarship slots, fundraise for financial aide and tuition remission, and families received discounts for siblings. Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town were both 80% subsidized. Children's Town was also part of a school district partnership program called Pre-K Counts and received additional funding, allowing two unemployed mothers to enroll their children at no cost.

Another lesson that I learned was that from a numbers perspective, there are great differences in the distributions of STAR rated centers. Specifically, I became concerned with the disparity between the number of 1 and 2 versus 3 and 4 STAR centers. According to the Keystone STARS, there were 683 total STAR rated centers in the city when the study began. Of those, 540 had one or two STARS, while only 143 had three or four, a difference of 397 centers. The most notable shortage was of four STAR centers; there were 62 total. When I potential four STAR sites, only 41 of the 62 accepted CCIS subsidies and most had lengthy waiting lists for smaller numbers of subsidized slots. (Keystone Stars, 2013) The distribution of STAR ratings speaks to a systematic lack of access to "high quality" urban center-based care for families with limited funding or those who are dependent on subsidized childcare.

From a researcher's perspective, the childcare system in the city where this study was conducted appears highly fractured and entirely decentralized, making it both difficult to access and complicated to study. Further, this study only included three STAR rated centers and yet, the purpose, management, funding streams, and cost of each site were as different as the number of STARS they had earned. To further highlight the nuances of this complex system, this discussion next describes each of the centers individually, focusing on physical descriptions, background and history, site and classroom resources, atmosphere and environment, and characteristics of the maternal primary caregivers who participated in the study.

The Christian School

I first approached The Christian School to participate in this study through a colleague who at the time ran a reading outreach program that worked in local early childhood programs. She contacted the school's principal on my behalf and after receiving the principal's permission I accompanied my contact to meet the teacher I would coordinate with. Per the principal's request, I focused my observation and parent recruitment efforts in one of their two four-year old classrooms, which gave me access to 18 families. Over the course of 5 different days and at various times of the day, I spent a little over 15 hours observing in Mrs. Wild's classroom. To give context to The Christian School, I describe its background and give a brief history. Then, I describe aspects of quality I captured using my adopted version of the ECERS and Arnett quality rating tools, which focuses generally on site and classroom resources, the classroom environment, interactions, and parental involvement. I also include profiles of the maternal primary caregivers I interviewed at The Christian School.

Background and History

  The Christian School is a one STAR learning center housed in a K-8 school. Located north of the city's center, the school building is located in a high poverty neighborhood. The school is run by a religiously affiliated non-profit whose primary objective is to serve the needs of low-income families. The school itself has been operational for the last twenty years. However, its two early childhood classrooms were added only recently. Situated on a quiet, shaded side street, The Christian School is tucked behind an expansive private all-male Christian high school with which it is not directly affiliated. Its building is easily accessible by turning off of a busy city road lined with cars, trolleys, storefronts, and a hospital. The school building itself faces away from the noise and towards a long, city block of three-story brick row homes. Approaching the main entrance, cars and SUVs of all makes, models, and colors line both sides of these streets, as do a series of "School Zone" signs. The building is tall, five stories high, but thin. All of the windows in the building have iron bars on them. In the middle of the block, a small, navy blue sign with the school's emblem hangs outward over the building's main entrance.

  Though labeled an early childhood learning center and listed under the STARS as center-based care, my observations indicate that the program operates like a Pre-K program and has no intention of climbing the STARS ladder. The program is open only to children who have turned four years old before September 1,st unlike daycare centers that typically accept infants and toddlers. In addition, though there are large signs that read "Early Learning Center" over the doors of both its early childhood classrooms, I noted that administrators, teachers, parents, and students collectively refer to the program

as "Pre-K." Like the rest of the school, the early childhood classrooms follow a

traditional ten- month academic school year, though the school offers a summer camp

option. The school day for all ages lasts from 7:45 AM until 3:10 PM, but parents can

also utilize the before and after care options, extending the day from 7:00 AM until 6:00

PM. Children are also required to wear a version of the school's uniform, specifically

black shoes and a navy blue sweat-suit.

Between its two early childhood classrooms, The Christian School accepts 36

children total each academic school year with 18 children assigned to each classroom.

Classrooms have one lead teacher as well as an assistant teacher. I only had access to one

of the two early childhood classrooms, Mrs. Wild's classroom, per the principal's terms.

In terms of demographics, I observed the early childhood program's total population to

be 98% African American, though the school lists its total population at 100% African

American. Mrs. Wild's classroom was 100% African American. Of the room's 18

children, 11 were boys and 7 were girls. Because the early childhood program does not

accept childcare subsidies, socioeconomic status was difficult to estimate. However,

according to the school's self-reported demographic information, which is publicly

available on the school website, over seventy percent of its children qualify for free or

reduced lunch. In terms of cost, the school's website also conveys that in accordance with

its non-profit mission, families are never turned away for lack of financial resources. In

conversations with the principal and Mrs. Wild, it was reiterated that all families were

eligible for financial aid in the forms of donations, scholarships, and fundraising for

tuition remission to incur tuition cost. Discounts are also available for families with

multiple children. Though the early childhood program did not accept CCIS or welfare

subsidies, the price breakdown per week for this program at the time of study was approximately 50 dollars, which is comparable to a CCIS co-pay. Finally, as a religiously affiliated school, I observed religious practices, including morning prayer and prayer before meals, on multiple occasions. Per the school's website, however, only 8% of its students practice the religion.

Site and Classroom Resources

Due to its affiliation with a K-8 school, the early childhood program at The Christian School has access to a number of site-specific resources. The first significant resource is space, both indoor and outdoor. With five stories, at least 15 feet high ceilings, 15 feet wide corridors, an elevator, and a rooftop play area the size of a football field, this site is not lacking in space. In my field notes, I noted Mrs. Wild's class taking full advantage of the building's vast space, from riding the elevator as a class to Mr. Rock's music room on the fourth floor to spending an afternoon outside alternating between running laps around the roof's turf field and crawling over the massive jungle gym in its corner. In my observations, the jungle gym and track were the only gross motor equipment available. I did not observe the use of bikes, balls, or other equipment on the roof.

Mrs. Wild's classroom itself is relatively spacious, though it's somewhat awkward in shape and has a set up more typical of an elementary school classroom than an early childhood classroom. The main area of the room is carpeted, a pattern of gray and blue checkers. The walls are painted a pale yellow with baby blue trim, which is an extension from the hallway. On the walls to the left of the entrance there is a bulletin board covered in baby blue butcher paper with Christmas lights as well as a caterpillar

display of Eric Carle books displaying children's artwork and dictation. Under the bulletin board to the left, children's cubbies line the wall. Above the board are a series of birthday posters, listed by month.

An oddly placed mini wall to the right has children's artwork with dictation covering it, labeled as an Eric Carle caterpillar display. This odd right side wall stops after about 12 feet and opens up to the main part of the classroom; it also has two small windows through which you can see into almost around the corner into the children's table space. On multiple occasions, Mrs. Wild complains it is difficult to see what children by the entrance are doing when she is working at the tables. A low beam and a lower ceiling separate the main part of the classroom from a smaller, tiled table section of the room. This area has 3 sets of long child-sized tables with 4 to 5 multi colored chairs parked around them. The low ceilings have exposed lights and pipes, but continue in the pale yellow paint color.

With the two main areas of the classroom either having open carpet space or children's sized tables and chairs, it seems every inch of the walls are lined with the remaining furniture, including art drying racks and easels, cubbies, both teachers desks and shelves upon shelves of either books or supplies. In my field notes, I note that most shelves house an abundance of supplies ranging from bins of string, pencil sharpeners, and art supplies like magic markers, bins of crayons, scissors, and glue, to bins of butcher paper construction paper, lined strips of paper, toilet paper rolls and two bins with miscellaneous items. Next to one bookshelf are two ancient looking computers. Next to the computers is a small shelf of books with curriculum boxes; the one at the top appears to be a kindergarten reading box.

During my observations, I witnessed four instances in which children chose centers for free play. I noted children having access to fine motor/writing, art, dramatic play/housekeeping, blocks, and books/literacy-based centers. I did not observe a sand/water table or a nature/science center, though there was a magnet center. In terms of music and technology, the class attended both music and computer class weekly and listened to music over the classroom's SmartBoard. I did not observe children using the classroom computers at any time. I also did not observe the class engaging in math activities or see children choosing a math center, though a counting chart up to 100 and a calendar were displayed.

In terms of personal care, all children arrived and departed within minutes of each other. All students, Pre-K-8, arrive through the school's main entrance, though the Pre-K and K classrooms dismiss through a back entrance that leads to a side street. The class is led to their pick-up location by a teacher; children who take vans to afterschool care, participate in the after school program, or have Reading Group on Tuesdays and Thursdays have different dismissal procedures. The school is secure in that it is accessible only by being buzzed into the main office. However, the fact that the facility is so large and four year olds are in close proximity students in middle school could be viewed as a safety concern.

The school day officially begins with morning announcements, a prayer, and a school cheer. The school participates in a food program and children indicate at arrival if they are participating that day. Cold breakfast is served around 9:00 AM, and I observe children eating cereal with juice and milk. Children also have a hot lunch, like pizza with chocolate milk, around 12:00 PM, and a snack after nap. All meals are delivered to and

eaten in the classroom. The whole school participates in a healthy food program, aimed at exposing kids to new fruits and vegetables three times a week. In a field note, I observed Mrs. Wild introducing raw asparagus during breakfast, saying "Remember what we heard on announcements, the healthy snack today is asparagus… Let's be good to our bodies and give the asparagus a try."

The classroom itself is equipped with two private bathrooms with child-size toilets. A sink with a small step stool sits outside of the bathrooms. Mrs. Wild or Mrs. Wagner typical trade off on bathroom duty, unless they are alone in the room. Children are sent to use the bathroom and wash hands before breakfast, before leaving the classroom for specials or the roof, prior to eating lunch, and between nap and snack. Children are also permitted to raise their hands and request to use the bathroom at any time during the day. Nap lasts from 12:30 to 2:00 PM, about an hour and a half, though in my field notes I note Mrs. Wild saying, "Sometimes it's more if necessary…especially the first day back from vacation." Children sleep on "nappers" rather then beds. Nappers look like child-sized sleeping bags and every child has their own stored in their cubby. Most children sleep in rows on the carpet, though a handful sleep away from the class on either the tile floor or by the room's entrance.

With regard to teacher background and education, Mrs. Wild led the classroom I observed in and her assistant was Mrs. Wagner. Mrs. Wild is a white woman in her thirties. She has a daughter the same age as the students and refers to her so often the class knows her by name. Her assistant, Mrs. Wagner, is an older Black woman possibly in her mid fifties. In the second classroom, the reverse was true as the lead teacher is white woman in her fifties with an assistant in her thirties who is Black. Both of the lead

teachers earned master's degrees while teaching, though neither is state certified in early childhood education. In a field note taken during an observation, I noted Mrs. Wild saying, "I did my master's with her. It's awesome, The Christian School sends teachers to get Master's for free…and I did it." When I asked Mrs. Wild what the education level of both assistants might be, she responded she was under the impression that both had high school diplomas and gained most of their experience having worked at the school for decades. Mrs. Wild had been teaching for thirteen years. She began as a kindergarten teacher in a different school, before teaching second grade for a year and Pre-K for six years at The Christian School. Mrs. Wagner had been an assistant at the school since it opened.

The Christian School's early childhood program is unique in a number of ways, the most obvious being that it is provides a religious-based education. Specifically, children pray and regularly attend church services. School personnel, including the principal, are religious persons, while crosses and statues of religious figures can be found throughout the building. Unlike most centers, which operate under directors or boards of directors, this site is unique in that the school's principal is immediately in charge of the early childhood program. She, however, seems to have a hands-off approach and the Pre-K teachers have significant latitude in their planning and orchestration of daily activities. Just like the K- 8 grades, the Pre-K classrooms get to attend daily "special" classes, including art, music, gym, or computers, led by a different teacher specialist. In my observations, I attended two music classes and an art class on the building's fifth floor.

The school is also unique in that it offers on-site special needs and behavior counseling services. The following is an excerpt from a field note taken when a child with an IEP was taken out of classroom:

> A middle age, smartly dressed white woman named Ms. O'Brien comes to collect a child who has academic and behavioral issues and who is in the referral process… After a half hour, Mrs. O'Brien returns with the boy she took and he shows Mrs. Wild his picture. Mrs. Wild says, "Isn't he a fabulous artist?" Mrs. O'Brien says, "He sure is, we had a great time, thank you!"

I further observed that there is also a dean for any student experiencing discipline problems, including those in Pre-K. Another unique resources for children at The Christian School is the opportunity to participate in AmeriCorp's Jumpstart Program, an after school reading initiative that brings highly trained local college students into centers two days a week. I observed up to six volunteers joining the class as early as 12:00 PM to assist with lunch, nap, snack, and afternoon activities before leading the reading program after school hours. Jumpstart, however, was not open to all students, only the "middle of the road readers, neither highest or lowest" according to Mrs. Wild.

Finally, in terms of financial resources, The Christian School appears to have many donors. I observed that the walls of the building itself are lined with plaques bearing the names of funders and donors. Over the doors of the early childhood classrooms, signs indicate persons whom the classrooms have been named for. Both early childhood classrooms also have SmartBoards that were donated and also bear plaques. During observations, I heard the phrase, "We have visitors in the building" quite often as well. According to Mrs. Wild, "visitors" was the word the school used to indicate that donors were visiting. I noted during four of my five visits that Mrs. Wild was alerted via a phone call to "visitors" walking around the school.

Classroom Environment

My observations of the classroom environment focused on two specific environs: the teaching and learning environment and interactions. In terms of the teaching and learning environment, I was specifically interested in how children spent their time, the attention that was given individually to language, literacy and books, and math, and how students with disabilities were accommodated. On paper, the schedule for the early childhood program looked something like the following:

7:45 AM	Arrival
7:45 AM- 8:15 AM	Individual desk work
8:15 AM- 9:00 AM	Morning Meeting
9:00 AM- 9:30 AM	Breakfast
9:30 AM- 10:00 AM	Story/Activity
10:00 AM- 11:00 AM	Small group work/Centers
11:00 AM- 11:45 AM	Roof (Outdoor time, weather permitting)
12:00 PM- 12:30 PM	Lunch
12:30 PM- 2:00 PM	Nap
2:00 PM- 2:15 PM	Snack
2:15 PM- 3:05 PM	Review/Centers
3:10 PM	Dismissal

I observed, however, that the schedule seemed to change daily to account for the class's specials, which ranged from art at 8:15 in the morning to music class that took the 11:00 AM roof-time spot. As an observer, I found it difficult to get a grasp on the daily schedule because it not only changed daily, but Mrs. Wild seemed to have great latitude in determining the day's activities and schedule. For example, on the day I accompanied the class to art first thing in the morning, morning meeting was pushed back until after breakfast and it was combined with a brief story before kids dispersed into their centers. On another day when the children were given an extended naptime, the class had snack then went home and afternoon centers were skipped altogether.

In my observations, children seemed to spend about half of their learning time participating in whole group instruction, joining in activities like morning meeting, story time, and music class, while they seemed to spend the other half in centers. Whole group instruction was always led by an enthusiastic Mrs. Wild and appeared highly interactive and fun. I noted, however, that the flow of instruction was often interrupted due to disruption or redirection. I believe this split in time and the need to constantly redirect during whole group instruction reflects the fact that unlike most centers that abide to a strict 1-10 teacher-child ratio for four year olds, The Christian School's program did not. For some portion of every observation, one of the teachers was alone. In multiple instances Mrs. Wagner was pulled from the classroom to cover or sub in another room. Consequently, during whole group instruction Mrs. Wild sat in her maroon chair while the kids sat in a circle on the rug by themselves. In my field notes, I captured the following example of disruption during story time:

> I notice that about 5 kids have lost interest in the story, some are making faces, one has his face buried in the carpet. When the page changes through, they seem to reengage, the one with his face in the carpet shoots his hands up. Mrs. Wild stops the story because a child keeps shouting out. She says, "I'm so happy your excited and you have a lot to say, but you're interrupting so please have a seat." He sits down and watches, after a few moments he raises his hand. On the last page, where together they read "Spring is here," the kids begin to clap. The same child shouts out again saying "My dad makes me spell everything!" Meanwhile the kids are starting to get restless and play so MW says, "Ok take 5. Lets put on our thinking caps and review the rules of Pre-K at The Christian School."

Even when Mrs. Wagner was present, she often sat at her desk. I observed her playing games on her phone on multiple occasions she sat next to children in the time-out chair. Her duties seemed to focus on the logistics, like food, the bathroom, and taking the class to their specials and roof time. Mrs. Wild's duties appeared to focus on instruction.

In terms of specific instruction, Mrs. Wild informed me that she used the Archdiocesan curriculum as her teaching guide. I had difficulty, however, deciphering what, if any, theme the class was learning about during my observation period. It appeared they were learning a combination of Spring and Easter themes, but I didn't see formal lesson plans and lesson planning was never mentioned. It seemed as though Mrs. Wild had significant latitude in deciding day-to-day what stories would be read and what activities would be done. She also decided which centers would be open, though children were able to choose where they would play.

Language and communication in Mrs. Wild's room included a mixed approach of fun and formality. Mrs. Wild often used catchy sayings or rhymes like "peanut butter, jelly everybody stand up and spread out" or "ready spaghetti" during transitions, which the children seemed to respond well to. She also spoke to and exposed the class to mature language and concepts. In a field note captured as she read *The Country Bunny* aloud, I noted:

> Mrs. Wild stops the story and asks for a prediction at the part of the story where the bunnies all run away from their mother. She asks one student what his mom would do if he ran away and he laughs. When another child says the mother "teached them" in response to the question "How would the mother be able to leave the kids," Mrs. Wild nods then restates the girl's statement except using "taught" instead. Mrs. Wild continues reading before pausing again a few moments later to ask the class what "merry" means.

Mrs. Wagner's approach to communicating with the class was more informal and discipline-focused, though it is important to point out that she most often led or directed the class in logistical, rather than learning-based activities.

Though math was incorporated into the classroom through counting, there was a very clear emphasis in this classroom on literacy and books. Evidence of exposure to

math included the calendar hanging on the wall, a numbers chart, and occasional prompts

like "How many years does it take an apple tree to grow apples?" or "There are 21

bunnies in the story, let's count to 21 using our numbers chart." The exposure to literacy,

on the other hand, was overwhelming. In my observations, I noted Mrs. Wild prompting

students on parts of a book, including the spine, reading left to right, and periods ending

sentences. I also observed literacy-based lessons on the difference between facts and

opinions, fiction and non-fiction, making predictions, identification of authors,

illustrators, and main characters, as well as the identification of sequence, plot, characters

and setting. In one field note, I observed Mrs. Wild prompting children during a

transition:

> Mrs. Wild says, "I'll tell them the password, ok lets see…whose ready? So far
> we've had the passwords, "setting" and "character," and now we are going to
> have "sequence." Its not the shiny stuff on mommy's sweater, it's the order. If I
> make a sandwich, there is a sequence…" Mrs. Wild walks through the steps of
> making a sandwich from pulling out the bread to eating it. She points to the very
> hungry caterpillar display and says, "Lets remember the sequence together." She
> simultaneously writes the words sequence on a poster by the door, with plot
> character and setting.

In addition to exposure, the class did both whole group and individual center-based

literacy and writing activities. In my observations, I noted Mrs. Wild using the

SmartBoard to prompt the class to identify upper and lower case letters, "Reading the

room with word wands" was also offered as a center. I also noted that children had

journals stored in the classroom and access to clipboards and pencils in a writing-based

center.

During my observation period and in conversation with Mrs. Wild, I noted two

students in the class had IEP-designated special needs. The first had a diagnosis of

cognitive delays and behavioral challenges. This child and his family were in the re-

referral process to update the child's IEP from his prior childcare setting. Despite the

site's special needs and behavioral counseling services, I did not observe

accommodations or differentiation practices in the classroom. I did observe the child

being taken from the classroom for one-on-one time with Mrs. O'Brien. One other

student had a speech-related IEP. I did not observe any instances in which this child

received differentiated instruction or was taken from the classroom.

Interactions

Learning interactions in Mrs. Wild's class occurred frequently, at times as part of

instruction and at other times through teachable moments. During whole group

instruction, Mrs. Wild seemed to balance teacher and child-centered approaches to

learning. She posed questions constantly and encouraged the children to ask relevant

questions. When children answered correctly, remembered something she had taught, or

posed a particularly thoughtful question, she used praise by saying, "Kiss your brain" or

"You get a cheer." In individual, center-based, and small group settings, Mrs. Wild often

bounced around, especially when she was alone with the class. Though I observed her

continuing to prompt children, she assumed more of a management role during these

times. When Mrs. Wagner and the Jumpstart volunteers were in the classroom during

these types of instruction periods, I observed that they often were the ones sitting with the

children. Because the time-out chair was next to Mrs. Wagner's desk, if there was a child

in time-out, she frequently worked with him or her on a mini-project.

In more informal learning settings, like the hallway, Mrs. Wild often took

advantage of teachable moments. In my field notes, I noted, "In the hallway after leaving

music, Mrs. Wild stops the class outside of the school's art room. I hear her talk about the

Picasso pictures hung up on display. She asks kids about types of art and techniques." She also encouraged children to share with the class beyond the morning meeting or story times. For example, I observed her stopping the class during transition periods so children could share their work or so the class could "hear comments." When she called for certain centers to clean up, she occasionally spelled out the name of the center, saying, "If your necklace says b-l-o-c-k-s, blocks you need to clean up." I did not observe instances in which Mrs. Wagner engaged in these types of interactions. In leading the class through the hallways, she focused on getting the class where they needed to be as quickly as possible and with minimal behavioral issues.

In my observations, both Mrs. Wild and Mrs. Wagner appeared to be well liked by the class, frequently receiving gestures like hugs and pictures that they could take home. The ways in which they interacted with children were quite different though. Mrs. Wild was direct, but also silly and fun. She often bent down to address children on their level and I did not observe her raising her voice above a conversational tone, even when she appeared visibly frustrated. She often let children problem-solve on their own or by talking to their peers. On the other hand, Mrs. Wagner had a more hands-on, tough-love approach. When there was an issue between students, Mrs. Wagner got to the bottom of it; if there was an untied shoelace or a cereal box that needed opening, Mrs. Wagner took care of it. Though I did not observe her teaching at any time, she often led or directed the class in the more logistical activities. Alone, she spoke directly and loudly, yelling and raising her voice often to get the class's attention. Inside the classroom, she was loud, but also showed affection when giving individual children one-on-one attention.

Though their approaches to interactions were different, the working relationship between Mrs. Wild and Mrs. Wagner appeared solid. It was evident they had worked together in years past and that they cared for one another on a personal level. For example, in one observation Mrs. Wagner was very upset about a personal issue. Mrs. Wild comforted her saying, "It will work out." In an instance when Mrs. Wild stubbed her toe and was in visible pain, Mrs. Wagner expressed her concern making sure she was fine. On occasion, however, the difference between their hands-off and hands-on approaches created tension. In a field note, I observed:

> The class marches to meet Mrs. Wagner in the hallway. She will lead them up to music. There is a large pack of visitors, maybe 8 people, in the hallway with the principal. Passing the visitors, all the kids want to shake hands, Mrs. Wagner leads the line and Mrs. Wild is at the end of it. After passing the visitors, which takes a few minutes because they seem enthralled with the little ones, Mrs. Wagner points to two kids and says, "You were not the ambassadors, you should not have stopped." Mrs. Wild responds tersely "But they need to be gracious."

In a later conversation, Mrs. Wild addressed the tension saying that she tries to focus on responsibility and Mrs. Wagner focuses primarily on obedience and ends up "just doing things for the kids instead."

While children were never in danger or immediate harm, both supervision and discipline were issues in Mrs. Wild's classroom. I believe these issues were related in part to the fact that the school did not abide by the 10-1 child-teacher ratio and that Mrs. Wagner did not participate in the learning-based activities. In terms of supervision, I observed both Mrs. Wild and Mrs. Wagner experiencing difficulties, especially during transition times and times they were alone with all of the children. Pushing and shoving in line and fights while riding the elevator were frequent occurrences, as were poking one another and instigating fights when the teachers' backs were turned. Another issue was

related to the way the classroom itself was built. Though the mini-wall by the entrance had two windows, when either teacher was in the main part of the classroom, she could not see what was happening behind that wall. In one instance, I observed two boys hitting each other with their "word wands," which were toy magic wands given to children so they could point out letters around the room, for most of center time before either of the teachers caught on and Mrs. Wild redirected them. On two occasions, Mrs. Wild lamented, "I hate this wall, I wish they would tear it down."

A good deal of time in Mrs. Wild's room was spent on discipline and behavior management. The strategies to promote positive behaviors for individual students included the star chart and the "kiss your brain book." The class as a whole had a marble jar so that when a compliment was received from other teachers or staff, a marble was added to the jar. In my observations, Mrs. Wild was consistent in applying these strategies, though I did not observe Mrs. Wagner using them. For individual punishment, the class had a time-out chair situated next to Mrs. Wagner's desk. I observed a number of different children getting sent to the time-out chair by both teachers for a variety of reasons. In my observations, the most frequent visitors included a boy who rolled his eyes at both teachers constantly, a girl who talked and called out often, and the child with the IEP for behavior. Children spent varying amounts of time in time-out, from a minute or two to twenty minutes. I could not get a clear understanding of how long time-outs lasted or were supposed to last. Outdoor playtime was also taken away as punishment. I observed Mrs. Wagner keeping 10 kids on the wall for 20 minutes of the class's roof time before she sending them to play. She did not let the child with an IEP for behavioral issues play at all. Mrs. Wild also took outdoor playtime away from children, but because

she did not usually accompany the class to the roof, it was up to Mrs. Wagner to enforce the punishment.

Maternal Primary Caregivers: Parental Involvement and Profiles

From The Christian School, I interviewed eight mothers and one grandmother for this study. This section of the chapter begins by presenting evidence of parental involvement at the school. The discussion then moves to descriptions of interactions between parents and staff. Finally, the nine women from The Christian School who shared their experiences with childcare are introduced.

In Mrs. Wild's class, I observed varying levels of parental involvement and many types of interactions. In conversation with Mrs. Wild and while recruiting parents, she often lamented that though she prided herself on establishing strong relationships with parents, this was a difficult class. Mrs. Wild declared parent participation to be "all or nothing," meaning that the same set parents volunteered all the time, while the remaining parents never volunteered. When she asked parents to donate supplies or sell cheesecakes for a tuition discount, she felt it was always the same two or three moms who participated. Getting other parents to join was "like pulling teeth," she said. In my classroom observation time, aside from the nine women who agreed to interviews, I did not witness any direct parental involvement. The Pre-K graduation, however, was approaching and I observed two or three mothers taking time on the side walk during pick up or coming into the classroom at the end of the day to talk to Mrs. Wild about its details.

More so than involvement, I observed countless teacher-parent interactions. As a formality, children took home a "communication folder" daily that parents were required

to sign and send back. More informally though, I observed that the primary form of communication was via text message and usually initiated by Mrs. Wild. In one instance, a child complained his stomach hurt during art class and Mrs. Wild had him stand next to her and watch as she texted his mom. In another, a child was hit in the mouth accidentally during a dance party at the end of a school day. After tending to the boy with gloves and an ice pack, Mrs. Wild completed an incident report and called the mom twice until the mother texted her back. On the sidewalk each day, Mrs. Wild accompanied her class to pick-up where she also interacted with parents, grandparents, family members, and siblings. On average, however, only about a quarter to half of the class was picked up this way. The remaining children rode on vans to after care programs or attended the after school program and Jumpstart.

Over the course of two and a half weeks, I interviewed nine women, eight mothers and one grandmother, who had enrolled their children or grandchild at The Christian School. This group of women included Barbara, Vi, Anessa, Drea, Jule, Tameka, Vera, Faith, and Denise. (See Table 4.1) In terms of demographics, all of the women were Black. Vi, who was in her sixties, was the only grandmother in the study. Barbara, Tameka, Vera, and Denise were in their late thirties or early forties; Anessa and Faith were in their late twenties, while Drea and Jule were teen moms now in their early twenties. Four mothers, Barbara, Anessa, Vera, and Denise, had daughters and the remaining women, Vi, Drea, Jule, Tameka, and Faith had sons/grandsons enrolled at The Christian School. The women lived all over the city, but the majority resided within ten minutes of the school. All of the women were working at the time of the interview except for Vi who was retired and caring for her grandchildren. Barbara worked as a mechanic,

Drea worked part-time in the school's after-care program, Jule in a hair salon, Anessa in

social work, Tameka and Vera in security, and Faith and Denise in hospitals. From my

conversations, I found out that both Vi and Drea had past experience working in the

child-care field.

Table 4.1
Demographic Information for Maternal Primary Caregivers of The Christian School

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Age	#Children/ Grandchildren	Marital Status	Occupation/ Employment Status
Anessa	Black	25-30	1	Single	Office work
Barb	Black	40-45	2	Single	Mechanic
Denise	Black	35-40	4	Single	Medical
Drea	Black	20-25	2	Single	Education (PT*)
Faith	Black	25-30	1	Engaged	Medical
Jule	Black	20-25	2	Single	Hair stylist
Tameka	Black	35-40	2	Married	Security
Vera	Black	40-45	4	Single	Security
Vi	Black	60+	2	Single	None (retired)

*PT indicates part-time

Barbara, Vi, Anessa, Drea, Jule, Vera, and Denise were single moms, while

Tameka was married and Faith was engaged to her son's father. All of the women except

for Anessa and Faith had or cared for multiple children. In addition, the four older

mothers, Barbara, Tameka, Vera, and Denise, had between two and four children each

and their four year olds were their youngest by ten years on average. All of these women,

plus grandmom Vi and Drea, had long standing relationships with the school because

older siblings had attended or were enrolled in older grades. In Drea's case, she did not

previously enroll an older sibling, but she had lived across the street as a child and had

worked in the lunchroom on and off since she was about 12 years old. Anessa, Jule, and

Faith had new relationships with the school. All of the children, except Anessa's

daughter, began attending the school the previous September. Anessa's daughter had

actually attended a pre-k program at a school whose building got condemned by the city over the winter break. Anessa was able to enroll her daughter as a special case under unique circumstances in January.

All of the women had removed their children from a prior childcare setting in order to enroll them at The Christian School as four year-olds. Eight children had attended other center-based care programs, while Vi's daughter came from a home/family care setting. Jule's son and Denise's daughter both received special needs services and had IEPs. Jule's son had cognitive delays and behavioral challenges, while Denise's daughter received services for speech. According to the women, all of the children would be back the next year for kindergarten except for Jule's son whose challenges required a more accommodating setting. Finally, Barbara, Vi, Jule, Tameka, Vera, and Denise picked their child up at the 3:10 PM dismissal, while Anessa's daughter, Drea's son, and Faith's son attended after care program at the school.

Celebrate Kids Academy

I first approached the owner and CEO of Celebrate Kids Academy, Mr. Marshall, and his niece and the center's director Ms. Kiera via email. After meeting with Mr. Marshall and Ms. Kiera once and Mr. Marshall again to discuss the details of the study and the site's participation requirements, I secured access for observations and interviews. With one young three year-old classroom and two three to five year-old "suites" housed in the center, I was given access to approximately 60 families. Over the course of 4 different days, including one full day, I spent over 15 hours observing primarily in Suites 1 and 2, which were located in one large room on the building's second floor. In this section, I provide a description of Celebrate Kids Academy's

background and a brief history and I describe aspects of quality that were captured using my adopted version of the ECERS and Arnett quality rating tool. Descriptions of quality focus on site and classroom resources, the classroom environment, interactions, and parental involvement. Along with evidence of parental involvement, I also include profiles of the fifteen maternal primary caregivers I interviewed from this center.

Background and History

Celebrate Kids Academy is a two STAR privately owned childcare facility that is housed in a mid-block storefront. Located in one of the city's oldest, but poorest neighborhoods north east of downtown, the two-story center has been open for three years. According to Mr. Marshall, the center's population has grown significantly in the last year and a half, coinciding with the site's second floor expansion. The Celebrate Kids Academy building sits just half a block off of two major metropolitan cross streets, the north-south street runs from the heart of the city's poorest neighborhoods to one of its most affluent suburbs, while the west-east street runs from the city center to the northeast.

The bustling cobblestone street housing the mid-block storefront is lined with businesses, including a cell phone store, a clothing store, a corner store, and a small supermarket. The window fronts are lined with advertisements and each store has an awning. The dark maroon awning covering Celebrate Kids Academy has its name and phone number clearly marked in bright yellow script. The building itself is four stories, though bright decorations are only visible on the first two floors. The building's first floor has two sets of large glass windows with the center's main entrance sitting in between. The window on the right looks into a toddler classroom, while the window on the left looks into an open-air office. The main entrance's heavy glass door leads to a

small enclave with a ledge of binders for signing-in on the right and a glass take-out window looking into the office on the right. To the right of the glass door leading directly into the center, there is a small black keypad used by staff and parents to access the building.

A two STAR center during the time of the study, Mr. Marshall was in the process of preparing the program to move up to three STARS. As CEO and owner, Mr. Marshall is the face of the center, though he mostly takes care of the finances from his office on the second floor. His niece, Ms. Kiera, was the director of another center before Mr. Marshall recruited her to run his center. She primarily oversees day-to-day activities like managing the teachers and collecting lesson plans. As a privately-owned and operated center, Mr. Marshall's business has competition in every direction in this particular neighborhood. In my observations, I counted at least 6 childcare centers in the two-block radius surrounding Celebrate Kids Academy, including a larger, more expansive center located directly behind it. According to Mr. Marshall, participating in the STARS program is key to staying competitive; his business plan involves this center getting to four STARS and expanding to open additional centers in the area.

Celebrate Kids Academy is a daycare center, open to children 4 weeks to 5 years-old and operating year round with extended hours. The center also has a before and after school program available for school-age students who attend local schools, though transportation is not provided. The center opens daily at 6:30 AM and closes promptly at 6:00 PM. Parents who are late picking up their children are charged additional fees and children are not admitted after 10:00 AM, though I observed the rule being loosely enforced depending upon ratios. The program closes only for major holidays.

The building's first floor houses two fully enclosed infant rooms, as well as five toddler and one young three year-old classrooms. These classrooms are mostly open, but guarded by four-foot walls and gates. There are administrative spaces with desks at both the floor's front and back entrances. The second floor, accessible via a narrow staircase at the front of the building, has one large classroom space divided by cubbies for Suites 1 and 2. Suite 1 holds up to 30 four and five year-old children and has three teachers, Ms. Frederick, Ms. Harrison, and Ms. Clarkson. When I began my observations, Suite 2 also held up to 30 children, all three year-olds with three teachers, Ms. Brody, Ms. John, and Ms. Michaels. However, Ms. Brody quit after my first observation and her kids were divided up, with most going back downstairs to Mr. Eli's young three year-old classroom. In addition to Mr. Marshall, Ms. Kiera, and the teaching staff, the center employs two women who work in the front office and a male janitor. Mr. Marshall requires that the teaching staff wear a uniform of khaki pants and the center's maroon-color collared shirt. Children also can purchase school uniforms to wear, though I observed only about 1/4 of children on average dressed in this way.

The center's exact enrollment remains unknown; it changed almost daily as new families enrolled or existing ones were cut off by CCIS. By my estimates, which I verified with Mr. Marshall, Suite 1 was at capacity with 30 children and the combination of Suite 2 and Mr. Eli's room was over its 28-child capacity after Ms. Brody's departure. However, according to Mr. Marshall enough children were absent each day and the center had a designated floater to maintain the 10:1 child-teacher ratios upstairs and the 8:1 young three year-old ratio downstairs. In terms of demographics, I observed the early childhood program's total population for three to five year-olds to be 99% African

American. Across the center, there was an even distribution of boys and girls, though

some Suites and teachers had more of one than the other. In terms of cost, 80% of the

center's population received CCIS subsidies for childcare, though co-pays ranged

according to families' incomes. Co-pays were due weekly and parents could pay with

cash or a debit card. If parents could not make a payment or if they were dropped by

CCIS and could not afford the $165 per week private-pay price tag, their children were

not permitted to attend.

Site and Classroom Resources

Though situated in the middle of a crowded city block, Celebrate Kids Academy

is expansive, about double the width of the other stores on the block. The center's indoor

and outdoor spaces cover only half of the building's 18,000 total square feet and

according to Mr. Marshall, "There is plenty of room to continue to grow." The four-story

building is oddly "L" shaped, which allows for an outdoor space, small parking area, and

additional entrance in the back. A massive parking lot also sits between the center's back

area and its neighboring buildings. The outdoor 20 x 10 rectangular yard is fenced in.

Covered in light colored wood chips, there are two small jungle gyms situated in the

space, one that appears toddler-sized and the other for bigger children. During my tour of

the space, Mr. Marshall mentioned that he had to buy the back of the building next door

to create this space. And while he purchased one of the jungle gyms, the second one was

donated and built by a local volunteer group. Gross motor equipment, like small tricycles,

bags of various shaped balls, and multi-child strollers for infants, were housed just inside

the building's back entrance right off of the playground. While I observed children

playing on the larger jungle gym, I did not observe them using any of the other available equipment.

I concentrated my observation time and recruitment efforts on the second floor of the center in Suites 1 and 2 because it housed the three through five year-old children. This expansive room has maroon carpets and pale pink walls; the space at the front of the room facing the street is referred to as Suite 1, while interior space is called Suite 2. At the top of the entrance stairwell, a line of 30 or so cubbies divides the room in half. If facing the street, there is a raised platform with books and a couch labeled "library" in the left corner. A desk with art supplies sits directly under the storefront windows, while a sectioned off dramatic play area and large locked cabinet sit on the right. In the center of this half of the space, there is a computer center with 5 flat screen computers with flashing screen savers.

Back on the left side of the room, there are two semi-circular tables separated by shelving. Labels for science and math centers indicate they are stored in the shelves closest to the library, while art and paint supplies are stored on the shelves closet to the cubbies. I notice a goldfish in the science center as well. Children's artwork related to cowboys and the desert is hung above the science and math center. A portable sink on the right side wall also separates these two spaces. According to Mr. Marshall, installing these portable sinks, one on each side, helps with hand-washing, sanitation, and the Keystone STARS. Back towards the center of the room sits an empty sand/water table. On the right side of the room sits another semi-circular table, partially in the block and truck area. The wall above the block center has "Inch Worm" posters, small worms with each child's picture on them are Velcro-ed to one of three posters.

Separating the space from the other half of the room are the children's cubbies, approximately 30 on each side, with a break in the middle that creates a small hallway between the two suites. Cubbies house kids' personal belongings, including jackets and blankets. The top of each cubby has a child's picture and name written on it. A stack of light blue cots rests against the cubbies in the left corner. The opposite side of the room, Suite 2, is almost identical, except without the raised platform in the library. And rather than a goldfish in the science center, this suite's pet is a guinea pig. I note that this side has a bin in the dramatic play area full of child-sized musical instruments. I did not observe any music or movement center in Suite 1. I also notice that above Ms. Kiera's desk next to the main door sits a bulletin board with a lesson plan, meal plan, a list of children's allergies, and a list of Islamic children's meditation times.

In terms of personal care, the arrival and departure of children seems sporadic. In my field notes, I observed parents dropping children off as late as 11:00 AM, though the center has a policy of not admitting children after 10:00 AM. According to the center's policy, all parents have a punch in code that grants them access to the building. They can either come through the main or back entrance and are supposed to sign their children in to a large binder upon arrival. While I often observed parents punching in, I did not frequently see parents signing children into the binder. Whether caretakers and children were greeted at drop off and pick up seemed to depend on the teacher, and some were friendlier than others. In my field notes, I also observed multiple instances in which parents had to actively look for their children because they were in a different Suite or classroom than where they normally were or than where they had been dropped off. The center's school day seemed to officially begin around 9:30 when children lined up to sing

the school song and recite the "Learner's Creed." During the first of my three observational mornings, however, this official start to the day never occurred and during my third observation this procedure took place around 10:00 AM.

The center offers breakfast, a hot lunch, and a snack provided by a food program. During my mealtime observations, I noted children being offered breakfast with milk and juice if they arrived while breakfast was still out. One day, I observed breakfast stayed out until after 9:00 AM, though I didn't see any signs of breakfast when I arrived at 8:00 AM on a different day. I observed a hot lunch of diced peaches, string cheese, and warm bagel with ham and cream cheese served with milk. For snack, I observed a "special treat" day snack with cake and milk. Though the center has a small cafeteria, children from Suites 1 and 2 eat in their classroom.

Using the portable sinks, I observed children washing hands upon arrival, after playing outside, and before lunch. There are two bathrooms on the second floor and both are located outside of the main classroom, past the cafeteria. In my observations, children spent a significant amount of time waiting for the bathroom. Teachers took their designated children to the bathroom shortly after arrival, before and after going outside, after lunch and before nap, after nap, and before going outside in the afternoon if that was on the schedule for the day. I further noted that if one child in their class had to use the bathroom, the teacher had to take all of her children with her to stay in ratio. Naptime lasts from 12:30 to 2:30 PM, about two hours. Children sleep on cots and are allowed to retrieve blankets and pillows from their cubbies during nap. The cots are spread all over both suites. I observed that children from Suite 2 nap in Suite 1's space and visa versa.

During my observation period, seven teachers taught in two suites and one classroom. Between my first and second observation, however, one of the teachers from Suite 2 quit, leaving five teachers upstairs and one downstairs. All of the teachers were African American and they ranged in age from their early twenties to early fifties. The five teachers upstairs were women, while Mr. Eli, the only male teacher on staff, taught in the young three year-old classroom downstairs. With regard to teacher background and education, three teachers held associate's degrees and three teachers had bachelor's degrees. Ms. Frederick, Ms. Harrison, and Mr. Eli held bachelor's degrees and Ms. Harrison was taking online classes to receive her master's degree. Ms. Clarkson, Ms. John, and Ms. Michaels held associate's degrees. None of the teachers at Celebrate Kids Academy was state certified. In a conversation with Mr. Marshall, he stated very honestly that he did not know teachers could be state certified in early childhood education and it was something he would look into. Ms. Frederick, Ms. Harrison, and Ms. Clarkson had been teaching and working in centers for over a decade, while Mr. Eli, Ms. John, and Ms. Michaels were newer to the field. Both Ms. Frederick and Ms. Harrison served as center directors prior to coming to teach at Celebrate Kids Academy.

Celebrate Kids Academy is a unique center in a number of ways. Though there are half a dozen centers in a two-block radius of its location, Celebrate Kids Academy is the only privately owned, medium sized center in the area. Consequently, as a medium-sized center, Celebrate Kids has more space and slots than most centers in the neighborhood, but unlike most large centers, it is not part of a franchise and does not feel impersonal. In my field notes, I observed Mr. Marshall and Ms. Kiera to both be very hands-on in problem-solving and addressing parents' concerns, placing great emphasis on

relationship building. After every observation, Mr. Marshall asked me to sit down with him to talk about ways to improve the center and what I thought that they could do better. I also noted that Ms. Kiera had previously been director of another center and prided herself on bringing a number of families over when Celebrate Kids Academy opened.

Similar to The Christian School, Celebrate Kids is also unique in that it Mr. Marshall is extremely proactive in referring special needs children for outside services. He tries, though not always successfully, very hard to secure resources for the center's special needs population, which not all center owners and directors are willing to do. In my observations, Mr. Marshall expressed great concern for children in need to resources and he expressed his frustration with the disconnect between centers, the two entities charged with administering services for this age group, and the School District. In one post-observation conversation, he lamented:

> "The center out back is probably the biggest next to us. Two children just came from there. The one boy is two and he's walking on his top toes… it's only been a week and we have been able to detect concerns. But why wasn't it addressed, you know? Most places (centers) don't it. And not only do they not, but then if there are issues, they put the children out. Then there's the disconnect with children who have IEP's from ChildLink because they go away when they turn three. There is no link from ChildLink to Elwyn, which is in charge of three to five year olds, no automatic referral. It's not like the issues go away."

To alleviate some of this frustration, Mr. Marshall employs his own wife, who holds a PhD in Psychology, for referrals, though in my observations and time at the center I never met her. He also recruits local doctoral students from child development and educational psychology programs to work with kids for free as they await services.

Additional unique offerings provided by the center include foreign language instruction and a central location. The center markets to parents that children are taught Mandarin Chinese and Spanish, an attribute many parents stated they were impressed by

and attracted to during the choice process. I did not, however, observe formal lessons in either language. My understanding of the situation is that Mr. Marshall recruited foreign-exchange college students each semester to teach, but was unsuccessful in getting them the semester of my observations. Celebrate Kids Academy is also unique in the convenience it offers to families. The location is central, especially for parents commuting into the city for work, the site is open year-round with extended hours, CCIS and subsidy are accepted, and parents with multiple children, including school age children, can keep siblings together because the center provides care for infants, toddlers, Pre-K age children, and has an afterschool program.

Classroom Environment

My observations of Suites 1 and 2 focused on the teaching and learning environment and interactions. In terms of the teaching and learning environment, I was specifically interested in how children spent their time, the attention that was given individually to language, literacy and books, and math, and the ways students with disabilities were accommodated. When I approached Ms. Frederick for a program schedule, she stated that she did not have one, but generally the day got started after 9:00 AM with a morning meeting. Children then did centers and the classes took turns going outside or for community walks before lunch at 11:30 AM, nap by 12:30 PM, and snack when children woke up at 2:30 PM. The afternoon consisted of additional center time and teachers could take their classes outside again before pick up time started around 3:00 PM. She also elaborated on the teacher schedule stating teachers were hired to work a shift. She was the last teacher to arrive and worked the closing schedule, from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM, while Ms. Clarkson opened and worked from 6:30 AM to 3:30 PM. All

teachers got a break during naptime and the schedule was structured so that all the teachers were present from 9:00 AM to 3:30 PM when the center was at maximum capacity for ratios.

Despite the hours of observations conducted, I still remain unclear about how children at Celebrate Kids Academy spend their time. Each day I spent observing was markedly different and the schedule seemed arbitrary except for lunch and nap. I did, however, note patterns I observed and I describe them here. The three ways children spent their time included whole group "rug time," transitioning from place to place, and in centers. Whole group "rug time" happened both formally, like during morning meeting, and informally.

I observed one morning when all of the teachers in Suite 1 assembled their classes on the rugs so Ms. Harrison could lead morning meeting. The meeting lasted over an hour, though halfway through a bell rang and the classes lined up to sign the school song and recite the "Learner's Creed" with the children in Suite 2. In the hour-long span, Ms. Harrison reviewed the calendar, including the day, month, year, and the weather through rote learning. Ms. Clarkson then took over and re-reviewed the day of the week and weather before having the children sing an alphabet song, count 1-10 in Spanish and Chinese, count by fives and tens up to 100, review the sign language words for "please, open, play, potty, yes, no, on, off, boy, and girl," and recite another alphabet song. The alphabet stopped at "Q" when Ms. Clarkson abruptly asked, "Who is President Obama." She continued with "Who can tell me about Rosa Parks?" Ms. Harrison and Ms. Frederick laughed and Ms. Harrison said, "They can't tell you what they did yesterday, why you bringin up stuff from three months ago" The class recited the "Learner's Creed"

again before they started to practice for their graduation ceremony, which in my understanding was about six weeks away. Around 10:45 AM, about an hour and fifteen minutes after they first sat down on the rug, children were sent to centers.

An example of informal rug time occurred one morning when Ms. Clarkson and Ms. Franklin's classes sat on the rug and requested YouTube videos for Ms. Clarkson to show. During this thirty or so minute span, children were able to request videos and Ms. Clarkson responded to requests by showing videos on tigers, ligers, crocodiles, and sharks, including a rather graphic video on shark attacks. During this time, Ms. Franklin sat on the couch behind the classes redirecting children when necessary.

In addition to rug time, children spent a good deal of time transitioning from place to place and in centers. Transitions happened primarily for two reasons: ratios and bathroom. When children were dropped off in the morning, they went with the teacher on duty until that teacher reached ratio capacity and another teacher arrived to take overflow. Though each of the teachers had a designated "class" or students they were in charge of from 9:00 AM to 3:30 PM, children often spent mornings and afternoon with other teachers to maintain ratios. In the instances teachers were over capacity, Ms. Kiera or one of the office workers took some children until balance could be restored and a child left for the day.

The other notable transition was bathroom time. With only two bathrooms and three toilets for fifty or so children, kids spent a good amount of time waiting for their peers to use the restroom. Due to supervision reasons and to maintain ratios, if one child in the class had to go, the whole class had to go with the teacher to the bathroom. The other way children spent their time in the classroom was in centers. I observed children in

centers before morning meeting, after morning meeting, and after nap. Center time, especially in the afternoon, could last a few hours according to my observations. During formal center time, which occurred after morning meeting, children used their "inch worms" to choose which center they wanted to play in. This choice was made by Velcro-ing the worm to the sign for the center. Most centers held four to five children. "Inch worms" were not required for children to pick centers in the afternoon.

In terms of formal instruction, Ms. Kiera informed me at our initial meeting that they used the Mother Goose Curriculum and Hooked on Phonics as their primary teaching tools. I did not observe either tool being used. The lesson plans for the observation period indicated children were working on desert themed lessons. I observed desert pictures hanging above the science center and I noted straw in the sand and water table. Children also talked about their upcoming Cowboy and Cowgirl party to mark the end of this theme. Aside from rote learning during morning meeting and rug time, I did not observe any formal instruction during my observations. Instead, to convey children's knowledge to me, teachers frequently called a child or group of children over, got my attention, and then had the child or children recite what they knew. In my field notes, I noted once such instance that occurred during lunch:

> Ms. Frederick turns to me and says, "When you taught kindergarten did most of those kids know how to write their names?" I respond that some did and some did not. Ms. Frederick tells me the kids in her class who are starting to read, pointing to children and saying, "She knows, he knows, and he knows." She continues, "They know their sight words too." She stops the class by asking loudly, "Class, what's a noun? Some children respond, "A thing." What's a verb? Some respond, "An action." What's an adjective? Some children respond, "A describing word." When some children respond, others look thoroughly confused. She points to a girl and says "Spell "is" and the child does. She takes them through long and short vowels, having them recite how the first vowel does the "talking," the second vowel is "silent," and long vowels "say their names."

In this same instance, Ms. Frederick asserts that children get homework every day, though she finds most parents do not care enough to complete it with their children.

Language and communication in Suites 1 and 2 was most often aimed at managing children and their behaviors. During whole group rug time, during transitions, and in centers, the teachers redirected children constantly, often using the phrase "practice self-control." Though necessary during times like clean up, the extent of redirection seemed excessive and at times, counter-productive, particularly during whole group rug time. In one observation, at a time when all of Suite 1's children were on the rug, each teacher had a say in stopping the whole class for various reasons. Ms. Clarkson insisted everyone participate and so the classes had to sing or count multiple times over. Then, Ms. Harris interjected because she wanted the classes to stand up and sit down for certain parts of the song. Meanwhile, Ms. Frederick stopped the class numerous times for specific behaviors saying, "Put it down" or "He holdin' up her dress and she ain't sayin nothing!" Each of these redirections halted the flow of rug time, making it drag on and on. Though each teacher had his or her own style of communication, language itself in the classroom seemed particularly informal. I noted phrases like "No boo, you told us how to do it wrong… No boo, everybody stand up" or "Go to a center, why you playin with me?" or "Don't be over there with that truck, you behave."

In my observation time, I did not observe teachers reading books to children. Books, however, were available in the libraries of both Suites 1 and 2. During center time, children had the option to sit in their respective libraries and look through books, which occasionally they did. There was one instance in which Ms. Clarkson looked for a book about making friends when two of the three Suite 1 classes were on the rug, but

could not find it and made up a story about a girl named "Viola" and her haunted house instead. Additionally, while I did not see children working or writing in journals, Ms. Clarkson referenced that her class had journals saying once, "My class, we can put our heads down or I can get out our writing books…guess whose in charge? We can get our writing books out." I did not observe the other teachers referencing writing books for their classes. Evidence of math in the classrooms primarily involved counting and the math centers. As previously noted, morning meetings in both Suites included counting. In the math center, bins of shapes were available for children and I noted children working there during two separate center times.

According to Mr. Marshall, more students attending the center had disabilities than had IEPs and more students had special needs than were in the referral process. Consequently, only a handful of children were actually receiving services. In my observations, I noted two speech therapists that came to work with two different children, one from Suite 1 and one from Suite 2. Of the mothers I interviewed, only one child had an IEP; she was born prematurely and had been receiving services since birth. Another child whose mother I spoke with was in the evaluation stage of the referral process. According to Mr. Marshall, approaching parents about getting their children services had to be handled with extreme delicacy. He stated that in this community parents became fearful of their children being labeled "slow" and suffering in later school years. In my field notes, I noted approximately ten children Mr. Marshall pointed out as being in need of evaluations. Except for the presence of the two speech therapists, I did not see additional evidence of accommodations or differentiation for children with disabilities.

Interactions

Learning interactions at Celebrate Kids Academy happened more frequently than formal instruction and my observations indicated such interactions to be the primary form of teaching and learning. As examples, I observed a lunch, a community walk, and a trip to the local library to see a fire truck where teachers actively engaged their classes in conversation. At lunch during one observation, I sat with Ms. Harrison's class. When a child talked about his trip to the zoo, Ms. Harrison asked specific questions about his experience before asking the class if they had ever been to the zoo. Ms. Harrison continued to prompt children about different animals and exhibits, engaging the class in a zoo-related conversation for most of lunch.

I also went on a community walk one morning with Ms. Frederick and her class. I noted that Ms. Frederick asked, "How's the weather today boys and girls? How's the weather?" When one of the children responded "hot" and another said "nice," Ms. Frederick made a dissatisfied face. She continued by saying "Yes, but what is it? Is it cloudy?" I noted that the children shouted, "No" before a child said "It's sunny." Ms. Frederick then reiterated that it was the first of the month that day. And finally, on the way home from a walk to the local library to see a fire truck, I walked with Ms. Michael's and Ms. Clarkson's classes. In my field notes, I noted that when the classes approached a blooming tree, Ms. Clarkson had them stop to examine it. She picked a bud and introduced the class to words like "blooming" and "blossoming" relating them to springtime.

Interactions between teachers and children differed depending upon the personality and teaching style of the individual teachers. Overwhelmingly, however,

interactions with all of the teachers seemed behavior management and discipline-oriented. Each of the teachers, including Ms. Clarkson who usually looked stern, also had lighter times, times in which I observed them interacting playfully with the children. During lunch with Ms. Harrison's class, Ms. Harrison noticed a child whose first name began with a "T" had this letter recently buzzed into his hair. She made a fuss and called Ms. Frederick over to come take a look. Ms. Frederick clapped and stomped before she started loudly singing "Calling Tymeer," a made up song with the child's name in it. On a different day, Ms. Clarkson engaged children with made up story about "Viola." She smiled and laughed as she led the class through an obstacle course, hushing them so they would not wake up the haunted spirits. Ms. John encouraged her children to have dance parties, while Ms. Michaels often sang to her class, which appeared to captivate them. Mr. Eli, the most reserved of all the teachers, also appeared playful, especially in one-on-one situations with children or when trying to get a child to stop crying.

Interactions between staff also depended on individual teachers and staff members. Mr. Marshall's presence in the classroom typically quieted the teachers and in some cases got them moving off of the couches. Ms. Kiera seemed authoritative and she called teachers by their last names, with the formality of a "Mr." or "Ms." On two occasions, I overheard the teachers in Suite 1 complain about her with Ms. Harrison saying she was eager to look for a new job. From my observations, I noted that Ms. Harrison and Ms. Frederick were playful toward one another, often joking back and forth. In this suite, Ms. Clarkson tended to keep to herself. However, when the suites were together, like on the walk to the library, I observed her scolding Ms. Michaels from Suite 2 multiple times, including once for not realizing she was walking her class down the

middle of a side street. I also noted that when Ms. Michaels was having difficulty with her class, she threatened to send children to Ms. Clarkson if they misbehaved, which prompted one child to cry. Both Mr. Eli and Ms. Johns kept almost entirely to themselves, rarely making conversation with other teachers and staff.

Finally, in terms of supervision and discipline at Celebrate Kids Academy, the shuffling of children due to the strict ratio adherence presented unique challenges to the site. The only significant lapse in supervision that I personally observed happened when Ms. Michaels had her class walking in the middle of a street, which was clearly accidental. Otherwise, I most often observed children waiting for teachers to turn their backs before misbehaving or instigating problems with other children. With almost fifty children in one room, instigating problems was quite common, though between the five teachers on the second floor most culprits were caught and immediately disciplined.

I observed teachers' discipline techniques and patterns to be somewhat random and to vary based on personal style. In my field notes, I observed that most often children were redirected on the spot, like being told to "Stop." In fewer cases, children were threatened with a loss of a toy or playtime was taken away. Teachers also threatened to call home or tell parents about misbehavior at pick-up. Though I never observed a teacher call home, I did observe all teachers discussing children's behavior with parents or guardians at pick-up. I did not observe use of a time out or cool down chair. Ms. Clarkson seemed to be the resident disciplinarian and when the newer teachers, Ms. Michaels and Ms. Johns, had behavior problems, occasionally they would send the misbehaving child to Ms. Clarkson.

And finally, though I only observed the aftermath, I became aware that center had a major lapse in supervision one afternoon that led to direct changes in supervision and safety procedures. More specifically, before my third observation, I was held downstairs for over an hour before Mr. Marshall let me upstairs. When Mr. Marshall finally did come to get me, I followed him upstairs to a completely silent second floor. Each teacher was sitting at their semi-circular table with their children, who colored pictures quietly. Eventually the room livened up, though the teachers remained quiet as I observed. After my observation, Mr. Marshall called me into his office. He explained:

> "I don't know if you heard, but there was a big incident yesterday so Ms. Kiera required all teachers to go on-line and take this training last night regarding supervision. So you might have seen a lot of pouty faces today. It could have been a very serious situation. It was the result, quite frankly, of improper supervision. So, it could be reported to the state, and if it does and it's investigated, we have to show what we did as a response and one was that we required all of the teachers on the whole floor to do training. Then, obviously a couple of teachers got written up. So you know, those are small samples, but we had a discussion with another teacher today reminding her that there are trainings available and they can be taken at any time in various subject matters."

Though I personally did not witness the incident, Mr. Marshall explained that a parent entered the second floor suites and found her child playing alone while the rest of her class was outside. She became very upset that her child was unsupervised and wanted an immediate explanation from Mr. Marshall, Ms. Kiera, and the teachers. Mr. Marshall stated that he spoke to the mother in his office and was able to calm her down, telling her that the situation would be addressed immediately with the staff.

In subsequent observations, I noted that each teacher carried a silver ring with index cards around it. Each index card had a child's name and picture. I observed that when a teacher arrived or left for the day and children were shuffled in response, the child's index card was traded to the new teacher now in charge of his or her care. I also

observed a staff meeting led by Ms. Kiera in which she addressed the severity of the incident. Specifically, Ms. Kiera mentioned that the parent had requested to see the files on all the teachers and warned them that the mother could post negative comments on the internet about the center and its staff. She then introduced the index card system as well as walkie-talkies, which were to be used every time teachers are out of the upstairs room with their children.

Maternal Primary Caregivers: Parental Involvement and Profiles

Over the course of two weeks, I interviewed 15 mothers with children enrolled at Celebrate Kids Academy. Prior to conducting interviews, I also observed for evidence of parental involvement and interactions between parents and staff. Similar to The Christian School, I saw significantly more parent-staff interactions than evidence of direct parental involvement in center activities. On my first observation day though, the center happened to visit the library a block away for a fire truck demonstration and three parents met their children there. In my field notes, I noted one mother parked behind the truck and carried her son's infant sister over to join the class, while another arrived telling the teachers excitedly that her boss let her out of work for the occasion. The third parent, a dad, stood quietly behind the classes and held his daughter up so she could see.

The presence of fathers at Celebrate Kids Academy was notable. In my time at The Christian School, seven of the nine women I interviewed were single caretakers and I observed only one father picking his son up from school on one occasion. At Celebrate Kids Academy, while over half of the fifteen mothers I interviewed were single, the presence of fathers at the center was highly visible. I observed dads or paternal caregivers

dropping off and picking up their children just as often as mothers or maternal caregivers did.

Interactions between parents and staff happened frequently, though almost always during drop off and pick up times. Typically, interactions were brief and friendly, only a few teachers and parents seemed to know each other well. During pick-up times, parents often asked how their child's day had been. I noted, however, that in almost all cases, unless a child arrived after 9:00 AM and got picked up before 3:30 PM, the child was dropped off or picked up under a different teacher's care, limiting parental access to their child's actual teacher. Perhaps consequently, when parents had questions or concerns, they went right to Ms. Kiera or requested to see Mr. Marshall. As examples, when I arrived one day, the office worker called Mr. Marshall to let him know I was there. She hung up quickly before saying, "He back talking to a parent, have a seat, he'll be down to come get you soon." And during a staff meeting led by Ms. Kiera one afternoon during nap, she mentioned the role she and Mr. Marshall assumed when parents complained. She stated, "The lack of communication up here is an issue," then continued, "When parents come in angry, they aren't looking for me they're looking for you. But we (Mr. Marshall and I) handle them so you don't have to. Do your job." And so, during the times when issues arose, Ms. Kiera and Mr. Marshall appeared willing to step in as buffers to protect the center with the parties on both sides.

For this study, I interviewed the following fifteen mothers with children enrolled in Celebrate Kids Academy's pre-k age program: Gina, Keisha, Tanya, Dawn, Felisha, Kim, Rhonda, Fanta, Jacqui, Kathy, Missy, Alayah, Rita, Tamara, and Trinity. All of the women were African American and their ages varied from early twenties to mid thirties.

Six of the moms, including Gina, Tanya, Dawn, Jacqui, Alayah, and Trinity, had their children as teenagers and were now in their early twenties. The remaining women were in their mid to late twenties or thirties. Eight mothers had daughters enrolled, while the other seven had sons, a representative sample of the center's gender distribution. Thirteen of the women lived locally with their children, while Kim and Fanta lived outside the neighborhood but passed the center on their work commute into the city.

Table 4.2

Demographic Information for Maternal Primary Caregivers of Celebrate Kids Academy

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Age	# Children/ Grandchildren	Marital Status	Occupation/ Employment Status
Alayah	Black	20-25	2	Engaged	In school
Dawn	Black	20-25	1	Single	Caregiver
Fanta	Black	30-35	2	With Dad	Education
Felisha	Black	30-35	2	Married	Security
Gina	Black	20-25	1	Single	Education
Jacqui	Black	20-25	1	Single	Security
Kathy	Black	30-35	6	Married	In school
Keisha	Black	25-30	2	Single	In school
Kim	Black	30-35	2	Married	Medical
Missy	Black	25-30	1	Single	Undetermined
Rhonda	Black	35-40	2	Single	Medical
Rita	Black	25-30	2	With Dad	Grocery store
Tamara	Black	30-35	2	Married	Medical
Tanya	Black	20-25	1	Single	Housekeeping
Trinity	Black	20-25	1	Single	None

Eleven of the mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy were working, including Gina and Fanta in education, Dawn, Kim, Rhonda, and Tamara in medical, Felisha and Jacqui in security, Tanya in housekeeping, and Rita in a grocery story. I was unable to determine Missy's job; she mentioned working two days a week for friends, but would not elaborate. Three mothers, Keisha, Kathy, and Alayah, were in school full time, while Trinity was "in between jobs." Nine women received CCIS subsidies to assist with their childcare payments. Alayah was working on securing a subsidy and could only afford to send her son part-time at a private pay price while she waited. Three women, Kim, Fanta,

and Missy, paid $165 per week as private pay parents. And finally, as close relatives of Mr. Marshall and Ms. Kiera, Felisha and Tamara paid at a discounted rate; their exact cost of childcare is unknown.

Eight women, Gina, Keisha, Tanya, Dawn, Rhonda, Jacqui, Missy, and Trinity, were single mothers raising their children alone or with the help of family. The other seven women, including Felisha, Kim, Fanta, Kathy, Alayah, Rita, and Tamara, were either married to, engaged to, or living with the fathers of their children. Six children were only children, while nine had siblings of various ages. Felisha, Kathy, and Rita all had younger children in Celebrate Kids Academy's infant and toddler classrooms, while Kim, Fanta, and Alayah had their infants or toddlers enrolled in other childcare settings. Of the 15 women, seven had enrolled their children as infants or toddlers. Three women had enrolled their children as young threes who had been at the center over a year, while the remaining five women had enrolled within the last year. Gina, Dawn, Kim, and Rhonda had family members watching their children prior to enrollment, making Celebrate Kids their only child-care experience; the other eleven women had removed their children from prior childcare settings. And finally, the drop-off and pick-up times for all families varied; as did children's attendance. Missy, who worked part-time, Trinity, who was in-between jobs, and Alayah, who could not afford full-time care, kept their children home at least two days a week; the remaining mothers typically had children at the center five days a week.

Children's Town

After my initial third site fell through late in the summer of 2013, I began to look for another 3 STAR center willing to participate in this study. I contacted Ms. Linda at

Children's Town to see if she would be willing to meet with me and she agreed. Ms. Linda did not make it to the center for our scheduled meeting so I met with Ms. Tami, an administrator, who shared information about the center then recommended I call Ms. Linda to ask for permission to observe and interview parents. Ms. Linda willingly agreed, saying she was more than happy to help, and granted me access to the 35 families who had children enrolled in the center's two classrooms for three and four year olds.

Just as at The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy, I spent 18 hours over the course of 5 different days and times observing in this center's classrooms. Because the center had two age specific classrooms for Pre-K age children and Ms. Linda advised recruiting parents from both, I split my time between Ms. Kim's three year-old classroom and Ms. Dora and Ms. Penny's four year-old classroom. To give context to Children's Town, I provide its background and a brief history then describe aspects of quality captured during observations. Again, descriptions focus generally on site and classroom resources, the classroom environment, interactions, and parental involvement. Following evidence of parental involvement, I include profiles of the 16 maternal primary caregivers I interviewed from this center.

Background and History

Children's Town is a privately owned and operated three STAR center housed in a five-story row home. Located in a neighborhood west of the city's center, the facility has been operational for the last ten years. Ms. Linda, who lives out of state, co-owns the center with her husband and mother. She serves as the center's official director, but has increasingly passed duties on to her two administrative assistants, Ms. Tami and Ms. Margaret, as she looks to expand. A medium-sized center, the site has classrooms for

infants, older and younger toddles, three-year olds, and four-year olds on four different floors, from the basement to an additional top floor added five years ago.

The building itself sits second from the end of a long block of row homes, sandwiched between a residence and a corner bar. Children's Town is physically distinguishable in that the building stands two stories above the rest of the homes on the block and has been refinished in pale pink stucco. Unlike all of the homes with awnings over porches, the building's porch has been built out and the main glass-door entrance requires walking through a wrought iron black gate housing strollers and trashcans. Inside the door, a schedule and flyers have been taped. A small black keypad sits to the door's left with a sign indicating parents should type in their children's birthdays for access. Fresh flowers sit on the brick steps up leading into the entrance. A large main floor window has "Passport to Learning" sign and is decorated with stickers, adding to the inviting atmosphere. Window boxes with flowers hang underneath this large window. Above the first floor, an awning with Children's Town's logo, website, and phone number rises over entrance.

A three STAR center during the time of the study, the center gained but refused its fourth STAR due to financial limitations last year. As Ms. Linda explained it, the center was not in a good financial place at the time and accepting a fourth STAR would have meant hiring and paying another staff member with a college degree, which they could not afford at the time. The center would accept its fourth STAR before the end of this year, according to Ms. Linda. Unlike in the northern neighborhoods, Children's Town has some, but not an overwhelming amount of competition in the area as only one other home daycare facility is housed on the same block. In the fall of the 2012,

Children's Town became part of the School District's Pre-K Counts program. The program has strict funding, scheduling, curricular, and teaching requirements, all of which have changed the structure of the three and four year old classrooms in the last year. Consequently, Children's Town functions in some ways like a daycare center and in others like a Pre-K program. It continues to function like a daycare because the whole center accepts infants through school-age children year round with an extended school day. Due to Pre-K Counts' requirements, however, the school day for three and four year-olds spans from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM and parents must pay extra to drop off earlier or pick-up later. While the center remains open in the summer, Ms. Linda hired the Pre-K Counts teachers, who hold bachelor's degrees, for only ten months.

With only the three and four year-old classrooms impacted by the partnership with the School District, the facility still accepts infants at six weeks and toddlers at any age prior to three. The center is open year-round from 6:30 AM to 6:00 PM. The site's before and after school program is housed in a church a few blocks away and accepts children between 5 and 13 years old. The three year-old classroom, which shares the second floor with the center's tiny administrative office, has 12 district-funded slots for children who turn three before September 1st, while the four year-old classroom on the added third floor has 15 district-funded slots. Pre-K Counts pays for children to attend the center from 8:00 AM until 3:00 PM daily, ten months a year. If parents need care before or after those hours or want to send their children in the summer, they have to pay Ms. Linda an additional fee. According to Ms. Linda, CCIS covers summer care for most children so the fee is minimal.

Pre-K Counts also requires teachers to have a bachelor's degree and a state early childhood education certification. However, because Ms. Linda's teachers did not meet those requirements, she hired Ms. Dora last year and Ms. Kim a few weeks prior to the study starting because both hold bachelor's degrees in early childhood education. Ms. Kim teaches the three year-olds and has two rotating assistants, Ms. Teri in the morning and Ms. Diane in the afternoon. Since Ms. Penny had taught the four year-olds since the center opened, Ms. Linda refused to demote her for Pre-K Counts. She and Ms. Dora co-teach the four year-olds, though Ms. Dora is the lead teacher on all administrative paperwork. Both Ms. Kim and Ms. Dora are white women in their early twenties teaching for the first time. With the exception of part-time administrator Ms. Margaret, who is also white, the remaining staff and teachers, including Ms. Linda, are black, middle-aged, and seasoned in the field. Ms. Linda's mother, Ms. Theresa, works in the kitchen in the basement and a local high school student oversees the facilities housekeeping. Infant and toddler teachers are required to wear medical scrubs, while Pre-K age teachers do not have a uniform. Unlike at The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy, the center does not require a uniform for children.

The center's 27's Pre-K Counts slots had been filled at the start of the school year. According to Ms. Linda, however, the center could accept up to 8 or so more Pre-K age children during the school year, which would keep both classrooms in ratio, and submit paper work to the district for funding after the fact. During my time at the site, one new student started. In terms of demographics, I observed the center to be 99% African American. With one mixed race child, this site was the only center where I interviewed a non-African American, white mom. The center had an even distribution of boys and girls

though there were more three-year old girls than boys and four-year old boys than girls.

In terms of cost, approximately 80% of the families at the center received CCIS

subsidies. Parents could also access cost free funding if they applied for Pre-k Counts

childcare through the district and were out of work; I interviewed two mothers who found

and paid for Children's Town via the later route. Co-pays were due weekly, though Ms.

Linda prided on the center's flexibility and willingness to work with parents who had

financial issues. If parents could not make payments or if CCIS dropped a family,

children were often allowed to attend part-time until the matter was resolved. The private

pay cost of Children's Town came to $145.00 per week.

Site and Classroom Resources

With its additions and expansions over the years, Children's Town has reached its

limits in terms of indoor and outdoor usable space. Outside, the facility does not have a

parking lot so families who drive have to find parking on the street, which borders a very

busy intersection. The center has two small areas for outdoor play, one for infants and

toddlers, and the other for the Pre-K age classrooms. For the infants and toddlers, turf

flooring and a small jungle gym sit in the small backyard off of the first floor. The three

and four year-old classrooms' play area sits on the building's roof. An enclosed fire

escape at the back of the house, which leads from the first floor all the way to the roof,

gives all but the basement classrooms direct access to the playground. The rooftop space

itself is narrow, like the building, and has also been covered in turf. There are two small

jungle gym sets on the roof; a five-foot high fence encloses the space. Above the fence,

mesh netting continues up the sides of the walls and covers the top of the roof. The heavy

door leading to this level locks automatically as an additional safety precaution. Ms.

Linda says that the children, even the toddlers, absolutely love the roof because "it feels like you're on top of the world." Likely due to the limited space, aside from the jungle gym equipment, the only other gross motor equipment I observed included bins of balls and miscellaneous toys.

During my observation period, I split my time between the third and fourth floor Pre-K age classrooms. Though notably narrow, bright lighting, glass windows, and warm paint colors make both classrooms feel more spacious than they actually are. The third floor classroom houses three year-olds and is physically smaller because it borders the entire length of the main stairwell and the front of the classroom houses the building's administrative office. This singular room has a soothing blue paint color and light tile floor. In the middle of the room, just inside the main door, sits a circular carpet with a map of the world in the middle and pictures of animals on the outer border, each picture is small enough for one child to sit on. A round table with ten chairs sits to the left of the rugs, towards the back of the room. To the right, shelves separate the joint block and writing centers from the manipulatives center. On the right side of the room, I also see a cozy corner chair for time-outs, a small library area with books and a beanbag, an easel housing art supplies, and one computer.

The administrative office door sits just outside this space, overlooking the street. Above the block area rug looms a bulletin board with a large colorful tree on it displaying a hand activity that children have made. Over the main rug, a children's bubble art display, a color of the week poster, a jobs poster, and an "I'm Glad I'm Me" poem hang one next to the other on the wall. To the left of the rug and main classroom table sits shelving for science and math centers and a television. Moving towards the back of the

room, the classroom narrows and cubbies, which I note children share, line the left wall. Above the cubbies, parents have mailboxes and a bulletin board with lesson plans and a meal schedule. The back of the room houses a supply closet, where the dramatic play clothes are stored, a single-person bathroom, an empty sand/water table, and a back door leading to the fire escape and roof. The only play center I do not observe on this floor is music and movement, though I observed the incorporation of both music and movement into morning meetings on both floors. I note that each center on this floor is labeled at children's eye level and has pockets for "finger people," the popsicle sticks children use to choose centers.

The four year-old classroom is equipped with the same centers in more space and with a different physical layout. Each of the centers is labeled and has pockets for "finger people." This floor has bright yellow walls and light tile flooring. The main entrance to this room sits in the back, while the room itself extends to the street. It is wider with higher ceilings and three large windows face the front of the building. Just inside the entrance are two long tables with six chairs around each. The back wall of the room houses bookshelves packed to the ceiling with puzzles, board games, books, paper, magazines, and other miscellaneous supplies. A lower shelf has a bin labeled "Journals" and has 15 or so black and white marble notebooks in it. The door leading to the fire escape and the roof stands next to these shelves. Behind the room's main tables sits a computer and an adult size chair, parent mailboxes, a "Lending Library" board, a numbers poster, and a long alphabet wall that stretches to the center of the room. The opposite wall, closest to the door, houses children's shared cubbies and the door to this classroom's bathroom.

Like downstairs, a bulletin board with lesson plans, meals, and allergies hangs above the cubbies. The bathroom door displays children's magazine collages and a numbers chart. A stainless steel mini refrigerator and additional supplies and materials, including the bins housing the silverware, napkins, and cups, are stacked high above the children's cubbies. Children's "All about me" projects line the room's main walls. One other notable difference between the two classrooms is that the morning meeting rug for this class, in the front right corner of the room, does not have seating cues. Additionally, "Days of the Week" and "Months of the Year" posters hang over the rug at children's eye level. I note this classroom does not have a supply closet and so children's naptime cots are stacked and leaned against the wall between the main and block area rugs.

In terms of personal care, the majority of children in both classrooms arrived at the center between 7:45 and 9:00 AM, though the Pre-K Counts program officially starts at 8:00 AM. A quarter of the children in each classroom were picked up at 3:00 PM when the program ended, while the majority stayed for "after-care." The three and four year-old classrooms were combined at 4:30 PM when their lead teachers left. Similar to Celebrate Kids Academy, the parents at Children's Town used a punch code to gain access to the building's sole entrance. I note that the infant and toddler rooms off the first floor have a second punch code for added safety. The only potential safety hazard I observed was the slope of the main stairwell in the building, which slanted almost ten degrees to the right.

Parents typically walked their children directly to their rooms, either on the third or fourth floor, and as the child got settled, I observed teachers greeting both parents and children. Children who arrived between 8:00 AM and 8:45 AM were offered a cold

breakfast of cereal, milk, and juice. In the three-year-old room, the class transitioned

from breakfast to morning meeting before center time. The four-year-olds had center time

before morning meeting so that each class could have their own outdoor time on the roof.

The center participates in a food program, offering children a hot lunch and cold snack.

Ms. Linda's mother was in charge of food preparation using the kitchen in the basement;

on the days I observed, lunch consisted of sandwiches with fruits or vegetables. Children

were expected to wash their hands before meals and after messy activities. I observed the

teachers were also diligent with tissues and wiping faces. Each classroom had one

bathroom, which required children to wait during busy times. While in the classroom,

children were free to go as needed to the bathroom; they were expected to go before and

after naptime. Children napped on the same blue cots that Celebrate Kids Academy used

and were spread throughout the room. Teachers kept all children's individual blankets in

plastic bags, which were stored in large red duffel bags. Naptime lasted from 12:30 PM

to 2:15 or 2:30 PM.

The teachers for the four-year-old classroom included lead teacher Ms. Dora and

her co-teacher Ms. Penny. In the three-year-old classroom, lead teacher Ms. Kim seemed

to handle the majority of classroom duties because her assistant teachers, Ms. Teri and

Ms. Diane, switched midday. As previously mentioned, Ms. Dora and Ms. Kim were

recent college graduates with education degrees and state certifications. Ms. Dora had

been at the center for one year. This teaching assignment was Ms. Kim's first since

graduation from college. Ms. Penny, Ms. Teri, and Ms. Diana, as well as all the infant

and toddler teachers, were African American and on average ten to fifteen years older

than Ms. Dora and Ms. Kim. Ms. Penny, who was in her fifties, did not have a college

degree, but had been in the childcare field for many years. She had been at Children's

Town since its opening ten years prior. Ms. Teri and Ms. Diana were younger than Ms.

Penny by approximately ten years, but were equally as experienced though they did not

have formal degrees. A family-owned and operated facility, the center had two family

member administrators. Ms. Linda's mother, Ms. Theresa, co-owned the center and

oversaw meals, while her cousin, Ms. Tami, worked in the office. A longtime family

friend, Ms. Margaret, had worked for Ms. Linda since high school. In school for her

associate's degree, she was also a part-time administrator. I interviewed both Ms. Tami

and Ms. Margaret for this project, as they were also parents with young children enrolled.

Like The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy, Children's Town has a

number of unique site and classroom resources. Its family-oriented atmosphere plus the

facility's building and physical layout creates a feeling of intimacy. Ms. Linda especially

generates feelings of warmth and friendliness. Though she herself is not on-site every

day, someone in her immediate family is, usually her mother. During my observations,

when issues with parents arose, I observed one parent screaming and threatening to pull

her child out when Ms. Dora and Ms. Penny refused to administer a non-documented

medication to her child, Ms. Theresa calmed her down before putting the parent on the

phone with Ms. Linda. Ms. Linda is also an extraordinarily knowledgeable childcare

director. She makes a concerted effort to maintain close contact with the School District,

the welfare and CCIS offices, and the STARS evaluators. She seems to know the system

very well, which allows her to navigate the system and maintain good relationships with

these outside entities. In one conversation, for example, she stated, "When I call CCIS, I

know to just ask for a manager or a person in charge. The chances are very high the

person answering the phone is new. The person above her is probably new too. I'm up against morons." Because of her knowledge, Ms. Linda is also extremely adept at helping parents who started out as private pay clients qualify for CCIS subsidies.

As previously mentioned, Children's Town also offers a unique partnership with Pre-K Counts, a selective School District partnership program. Aside from paying for state certified teachers, the program mandates that the center keep their ratios lower than typically required. The program also has curricular and assessment requirements. In fact, Children's Town is the only center in the study with a formal curriculum, the Creative Curriculum, and an assessment system. Financial support from the district partnership allowed Ms. Linda to purchase the Teacher Standards Assessment System the prior year. This digital system generates ideas for activities both parents and teachers can use to improve on children's weaknesses. Parents can log in from their computers or phones to check children's progress as well.

Classroom Environment

In part, my observations of the Pre-K age program at Children's Town focused on the teaching and learning environment. I paid particular attention to how children spent their time, the attention given to language, literacy and books, math, and the accommodations for children with disabilities. The Pre-K Counts partnership program only assists with funding seven hours of the center's day, from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Prior to the program's official 8:00 AM start time, children dropped off between 6:30 AM and 8:00 AM are combined in one room where they played in centers until 7:30 AM. At 8:00 AM breakfast begins as drop-off continues; breakfast lasts until approximately 8:45 AM. At 9:00 AM the three-year-olds have their morning meeting and the four-year-

olds go to centers and fine motor skill time. At 9:30 AM the three-year-olds transition to centers and fine motor skills. The four-year-olds have their morning meeting at 10:00 AM then go to the roof from 10:30 to 11:00 AM. The three-year-olds stay in centers until 11:00 when they transition to the roof. The four-year-olds do an additional activity, center time or reading time, before both classes start to prepare for lunch around 11:45 AM. From 12:30 to 2:30 PM both classes nap. When they wake up, children eat snack and then go home unless they stay for after-care. After-care consists of additional center and fine motor activities, sometimes roof time as well. When the classes combine at 4:30 PM, children transition up or downstairs and continue with the center and fine motor activities. Teachers at Children's Town work a shift, lead teacher Ms. Kim works from 7:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Ms. Dora from 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM, Ms. Teri opens at 6:30 AM, while Ms. Diane closes at 6:00 PM. Ms. Penny's shift is from 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM. All of the teachers get a break during naptime.

Dictated by the Creative Curriculum, the classrooms at Children's Town spend two weeks working from the same theme. During my observations, the theme was body parts and I observed morning meetings, centers, and fine motor skill activities and projects revolve around this theme. In my observations, children spent the least amount of time participating in whole-group learning. Whole group learning happened almost exclusively during the morning meeting, which lasted about 20 minutes for three-year-olds, 30 minutes if Ms. Kim read a story at the end. Morning meeting lasted five to ten minutes longer upstairs. I did not observe Ms. Dora or Ms. Penny readings stories at the end. The longer meeting upstairs included the calendar and counting, which the younger children did not do. Both meetings included the "Good Morning" song. During the song,

the class clapped in a circle while one-by-one each child was greeted and jumped in the middle of the circle before introducing the child next to them.

During the morning meeting, both classes also reviewed the color and shapes of the week, tan and a semi-circle respectively, before the teachers reintroduced the theme. I observed Ms. Kim asking, "Who remembers what we are talking about this week?" while Ms. Dora asked questions like, "Who can point to a body part we've learned and tell me about it?" Children were expected to raise their hands to answer in both classrooms, though the hand-raising policy was enforced more frequently upstairs. The morning meeting in the three-year-old classroom took longer to get started and was interrupted more often due to behavior management issues. In talking about the body parts themes, I observed that in the three-year old-class, the children practiced singing and acting out a body parts song, while upstairs the class learned to recite and act out a body parts poem. Downstairs, Ms. Kim made a long poster with the words to the song and hung it over the morning meeting rug. Upstairs, children did not have a poster. Ms. Dora also used morning meeting to introduce body part-themed vocabulary words. Each day, she hung a new word on the alphabet wall.

The majority of children's time was spent in centers or working on theme-based activities and fine motor skills in small groups. In the mornings, children used their "finger people" to choose centers. "Finger people" were not used in the afternoons. Once children had dispersed to centers, I observed Ms. Kim and Ms. Penny typically setting up a small group activity also related to the theme. For example, on the same day, Ms. Kim had the three-year-olds playing a skeleton game at a table during center time, while upstairs Ms. Penny pulled children to work on a shape-people art activity. After

approximately 20 minutes with their small groups, both teachers sent the children to centers before calling the next small group over. Downstairs, Ms. Teri mostly circulated, though I also observed her pulling individual children or small groups to do activities, like letter recognition or puzzles. Upstairs, Ms. Dora rotated working with two or three children at a time on their writing journals.

Language and communication in the three and four-year-old classrooms at Children's Town differed based on what I observed to be a combination of children's ages and the teacher's personalities. Downstairs, Ms. Kim spoke softly and warmly, often addressing children with "sweetie," even when they were disobedient or disruptive. She also encouraged children to refer to each other as "friends," by saying things like "We don't call out friends" or "Excuse me friends, we have gone over this every day." I would describe Ms. Teri as quiet and reserved. She spoke softly to children when she worked with them, but more often, she deferred leading the class and disciplining children to Ms. Kim. I also observed that children in this classroom cried significantly more often than the children upstairs. When they did, both Ms. Kim and Ms. Teri used phrases like, "come on, you're a big girl" or "use your words please" to dissolve the teary situation. Both teachers also hugged children often, especially during transition times like upon arrival or after naptime.

Upstairs, neither Ms. Dora nor Ms. Penny were as soft and reserved. I would describe both as firm and stern, though they also laughed and gave praise often. Both Ms. Dora and Ms. Penny expected children to behave and act like they were "ready for the big school." I also observed the teachers encouraging children to talk to and communicate with each other. For example, one afternoon when Ms. Dora played a caterpillar board

game with four boys in her class, she repeated phrases like, "You can do it, Micah. Come one guys, cheer him on." Though the teachers approached language and communication differently, I observed consistent formal language use and the encouragement of inter-peer communication at Children's Town.

Literacy and books appeared frequently in both the three and four-year-old classrooms. In my observations, both classrooms used books most frequently as transition tools, including to keep the room calm during meals, while waiting for cots to be placed or food to get delivered, or when the classes had time between the end of centers and going outside. While I observed a handful of theme-related books, like "My Body" being read, the teachers more often incorporated children's favorite books like "The Grouchy Ladybug" or "Little Bear" into these transition times. For example, one morning during breakfast, I wrote the following in my field notes:

> Ms. Kim asks the kids if they want to read a story. She comes to the window behind me and takes *The Grouchy Ladybug* by Eric Carle off of the sill. She begins to read and the room turns silent, the children look captivated. As she reads, they shout out questions and tell her things they notice. When one child says he sees the ladybug's brown spots, she says, "Not brown, that's what? Black. Tell me again what color that is?" The child replies, "Black." Two dads drop their children off as she reads. She stops the story to greet the dads and the children. She sends them back to wash their hands, though one of the children doesn't do it… After getting them settled into breakfast, Ms. Kim returns to the story. A child interrupts asking, "Is that me?" Ms. Kim smiles and responds, "No, you know this is the grouchy ladybug. Use your picture clues." The story gets to a part where there are lobsters. A little girl says that she knows lobsters have pinchers, and she points to her fingers. MK smiles and nods saying, "Yes, that is right." On the next page, there are monkeys and the children get very excited. Another little girl, who cried when she was dropped off, says, "Ms. Kim, this is what a monkey does." She starts to lightly beat her chest and make monkey sounds. A handful of kids around the table pick up on the movement and sound and start doing the same thing. Periodically, as kids finish, they stand up and take the top off of the trashcan before they return to the table to listen.

Though I did not observe during a breakfast time upstairs, I observed books used similarly, especially because the schedule for this class was less fluid due to their later morning meeting time. The focus on literacy downstairs appeared to revolve around letter recognition, starting with children recognizing the letters in their names. Upstairs, writing in journals was highly emphasized, as was the recognition of the entire alphabet and basic sight words.

In terms of math, the classrooms upstairs and downstairs incorporated math skills differently into their daily routines and activities. Downstairs, for example, math skills focused primarily on shapes and counting. In addition to the shape of the week, which I noted the class explored further in a semi-circle "Rainbow" art activity, shape manipulatives were present in both the math and manipulatives center. Counting also occurred frequently, most often counting from 1 to 10. The teachers counted down from 10 holding up their hands before clean up, they also counted the number of children present at morning meeting each day. Further, if there was a behavioral issue, Ms. Kim frequently used her hands to communicate "1-2-3, eyes on me," requiring children to respond "1-2 eyes on you." Upstairs, more advanced math skills like the calendar were incorporated into morning meeting. Counting stretched to 100 and children were exposed to, but not required to count by 5's and 10's. When I observed the shape people, body part art activity, I noted Ms. Penny required children to choose the shapes that best corresponded with body parts. For example, when a boy chose a rectangle for the trunk of the body, Ms. Penny prompted him twice to choose a more appropriate shape until he chose a circle.

Unlike at The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy, I did not observe children with special needs or disabilities receiving pull out or one-on-one time with therapists at Children's Town. Conversations with Ms. Linda and the teachers also did not give any insight into how the center dealt with the needs of these children. It was not until I interviewed mothers that I realized at least two children at the center had IEPs, including a boy whose IEP for speech never transitioned to the center after he turned three and another boy with an existing IEP for behavioral challenges. In their interviews, both mothers expressed their frustration in getting their children services. Prior to the interviews, I did not observe teachers engaging in differentiated practices nor did I observe teachers making specific accommodations for these children.

Interactions

Learning and staff-child interactions at Children's Town occurred frequently. The teachers balanced learning interactions, both formal and informal, with behavior management and redirection. Downstairs, Ms. Kim primarily led these types of interactions as Ms. Teri and Ms. Diana deferred to her instructions, while upstairs Ms. Dora and Ms. Penny prompted their class equally. I observed examples of this balance specifically during Ms. Kim's morning meeting, Ms. Dora's board game, and Ms. Penny's impromptu literacy game during snack one day.

At the start of Ms. Kim's circle time, for example, a boy kicked a girl, which Ms. Kim did not see. The little girls cried very loudly and Ms. Kim turned to look sternly at both of them saying, "Use your words. You are a big girl. What happened?" After a brief explanation, she moved the boy to sit next to her and began circle time saying, "Friends, who wants to share what they did last night?" Kids both raised their hands and started to

shout out. She put her hands up before calling on a child who had her hand raised, praising her for remembering to raise her hand. She repeated, "Who wants to share again?" and almost all of the children raised their hands.

Two more examples of learning interactions followed during subsequent observations in the four-year-old classrooms. First, Ms. Dora engaged four boys in a board game. As she pulled the game out, the boys excitedly shouted the colors they wanted. Ms. Dora stopped what she was doing and said, "You need to calm down. Calm down." Ms. Dora explained the rules of the game, asking each boy to repeat a rule until they all nodded in agreement. Before choosing colors, Ms. Dora asked the boys to identify all of their options, the boys called out the colors they saw.

And on a different day during snack, Ms. Penny played an impromptu game of telephone with children sitting at the snack table. After the classroom phone rang twice, a boy held a pretend phone to his ear calling out, "Ms. Penny, are you there?" Smiling, Ms. Penny said, "Hello, can I talk to Sam please?" The child looked confused for a moment and Ms. Penny repeated, "Yes, where's Sam?" The child laughed, saying, "I'm not Sam!" Ms. Penny then asked, "Who are you?" and the boy responded. She continued, "I need you to spell it so I know you're him." The boy spelled his name and other children at the table excitedly put pretend phones to their ears eager to participate.

Interactions between teachers focused primarily around lesson plans or classroom-based activities or concerns. Perhaps because Ms. Kim had only been teaching for a few weeks, I found that she and Ms. Teri in the morning and Ms. Diane in the afternoon seemed to still be getting to know each other. Ms. Kim primarily interacted with the children, while both Ms. Teri and Ms. Diane joked with each other and other

staff members who passed through the classroom. The most in-depth conversation that I observed with Ms. Kim revolved around the new books Ms. Teri brought from her mom's house. During breakfast one morning, she called Ms. Kim over and laid all of her books out on the rug. They flipped through them together before Ms. Teri asked Ms. Kim which one she wanted to read after morning meeting. I did not observe any in-depth conversations between Ms. Kim and Ms. Diane.

Ms. Dora and Ms. Penny, who had been working together for over a year, were more conversational. Aside from small talk about Ms. Dora catching the bus or Ms. Penny going to Atlantic City for the weekend, most of their conversations revolved around the class or class activities. For example, as Ms. Dora worked on a future lesson plan during nap one day, she asked Ms. Penny if she had any ideas for the upcoming farm theme. In a twenty-minute conversation, Ms. Penny shared past activities she had done with the class as Ms. Dora nodded and continued to write. In my field notes, I further noted that the teachers, staff, and administrators who had been at the center for some time had a family-like, sometimes silly rapport. Ms. Teri, who I observed to be quiet and reserved with Ms. Kim, had a fun-filled pushing match with Ms. Margaret inside the three-year-old classroom. Ms. Teri needed to leave, but because she wouldn't share her lunch with Ms. Margaret, who was on a diet, Ms. Margaret blocked her from the door. For five minutes, the two women squealed, laughed, and pushed each other as Ms. Kim looked on.

Aside from challenges brought on by the physical layout of the space, supervision did not appear to be an issue at Children's Town. With smaller class sizes and the Pre-K Counts program's 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM schedule, I did not observe supervision issues

like shuffling to maintain ratios or one teacher alone with the whole class that I witnessed at Celebrate Kids Academy and The Christian School respectively. Like any narrow home however, the physical layout of both the three and four year old floors had blind spots where teachers were unable to see children. Standing at the main entrance on either floor, a teacher could not look into the room and see the entire space because of structural walls. Perhaps the biggest blind spot at Children's Town was the bathrooms. Unlike at the other two centers where teachers could see into the bathrooms, the bathrooms at Children's Town were single occupancy and completely enclosed. I noted on multiple occasions that after looking around the room, one teacher would ask the other teacher where a child was until the child emerged from the bathroom.

In terms of discipline, Children's Town experienced many of the same discipline-related issues as The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy. The teachers at Children's Town appeared to try to balance redirection, behavior management, and teaching and learning. Technically, the punishment for misbehavior in both classrooms was "the cozy chair," where children could go to "cool off." While I observed Ms. Kim asking a child if he needed to sit in the chair, I did not observe children physically using the cozy chair at any time on either floor. In terms of balance, with only 12 children on the third floor and 15 children on the fourth, teachers had fewer children with fewer behaviors to handle. Though the teachers were not overly conversational, especially Ms. Kim and her assistants, they worked and moved in tandem. As an example, I observed that one afternoon during nap Ms. Kim was working in the back of the room when a child began to have a tantrum on his bed. Immediately and without saying a word, Ms. Diane stood up, nodded to Ms. Kim, sat a chair directly next to his bed, and spoke softly until he

calmed down. The teachers in both rooms were also effective in engaging their classes during transition times to curb misbehavior and foster learning. Using songs, stories, and poems and by encouraging children who had finished cleaning up to help their friends, the teachers on both floors lessened the need to redirect children by keeping them occupied.

Maternal Primary Caregivers: Parental Involvement and Profiles

Over a two and a half week span, I interviewed 16 mothers with children enrolled in the early childhood program at Children's Town. Prior to conducting interviews, I observed for evidence of parental involvement and parent-staff interactions. When I first approached Ms. Linda for consent, she mentioned she would make participating in interviews count towards the parent-participation requirement at the center. Like at The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy, I observed more examples of parent-staff interactions, like conversations at drop off or pick up, than I did examples of direct parent involvement, which might have looked like parents volunteering in the classroom or attending center events. However, each class had a parent board, which provided evidence that parental involvement did occur. In my field notes, I noted that parent boards had flyers for community and church fairs and concerts. I also noted websites and resources parents could look into to find activities for their children. On multiple occasions, parents asked teachers for homework for their children. When the teachers explained Pre-K Counts does not allow for homework, they referred to the parent board as an activities resource.

In terms of interactions, parent-teacher interactions were frequent and most often occurred during drop-off and pick-up times. Each parent also had a mailbox in their

child's classroom where flyers and communication letters could be retrieved. I noted that while all teachers interacted with parents, Ms. Kim especially made an effort to engage parents in conversation. For example, after a father walked into her classroom, Ms. Kim looked at him before asking, "I'm not sure if I've met you, have you picked up before?" As she spoke, Ms. Linda emerged with Ms. Theresa behind her. Ms. Kim let them take over and Ms. Linda asked for an ID to check. Meanwhile, Ms. Kim turned to him saying, "She had a really great day today. She is talking so much more, she even did some dancing today." The dad lit up and responded, "Really? She dances all the time at home." Ms. Kim smiled, saying, "Well, we hope she keeps dancing here too. Have a great night!" as the dad and his daughter left.

Not all parent-teacher interactions, however, were friendly. One afternoon, the mother and grandmother of a child screamed at Ms. Penny for not administering a child's medication. When Ms. Penny tried to explain she could not do so without a doctor's note, the grandmother screamed louder, exaggerating her name and yelling that the child would never set foot in that classroom again. While the grandmother grabbed the child's hand, the mother gathered all his belongings and emptied his cubby before they stormed out of the room and down to the office to Ms. Theresa. While I did not observe Ms. Theresa intervening, I later noted the mother spoke to Ms. Linda on the phone and the child came back the next day.

I interviewed the following sixteen mothers with children enrolled in the Children's Town program: Margaret, Tasha, Kendria, Florence, Samira, Tami, Maya, Zedra, Kadijah, Tiffani, Sanaa, Fae, Trina, Chanel, Lisa, and Genesis. Fifteen of the sixteen women were African American. Margaret, who was very eager to participate, was

White and in her eagerness pointed out that her son's father was Black. The mother's ages ranged from early twenties to early forties. Margaret, Kendria, Samira, Chanel, Trina, and Lisa had their children as teenagers. The remaining women ranged between their mid-twenties and early forties. Eight of the moms had sons enrolled, including Kadijah who had a son on each floor, while the other eight women had daughters enrolled.

Table 4.3

Demographic Information for Maternal Primary Caregivers of Children's Town

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Age	#Children/ Grandchildren	Marital Status	Occupation/ Employment Status
Chanel	Black	20-25	2	Single	None
Fae	Black	25-30	3	Single	Electrical
Florence	Black	30-35	1	Single	Undetermined (PT*)
Genesis	Black	30-35	2	Married	Office work
Kadijah	Black	25-30	2	Married	Medical, in school
Kendria	Black	20-25	1	Single	Education
Lisa	Black	20-25	1	Single	Medical, in school
Maya	Black	25-30	1	Single	Office work
Margaret	White	20-25	1	Single	Education, in school
Samira	Black	20-25	2	Single	None
Sanaa	Black	30-35	2	Single	Medical
Tami	Black	25-30	3	Married	Education
Tasha	Black	25-30	1	Married	Education
Tiffani	Black	30-35	1	Married	Education
Trina	Black	20-25	2	Single	None
Zedra	Black	35-40	4	Married	Education

*PT indicates part-time employment

All of the women stated that they lived locally with their children. Three of the mothers, Samira, Trina, and Chanel, were not working at the time of the interview, while Florence worked part-time. Margaret, Tasha, Kendria, Tami, Zedra, and Tiffani worked in the education field and three mothers, Margaret, Tami, and Zedra, were employed by Children's Town. Of the remaining women, Maya and Genesis held office jobs, Sanna, Kadijah, and Lisa were in the medical field, and Fae was an electrician. Margaret,

Kadijah, and Lisa also attended school. Twelve women received CCIS subsidies to assist with their childcare payments. Genesis could not afford private pay on a full-time basis so her son attended three days a week. Maya, Tiffani, and Sanna paid $145 dollars per week for their children.

Ten women, Margaret, Kendria, Florence, Samira, Maya, Sanaa, Fae, Trina, Chanel, and Lisa, were single mothers raising their children alone or with the help of family. Tasha's husband was in the armed forces and living overseas, while Tami, Zedra, Kadijah, Tiffani, and Genesis were married to and lived with their children's fathers. Seven of the women had one child, while the other nine had siblings of various ages. Samira, Tami, Kadijah, Fae, Trina, and Genesis all had multiple children attending Children's Town. Nine mothers, including all three employees, enrolled their children as infants or toddlers. The remaining seven women had enrolled their children within the last year. Twelve of the mothers had pulled their children out of a prior daycare or home care settings, while Fae and Zedra had family take care of their children as infants. Margaret and Tami, both employees, had only ever sent their children to Children's Town. Finally, the drop-off and pick up times for families varied, as did children's attendance. Only Tasha, Samira, Florence, Kadijah, and Chanel picked their children up when the program ended at 3:00 PM, the remaining moms paid the aftercare fee. All of the children attended care regularly except for Genesis's son because the family was only able to afford to send him part-time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided descriptions of the three early childhood education centers that participated in this study. The sites included the one STAR Christian School,

the two STAR Celebrate Kids Academy, and the three STAR Children's Town. I first

described my experiences and difficulties finding sites willing to participate in this study.

The purpose of providing a timeline and sharing my own struggle with access was to

explore the ways in which my difficulties relate to issues of equity and access to high

quality, STAR-rated childcare centers. This chapter then included detailed descriptions of

observation-based data, the purpose of which was two-fold. First, in order to most

accurately understand parental choice and satisfaction, it is important to understand what

each site offered, generally how each program operated, and what made each site unique.

Second, based on an adapted quality-rating measurement tool created specifically for

qualitative observations, the chapter described what indicators of quality at each site,

including classroom and site resources, classroom environment and interactions, and

parental involvement, looked like in practice. These indicators of quality adopted from

the ECERS and Arnett ratings tools were targeted in observations due to their wide

acceptance in the field.

With a context for each site having been presented and the 40 maternal primary

caregiver participants for this study having been introduced, this exploration next turns to

an analysis of the emergent themes and findings to answer the study's first research

question: What factors influenced maternal primary caregivers when choosing to enroll

their minority children in high poverty, center-based childcare arrangements? How did

structural, parental, and child-level factors intersect in this process? To answer these

questions, the following chapter explores maternal primary caregiver perspectives on the

childcare search and selection processes.

CHAPTER 5

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE PROCESS

Introduction

The findings that have emerged from this study offer insight into the complex nature of securing childcare in urban high-poverty neighborhoods from the perspective of parents. Qualitative in-depth interviews on this process have not been conducted since before Welfare Reform in the late 1990s. While there is a strong body of literature that examines parents choosing childcare arrangements, there is less of an understanding as to why decisions get made and how combinations of factors lead parents to certain settings. With alarming numbers of options in the high-poverty neighborhoods where this study took place, Celebrate Kids Academy, for example, had 6 competitors within a one block radius, I felt it was important to examine how and why this process unfolds as it does from the perspective of maternal primary caregivers.

The short- and long-term benefits of high quality care for minority children living in high-poverty neighborhoods include increases in academic performance and literacy attainment and decreases in the likelihood of early dropout and behavioral issues (August & Hakuta, 1997; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995; McLoyd, 1998; Wertheimer & Croan, 2003; Zill, 1999). As the previous chapter illustrated, however, when aspects of quality are described, they look markedly different across different settings and using a singular quality rating, like saying for example that a center has two STARS's worth of quality, can be difficult for parents to interpret. Thinking about the complexity of these relationships, I wondered what maternal caregivers think, feel, and experience as they

look for providers to care for their children. Do they know about the STARS? Are quality ratings perceived to be important? From a realistic, first person perspective and given the circumstances and resources families have, what are those factors that most influence mothers to say, "Yes, this center is the place that I choose for my child?"

The literature on the decision-making process suggests that three levels or sets of factors have roles in influencing choice. Those levels include structural factors, like the availability of care, the availability of subsidies, and the supply of care in different neighborhoods, which parents largely cannot control. A second set of factors comes from the parent level, essentially aspects of care that parents will look to align with their preferences and must work for their entire family. Such factors may include family values, parents' positionality in society, parental agency, and family structure. The third level of factors, child characteristics, is also the least researched. Child characteristics speak to a child's qualities, which may or may not be unique, that may require or lead to parents making a particular choice. Child characteristics could include children's race or ethnicity, gender, language(s) spoken, disability, or their future potential as perceived by the parent.

These three sets of factors identified in the literature as salient in the choice process have largely been examined in isolation. Within the last two years, however, Grogan (2012) conducted research on parents' considerations for pre-kindergarten choice and became one of the first published researchers to examine the interaction of parent, child, and contextual factors. The study found that a combination of contextual, family, and child factors were considered prior to choice and parents do not group their considerations into the multiple, distinct categories that previous research has relied

heavily upon. Though Grogan's study differed methodologically by using survey-based methods and including parents from various socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, the argument for considering multi-leveled combinations of factors when studying choice supports the design of this study. Grogan cited the study as just "an important first step in assessing processes associated with parents' choice of early education" (1284). The current study is an important one because it adds another layer of understanding to a conversation that is beginning to emerge.

The population of maternal primary caregivers who were interviewed for this study was purposefully exclusive. As stated, the educational stakes for minority children living in poverty is high because high quality programs have been shown to mitigate a number of the effects of poverty (August & Hakuta, 1997; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995; McLoyd, 1998; Wertheimer & Croan, 2003; Zill, 1999). Further, despite the increases in the number of early childhood education programs, an achievement gap at this earliest level of education persists and warrants further examination (Grogan, 2012). Understanding the choice process for this group of mothers requires recognizing that choice happened under a distinct set of circumstance, using a limited amount of resources. An examination of the choice process would be shortsighted without accounting for the circumstances surrounding that process. To understand how the environments within which parents made childcare choices affected choice, this study draws upon its theoretical framework.

Bounded rationality and family capital frameworks afford an examination of parents' socio-historical realities, which offer realistic and contextualized insight into the circumstances surrounding pre- and post-choice processes. In order to better and more

fully understand parental choice processes, we have to consider that parents have bounded rationality, or limited cognitive resources, information, and time, and call upon heuristics or shortcuts to make reasonable, not optimal decisions. (Simon, 1986) It is not possible for this or any group of mothers to have considered all the childcare possibilities, especially given the time and resources it would have taken to gather information about the 683 centers in this one city. According to Simon (1990), mothers would have satisficed, or called upon their experiences to evaluate centers and construct expectations of how of good choices might be, enrolling children when a center met those expectations.

The context within which this group of mothers constructed their choices was also constrained by the resources, material and immaterial, they brought to the decision-making process. Just some of the questions about resources that I began to consider were: How many centers did they have time to visit? Do they have a car? How do they view the purpose of childcare? How was this view constructed? What is their educational background? Are they working? Are they reliant on subsidy? How much can they afford to pay a week? Are they a single mom? Do they have a support system? Who did they talk to about centers? Did they get referrals? And so on. I became curious as to how and in what ways mothers used the resources that they did have to access their settings.

To explain how resources get distributed, Bourdieu (1977) argued that education is a structured system of social positions ordered through power relations. Individuals maximize their potential in education based on their habitus, or "system of lasting, transposable dispositions" and capital, a form of power in a field (Bourdieu, 1977a). In education, high levels of capital are particularly advantageous, yielding unequal

distributions of power across race and class. Bourdieu specifically identified three types of capital: economic capital, money and financial resources, social capital, social networks and connections of an individual, and cultural capital, the status of an individual reflecting cultural knowledge. Another way to theorize the interplay of capital, education, and society was posited by Coleman who differs from Bourdieu on a number of points. Coleman (1988) broadened the conversation around capital as a conceptual tool in the field of education by adding human capital to economic and social capital. In education, human capital, intangible skills and abilities shaped by social capital, is measured by parents' education levels and "provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning" (S109).

While both Bourdieu and Coleman posited theoretically useful models, they are both fundamentally interested in social class differences. In addition, I could not answer all of the questions that I was looking to answer about the role of resources in the choice process with these frameworks. Instead, I needed a theory of capital that at once incorporated economic, social, cultural, and human capital. Therefore, I turned to a broader conceptualization called family capital. A newer and not as widely used multi-dimension model of capital, the family capital model suggests that a family's capital represents the culmination of human, economic, social, and cultural resources, all of which are procured and accumulated by family members and are valued differently depending upon interaction contexts (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Broader in context, family capital accounts for the intersection of these resource bases and has previously been applied to work around parents and school choice. To support the individual

perspectives voiced in this study and to be able to explore the many questions I had about choice, a family capital theoretical orientation was adopted.

According to the family capital model, access to education, including early childhood education, is not rendered equally across class and racial groups. Moreover, mothers of Black or bi-racial children living in high-poverty neighborhoods are making choices within segregated and stratified contexts because their family capital is less valued by dominant structures in society (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). A picture of the lived experiences of parents from a family capital theoretical lens has the latitude to look at once at race and class, social position, power dynamics, values, the intersection of competing factors, and can account for all of the nuances and intricacies that make navigating this choice the complex process that it is.

The aim of this chapter is to provide analytic descriptions of how the choice process is experienced by maternal primary caregivers who have enrolled their minority children in one of three urban, high-poverty childcare centers. The chapter speaks to the factors that mothers felt most influenced their processes as well as to how mothers experienced the intersection of structural, parent, and child-level factors, all of which literature has consistently suggested affect choice. Throughout the analysis, I rely on the literature and theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 2, the methodology of the study shared in Chapter 3, and the contexts of The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, and Children's Town described in Chapter 4. Implications of the analysis from this chapter and Chapter 6 are addressed in the Chapter 7.

Factors Influencing Choice

Maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, and Children's Town took unique journeys to find their current childcare centers. In each interview, I asked mothers to describe what their experiences finding childcare had been like since their child's birth. During data analysis, patterns of factors across all women began to emerge. Specifically, there were four sets of factors that all mothers spoke about as influencing their choices, two of which were anticipated and two of which were not. In describing how these sets of factors came to influence decision-making, I argue that greater attention needs to be given to the two unanticipated sets of factors, maternal instincts and networks of trust and lessons learned from past childcare experiences. Lessons learned from past childcare experiences I found to be particularly problematic because the majority of mothers removed their children from childcare settings after traumatic events or negative experiences.

Networks of trust and maternal instinct emerged as related concepts and were a common theme across all maternal primary caregivers. Networks of trust refer to the trusted persons, almost always fellow maternal primary caregivers, who women spoke with during their individual childcare searches. Often family members, close friends, neighbors, or co-workers, the women of this study activated their social capital and relied on people they perceived to be knowledgeable within their individual networks for recommendations and advice on childcare settings. Thirty-nine of the study's forty maternal primary caregivers referenced talking to a trusted source as an influential factor in their decision-making process. Maternal instinct then refers to how mothers internally assess the centers they consider. After learning or hearing about specific centers via word

of mouth, mothers then visited sites and described trusting themselves and their instincts before making a final decision. Maternal instinct was frequently spoken about in terms of a being a "gut feeling" or being "comfortable" as some mothers described it. All forty maternal primary caregivers referenced this instinct or feeling as greatly influencing their choices.

All of the maternal primary caregivers who participated in this study also had past histories with other childcare settings. With the exception of Margaret and Tami, employees and mothers from Children's Town, all of the women also had previously sent their three and four year-olds to different childcare arrangements. For thirty-eight mothers, experiences with family members, home-care settings, other centers, and Head Starts were part of those childcare histories. Further, the primary reasons for switching were due to either the arrangement no longer meeting their child's needs or because they had a traumatic or negative experience. Issues with socialization, supervision, safety and cleanliness, relationships with teachers and staff, communication, and a lack of education and structure were most often as cited as reasons for leaving prior arrangements. Mothers' willingness to intervene in their children's education and remove children from settings they perceived to be inadequate supports their accumulation not only of knowledge, but also their activation of capital.

Two of the more anticipated sets of factors that influenced maternal choices were educational value and logistics/cost. All mothers talked about being influenced by the fit between their own educational values and center environments during childcare searches. Though ideal fits were often difficult to find in their neighborhoods, maternal primary caregivers had also given thought to their children's educational next steps, kindergarten

and beyond, prior to childcare enrollment. Citing the negative lessons they learned navigating the childcare system early on, many parents talked about becoming more influenced by the overlap between centers' teaching and learning environments and their own educational values. Mothers most often evaluated a center's structure or daily schedule, class-sizes/ratios, curriculum and learning material, and teacher/staff knowledge and experience during initial assessments. Long-term goals for their children were also influential in the decision-making process. Mothers in this study most frequently referenced plans for kindergarten and elementary school, educational attainment expectations, and general plans or hopes for children's futures when discussing long-term goals.

The most practical, yet constraining set of factors for families were the logistics and cost of care. All maternal primary caregivers expressed that these aspects of care, often points of frustration for the women, heavily influenced their choices. Logistics and cost are described together because mothers often spoke about what they considered to be practical matters in relation to one another. Logistics refers more specifically to considerations the center's location, hours, annual schedule, and the availability of infant-toddlers rooms or school-age programs. Cost refers to out of pocket payments and subsidy-related considerations. Factors impacting cost often related to family demographics such as number of children and parents in the household and parent employment status. Because a handful of parents reported lower wages or job loss as the result of the recent recession, effect of the recession was also included in relation to cost.

Networks of Trust and Maternal Instinct

Across participants in the study, networks of trust and reliance on maternal instinct emerged as salient influences prior to enrollment. As noted, thirty-nine of the forty women talked about the influence of childcare referrals and advice from friends, family, neighbors, or co-workers in their search. Kathy from Celebrate Kids Academy was the sole mother whose opinion differed. Kathy reported trusting herself and her own maternal instinct over others. She explained, "Word of mouth I really don't go on… It's going, seeing what it is like. Really going to the place I find that that is the best way to feel places out. You have to go. If you don't go, then you don't know." And so with the exception of Kathy, over and over, when mothers were asked how they went about finding childcare, a pattern of talking to people, seeing and assessing the site, and going with a gut feeling emerged.

Though they conveyed the same sentiment, the women referenced maternal instincts in different ways by using a variety of phrases. Anessa from The Christian School, for example, talked about "a place she felt comfortable with," Rhonda from Celebrate Kids Academy described, "I just basically went on a feeling that I had that it would be a good fit," and Kadijah from Children's Town advised, "Go with your gut. If you don't feel that the place is right, then that's not right for you. Don't second guess yourself about that." Maternal instincts also proved to override the importance of ratings and accreditations for over half of the mothers. Twenty-one maternal primary caregivers from all three sites, including four of nine women from The Christian School, ten of fifteen mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy, and seven of sixteen women from Children's Town, reported that their instincts trumped the STAR system in evaluating

centers. Lack of reliance on the STARS system is problematic because the ratings do not appear to be serving their purpose; this reality is addressed after analytic descriptions from each center.

Perspectives from The Christian School.

At The Christian School, a one-STAR center housed in a K- 8 school, the eight mothers and one grandmother I interviewed all found out about the program via word of mouth. Each woman stated previously knowing someone who had sent their children to the school, either for the early childhood program or for later grades. Barb, Tameka, Vera, Denise, and Vi all knew about the school itself because they had older children and grandchildren who attended. With the pre-k age program only having been added in recent years, however, participants were reminded to enroll their younger children. Barb remembered, "I have a girlfriend, her daughter goes here now. She's in first grade. She told me when there was an Open House. I came for the Open House." Tameka and Vera had talked to the school secretary, Tameka recounted, "I was talking to Ms. Johnson in the office [about another matter]. She said 'Come sit with me, get him transitioned.' And I flew up there. It was one spot. Thank God, I took it. But by the grace of God." Denise had spoken to co-workers, while Vi had talked to the director of her grandson's previous center.

The mothers without previous ties to the school included Anessa, Drea, and Jule. Anessa remembered her referral, recounting, "The person who first told me about The Christian School when I wasn't looking for a formal school … that formal environment … her child had been here since September and she was just singing praises about it, so I knew. I had an idea that it was a good school." Drea remembered hearing about the

program from her aunt's sister, while Jule received a recommendation from "good friends." Faith recalled talking to her sister-in-law, sharing, "My nephews go here and my sister-in-law loves it. I wanted to put him somewhere where I won't have to constantly look for schools. I know this goes from Pre-K to eight and I know it was a really good school."

While all of the women spoke about relying on their maternal instincts before choosing The Christian School, mothers differed in their factoring of ratings and accreditations along side that instinct. As a one STAR center, this center was designated as most in need of improvement. Five mothers reported STARS ratings as equally influencing their choice, while four indicated instinct entirely trumped ratings. On the subject of instinct trumping ratings, Drea offered the following perspective, "The STARS? At the time I wasn't really looking for that. I was a little younger, and I needed my son to be in school; so I wasn't really looking at that…I just liked the environment, the whole atmosphere." Tameka felt similarly, saying, "They didn't really matter at the time. I felt comfortable with the people and still knowing the people there." Of the mother's who cited the STARS as equally important, Jule's explanation was problematic because she did not have clarity on how the system worked. She shared, "I think so (STARS are important). I'm not saying that the center that gets two or three stars is necessarily a bad center, but you know… I wanted the one (STAR)."

The context of The Christian School's program was also highly unique since it was part of a K-8 school, which attracted a different type of parent. Even though the program only had one STAR, all of the women stated that they removed their children from prior childcare arrangements because the program's structured learning

environment and school-based setting were important to prepare their children for kindergarten. They were also unanimous in their attraction to the long-term benefits of enrolling their child in a program attached to a K- 8 school. Anessa, for example, expressed her feelings, saying, "The bright environment [was important.] Knowing that she can stay here for a long time was a plus. I didn't have to look in the next two years and go through this process all over again." Drea too offered her perspective, "I wanted him here. You have to get a spot. You have to have a spot… I would like him to stay to eighth grade." And with the exception of Jule, whose son had special needs, the other eight women reported that as long as the school continued to work for the family, their children would stay through eighth grade.

Perspectives from Celebrate Kids Academy.

The mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy, a two STAR center housed in a storefront, were almost unanimous in considering word of mouth as a primary influence. With the exception of Kathy, who relied solely on her maternal instincts, the remaining 14 mothers explained that word of mouth had guided their decision-making process. This center, however, was unique in that it had been open for less than three years and had a less established reputation in the community. Consequently, parents like Tanya, Dawn, Kim, and Fanta had heard it "just opened" from trusted networks, then relied on their maternal instincts to assess the fit for their children. Tanya recalled talking to family, explaining, "My cousin would tell me, 'Oh, it's a new day care.' Then because my mom is actually friends with the Director, so that's how I heard [more] about this. My aunt actually works there, too. So that's another way I heard about it." Though this group of mothers did not actually know fellow parents with children enrolled, they trusted the

external assessments of their family and friends who had passed by. Dawn recalled stopping by after hearing about it and making the decision to enroll, "When I first was looking, I went to whosever day care was in the same vicinity [as here]. I came here … I don't know something directed me here because I walked past it, but I came back. I was like 'I see ya'll opening, how can I go about getting my son enrolled?' That was it. I went to other ones to look and see how it was. I didn't really like them. I came back, came in, I was like, 'He's coming here.'"

Ms. Kiera, the center's director, brought over three additional mothers from her previous daycare, including Keisha, Rhonda, and Tamara. Rhonda explained, "Actually, I knew the director from a different daycare with my older son. I knew this school would be fantastic because I had a great experience with Ms. Kiera eight years ago, so I already knew." Then aside from Gina who was employed by the center and enrolled her daughter shortly after starting work and Felisha who was a family member of Mr. Marshall, the remaining mothers heard about the center from family members, co-workers, or neighbors with children enrolled. Jacqui, for example, relayed her referral process, explaining, "[I heard about it from] My cousin, one of my younger cousins, she was here about two years ago, Carly. So I knew about the school already and they just gave me the heads up. My aunt said it's close walking distance to the school. He's just been here since, since last August." Trinity had a similar experience, explaining, "I knew girls that went here from the welfare office and they were saying they really watch the kids and do really good jobs, but [before that] I never heard nothing about this place."

Like all women in the study, the mothers at Celebrate Kids Academy also relied on their maternal instincts to assess the center prior to making their decision. Because the

center was new, however, mothers like Tanya, Dawn, Kim, Fanta, and Gina, who

enrolled their children when the daycare first opened, expressed the importance of

maternal instinct in a distinct way. Rather than evaluating a well-established center, they

talked about feeling comfortable with and feeling good about Mr. Marshall, Ms. Kiera,

and their vision for what the center would or could become. Kim explained her initial

feelings, "[I thought it would be] A daycare that's education … I'm quite stuck with that.

And stringent in terms of structure because if there's some structure they're safe I guess.

Safety was important and her being comfortable was important. When I looked at a lot of

the day cares, there were a lot of day cares, but a lot of them were the same in terms of

what they did. Some of them didn't do anything."

Ten of the fifteen women interviewed also reported that their maternal instincts

trumped the influence of STAR ratings. Reflecting on if the STARS were influential in

her decision-making process, Keisha explained, "Not at the time… because I never really

knew about it until my mom started trying to open up a daycare [after enrollment]. Then,

I started knowing the different stars and this and that. I didn't really know then. But I

knew they're open. I knew the person. It was fine." Rita's maternal instincts also were

more important than ratings, she recalled, "I didn't really see any ratings ... It wouldn't

have mattered if I did see any ratings. I hadn't heard anything [bad] from a parent or from

a teacher that would stop me from wanting them to come here." Kathy offered a different

perspective. She felt that accreditations were important, but STARS were not because

they did not fit with her parenting style. She explained, "I certainly didn't look at places

with no accreditations, but you have to watch for the accreditations that are given. A lot

of those STARS are given for the 'learning through play' style, but that's not something

we endorse… When we saw our daughter was getting what she was thirsting for, that really sort of drove at home for us that this is the good place for her." And so, even though Celebrate Kids Academy was up and coming within the STARS system, the women felt reliance on their instincts to assess the center's potential was more important. They chose to believe in and invest in Mr. Marshall's vision.

Perspectives from Children's Town.

Children's Town, a three STAR center housed in a row home, had a strong and well-established reputation in its neighborhood. In fact, the center had a waiting list that parents like Genesis had been on prior to a spot opening. Not surprisingly, all of the women except for two of the center's employee-mothers had heard about the program via word of mouth. Both Margaret and Tami were employees prior to having children and though they reported looking at other reputable centers in the area, their children had been enrolled since six weeks of age. Of the other 14 moms, Tasha, Zedra, Fae, Trina, and Lisa heard about Children's Town from talking to fellow parents in the neighborhood. Trina explained her process:

> I didn't have any family members that came here. As people would come out, I lived really close by I would ask them and I would ask some of the neighbors 'What do you know about the school up the street at the corner?' I knew there was a bar next door so I wanted to know was the bar open during the day when school is in session. I just asked a couple of neighbors about it as well. Like I said, I got nothing but good feedback.

Tiffani and Genesis talked to girlfriends who had visited the center. Genesis remembered, "It was a word of mouth. Someone who lived on the other side of the town visited here. There was someone telling them about it and then they realized they couldn't. They lived too far. We're so close that it just made sense for us." The remaining women heard about the program from family members, including Florence and Samira who did not explicitly

name their sources, Sanna and Chanel who talked about their sisters, Kadijah her mother, and Maya her cousin. Kendria had heard about the center because her father's mother lived across the street.

All of the mothers at Children's Town cited their maternal instincts as critical when assessing the center's fit for their children. When the women talked about their reliance on this instinct and why they felt comfortable, they uniquely attributed those feelings to the center's "home-like" or "family-oriented" atmosphere. Tiffani explained what led to her making the decision, recalling "Just the environment… They just made me feel like they cared about my child, that you have my child's best interest at heart. It's one of those places where you go in and you just know that ... You don't think about her when you drop off; it's not hard. I just want people to treat her like I would, and my family would. They have; they've done that here." This unique atmosphere was further attributed to Ms. Linda's personality, the teachers, and the center's home-like design and layout. In talking about Ms. Linda and the teachers, Fae explained, "It's very family-oriented. I like them. I like the owner, Ms. Lisa. She's nice. All the people… I haven't had any real problems with anyone. I like it… When I came here I felt that the teachers were very responsible and had a lot of knowledge about kids and I felt comfortable with them coming here."

Nine of the sixteen mothers interviewed, the most of all three centers, reported simultaneously considering the center's three STAR rating in conjunction with their maternal instincts. Lisa offered her perspective on the STARS first, explaining, "I felt that those daycares that had those stars mean that they really took initiative to be qualified by the state or something like that or whoever functions to give those quality

stars, to have that program for these kids." Yet the same time, due to incidents in which

her daughter had been injured in two previous childcare arrangements, Lisa talked

extensively about also making sure her daughter was comfortable and safe. She

explained, "I want to make sure she's good and she's comfortable so if I got to sacrifice

some time out of my day, or just to look for a better daycare then that's what I did. "

This group of nine was also unique in that it included six mothers who were

employed in the field of education, again the most in the field of all three centers. All six

women who worked in the field of education referenced some prior knowledge of the

STARS rating system. Margaret, an employee of the center, explained her perspective on

considering the STARS for her own child, reasoning, "Just because of the area, I look for

quality like what type of teachers do you have in your center? Are you in Keystone

STARS? If they're not and they're `not willing to ... I want to know why? Why wouldn't

you want to be a part of Keystone STARS? What school do you back?"

"I heard then I felt."

Networks of trust and maternal influence were unanticipated factors heavily

influencing the decision-making process at the study's on-set. Reliance on talking to

fellow parents and then using instincts to assess centers, often in place of the quality

rating system in place, have multiple repercussions. Methodologically, the "I heard then I

felt" pattern, as Alayah from Celebrate Kids Academy phrased it, supports the need to

continue to examine choice using methods and frameworks that support a deeper and

more realistic understanding of how and why parents make the childcare decisions that

they do. The descriptions that mothers provided of their searches for care illustrate the

contexts within which these decisions are being made and the resources that parents are

most heavily relying on to make those decisions. The stakes in understanding the how and why of this process are extremely high because this group of parents is making decisions for an at-risk population that research has consistently shown benefit greatly from high quality childcare (August & Hakuta, 1997; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995; McLoyd, 1998; Wertheimer & Croan, 2003; Zill, 1999).

Questions about the how and by whom the STARS rating system is used have also arisen. With or without prior knowledge of the STARS, many mothers indicated a lack of faith in the system, which is problematic given that guiding parents is the exact purpose of the STARS. Absent much faith in anyone or anything at the programmatic level, mothers described talking to people within their networks and assessing centers based on how they felt. Sanaa from Children's Town explained her thought-process, sharing, "There are a ton of daycare centers out there but all daycares aren't equal. I was reluctant to put them in some place that I had no personal referral, just a base of knowledge for. Giving your kids to somebody else for ten hours a day that you don't know and you don't know what they're doing, it's quite scary." Networks, knowledge, and feelings, however, are contextualized and again, access to early childhood education is not rendered equally across class and racial groups. The group of mothers who are raising minority children in high-poverty neighborhoods are making choices within segregated and stratified contexts because their family capital is less valued by dominant structures in society. Even relying on the STARS, Jule was an example of how parents need to understand how the rating system works in order to apply it.

Lessons Learned: Past Childcare Experiences

Lessons learned from past experiences with childcare arrangements, especially when negative, were greatly influential in framing later searches for subsequent childcare settings. At all three centers, mothers were quick to share horror stories from providers past and talk about their fear of leaving their young children in the wrong hands again. Traumatic events ranged from when the building housing the pre-k program Anessa's daughter, now at The Christian School, attended collapsed mid-year with her daughter inside to when Missy from Celebrate Kids Academy had her money stolen by a "pop-up" center. Then there was the time that Tasha from Children's Town realized a home-care provider had been taking her four month-old out on errands after seeing them board a bus from across the street. In the most extreme cases, a handful of women talked about criminal activities such as cheating on taxes, hitting or pinching children, and providers using their centers to store and sell drugs. The nature and number of traumatic stories shared through interviews was highly problematic and speaks to questions about the regulation of childcare in the city.

Not all negative experiences were traumatic, however, and a number of removal patterns emerged. For example, mothers who enrolled children as infants or toddlers in home-care settings almost always pulled their children out so they could "be around more kids their age" between two and three years of age. Around the two to three year age mark, a number of mothers with children in every type of setting also switched because they did not feel their children were doing anything all day or learning enough under the care of their providers. In several cases, and for two mothers with children previously enrolled in Head Start programs, childcare arrangements they were very comfortable and

happy with were closed down. These mothers talked in turn about looking for either well-established or medium-large centers that they perceived would be less likely to close. The changing of centers due to reports that children were not doing anything all day, children not learning, and centers closing down adds to questions about the nature of center regulation and to the suspicion and fear that many mothers indicated they felt towards providers.

Lessons shared from The Christian School.

Maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School had to have enrolled their children in prior childcare arrangements because the program was open to four-year olds only. Eight of the nine women had chosen daycare centers, while Vera's daughter was in a home-care setting. Across all women, the desire for school-based learning environment and dissatisfaction with less structured settings were the primary reasons for switching. Consequently, The Christian School's program became an ideal option for all women.

Barb, who was very suspicious of daycare in general, had her daughter in a daycare. She felt, "It was a safe, more like a homey type thing. But I didn't want just a place where you're just going to go sit and play all day. I want you to learn something." Tameka's son had been in both home care and daycare settings. In her experience, however, "I just don't think they prepared him to go to Pre-K. So I'm kind of glad I made the decision that I made to take him out. I mean, the teachers were great, maybe it was just the curriculum that it wasn't good, you know what I mean?" Vera's home care setting also wasn't giving her daughter the foundation that she wanted. In her words, "My daughter didn't need to sit in family care any longer. Based upon the estimation of her caregiver and myself, she was starting to show that she needed to be challenged a little bit

more." Denise and Faith echoed similar sentiments about changing settings. Denise stated, "I felt that they were in safe and it was a clean environment, but I've always said soon as you get old enough, you go to The Christian School because it's a good school." Faith's son started at a disorganized center then went to a school-based setting but it only went up to 4th grade. She also wasn't pleased with his behavior in his prior setting, explaining, "Coming from another school, I'm not saying he was bad but, he saw the other kids not listening so he kind of took after them." And so, the experiences that Barb, Tameka, Vera, Denise and Faith had with their previous providers led all five women to look specifically for a school-based setting with a strong learning environment.

Drea, Jule, and Vi spoke highly of their former daycare settings, but switched due to extenuating circumstances. Drea reported that situation got "complicated" when she couldn't pay. She explained, "I was trying to go through this program that they had me going to so I can get qualified, so I can get childcare... I was working here, it was fine, and then when I would say, probably my second year here, childcare was kind of complicated. They said that he wasn't eligible for funds and stuff like that." Like Drea, Jule had difficulties securing the funding to pay for care. She stated, "It was getting a little hard to pay and it was like, he should go back into that setting and I'm like … I didn't really pay. It was hard keeping a job around that time." Vi's daycare shut down abruptly due to financial issues, leaving her in a bind. Vi expressed her frustration saying, "They had to close… not because of them, but something financially with whoever owned the building so …"All three of these women were in turn looking for access to affordable long-term care solutions so they would not have to scramble for childcare again.

The most traumatic lesson learned came from Anessa. Anessa's daughter was inside of a different pre-k program when the building collapsed midyear. She recalled the terrifying day saying, "She was there when it collapsed. I was actually working in the area and I got a phone call that the wall collapsed. The fire rescue was at the school. Everyone needed to come and pick up their children to evacuate immediately. Of course, I was panicked, so frantic …" This experience, however, was not her first negative one with childcare. Her daughter had previously been pulled out of two "horrible daycares" in Anessa's words. At the first one, her daughter came home with a black eye in her first week there with no notification or incident report. In her second setting, Anessa found, "When I went to speak to people about what do you teach, at that time to a two-year-old or a three-year-old, or what do they do throughout the day, no one could really tell me … they didn't have a curriculum." Anessa reported that this series of negative experiences led her to look for a safe and well-supervised setting where her daughter would be engaged in activities during the day.

Lessons shared from Celebrate Kids Academy.

At Celebrate Kids Academy, all maternal primary caregivers had past experiences with family care, homecare, daycare, or Head Start settings. Ten of the mothers had their children in one other setting prior to enrollment and the two most common reasons for changing settings were related to socialization and the need for an educational setting. Gina, a self-described "freak out mom" and employee, kept her daughter in family care until she had been working at Celebrate Kids Academy for a few months and became comfortable. She stated, "I worked here first. I brought her in I want to say, three or four months after I started working here. I had to feel it out first, I was skeptical. But then I

needed her to go to school she needed social interaction." Dawn also kept her son in family care until he was ten months. When he wasn't talking, she became worried, recalling "He was home with his grandmom. I was in school first, and then he was home with his grandmom and his dad. Then he came here because he wasn't talking, I was a little worried." Felisha and Fanta had daughters in homecare settings with six other kids. Felisha switched for "more interaction with different types of kids" and Fanta changed so her daughter could "get her social cues."

Keisha and Rhonda cited switching primarily because they were dissatisfied with the learning environments and wanted more "school-like" settings. Keisha's daughter had been with a babysitter, but Keisha stated, "Eventually I wanted her to have that school setting. I just wanted her to be at least one year old, being able to walk, and be potty-trained and all that, before she started daycare, so it would be easier." Rhonda's son was in an unstructured homecare, she commented, "He stayed at a home, which was a bad idea. He was spoiled. Oh, my goodness. It was a good idea because it helped him get ready for being with other kids too. But he needed more structure." Tamara and Kim pulled their daughters out of homecare settings citing a lack of their children's social and educational needs being met. Tamara reasoned, "I took her out of that home daycare because though the lady was good with care and making sure she was fed, I don't think the educational part was good. As she was getting older, there were other children in the home but not too many, I wanted her to be in the daycare setting." Kim felt similarly, saying "She was with a family friend who actually … who takes care of other children. Then I really wanted a place that was going to be focused on education. I've really didn't want a place that the kids just sat around. They didn't do anything."

Alayah and Rita's children had also been in one other setting. Alayah's son was in a daycare that changed ownership; she became unhappy and explained, "I had really liked it. And then they changed ownership, so things kind of went south. I change schools for him. The teachers started leaving. So when people you like our leaving your like 'Oh, I think it's time for me to leave too.'" Rita's daughter had been in a Head Start, but Rita disagreed with "the education and timely fashion." Asked what she meant by that, she clarified, "When he was going there, they wanted him to be in school by 8:30 AM. If it was raining or snowing, we actually had to stay outside until 8:30 and I didn't like that." As a medium-large center with approximately 60 children between three and five years old in attendance, a number of parents chose Celebrate Kids Academy so that their children to be around other children. It is also clear that a number of parents viewed the center as having a legitimate learning environment. While my observations call into question the center's actual quality in relation to teaching and learning, Mr. Martin's vision promotes the center as an academic atmosphere to parents.

Five women from Celebrate Kids Academy experienced traumatic events, which led to their prioritizing safe, clean, supervised environments with attentive staff and parent-teacher communication. The children of these women had each been in at least two settings prior to enrollment. Jacqui had recently moved from another northeastern metropolitan city and her son had been in two different daycares there. The first daycare had Caribbean teachers feeding him foreign foods she disagreed with and stole her diapers so she pulled him out. Jacqui recalled, "The diaper thing was … it was just annoying. The diapers were going missing, Teachers couldn't explain where the diapers were going. I'm buying a pack of diapers literally every Monday. Why doesn't he have

diapers left over?" At the second center, she became "uncomfortable with a privacy issue." When she moved, she wanted a good relationship with the teachers and staff in her search.

Kathy's daughter started at a daycare center, but the family couldn't afford it after the birth of a sibling. After switching to more affordable care, Kathy found, "We did that for six months. But our 2-year-old did not acclimate there, which called us to look for another place for them both to go to school. She was having a hard time when we dropped her off every morning." Kathy needed an affordable center with an accommodating staff where her youngest child would feel comfortable. Tanya's daughter had been in daycare since she was six weeks old. Tanya became unhappy with her first daycare because she didn't feel they "helped her as a new mom." After switching, Tanya reported her second daycare to be bad, recalling, "She wasn't potty trained at that time, and they would not change her. So when I came and got her, she would still be wet. So she would have poop on her. They wouldn't wipe her. It just was like really horrible." Consequently, Tanya was looking for a clean center with an attentive staff.

Missy and Trinity's boys had been to six and four centers respectively. Missy's son started at homecare, but she pulled him out to be around other kids. She tried a daycare, but she pulled him out due to a series of issues. Missy recalled, "I just remember his butt was super raw, red raw. He wouldn't even sit in the tub and I was like, "What is wrong? What is going on?" I brought it to her attention. Then I noticed another incident where I picked him and he had bleach, on his jeans. You could see like the bleach map, how it fades, faded things … And among that he caught an eye infection." The next

daycare over-charged her and refused to help potty train her son. She then tried a school, but encountered more problems. Missy remembered:

> The administration… they would say that they were going to go to music, never music. They would have gym, no gym. They would also have fundraisers. We never knew where the money my son actually raised went … he was the top student that raised money and also the administration lady… she was sometimes there, sometimes not. They forced us private pay parents to give money to the teachers, which this teacher one day decided to pocket it. His tuition money! And then she tried to look me in the face when I said something and I gave it to her. That's when I went ballistic. I said, "I have my bank statement from the night before where I took out a lump sum of money," and it was at this point where I said, "Do you need me to call my lawyer?" because this was just …

The next school's building was condemned by the Department of Public Welfare and shut down. Missy tried a third school-based setting but her son was threatened on his first day. She walked in to witness, "Two boys were pushing and shoving one another into the bookshelves. I mean they were physically thumping on each other's backs and I was just like, "That's it.' My son kept saying, 'The boy with the Mohawk keeps trying to fight me.'" Fed up with school-based settings, she decided to try daycare again and spoke about how important it was to look for a safe environment with an honest and well-established reputation.

Trinity's son had been in four prior settings. He started at a daycare, but kept getting sick so she pulled him out. Trinity recalled, "He was constantly getting sick because when he was around anyone who is sick or if he is in a dirty area or something because of his sickle cell disease, he has a weak immune system, so every other week he was getting sick and I had to take him to the hospital all the time." The second daycare punished children by depriving them of outdoor playtime, which she disagreed with. She owed five dollars to a third center and when she couldn't pay it, an incident occurred. Trinity recounted:

I had owed her 5 dollars and I couldn't break a twenty, so I kept asking them could they break a twenty for me. They said, 'We don't have cash in here …' I said I will go down the street and get it. She grabbed my son and she is like 'Leave him here.' Like he was hostage. Like he was held …So I said 'You have to get off my son.' I didn't mean to be ghetto, but I was like get off my son. You don't hold him hostage for five dollars. I said I would give you the five dollars; I will give you the five dollars. In my mind I am like 'don't give her the five dollars' because if I give my word I am going to give you five dollars, I am going to give you five dollars and after that he never went back.

Fed up with daycare settings, she tried a homecare, but it was Muslim and she found it too strict. Her son was also having frequent accidents, which he was punished for. In Trinity's words, "He pees a lot and he was peeing on himself all the time. The lady was like 'I am not going to be waking him up.' You only have three kids, you can't wake one kid up? That was getting on my nerves." Again, Trinity took her son out of the setting. In her search, Trinity needed a clean setting with friendly teachers that would communicate with her and not be overly strict, which she perceived Celebrate Kids Academy has having.

Lessons shared from Children's Town.

At Children's Town, the Pre-K Counts program's educational component and small class sizes were a big draw along with its family-oriented, clean atmosphere, and access to Ms. Linda. Margaret and Tami's children had not been in other settings, but Tami had worked in other centers that "didn't feel like family." Zedra, the third employee, had her daughter in homecare and family care prior to enrollment, switching because of a traumatic event. Zedra shared, "We went through a couple before we actually got it right. A lot of them wasn't up to my standards. The very first used a string to hold the binky and I went crazy because why would you do that? I pay you good money. If it falls a million times, why not give it to her or tell me to get a proper string

for it? Don't tie a necklace around her." And so all three employees had chosen to enroll their own children at Children's Town because of its atmosphere and environment.

Seven additional mothers had pulled their children out of one other childcare setting for various reasons. Fae, for example, took her child out of family care, explaining, "I wanted her to be fully prepared for kindergarten, knowing how to write her first and last name, knowing all of her shapes, colors, numbers, everything." Florence's son was in a Head Start, which she liked. Upset, she recalled, "Unfortunately it had to close." Other mothers, including Tasha, Maya, Genesis, and Tiffani who removed children from homecare settings, had traumatic experiences in their first settings. Tasha recalled her time at a homecare explaining, "The lady would like take her on errands at four months, and I wasn't comfortable with it. I guess, she's going to the supermarket or paying bills, and I see her coming off the ave or wherever with my daughter. No supervision. It wasn't professional." Maya shared her experience, saying, "I put him like at home day care, which was fine. But, she would close like randomly because it was just her; and she had no staff or support, so if she had something going on, she would just be like, 'I'm closed tomorrow.' I couldn't do that."

Genesis too had a negative homecare experience. She commented, "He was in a home daycare. We experienced a lot of issues there. I don't think it was adequately staffed. She said she would like to take younger children. They didn't happen to say what happened during the ordinary day." Tiffani also removed her daughter from home care. In Tiffani's experience, "My daughter was the only baby. The children were good, but my idea of what you should be doing, and your idea of what it should look like, was different. I was having conversations with the owner. She's just like, it's not changing. It

was just time for me to pull out." Finally, Kendria had become upset by an incident with her son. She recounted:

> He got a ringworm. I took him to the doctor…When I sent him back, I put a note in his diaper bag. One of the employees, she called me and she was just making it seem like my son gave it to somebody. Then she was telling me that I was talking back to one of her employees. Nobody was talking back, we were having a conversation, I couldn't deal with it anymore. I was upset.

And so despite a family member owning the daycare, Kendria made the decision to remove him from the setting.

Six of the mothers, Samira, Kadijah, Sanaa, Trina, Chanel, and Lisa, had enrolled their children in at least two prior settings. Again, parents highlighted the center's educational components, small class sizes, family-oriented atmosphere, friendly staff, and well-establish program in the wake of negative experiences in other arrangements. For example, Trina's switched once after she moved, only to find, "When I changed her over here, the school that she was at, she just wasn't growing anymore. I think she grew out of them so I just felt like it was time for her to move on to something better." Chanel had also moved once. From her experience with a local center chain, she shared, "The people there, they were ignorant. They were real ignorant or whatever. I finished for him." Samira's son had been to two daycares, but found the first one cost too much and staff didn't interact with children. She also had a negative experience with a second center, explaining, "It didn't seem like they were learning anything. It seemed to me like they were just babysitting my kids. I asked my son every day what they do at school, what they learned. But he wouldn't really think. He'd say watch TV, eat, sleep, play." Finally, Kadijah's first experience with daycare was traumatic. She recalled, "There was an incident where my son told me that they hit my child. We never really got told by the

owner. We were supposed to have a meeting. I had a meeting with the teachers when we're waiting for the owner and she never came. She kept pushing it off and never said anything. I took him out and never looked back." Upset by this experience, Kadijah kept her sons with family members for over a year until she could find an educational setting that was also safe, which she perceived Children's Town to be.

Lisa and Sanaa had each tried three settings before finding Children's Town. Lisa's daughter had been in family care then two daycares where she had been subjected to traumatic events. When her daughter turned one, Lisa wanted her to have more interaction and took her out of family care. This first experience with daycare, however, was traumatic. Lisa reported, "After three months, when I started to drop her off, she started to cry, scream, cry as if somebody was doing something to her. It was becoming an issue. She would have a little bruise or a scratch or something. No incident report, no phone calls." After trying to meet with the director, who wanted Lisa to keep daughter home because the center was over ratio anyway, she tried another daycare. This experience was equally as traumatic. In Lisa' words, "It was just one morning I dropped my daughter off, about seven in the morning. I came back that afternoon. There was no phone call and she's got a big hickey. I still got a picture of her forehead on my phone. They say, 'I don't know what happened. I'm so sorry.' I took her out; that was her last day." Lisa then conducted more research and talked to more people to find a good daycare where her daughter would be safe and supervised.

Sanaa had also pulled her daughter out of three settings prior to Children's Town. She started her in a two different home cares, but was not satisfied with either. Sanaa explained her reasoning for leaving the first one, saying "I stopped taking her because the

proprietor and I had a disagreement about her sharing private information with other people. That didn't work." She then tried another homecare, but again was dissatisfied because, "Unfortunately, my children were a bit too busy. They don't just sit there and watch television and because they were too busy they were not a good fit for her homecare." After finally finding a daycare she loved, Sanaa was upset when it had to close. In her words, "The third daycare, which I loved, was midway between home and work. It was reasonably priced, great teachers, great atmosphere, but they closed because the building they were leasing, the lease agreement was changed and it was too much money to continue running so they ended up closing that daycare center." Like other mothers, Lisa and Sanaa appreciated Ms. Linda's willingness to address parent concerns and the center's reputation as being a safe, well-supervised and well-established learning environment.

"At least they're safe."

Lessons learned from past experiences with childcare were a second unanticipated finding of this study. Shaped by the lessons learned from journeys through multiple childcare arrangements, the mothers from Children's Town, as well as those from The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy, relied on the past to inform their present choice. The perspectives from this study reveal that the majority of mothers were forced to make multiple early childhood education decisions, most often due to negative experiences or events. Though prior research has been conducted on parents making multiple childcare decisions simultaneously (Uttal, 1997; Early & Burchinal, 2001), research has not yet looked at progressions of childcare choices across time. The findings of this study, however, suggest that past experiences are leading parents to make between

one and six choices prior to finding settings that they are satisfied with and that remain available to them.

The more problematic issue with mothers relying on lessons learned from past experiences with childcare is the number and nature of the negative events that were recounted during interviews. Illegal activities, children coming home with injuries and no incident reports, children watching television or doing nothing all day are, all of these incidents call into the question the regulation of childcare settings. Further, they lead parents to become suspicious of and fearful of providers and settings. In Kadijah from Children's Town's case, she felt her children were safer in the care of family members and kept them at home for over a year before she was willing to trust another provider. After her son told her he was hit a teacher and the provider was unresponsive, Kadijah spoke about doing what she felt was best for her two young children because even though they weren't learning day-to-day, "at least they're safe."

Educational Values and Next Steps

Educational values and children's next educational steps were anticipated findings of the study. Though anticipated, descriptions of maternal primary caregiver experiences add to an understanding of why these factors influenced the process in the ways they did and give insight into the nuances of this population's views on childcare and its relationship to education. All maternal primary caregivers addressed the importance of centers having an educational component in their searches for childcare. Kim from Celebrate Kids Academy captured a sentiment most mothers conveyed when she explained, "I really wanted a place that was going to be focused on education. I've really didn't want a place that the kids just sat around. They didn't do anything. I thought I

wanted a place that would stimulate her socially and a place that will stimulate her intellectually, and a place that wasn't being seen crazy." Across all interviews, from Trinity who cited her son's learning as important once in explaining her childcare search to Tameka who mentioned educational value fifteen times when describing her search, the importance of children learning something in childcare was consistent across all maternal primary caregivers. How much emphasis and detail parents placed on educational values, however, varied greatly based on individual mothers, though patterns across sites became evident.

All women also expressed to varying degrees their next steps and long-term goals for their children. The women with the clearest path for their children's education were from The Christian School, which is not surprising as they chose a program that directly filters into a K-8 school. As Fae reasoned, "I wanted to put him somewhere where I won't have to constantly look for schools. I know this goes from Pre-K to eight and I know it was a really good school." Almost all women also expressed a strong distaste for the public school system, indicating they would try for alternatives for kindergarten. Kadijah from Children's Town talked about exhausting every option before public schools based on her own experiences in the system. She emphatically explained, "I haven't even looked at the city's public schools. I looked at charter schools. I looked at Catholic schools. I've looked at seeing if I can go into Springside, or up to Derby, anywhere, absolutely anywhere, except this city's public schools." Expectations for academic outcomes and hopes for children's futures also varied greatly, from wanting children to not deal drugs and become productive citizens to expecting children to stay in school through the completion of doctoral programs. Rhonda from Celebrate Kids

Academy detailed how she explained her educational expectations to her son, Milo. She relayed, "I talk to both of my kids about college. Milo is like, 'What's college?' I'm like, 'It's where you go after high school.' He's like, 'What's high school?' I'm like, 'It's where you go after junior high school.' He's like, 'Well what's that?' I say, 'You got a long way, but you'll be there.'"

Perspectives on education from The Christian School.

At The Christian School, all women were looking for an academic, school setting where in the words of Barb, "You're not just going to sit and play all day." In discussing their educational values, Barb, Drea, Tameka, Vera, and Faith all looked for a program with structure where children had activities and a schedule and where discipline was enforced consistently and fairly. Drea explained her perspective saying, "They're very well structured. They communicate with me a lot. They're doing it with the nice teachers. They're always doing something with the kids. They're constantly learning something and sending homework home." Tameka reported choosing a religious school specifically for the structure and discipline aspect of education. She reasoned, "I would recommend The Christian School to anybody, or any good Christian school in the area. You're going to have more structure, more discipline for your child. To me, personally, that's just what I feel." Anessa, Vi, and Denise mentioned that a small class size was important in their searches; and though the program didn't abide by ratios, a class of eighteen with two teachers is smaller than most comparable centers. Anessa and Tameka also mentioned looking for a center with a set curriculum, while Tameka also was looking for a program that sent home homework.

All but a handful of mothers also evaluated teachers in their search. Barb was looking for teachers who treated children equally, Vi for teachers who would take time with children, Drea for "good teachers," and Tameka for teachers who would communicate with her, tell her what's going on, and who were passionate about their jobs. Vera talked about looking for teachers who were sturdy and firm, while Faith wanted teachers "who wouldn't be lazy and would push him [her son] to get it right." Seven women, Barb, Vi, Anessa, Tameka, Vera, Faith, and Denise, also reported supplementing what their children were doing in school with work at home. Vera even made copies of all of her daughter's homework packets and assignments so she could work on them at home, while Tameka enrolled her son in a summer reading program every year. Tameka explained, "Skill-wise, over the summer, I was going to put him in this reading program… it's an hour, once a week for six or seven weeks. And they just teach him how to actually read from ... It's one-on-one reading. It's going to cost me, this is probably $200, but I said, 'You know what? I don't have a problem with paying that.'"

Of all the centers, educational next steps proved most important for The Christian School maternal primary caregivers, which was not surprising given that the program was part of a Pre-K to 8th grade school setting. Except for Jule, whose son's behavior was problematic, all of the women reported hoping that their children would stay enrolled at the school through 8th grade. Jule felt, "I thought it would have been best if he stayed at the Head Start, but my mom said, 'No, he'll be fine. He'll be OK.' The Christian School, like I said, is a good school, but I don't think they're ready or really set up to deal with children that have real, real behavioral problems or issues." Barb and Vi stated their children would stay as long as they could afford it, while Vera said her daughter would

stay as long as she continued to be challenged. Like Jule, Denise's daughter had an IEP and special needs. Denise expressed concerns about her daughter, but remained hopeful she would stay through 8th grade. Denise explained, "I'm not 100 percent sure, it depends on how she, you know, how she…how can I say this… it depends on if she's able keep up. I'm not sure right now. Since like her speech difficulties, I'm kind of concerned like, you know, ever since she's been about maybe 18 months."

With regard to long-term educational goals, Barb, Vi, Anessa, Tameka, and Faith reported that they expected their children to complete college Vi reasoned, "They're definitely going to be college grads. What they do after that, it'd be their choice. Whatever makes them happy." Drea hoped her son would get into computers, but would be able to make his own decisions, while Jule said her son could do whatever made him happy as long as it wasn't illegal. She explained, "Whatever makes him happy as long as it's not drug dealing or anything like that. Not anything dangerous. If he wants to be … I mean, dangerous … OK, I'll take that back because some jobs are, a lot of jobs are dangerous, but as long as he's not the illegal or bad." Vera hoped her daughter would use her imagination and Denise didn't mentioned any long-term goals for her daughter outside of being able to keep up academically at The Christian School.

Perspectives on education from Celebrate Kids Academy.

At Celebrate Kids Academy, all participants talked about the importance of finding a center where their children would learn. Structure was important to Felisha, Kim, Rhonda, Fanta, Kathy, Gina, who also sought it in relation to "stability," and Trinity, who believed it coincided with "calm." Jacqui and Missy also expressed the importance of structure and both referred to themselves as "traditional" in that they

looked for structure through classrooms' tables and chairs arrangements. Missy

elaborated, explaining, "I look for the desk. I guess I'm a little still traditional as far as

how when we went to school and just kind of like your desk. I know you are responsible

for pulling your chair out, pulling it in, making sure you are … maintain your space,

that's your materials that's in your desk." And though Celebrate Kids Academy had over

50 children and my observations suggested they struggled with maintaining ratios, both

Dawn and Tamara mentioned ratios as important. Dawn placed great emphasis on ratios,

explaining, "I wanted him to be somewhere that he wasn't going to be looked over. He

was going to be able to grow. Here the place is like ratio-ed out, so it's like I know you'll

have that one-on-one attention with him and he's going to get one-on-one time with

them. Everything clicked. Everything fit into place."

About half of the mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy, including Gina, Keisha,

Tanya, Felisha, Rhonda, Mel, Alayah, Trinity, mentioned they looked for program with a

curriculum. Fourteen of fifteen mothers also talked about the importance of evaluating

the teachers and staff, though their criteria for teacher varied greatly. Trinity, Fanta, and

Missy all talked about their preference for "older, seasoned" teachers. Fanta was

particularly emphatic in describing what she looked for in teachers:

> Even though I would have liked to have her somewhere where she was in a
> classroom with a little old lady who's probably been teaching for 30 years, I just
> didn't have time to look around and research for that. That's my ideal childcare
> setting. I want a teacher who's seasoned as opposed to maybe someone who's like
> only been doing it for a couple years because as you know with childcare
> sometimes, a lot of childcare centers you don't have to have a degree so therefore
> … I'm old school, experience sometimes can be better. So if there's a preschool
> teacher who's been doing it for like 35 years, she's been had well more
> experience then someone who might have gone to college for four years who's
> never been in a classroom. That's my ideal of setting. I want an old woman who's
> been around for like 30 years.

Teacher training and education, on the other hand, was considered an influential factor by Jacqui, Fanta, Kathy, Alayah, Tamara. Six mothers also looked for teachers who cared about and love working with kids, while five mentioned the importance of having teachers who would keep them informed about their children's days. Gina, an employee, expressed her appreciate for her daughter's teachers willingness to communicate. She commented, "In work, it's professional: my daughter did this today, she did that today, she had an accident. Okay, this is what we need to change; her teacher goes over everything. I like that and I enjoy that because she cuts off the teacher and then puts me in the parent room."

A number of mothers spoke about educational values and offerings that were unique to Celebrate Kids Academy and drew them to enroll their children. Five mothers, including Gina, Tanya, Kim, Rita, Tamara, were looking specifically for environments where children seemed engaged. Tanya described her personal process, explaining, "I was looking around, kind of like walking into the daycare, and you know, 'Do you have any space?' And asking them for a tour, and watching how the teachers interact with the children." Eleven women also mentioned being impressed by the program's foreign language component. Keisha offered her perspective, sharing, "I think it's a nice atmosphere that offers things that other schools haven't offered, like the Chinese lessons, Spanish, and things of that nature. I haven't been to another daycare that offers that. I say they offer variety as far as other daycares." Jacqui, Kathy, and Missy each mentioned that they were looking for a program that gave homework, which they saw as having educational value. Twelve mothers also reported that they supplemented what their children were doing at the center by working with them at home. Rhonda and Rita did not

report working with their children at home, while Trinity only mentioned working with her son on tying his shoes.

In terms of next steps and long-term goals, all of the mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy had given thought to kindergarten. Kim's daughter was already enrolled in a Catholic school, Fanta registered her daughter for school outside of the city, Missy's son was enrolled in a Montessori for the next school year, and Trinity's son was registered in the public school system, though she wasn't sure she was actually going to send him. Trinity explained, "I have enrolled him into Prince [for kindergarten.] I don't know. There is also another school, it's right around the corner from our house. But they were asking me to keep here, but I need to see how CCIS is going to work out because I don't think I can afford $200 a week or something like that to stay." Every other one of the remaining 11 mothers stated that public school was either not option or the last possible alternative for their children's kindergarten. Keisha stated, "I'm trying to avoid the public school system since they have so many issues right now, I'll try for private," while Dawn said, "I just don't want him to be in the public schools, I want what's best for him," and Kathy stated, "Public schools are really, really lacking…I'm hoping by next fall we will be out of the city and in a suburban neighborhood… we want to get out to suburbia as soon as possible."

When asked how long they expected their children to stay in school, ten mothers, including Keisha, Tanya, Dawn, Rhonda, Kathy, Alayah, Tamara, Kim, Fanta, and Missy, stated that they expected their children to attend college, if not go farther. Alayah offered her plans for her sons, sharing, "They're going to graduate high school, they're going to graduate college, get ahead, go to graduate school. It's their choice. I'm not

forcing them into anything but through the whole thing they're going to be playing sports." Other hopes and dreams for children's futures varied greatly without any significant patterns arising across the site. Gina, for example, spoke generally about expectations for her daughter. She stated, "I want her to be great. I know that's probably what every mom says, but I want her to be on top of her game, I want her writing to be up to score, I want her to speak proper English, I want her to know everything there is to know and I want her to learn everything that she can." Rhonda was more specific, sharing, "I encourage my kids to be FBI agents, let's do a marshal, you can be a US Marshal. You know they're boys, so I'm trying to keep it in a range like that. He's really interested in firemen and police officers." Perhaps the most specific parent of all was Kathy, who disclosed, "The two little ones…Kai, I think that she would mess around and get like a Master's degree in vocal ensemble or something just because she's so out there. I can so see her being the director of a cruise ship or something like that. Kara, she's a very visual girl. Brilliant to the math and sciences, so I if could say I anything I think that she'd be like a color developer."

Perspectives on education from Children's Town.

And finally, just as those from The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy, all maternal primary caregivers with children enrolled in Children's Town reported factoring a learning environment into their childcare searches. This center had a number of mothers who reported looking specifically for a structured environment, including Margaret, Fae, Tasha, Kendria, Tami, Maya, Trina, Lisa, and Genesis. Tami was looking for a balance between structure and nurturing, stating, "You have to be tough and not let the children run over you but at the same you got to take that time to show that

you care for each of your children in that class and know they're different personalities and how to cater to their needs." The combination of Children's Town's daily schedule and curriculum supports its structured environment. Five mothers, Margaret, Samira, Sanaa, Trina, and Tiffani, also mentioned the importance of a curriculum. Samira explained, "I was really looking at the curriculum because it prepares them for kindergarten and that's what I was looking for in that so it doesn't just hit him when he gets there. He'll be used to a little bit more." Margaret, Trina, and Tiffani also each reported looking for centers that required teachers to have lesson plans, which Children's Town does. Though Celebrate Kids Academy had the lowest ratio number of all three centers, only Maya, Zedra, and Kadijah reported looking for low ratios in their searches. Zedra shared, "That ratio between children to teachers is really big because you really have to respect the ratio of what… to give children what they actually need."

Aspects of teacher knowledge and communication were important to 12 out of 16 mothers. Samira, Zedra, Tiffani, Trina, Lisa looked specifically for teachers who had training and were educated in the field. Trina placed significant emphasis on teacher education, commenting, "I really wanted to see about credentials as far as the teachers, their education. What were their backgrounds? Did they have backgrounds in education? Were they at least in school for early childhood education? That was really, really big as well." A second set of mothers, Margaret, Kendria, Maya, Sanaa, Fae, Chanel, and Genesis, were more interested in whether or not teachers would communicate with them. From Sanaa's perspective, "I know that the staff that's there, I felt they care about the children. They don't have a problem calling or texting if there's a problem. They communicate with the parents. I know that she's well taken of."

Two additional patterns related to educational values emerged that were unique to Children's Town. Mothers from Children's Town expressed a fear of their children being in environments where they didn't do anything all day; therefore, a center that engaged children in daily activities was crucial to Tiffani, Sanaa, Kendria, Samira, Tami, and Genesis. Genesis was specific about what she was looking for as far as daily activities. She clarified, "[It was important] That they would have an education as well. I mean, I teach them at home. We really teach at home, but I wanted them to be reinforced in the school as well… They have to be able to articulate what they learned. We ask them every day, 'What did you learn today?'" A second set of mothers, including Florence, Kadijah, Fae, Chanel, and Lisa, were looking for centers that would prepare their children for kindergarten specifically. Chanel offered her perspective, sharing, "I didn't want him sitting home and then waiting for kindergarten at home. I didn't want him to go there without a clue." Almost all of the mothers from Children's Town mentioned working at home with their children, and the greatest emphasis was placed on children's writing.

In terms of kindergarten and long-term goals for children, the mothers of Children's Town had also all given thought to their children's educational futures. For kindergarten, Florence's son was set to go to a local public school, Sanaa's daughter was enrolled at a charter school with her older brother, Fae's daughter would join her siblings at a public school, and Lisa's daughter was set to attend a charter school. Of the remaining 12 mothers, Margaret, Tiffani, and Genesis expressed how stressed and anxious they were about finding a quality kindergarten option. Margaret explained, "It puts a knot in my stomach because I don't know the teachers… Sending him off to kindergarten that's why I have been looking since January for a kindergarten and I know

he's not going until next September. I have a lot of time, but I'm just really, really nervous." Unless outside of the city, all three mothers said public schools were not an option. Also unwilling to send their children to public schools were Tasha, who asserted, "If I have to work six jobs, my daughter is not going to public school," as well as Kendria, Samira, Tami, Maya, Zedra, Kadijah, and Chanel. In total, 13 of the 16 participants did not consider the public school system to be a viable educational pathway. Aside from Florence and Fae, only Trina was still considering sending her son public school; though it was not her first choice, she stated, "I've tried charter and I can't afford anything else."

In terms of long-term educational goals, about half of the women, including Samira, Maya, Zedra, Tiffani, Sanaa, Fae, Trina, and Chanel, mentioned their hopes for their children to attend college specifically. Maya was matter-of-fact, stating, "I expect him to go to college." Other mothers were less concrete in their future hopes and goals. Tasha, for example, shared her hopes for her daughter, saying, "[She can be] whatever she wants to be, which right now is a ballerina. She wants to be that, so we're going to try that." Genesis was equally noncommittal talking about her hopes for her son. She reasoned, "I believe that you should achieve as much as you can, that you should not stop learning. I hope he continues to achieve as much as he can because we should not stop learning at any age. Every day there is something to learn." And so while mothers from Children's Town shared a variety of paths for their children's futures, each had given thought to their children's educational next steps, kindergarten and beyond, prior to childcare enrollment.

"She's not going to public school."

Maternal primary caregivers varied in their views on the specifics of education, especially in terms of what they were looking for, and the educational next steps for their children. Mothers remained consistent, however, in expressing that they were looking for learning environments and had high hopes for their children's futures. Mothers were also consistent in their condemnation of the city's public school system. Not one of the forty women wanted their children in a public school for kindergarten. Tasha from Children's Town stated, "If I have to work six jobs, she's not going to public school." For the handful of mothers who were still considering public schools as options, this option was spoken about in "last resort" terms. Distaste for the city's public school system was so strong that some women considered moving just to avoid it. The public school system aversion was highly personal for many mothers as well, referencing either their own or family members bad experiences with the system. Avoiding the public schools was cited by women from The Christian School as a primary purpose for choosing a program that fed into a K-8 school.

The interview lens also allowed for mother's to describe what aspects of education they valued and why. In some instances, the aspects of education most highly valued stand in direct contrast with what experts in early childhood education recommend for young children, thus creating a tension. One example of this type of tension is related to mother's looking for structure. As the descriptions above illustrate, structure and structured learning environments were important to the majority of mothers. Missy, for example, really wanted her son to have his own individual desk and felt that he was backsliding at Celebrate Kids Academy without one. Experts in child development,

however, would argue that too much structure and rigidity in a program is neither age appropriate nor developmentally appropriate for young children. In fact, Montessori programs are founded upon the encouragement children's independence and freedom within limits. As Kim from Celebrate Kids Academy explained, however, she felt a structured program translated into a safer program. A number of mothers also equated structure with discipline, which Tameka from The Christian School felt her son needed because, as she explained it, "Boys get distracted just by their self."

Another example of a tension was with mothers who were looking for homework and curricula during their searches. Both The Christian School and Celebrate Kids Academy gave homework. Children's Town at one time had sent homework home, but had to stop. As Ms. Lisa explained, their partnership with Pre-K Counts disallowed homework because it was seemed an inappropriate practice for children of this age. Instead, children worked on take-home projects. Mothers who had enrolled children in all three centers also talked about looking for centers with set curricula. In my observations, however, only Children's Town had lessons plans and followed a curriculum in practice. Early childhood and child development experts, however, do not hold all curricula in the same esteem. Children's Town were required to implement The Creative Curriculum when they formed their Pre-K Counts partnerships, Celebrate Kids Academy, on the other hand, sited Hooked On Phonics, which is not traditionally used as a curriculum, as one of their two curricula. And so again, the importance of recognizing that this group of mothers was making decisions under certain circumstances and with resources that were less valued by dominant structures in society becomes relevant. In these cases, tensions were created when what mothers felt to be indicative of educational value did not align

with, and in some cases were the exact opposite of, practices supported by the fields of early childhood education and child development.

Logistics and Cost

A second anticipated finding of the study deals with the more practical side of selecting childcare. Though anticipated, descriptions of maternal primary caregiver experiences add to an understanding of why and how these factors influenced the process in the ways they did. Across all mothers, the two most referenced aspects of logistics and cost were location and affordability. In terms of location, participants reported needing a place near the family home, the mother's place of work, or somewhere in between. Lisa from Children's Town captured many mothers' sentiments in explaining the importance of a close location, sharing, "I tried to keep it close just in case of an emergency. I try to keep her close as possible so if there's an emergency I could just run and get her. I don't want to be so far." The Christian School mothers were most inclined to choose a program close to their jobs, while the mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town more often chose centers in their home neighborhoods.

Extended hours and year-round enrollment factored heavily into the decisions of the mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town. Hours were a deal-breaker for Keisha from Celebrate Kids Academy. In her words, "I just [had] to make sure that my child was covered in the work hours where I can get there, go to work, and then pick her up without them saying they're closing, or whatever. She's here five days a week, all year round. She's here every day." These logistics were less important for participants from The Christian School, which followed a traditional September to June academic schedule. The women from The Christian School expressed a willingness to

make the ten-month schedule work or doing "what had to be done," as a tradeoff for the benefits of access to a long-term educational setting.

In terms of affordability, all forty maternal primary caregivers also stated that cost was a significant factor because, as Gina put it, "If you can't afford it, you can't go." Over half of the women visited centers that they did not send their children to because either they could not afford it or they did not have access due to subsidy constraints. The families that most referenced cost as an influencing factor included mothers from The Christian School, the private pay parents from Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town, and parents with multiple young children. The CCIS subsidy was not available to families from The Christian School, though over half of participants reported receiving help to pay for tuition through scholarships, fundraising initiatives, or from family members. Of the 31 participants from Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town, both of which accepted subsidy, 19 received CCIS subsidies, two attended Children's Town at no cost through Pre-K Counts due to parental unemployed, and six paid full price. Among the remaining four families, two were relatives of Celebrate Kids Academy's owner and had discounted arrangements and two enrolled children part-time while they applied for subsidies.

Of the 19 families on the CCIS subsidy specifically, 16 mothers reported feeling frustrated with the CCIS system because their children had been dropped or they had been threatened with getting dropped. When asked if the recession had any impact on the affordability of their childcare, most participants stated that it did not. However, when a follow up question related to work disruptions and job loss was posed, one-third of the women from all three centers mentioned recently experiencing disruption or job loss.

Perspectives from The Christian School.

The Christian School was conveniently located near the workplaces of eight of the nine women. Vi lived down the street, but was retired so location was important to her in terms of proximity to her house. Drea had the longest commute, almost an hour on the trolley and bus, but she also worked at the school. When I asked the women about logistics like the fact that this program had shorter hours and only a ten-month school year, the women expressed a willingness to make sacrifices in exchange for what they perceived to be a strong academic, long-term educational experience. For example, Barb stated, "My job let me change my hours so I could drop her off and pick her up. Here my Mom brings her and I pick her up." Vi assumed the role of maternal primary caregiver to her grandson and he often stayed overnight so he could attend the program, Jule relied on family members to pick up her son, and Tameka's husband switched to an overnight shift so he could get their son to school and pick him up daily. Denise offered the following insight into how she worked the logistical aspects of care out, saying, "When I pick her up, she comes to my job and we have like a playroom. I have to go back to work until 4:30." The four other mothers used the program's after-care program, which

In terms of a ten-month schedule, interviews were conducted in late spring and many mothers mentioned their plans for care over the upcoming summer. Barb, Anessa, Drea, and Faith were going to send their children to The Christian School's summer camp, Vi and Denise were sending their children back to daycare camps, and Jule and Tameka had made arrangements for family to watch their sons. Only Vera had not yet made plans for her daughter's summer care. Vera explained, "I don't know if she's going to do the camp. She'll probably go to the other side of her family for a while and so I

might not do camp so much this year. I might just take her back and have her babysat or just hang out with my family or whatever, just to give her that little break." Though the program did not include infant or toddler care, multi-age care was still advantageous for Vi, Vera, and Denise because they had older children enrolled in the school.

In terms of cost, affordability was a major concern for the maternal primary caregivers at The Christian School. As noted, six participants relied on help from either the school or family members to cover their children's cost. Though the lump sum they paid annually was comparable to a weekly CCIS co-pay, this group of women expressed the most anxiety over cost. Their anxiety was linked to the fact that they would have to pay that sum annually for the next eight years, whereas parents in other arrangements could enroll their children in public or charter schools without assuming a long-term cost. Further, Barb, Vi, Drea, Jule, Vera, and Denise were all single and supporting more than one child; in fact, Vi, Vera, and Denise were paying multiple Christian School tuitions.

When they addressed affordability, however, the women from The Christians School again displayed a willingness to make sacrifices. Anessa stated, "I believe that good child care is very important, so I would much rather sacrifice something else and find quality child care rather than visa versa." Vera echoed a similar sentiment, saying "Having more than one child and so my tuition was going to be adjusted from one kid to two kids… to make the sacrifice. We don't have movie night, we go to a movie once or twice a year now. I took cable out and I made some other financial decisions because it was like, this money could be better spent." Jule sacrificed as well, letting her mother take over her son's educational decisions, which she wasn't happy about, because she was willing to pay his tuition. Tameka was intent on making her son the top cheesecake

seller in the school to get the maximum tuition rebate. She recounted her experience with her older son, saying, "They give you that help, with the fundraising and stuff. When my older son was there, I don't even think I paid tuition, because he was a top seller in every fundraiser that they had, the whole eight years he was there. The whole eight years. He was selling $2,000 worth of cheesecakes."

Perspectives from Celebrate Kids Academy.

At Celebrate Kids Academy, 11 mothers reported that they lived locally and had limited their childcare searches to centers close by or in the neighborhood. Of the remaining four women, Kim and Tamara dropped their children off on the way to work while Dawn and Fanta worked close by, making the center convenient for all participants. Flexible and extended hours were also important for this group of mothers. The center opened daily at 6:30 AM and closed at 6:30 PM; participants in the study reported that the later pick-up time was essential, especially for the mothers who worked during the day. The majority of their children were dropped off before 8:00 AM and picked up after 5:00 PM, which allowed parents to work a full day. Only Jacqui, who worked an overnight security shift, Missy, who worked part-time, Alayah, who was in school and on maternity leave, and Trinity, who was not working, dropped off later and picked up earlier due to their flexible schedules. All 15 mothers reported that they had kept or would be keeping their children enrolled year-round in the program. Kim, Fanta, and Mel had children attending kindergarten in the fall and stated that they would be taking their children out for "a break" before school started. All three mothers had college degrees and paid out of pocket, likely giving them the economic capital to do so. Celebrate Kids as a multi-age center benefited Felisha, Kathy, and Rita, who all had younger children in

Celebrate Kids Academy's infant and toddler classrooms. Also benefiting were Gina, Keisha, Tanya, Dawn, Rhonda, Rita, and Tamara, who had enrolled their children as infants or toddlers.

When the mothers at Celebrate Kids Academy spoke about affordability and cost, most viewed cost as constraining. Nine women, six of them single mothers, received CCIS subsidies to assist with their childcare payments. Alayah was working on securing a subsidy and could only afford to send her son part-time at a private pay price while she waited. Kim, Fanta, and Missy, paid $165 per week as private pay parents. And as close relatives of Mr. Marshall and Ms. Kiera, Felisha and Tamara paid at a discounted rate. For the CCIS dependent mothers, dealing with what they described as a difficult system made cost a significant constraint. Gina, Keisha, Tanya, Rhonda, Jacqui, Rita, and Trinity all had their children dropped at one point in time due to issues with CCIS, most often due to "mysteriously lost" paperwork, wrong addresses, and sick children with high absence rates. All nine mothers described CCIS as a system" eager to kick you out" and the two mothers who had not been kicked off both said the same thing, Dawn was "nuts about keeping up to date" and Kathy was vigilant about staying "on top of it [paperwork]."

The private pay mothers, Kim, Fanta, and Missy, also expressed frustration with the cost of care. Kim paid childcare for two children and stated, "Cost is very important for us because we don't qualify for a subsidy… We've seen some places that are like $400 a week and we're like, "Okay, no." Missy relayed, "Price is everything. It really is everything when it comes to education and at times there's definitely been more bills and money at the end of the month," while Fanta who also paid for two children echoed, "I

was looking into scholarships and everything. I did my research and doing whatever I could do because my childcare is expensive. I pay up $1200 a month for childcare. It's expensive. It's more than my mortgage." And finally, likely due to their close relationships with the owner, the only mothers who did not share in frustration over subsidy and cost were Mr. Marshall's family members, Felisha and Tamara.

Perspective from Children's Town.

For the mothers at Children's Town, location was a more important logistical factor than hours, though all mothers were looking for a year-round enrollment option. In terms of location, 12 mothers reported living in close proximity to the center. Margaret and Tamie each lived in bordering neighborhoods, but since they were employees and worked daily, Children's Town was convenient. For two mothers, Kadijah and Sanaa, Children's Town was close, but life circumstances were complicating the center's convenience. Kadijah had two sons in the program, but was also due to give birth in two weeks. Though she lived close-by, she was thinking about switched to a center in a church across the street from her house after the baby arrived. Sanna was going through a divorce and had to work overtime to pay for childcare. Though she too lived locally, she was pulling her daughter out the next year for a charter school because she needed a place both her children could attend. Like The Christian School, Children's Town had set hours. If parents needed before and after care, they had to pay an additional albeit minimal fee. Only Tasha, Samira, Florence, Kadijah, and Chanel picked their children up when the program ended at 3:00 PM, the remaining moms paid the minimal extra care fee so they could work a full day. Children's Town as a multi-age facility benefited six mothers, including Samira, Tami, Kadijah, Fae, Trina, and Genesis, who all had multiple

children enrolled. Further, nine mothers, including all three employees, had also benefited from its multi-age capacity when they enrolled their children as infants or toddlers.

Like the mothers at Celebrate Kids Academy, the women of Children's Town cited cost as a major constraint. Twelve of the sixteen women, eight of them single mothers, received either CCIS of Pre-k counts subsidies to assist or negate their childcare payments. Genesis could not afford private pay full time so her son attended three days a week. Tiffani along with Maya and Sanaa, both single mothers, paid $145 dollars per week for their children. Similar to the mothers at Celebrate Kids Academy, six of the ten families on CCIS subsidy had been dropped at some point during care. Lisa's experience was representative of the group, she relayed, "They did cut me off and then it was something that had to do with one of the case workers reading my stuff and they put that wrong code or error, whatever, in there and had me out and I couldn't understand." Tiffani, Maya, and Sanaa, the private pay parents, also expressed concern over cost. Tiffini had a dream center, but couldn't afford the $265 price tag and had to chose a more reasonable option, while Maya discussed her need to budget the monthly bills and Sanaa echoed, "Unfortunately, price plays a big part because if it's too expensive for me to afford then that's my biggest deal breaker." Only Kadijah and Chanel who each received full compensation because they were out of work didn't express frustration over childcare cost. Both, however, had strained financial situations and were grateful to not be paying childcare.

"A very difficult time."

Though an anticipated finding of the study, the descriptions presented provide deeper insight into how and in what ways logistics and cost influence the parental enrollment process. In terms of logistics, mothers made an important distinction between options and choices. When I asked mothers if they felt like they had many options in their neighborhoods for care that would work, many said that while there were many options, they did not feel as though they had many viable choices. As Anessa explained, "Childcare in general … even though there were a lot of options basically a childcare center on one … or several sometimes on every block … I had a very difficult time finding childcare for her. I had explored over 10 different childcare centers here either in my area or at her grandmother's area and I just wasn't happy. From the big names to small private providers … not happy." This question of options versus choices highlights issues of accessibility and the lack of quality of childcare in high-poverty neighborhoods. On the programmatic side of childcare, this distinction again calls into question the regulation of arrangements throughout the city. If a mother visits ten centers and still can't find one, what is going on at these centers that is turning parents away? More importantly, who is checking up on these centers, what standards are they being held to, and how often are checks happening?

Cost was a point of great frustration for maternal primary caregivers, regardless of center and regardless of form of payment. Most parents relied on assistance, either borrowing from family, scholarships, or the Department of Welfare, to pay for care. Parents who paid of pocket were frustrated by the fact that as a privatized industry, centers can charge excessive amounts per week and get away with it so long as parents

are willing to pay. Mothers reliant on subsidies were at the mercy of the system to access funding for their childcare. Their search became limited to only those centers that accepted their subsidies and had spots open. Issues related to cost fueled disenchantment in parents who viewed cost largely as another major hurdle in their access to care.

Intersections of Structural, Parental, and Child Level Factors

Salient factors influencing parental choice have consistently been identified and described in terms of three sets or levels of factors: (1) structural characteristics and policy contexts; (2) parental characteristics and practices; and the least researched (3) perceptions of child characteristics. As previously stated, these three sets of factors have largely been examined in isolation. Within the last two years, however, researchers have begun to examine the interaction of multiple levels of factors. Grogan (2011) found that parents considered a combination of contextual, family, and child factors prior to choice. This discussion then is timely and adds another layer of depth to current conversation. Analytic descriptions of how the intersection of these sets of factors became manifested in the choice process add deeper insight into our understanding of how mothers find and select centers. Though there is great overlap, this analysis differs from the discussion of the factors that most influence choice because it focuses more so on the process and the construction of choice sets.

Based on the data collected, I argue that mothers consider then negotiate all three levels of factors, a frustrating and difficult process according to many. For this group of women, the process began when they constructed choice sets and began to assess what choices they had. Understandings choice sets and how they are constructed from the perspective of the parent quantifies bounded rationality, or the limits of their cognitive

resources, information, and time. Choice sets also illustrate how shortcuts and satisficing were used to make decisions. It is not possible for this or any group of mothers to have considered all the childcare possibilities, especially given the time and resources it would have taken to gather information about the 683 centers in this one city. According to Simon (1990), mothers would have satisficed, or called upon their experiences to evaluate centers and construct expectations of how of good choices might be, enrolling children when a center met those expectations.

The context within which childcare choices were made was also constrained by a lack of resources, including unequal access to transportation, time for center visits, information on childcare, money, and subsidies (Bell, 2009). In education, high levels of capital are particularly advantageous, but are not equally distributed across race and class (Bourdieu, 1977a). Mothers of minority children living in high-poverty neighborhoods made their choices within segregated and stratified contexts because their family capital is less valued by dominant structures in society. As Diamond and Gomez (2004) have argued, poor and working class African-American parents are faced with "more challenging educational contexts (i.e., lower quality schools that parents perceive as less responsive to their involvement) and engage these educational contexts with fewer valued resources than their middle-class African American counterparts" (385).

Using the resources they had and with bounded rationality, mothers went about constructing choice sets. The first barriers that mothers met were in the form of structural constraints. Specifically, those constraints were related to how individual parents perceived centers' accessibility, availability, regulation, and affordability. If centers were not perceived to be accessible, available, regulated, and affordable, which are each

addressed in detail below, then they were not considered reasonable and they were not

included in the choice set. Structural barriers, like cost and subsidy, were perceived to be

outside of parents' control. In many cases, mothers indicated satisficing at this stage of

the process because optimal centers were eliminated due to lack of resources.

With choice sets narrowed significantly at the structural level, choice set

construction became largely parent-level driven. Reasonable choices for participants

arose when centers made logistical sense for the families and when mothers felt

comfortable leaving their children under the care of providers. At this stage in the

process, the majority of mothers halted search when they found a solution that fit this

levels of needs. For some maternal primary caregivers, however, the search did not end.

Mothers, often after having removed a child from a center deemed unfit to meet needs,

felt they needed to take the process a step further due to child-level characteristics.

Specifically, child characteristics became a significant factor when parents were

concerned about children with special or exceptional needs and when children were

perceived as in need of structure and/or socialization.

Structural Barriers

In the extant literature on parental choice and childcare arrangements, structural

characteristics and policy contexts address factors such as subsidy use and Welfare

Reform, the recent recession, and variability in policy and legislation across local, state,

and federal entities as impacting choice. In interviews with maternal primary caregivers, I

asked questions related to experiences paying for childcare, feelings on cost and subsidy

use, work and job histories, and for those mothers who had relocated, how their

experiences with childcare in this city compared to others. When mothers talked about

their searches and how they went about constructing choice sets, they spoke about and referenced four barriers they had no choice but to confront: accessibility, availability, regulation, and affordability. Further, these were references as barriers because they were largely framed as out of mothers' control. (See Figure 5.1)
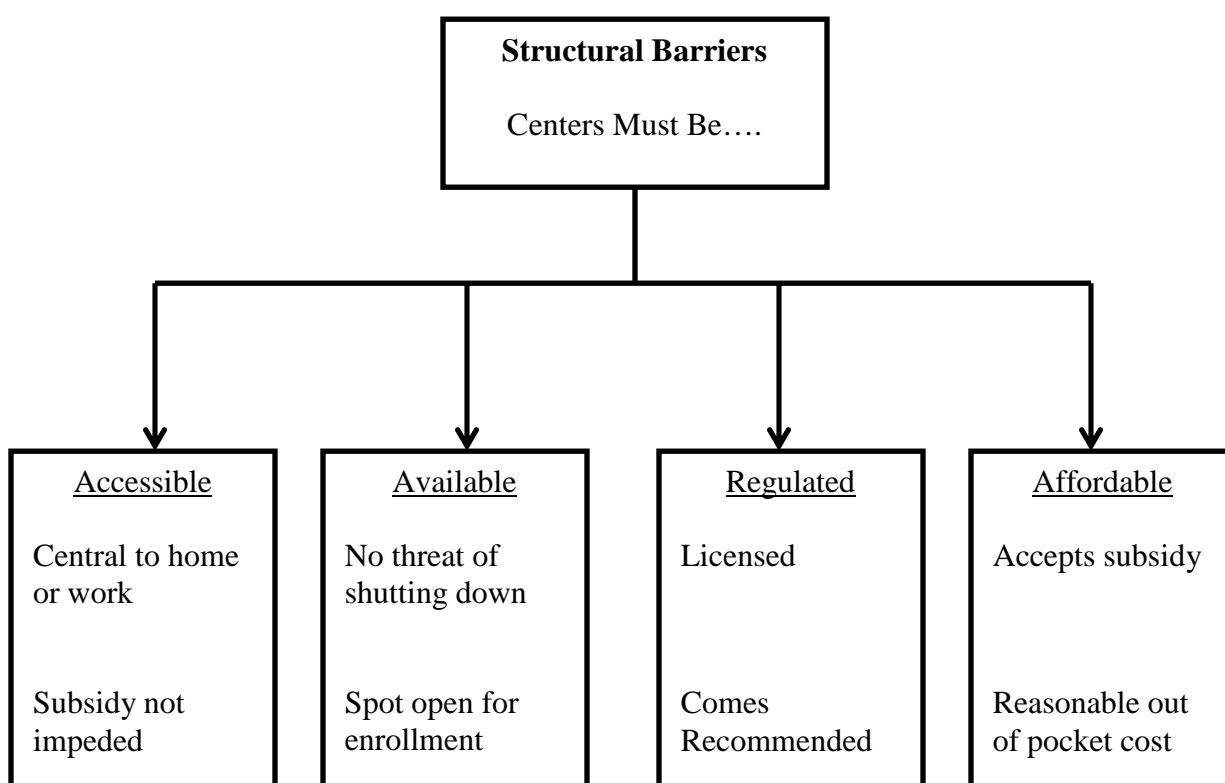
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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Structural Barriers    │
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                    │    Centers Must Be….     │
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Accessible	Available	Regulated	Affordable
Central to home or work	No threat of shutting down	Licensed	Accepts subsidy
Subsidy not impeded	Spot open for enrollment	Comes Recommended	Reasonable out of pocket cost

Figure 5.1
Structural Barriers Limiting Choice Set Construction

Accessibility.

For maternal primary caregivers, accessibility was related to two main questions: Was the center reasonably accessible to the family's home or the mother's place of work? And for those parents reliant on subsidy, was access to CCIS unimpeded? Centers not accessible in terms of location were excluded during the construction of choice sets because if parents could not get their children to them, they were not reasonable choices. Further, if parents were reliant on subsidy and having issues accessing the CCIS subsidy,

as many mothers did, center-based care was either eliminated from the choice set until subsidy was secured or parents had to consider paying out-of-pocket for part-time care, as Alayah from Celebrate Kids Academy and Genesis from Children's Town had done. When access to subsidy was blocked, many mothers described changing their searches to include relative care or Head Start programs, which were free.

In the literature, accessibility in terms of location or centrality is typically addressed in terms of supply and demand. Queralt & White (1998), for example, found an uneven supply of childcare across geographic areas, and even within neighborhoods. Conversations among researchers around subsidy have shown considerable disagreement about their effectiveness for low-income families. (Fuller, et al., 2002). While research has shown that states were serving only small portions, as low as 17 percent even, of all federally-eligible children as of 2000 (Collins, Layzer, & Kreader, 2000), research has also shown that families who are eligible for subsidies are not using them (Fuller, et al., 2002). Some experts say these contradictions are due to the fact that current subsidy policies are not fulfilling the needs and/or values of many families. Recently, Schilder and colleagues (2011) pointed to a double decrease in subsidy funding for early childcare due to the recession. The recession not only reduced the number of state childcare subsidies, but also led to a decline in the number of state childcare subsidy reimbursements.

Though proximity to home or work is also a parent-level factor in the literature, location proved to be a structural barrier for this group of mothers. Largely due to fluctuations of supply in differing neighborhoods and due to transportation concerns, every mother reported only considering centers close to work or home when they

constructed their choice sets. Variability in supply at the neighborhood level often affected whether mothers considered centers close to home, close to work, or had to look at both. Since her son's birth, Faith from The Christian School, for example, only considered centers close to her work because there were more options than in her home neighborhood. She explained, "There weren't a lot of options [in my neighborhood] so I had to kind of go, at that time I went with what was convenient for, where it was located… All of them [centers my son has gone to] have been basically located in the same area, which is not too far from my job." In other cases, the opposite was true or parents looked at centers somewhere in between or on the way to work. Kim from Celebrate Kids Academy explained, "I mean there were honestly several other daycares that just were not within our reach that we would have liked to have taken her too but they were just too far… We have to find a place … we have to have a happy medium."

Transportation concerns also narrowed the construction of choice sets for many mothers, especially those who relied on public transportation or had to walk. With the majority of women working during the day, centers had to be close to home, work, or on the way from one to the other. Chanel from Children's Town, for example, looked only for centers in her neighborhood, explaining, "I usually like to go to the closest one to my house so that if, in any case… I don't have a car… I can usually get them to school and get on the bus. I always like to have one that's near my house." Keisha from Celebrate Kids Academy, on the other hand, only considered centers close to her work. She shared, "I needed location [close to work], because I wanted to have not that many miles to go to drop my child off, and then go to work." Consequently, when accessibility factored into the search process, what may have started out as a vast field of choices became limited to

one or two neighborhoods given time constraints, work demands, and limited transportation resources.

A second accessibility issue was subsidy-related. If access to CCIS became impeded, either before or after enrollment, all things childcare related stopped while mothers sought resolution. Of the 23 mothers working with subsidy programs at the time of their interviews, including 19 on CCIS, 2 on Pre-K Counts, and 2 in the CCIS application process, over half had experienced disruptions in childcare because their children were dropped from the program. Some mothers reported fixing the problem right away by taking paperwork directly to their caseworker, but when mothers like Jacqui, Kadijah, Lisa, and Chanel were cut off, they changed their choice set to only relative care. Lisa explained her situation:

> There was an incident one time that they cut me off and it had something to do – it was set there on their behalf. They didn't cut me off for about a week. They cut me off for about six months… My mom had to watch her again and my mom was working. She was watching her and I said, "You know what, something's not right." I did everything, my welfare woman said, everything. I don't understand why I can't get it.

For Alayah and Genesis, who were working on securing subsidy, their resolution was to look for centers that would let them enroll children part-time while they waited. Both reported, however, that their current situations were not sustainable and they would have to switch care if there was no resolution soon. And while The Christian School did not accept subsidy, my interviews with Drea and Jule revealed that both altered their searches to look for alternatives to subsidized care after they were dropped, in part so that they didn't have to deal with the subsidy system anymore.

Availability.

In order to be included in choice sets, centers also had to be perceived as available to mothers. Availability was critical for two reasons. First, the recent recession affected the funding of centers and a number of mothers reported their previous centers closing. And second, availability in terms of "open spots" impacted parents who had enrolled at The Christian School and Children's Town. Because both programs operated at full capacity, if either center did not have spots open, it was eliminated from the choice set for families needing immediate care. In the literature, the effect of the recent recession has been addresses. Schilder and colleagues (2011) found that the recent recession dramatically affected the amount of funding allotted for state-funded Pre-K programs due to budget cuts. As a result, fluctuations in Pre-K funds affected both the quality and supply of childcare, which in turn limited parents' ability to choose this type of early care setting. Literature on variability in policy and legislative contexts also looks at how factors like the timing of funds, classroom availability, relationships between program directors, and enrollment fluctuations subsequently impact the number of slots open to children (Schilder, et al., 2011).

According to Jule, Vi, Sanaa, Florence, and Missy, the recent recession forced them back into the childcare search process when their previous programs closed. Jule's son was in a Head Start program that suffered from funding cuts and closed, as was Florence's son. Both mothers expressed that while they liked Head Start because it was free, they were weary of pursing re-enrollment due to the bind that they were left in when the programs shut down. Florence explained, "He was in a Head Start last year, but it closed. I was kind of upset that I had to change. It was close to home. It's a nice place and

they closed it… Yeah, I would have stayed." Vi also reflected on her experience with care shutting down, sharing "They were very nice when I was there. They had to close not because of them, but something financially in, whoever owned the building so …" Sanna and Missy reported similar experiences with care shutting down due to finances. Sanna recounted, "The third daycare, which I loved, was midway between home and work… But they closed because the building they were leasing, the lease agreement was changed and it was too much money to continue running so they ended up closing that daycare center." And according to Missy, "The unthinkable happened with a daycare I loved." She continued, "They must have had violations in the past. Although it was my dream school, the Department of Public Welfare didn't like them at all. They abruptly shut them down and this was Monday. I'd paid for tuition and then Thursday it's like we are shut, damn."

Both The Christian School and Children's Town had waiting lists. At The Christian School, enrollment for Pre-K closed when all spots were filled, which typically happened the spring prior. Once both classes were full, the waiting list transferred over to Kindergarten and families could try for enrollment the next year. Except for Anessa's daughter who was enrolled in mid-January due to extenuating circumstances, children were not admitted during the year. As Tameka explained, "When I called, they was like, 'Oh, you have to go on the waiting list.' I'm like, 'You have got to be kidding...' I flew up there." According to Genesis from Children's Town, the program's waiting list for spots was lengthy, especially for three year-olds and infants/toddlers. Since the center operated at capacity, spots opened only when a child left the center or transitioned on to kindergarten. Consequently, spots opened up more sporadically than at The Christian

School. The waiting list and open spot aspects of childcare added yet another dimensions to the childcare search.

Regulation.

In addition to accessibility and availability, parents contended with issues of regulation when constructing their choice sets. Though almost all mothers reported relying on maternal instinct over the STARS quality rating system, the mothers were unanimous in only considering accredited or licensed centers. As Kathy from Celebrate Kids Academy reasoned, "Ratings and accreditation, no and yes. I certainly didn't look at places with no accreditations but you have to watch for the accreditations that are given. A lot of STARS are given for the learning through play but that's not something we endorse." This finding both challenges and supports current literature. Shlay and colleagues (2007), who used a unique vignette data collection method, found that all groups of parents valued safety, the regulation of child-staff ratios, and the Pennsylvania childcare rating system. The authors also found parents to be indifferent as to whether or not childcare settings were accredited. However, African American and Hispanic parents reported they would pay more for licensed care and appeared to "be more tuned into" childcare as a government regulated system. The women I interviewed for this study, who were demographically less diverse than those in Shlay and colleagues' study, were unanimous in refusing to enroll children in unaccredited or unlicensed centers.

Citing lessons learned from the past as well as horror stories from the neighborhood or heard on the news, maternal primary caregivers like Barb who knew about a daycare provider who went to the Laundromat and came home to the house on fire, or Fae who picked a daughter up with a giant scar down the side of her face, or

Maya who had heard about a 24 hour daycare that locked children in alone at night, expressed a united concern about a lack of policing. In order for a center to be a choice, maternal primary caregivers had to have the reassurance that some entity was regulating its activity; too many horrible events had happened even under the state or city's watch. And so, the women in this study felt that they could not take the risk of enrolling children in entirely unregulated, unlicensed settings. Unlicensed care was only acceptable when children were in family care as infants or when they were with family members outside of a formal arrangement.

Affordability.

If a center was accessible, available, and regulated, it still had to be affordable in order to be included in a choice set. Affordability most often turned on whether or not centers accepted subsidies and whether or not centers charged reasonable weekly or annual fees to parents paying out of pocket. And while the recession had shut a number of programs down, some families were further affected by job loss and work disruptions. In the literature, subsidy availability and use have been addressed at both structural and parental levels. As previously reported, conversations among researchers look at subsidy use from the structural level have shown considerable disagreement about the effectiveness of subsidies for lower-income families. (Fuller, et al., 2002). Literature on parents' perceptions of the availability of subsidies was far sparser. Literature on the importance of price and/or cost, however, was abundant. Kim & Fram (2009), for example, found that mother's education, work status, and household income, all variables related to family socioeconomic status, mattered to how important practical variables became. The researchers found that working mothers were more likely to prioritize

practicality-focused choices. And finally, though researchers have examined the recession's impacts on state budgets and funding at a structural level, less attention has been given to how the recession may have impacted parents' work status.

The majority of parents from Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town relied on subsidies to pay for childcare. Consequently, centers that did not accept their subsidies or would not take their children part-time as they negotiated the subsidy application process were eliminated from choice sets. Maternal primary caregivers reliant on subsidy explained that they had not bothered to visit or research centers that did not accept subsidy because they already knew they could not afford those centers. Kathy, for example, shared, "I always did my research ahead of time to not waste my time." In discussing the CCIS system during interviews, maternal primary caregivers perceived subsidies to be available. Jacqui, for instance, knew she needed subsidy right away so she talked to her aunt who knew that the fastest way for her to get on CCIS was to skip the trip to the CCIS offices and go over to the Welfare Office. The issues the majority of mothers' experienced with subsidies arose after they were receiving aid. When parents were cut off, they could not longer afford care.

Questions of subsidy were not an issue for parents at The Christian School because the school did not accept subsidy. Cost, however, was a huge factor prior to committing to this arrangement. If parents could not pay for the school, and a number had concerns about maintaining cost past the pre-k age, then they would have to pull their children out. Though the school's annual tuition broke down to approximately $50.00 per week, comparable to a CCIS co-pay, seven of the nine interviewees reported needing financial help to cover the cost. Among all maternal primary caregivers, only six parents

were not at the mercy of an unreliable subsidy system, family members, or a program with a co-pay comparable tuition. Still, the six mothers reported affordability as a massive constraint. In fact, Tiffani reported that the cost of daycare was so taxing, "It became another reason why I wouldn't have another child." Maya explained that she briefly considered quitting her job so she could qualify for aid, saying, "Places damn near $200 a week, I can't afford that, like come on!"

In terms of the recession, 13 of the 40 maternal primary caregivers reported feeling as though the recession impacted their childcare search and choice. Kadijah, Rhonda, Vi, Kathy, and Zedra, for example, had been laid off. When she was let go, Kathy had to pull her daughters out of care because she couldn't afford the center any more and it was no longer convenient to her work. When Zedra was laid off, she needed a job to support four children so she changed fields and ended up working in the after-school program at Children's Town. Alayah, Genesis, and Tami had husbands who had experienced work disruptions, affecting their family incomes and childcare choices. Genesis explained, "My husband lost his job in late 2011. We've been able to still send him here, even if we dropped down some to only part-time." Drea and Keisha had problems with working too few hours and making too much money to qualify for CCIS respectively, though Drea's work hours and Keisha's income had previously been acceptable to qualify for subsidy. And finally, Samira, Chanel, and Tanya talked about how difficult the job market was at the time of their interviews. Samira and Chanel were both looking for jobs, but Chanel shared:

> I'm not working. No. I don't have a job right now so I'm not working with CCIS. They [school district] picked them up because he is a free candidate. My whole thing is with… with this is CCIS. Like I know some daycares is only open until 6 o'clock. My problem right here is that I'm trying to find work, but most of the jobs is where they work nights and weekends. Most of the daycares are not open on weekends and most of the daycares are not open at night. I try to find them… it's very rare that you find a night one to be here.

Tanya also did not have steady work and was going back and forth between full-time and part-time jobs. She felt that she constantly had to stay on top of her subsidy status so she would not be cut off for failing to report changes in her hours and then have to renegotiate the search process all over again.

Parents Become the Driving Force

Parent-level factors are the most frequently addressed set of factors in current literature; they are also the most difficult to differentiate among because they so often overlap. For the purposes of talking about them in the literature review, I focused on four categories that are said to impact the construction of choice sets: parental values, positionality in society, parental agency, and family structure. Parent values generally relate to aspects of quality, perceptions of quality, the importance of education/educational value, class sizes and ratios, proximity, price and/or cost, parenting practices, reliability, location, whether or not sick kids will be taken, whether or not after hours care and/or weekend care is an option, and family values. Positionality in society, on the other hand, typically relates to aspects of culture, race and ethnicity, preference for religious teachings, and preferred language. Parental agency speaks to how parental occupation, education level, socioeconomic status, the perceived availability of subsidies, welfare-to-work participation or status, and knowledge of the market impacts the choice sets. And finally, family structure examines the availability of relatives, having a one or

two parent household, whether a child has siblings and if so, how many, and who makes the education-related decisions in the family.

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   Factors Driving Parents'  │
│  Construction of Choice Sets│
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Logistics

Fit work or school schedule

Be flexible and/or accommodating

Work with needs of family and family structure

Sense of Security

Trust maternal instincts

Use lessons learned in the past

Compliment parenting style and values

Safe and clean with educational value
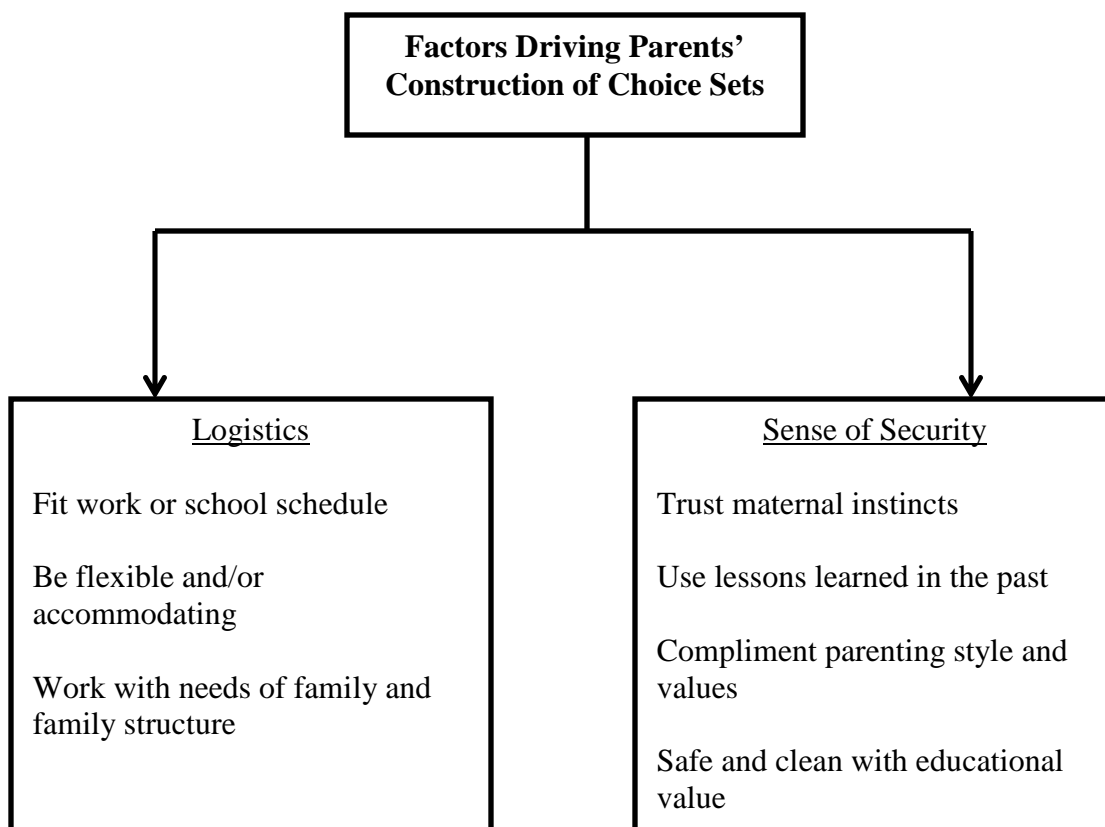
Figure 5.2
Parent-Driven Construction of Choice Sets

With choice sets narrowed significantly by structural barriers, choice set construction became largely parent-level driven. Reasonable choices for participants arise when centers made logistical sense for the families and when mothers feel secure leaving their children under the care of providers. (See Figure 5.2) At this stage in the process, the majority of mothers halted search when they found a solution that fit this levels of needs on both accounts. If these two requirements were not met in a program, however, maternal primary caregivers eliminated the option from the choice set because they were not feasible. Mothers continued searching until a more reasonable solution was found. If

children had specific environmental or special needs (child-level factors), parents also

may have continued their search. Logistically, maternal primary caregivers considered

only programs that worked with their job or school schedules, had flexible or

accommodating schedules, and worked with the needs of the family and family structure.

Even if center worked logistically, mothers also had to feel a sense of security. To feel

secure, women trusted their instincts, used lessons learned from the past to inform the

present, and looked for safe, clean centers with educational value that complimented their

parenting styles.

Center Logistics.

Mothers narrowed choice sets by looking for programs that worked with their job

or school schedules, had flexible or accommodating schedules, and worked with the

needs of the family and family structure. The extant literature on parent-level factors

suggests that scheduling, parental agency, and family structure are important aspects of

choice. Specifically, parent values prioritizing scheduling and family structure are

reflected in the works of authors who explore the practical factors that influence choice.

Kim & Fram (2009) found practicality-focus parents were most likely working mothers

with younger children. Peyton and colleagues (2001) further found that 21.7 percent of

mothers considered practical factors most important, with 21 of 354 women total citing

hours as their most important consideration. Early and Burchinal (2001) also found that

children living near the poverty line spend the most time in care because parents are

working. And overall, Black children spent the most hours in care, sometimes as many as

40 hours in care weekly. Both Early & Burchinal (2001) and Uttal (1997) found that

children were most often in multiple care arrangements simultaneously, depending on the availability of family members and the structure of families.

Under structural barriers, logistics like cost and center location were accounted for. Still, in order for maternal primary caregivers consider centers, they had additional needs that had to be met. First, mothers reported needing a center with hours and scheduling that coordinated well with their home or work schedules. Hours and scheduling were most important for the mothers of Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town. In talking about the importance of extended hours, Gina from Children's Town shared a sentiment many mothers echoed, "Hours were definitely important because when I first started [working], I started at 9:30 and I got off at 6:30. The majority of the centers close at 5:00. No way. It would have killed me." Further, all 31 mothers with children enrolled at Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town only considered centers open year-round. Tanya spoke about the important of year-round care for her family, explaining, "Yes. She's here [year round]. And during the summer, [I wanted a place] where they, like, they would be doing things. Not just coming here and doing nothing." Hours and scheduling were still important to mothers from The Christian School. However, mothers explained that they had not defined their choice sets by them and had accepted enrolling children in a program that followed a K-8 traditional school schedule would have its demands.

In many cases, mothers also had to simultaneously consider the needs of their other children, if they had them, and the availability of family members to step in and help with care. Though family structures varied from family to family, the majority of women, 25 in all, were single mothers and most women, also 25, were raising multiple

children. At The Christian School, all the mothers with multiple children either had them enrolled at the school or they were on a similar schedule. Vi explained, "This was the best choice and plus, it was easy. They're both here so I just come around the corner and pick them both up." Mothers at the other two centers were more likely to have younger children, though many had older children as well. Trina from Celebrate Kids Academy spoke about her experience looking for a place all three of her children could be. She shared, "Oh yeah, that was a big thing too, the fact that all of them can be at one place in the afternoon was like 'I'm blessed.' I can drop my 10 year old, my 5 year old, and a baby off at one time and then go to work and then come back and pick them all up at one place."

Sense of security.

If centers worked logistically for the family, mothers still had to feel comfortable enough with settings and providers to include them in their choice sets. To assess whether or not they felt a sense of security while visiting centers, women relied on their instincts, used lessons learned from the past, and looked for places that complimented their parenting style, were safe and clean, and had educational value. While trusting maternal instinct and lessons learned from the past are not discussed in the current literature, parenting style, concerns about safety and cleanliness, and educational value are. Specifically, Uttal (1997) found that when parental values were not shared with providers, mothers would reject the possibility of that provider. In doing so, mothers often inquired directly about providers' childrearing practices or relied upon popular reputations to determine if values were shared. Shlay et al. (2007) also found that all groups of parents value safety, suggesting that no parent would knowingly or willingly

put their child in an unsafe setting. Kim & Fram's (2009) work found that parents who consider parenting style and educational value to be important are usually the most socio-economically disadvantaged and are more likely to be ethnic minorities, less educated, on welfare, and single parents.

As has been described, all of the women I interviewed relied on their maternal instincts when searching for childcare. Often informed by lessons learned from past childcare experiences, maternal instincts were tied not only to mothers feeling secure, but also to children feeling comfortable and to relationships and communication with providers and teachers. Looking for providers with whom relationships could be established was important to all parents. Tiffani, who pulled her daughter out of a home daycare because she sensed something had been wrong, explained, "I know my child. I'm saying to myself, 'This is not a good fit or this might be a good fit for her.' You can just tell by people's personalities, if they're genuine, and if you're just trying to say things to me." Vera from The Christian School stressed the importance of a friendly staff, sharing, "I know it's probably 1,000 parents that come in, but if they greet you as if they know you personally, I like that." When Fanta explained why she considered Celebrate Kids Academy to be choice, she reasons, "I liked the fact that Mr. Marshall is a pretty open door … like you can always address him. He's not like 'Oh make an appointment or I can't talk to you right now.' I don't need a middle man."

Mothers were also looking for centers that complimented or fit with parenting style and values. A number of mothers stated searching for centers that reinforced and reflected home life. In addition to discipline policies, food and religion emerged as significant for a number of mothers. Genesis and Samira, both from Children's Town,

reported that food and diet were deal breakers for them. Genesis's family followed a kosher diet and needed a center that would accommodate her children, while Samira learned from past experience to inquire about the food being served because her son was eating "cookie cereal" and "hamburgers or hot dogs" every day. Jacqui from Celebrate Kids Academy also looked at centers' food policies during her search, having pulled her son out of a center where he was served Caribbean food.

Religion was particularly important for mothers at The Christian School. Eight of the nine maternal primary caregivers explained that they were looking for religious-based programs specifically. Only Drea had reservations about the program because she was Muslim and afraid her son would get confused. Ultimately, however, because Drea worked on-site in the after-school program and knew the staff well, she still felt comfortable enrolling her son. Outside of The Christian School, mothers like Alayah, Trinity, and Chanel had experienced issues with religious-based care and had tailored their searches. Alayah and Trinity had enrolled their sons in centers under Muslim providers, but disagreed with their practices and pulled their children out. Alayah recalled, "They didn't celebrate birthdays and they didn't teach about the holidays, and that bothered me because even though you are based off of a religion, you're not teaching my child Islamic." Trinity was upset because her former provider was teaching her son to use the bathroom sitting down. Chanel, who was Muslim, had the opposite experience and was upset when providers had her children pray before meals. All three mothers explained that they questioned centers about their religious practices during subsequent searches.

Safety and cleanliness were important indicators of security as well for almost all mothers. Intrinsically, most mothers made a judgment about the safety and cleanliness of a center as they were deciding whether or not they felt comfortable. For example, Gina from Celebrate Kids Academy was touring a center that had baby swings hanging from the ceiling, she recalled, "They push the kids in them. I was like, "Aw, that's cute," but that's dangerous… I didn't put her there for that reason." Tasha from Children's Town recalled her experience visiting centers, saying, "The outside just didn't look clean. Then their play area, their yard, it was like two pit bulls in the back of the … yes, like in the back of the school… I didn't think that was safe at all. It was just a lot, so when I set foot in there, it smelled like cigarettes. It was like, 'Oh my God.'" When centers appeared dirty, smelled bad, or felt unsafe, mothers eliminated them from their choice sets.

Finally, as described, educational components of centers were also important to identify before maternal primary caregivers would add potential sites to their choice sets. All forty mothers addressed their desire for centers with educational value. While unanimous in wanting their children to learn something, parents varied in describing what learning environments looked like in practice. For example, Margaret from Children's Town described "a curriculum-based school that was very structured was a must have," while Vera who enrolled her daughter at The Christian School, wanted "more of a balance between learning and play." Citing past experiences where their children were in settings and did nothing all day, a number of mothers, including Anessa, Faith, Tameka, Missy, Tamara, Maya, Samira, Sanaa, and Tiffani, were particularly adamant about the educational value. Sanaa offered her perspective, explaining, "I just didn't want them going someplace where they're going to sit and watch television all day. I wanted

them to do some things where they were stimulated and that they would learn that they would be exposed to things that I couldn't expose them to during the day because I'm working and do a broad range of things." For all maternal primary caregivers, knowing their children were in an environment where they would learn was key to feeling secure about choices. Consequently, centers that lacked educational value were eliminated from choice sets.

What Happens When Children Have Specific Needs?

Child-level factors are the least researched aspect of parental choice. Child-centered characteristics, which in the literature could be a child's gender, race/ethnicity, spoken language, disability, potential, behaviors, needs or ultimate educational goals, have been explored individually, but are largely unexplored in conjunction with parent and structural-level factors, with the exception of Grogan (2012). For some maternal primary caregivers, the childcare search did not end with a solution during the parent-driven stage of the process. Some women, typically those who had recently removed a child from a center deemed unfit to meet their needs, felt they needed to take the process a step further due to child-level characteristics. Specifically, child characteristics became a significant factor when parents were concerned about children with special or exceptional needs and when children were perceived as in need of structure and/or socialization. In these cases, mothers extended the search for childcare until a solution reasonably meeting those needs of the child were met.

Parents who had become concerned about children's needs looked for centers that were conducive to their children's race, religion, behavioral needs, disabilities, and potential or ultimate educational goals. (See Figure 5.3) Parents did not express

consideration of their children's gender specifically in their searches. In terms of diversity, mothers reported that a diverse setting would have been ideal, but recognized their own satisficing behavior. Most felt it unrealistic to expect diversity in the neighborhoods included in their searches. Kim from Celebrate Kids Academy had a bi-racial daughter and explained how she felt, sharing, "Diversity was and it still is [important] because her father is White and I'm Black. I don't want her to see all Black people. I don't want to see all White people either…. It's still important, I'm just not sure we're going to get it [in this neighborhood] as much as we'd like." Because 99 percent of all centers enrolled African American children, language was not a concern for this population of parents, though Celebrate Kids Academy's exposure to Spanish and Mandarin Chinese were attractive to many mothers.
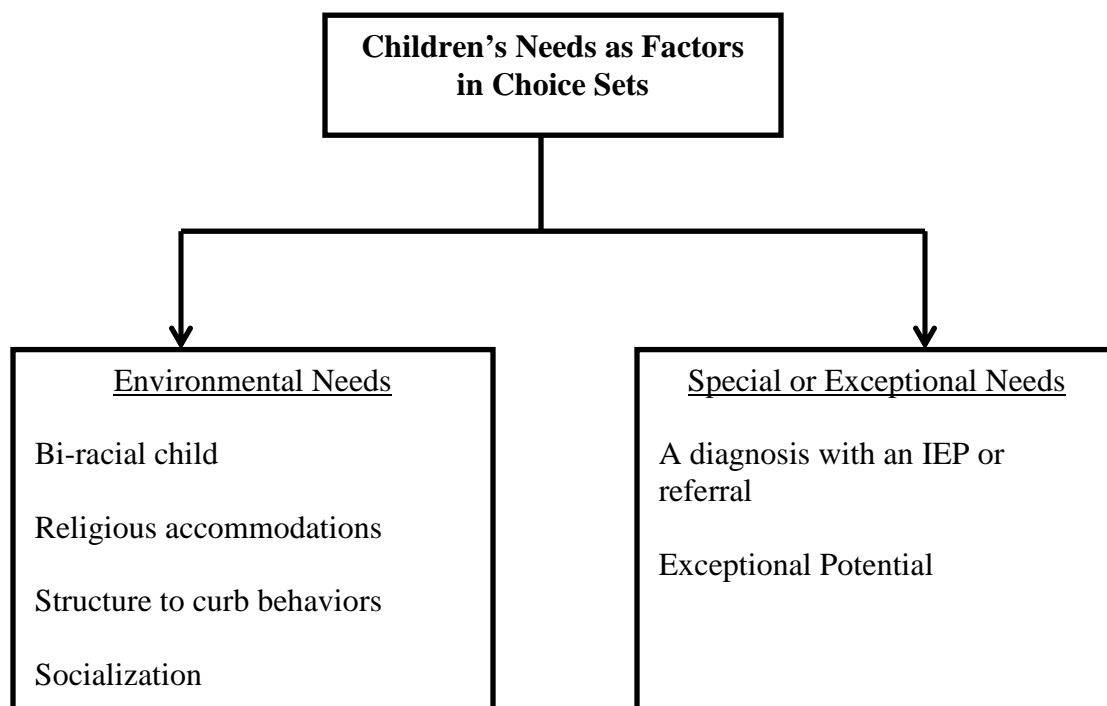
Figure 5.3
Children's Needs as Factors in Choice Sets

Current literature on the importance of race and ethnicity found that mothers of color were vocal in their desire to find childcare providers who could provide children with an extension of their cultural heritage and practices and that all mothers of color expressed a desire for their children to be "racially safe," meaning that their children were not being treated differently or maltreated because of their race or ethnicity (Uttal, 1997). Potential, behaviors, and needs or educational goals were the most underdeveloped aspect of child characteristics in the extant literature. Some studies have included the importance of having learning activities and quality-focused factors in their analyses, but the variable is not specific to how parents view their child's academic potential nor are they specific to parents' goals for their child's future (Kim & Fram, 2009). Other studies have included measures for quality, including quality of the provider, quality of the environment/equipment, and quality of the program, but again do not discuss end goals and children's potential specifically (Peyton, et al., 2001). Literature on children with disabilities has found that many parents choosing preschool programs for their children with disabilities felt that their current preschool was their only option. Data shows that parents harbor concerns that preschools will either turn them away due to disability or that their children's needs won't be met in other settings (Glenn-Applegate, et al., 2010).

Environmental needs.

When mothers felt their children had environmental needs, they extended the search process until a reasonable solution was found. While race did not have a significant impact on the construction of choice sets for the majority of parents, Margaret from Children's Town and Kim from Celebrate Kids Academy had bi-racial children and

race became very important to both mothers. Interviews with these women were particularly revealing because many studies hold children's race/ethnicity as a single, constant descriptive variable. There has been little, if any, discussion about children from multi-racial and ethnic backgrounds. In Margaret's case, she was White and her son's father was African American; the opposite was true for Kim who was African American while her daughter's father was White. Margaret explained, "My son is the only child here who is mixed. All the white kids are in the suburbs…" Because she was a center employee and had strong relationships with many fellow employees and parents, Margaret "felt comfortable" having her bi-racial son enrolled. She was more apprehensive about when he would go to kindergarten. Kim recalled her search saying, "I know it's going to sound awful or very biased that in my experience when you're looking for places in the inner city you find a lot of people that … I can't figure out how to word this … well, it's not diverse. For us, there's all black people." When she visited Celebrate Kids Academy, however, she explained that she felt it was "the most progressive" of all the urban centers she visited and subsequently chose it.

Religious needs, which were discussed under parenting style, could also be considered an environmental need at the child-level because parents and their children typically share religions. As was suggested previously, children's exposure to religion and/or religious practices was an important element of choice for some mothers. The women of The Christian School were looking for faith-based education programs, not only because of the religious element, but also because of the correlation between Christianity and discipline. Barb, for example, explained, "I knew that their schooling is very strict. There are certain things they don't allow, actually a lot of things they don't

allow. It's more disciplined… I looked for that." Barb's sentiment was echoed by Tameka when she shared, "I liked the [disciplined] atmosphere because boys get distracted." Drea, who was Muslim, and Vera and Faith, who were differing branches of Christianity, felt a religious-based program would expose their children to religious diversity and multiculturalism. Religious accommodations outside of The Christian School were not as prevalent. As mentioned, however, due to negative experiences with previous providers, Alayah, Trinity, and Chanel had incorporated an awareness of religious practices into their searches for new centers.

Two additional environment needs, structure and socialization, were identified by many mothers as important in shaping children's behaviors. Consequently, twenty-two of the study's forty participants looked for structured environments during their searches to curb the behaviors of their sons and daughters alike. From The Christian School, Barb, Drea, Tameka, Vera, and Faith all searched for programs with structured environments due to their children's behaviors. Barb, for example, believed that her daughter was "high energy" and needed "the calmness," while Tameka reported looking for "whose going to be able to deal with your kid and their hyperness." Structure as an environmental need was also important for the children of Felisha, Kim, Rhonda, Fanta, Kathy, Gina, Trinity, Jacqui, and Missy from Celebrate Kids Academy. As examples, Jacqui called her son "active," while Kim referred to her daughter as "bossy," and Gina joked that her daughter was "dangerous" before clarifying, "she's just everywhere, she bounces around, she's energetic." Another nine mothers, Margaret, Fae, Tasha, Kendria, Tami, Maya, Trina, Lisa, Genesis, explained that their children needed structured environments too. Fae, for example, felt her daughter was "a tough cookie who will test you and walk over you if

you let her," while Kendria was worried her son "get babied too a little too much and he's spoiled." Because of their children's behaviors, some extended their searches to meet the environmental needs of their children.

Socialization was not as prevalent an environmental need, but again some mothers extended their searches and looked for settings where their children would be around many other children. This was a group of mothers who had enrolled children as infants or toddlers in home-care settings and removed their children because they needed their children to "interact with kids their own age" as Tameka from The Christian School phrased it. Tameka's son had been in home care until three when he was taken out for socialization purposes. Gina, Dawm, Felisha, Fanta, Tamara, and Kim from Celebrate Kids Academy all saw a need for their children to be around more children their age. Dawn, in particular, was concerned because her son wasn't talking. Fanta also felt her daughter was missing "her social cues" and needed to be around more children. Finally Fae, Maya, and Lisa of Children's Town believed their children too needed more social settings. Maya was particularly concerned because her son had a speech delay and she hoped being around other kids and structure might improve his speech.

Special or exceptional needs.

Mothers of children with special or exceptional needs also extended their search processes until solutions that would accommodate those needs were found. A number of mothers had children with IEP's (Individualized Education Plans) and diagnoses or children who were in the referral process for special needs. From The Christian School, Jule's son had behavioral and cognitive delays, while Denise's daughter had a speech delay. The needs of their children shaped both women's searches. While Denise was

concerned about placing her daughter in an environment where she couldn't "keep up," Jule worried about how her son's transition would affect his behavior. At Celebrate Kids Academy, Felisha's daughter had an IEP for cognitive and speech delays and Tamara's daughter was being evaluated for cognitive and speech delays. Both Felisha and Tamara were concerned about their children's acceptance and treatment. They both chose to enroll at a family member's center because they felt family would be most willing to work with the needs of their children. Finally, from Children's Town, Maya's son had an IEP for speech, Chanel's son had an IEP for behavior, and Margaret's son was on medication for his ADD. Because of his delayed speech, Maya looked for an environment that "might bring it out." Chanel, on the other hand, was aware that her son's behavior was affecting his learning and his ability to pay attention. She talked about how hard it was for her to find something that worked for her, but would offer him services as well. She reported going to the school board to try to get help. Finally, Margaret stressed looking for an environment and teachers who would help her son stay focused.

Some mothers were concerned about their children with exceptional needs, specifically those with great amounts of perceived potential. For these mothers, finding a center that would "push" and "challenge" their children was important. Barb from The Christian School, for example, felt her daughter was "a very special little girl" who was above level in every subject and needed to be challenged, Anessa's daughter had been reading fluently since three years-old and likewise needed to be challenged. Drea's son was also reading and doing addition problems. Vera too believed her daughter was

"gifted." Vera was meticulous in searching for a setting that would push her academically.

From Celebrate Kid Academy, Keisha wanted a center that would push her daughter to stay a grade above, explaining, "She's actually doing kindergarten and first-grade work by herself." Kim shared that her daughter had been reading for some time and "needed a place where she would be challenged." Missy shared that her son "has always been advanced and needs to be pushed." Finally, Margaret, Tiffani, and Genesis from Children's Town reported that their children too had exceptional needs, which they considered when constructing their choice sets. Though he had ADD, Margaret's son was "so cognitively advanced, he spent his three year-old year in the four year-old room." Tiffani stated that her daughter was "a three year-old beyond her age" and "so very bright she gets bored easily." Genesis too reported that her son had a gifted math mind, and was a natural born "problem solver who loves puzzles." She looked for programs with a strong math focus.

Conclusion

In this chapter, themes were explored to answer the questions: What factors influenced the choices of maternal primary caregivers who children of color in one of three urban, high-poverty childcare centers? And how did structural, parental, and child-level characteristics intersect in this process? The chapter argued that all maternal primary caregivers were influenced by four factors when they made their childcare decision. All mothers showed a reliance on networks of trust and used their maternal instincts and lessons learned from past childcare experiences to inform their searches. These unanticipated findings support the need to continue to examine choice using

methods and frameworks offer a deeper and more realistic understanding of how and why

parents make the childcare decisions that they do. The descriptions that mothers provided

of their searches for care illustrate the contexts within which these decisions are being

made and the resources that parents are most heavily relying on to make those decisions.

Mothers were also influenced by their educational views and considered the logistics and

cost of centers in the decision-making process, which also had problematic implications.

The second part of this chapter explored the intersection of structural, parental,

and child-level factors, which are three sets of factors that literature has consistently

identified as important, but whose intersection had not yet been described. Using the

resources they had and with bounded rationality, mothers went about constructing choice

sets. The first barriers that mothers met were in the form of structural constraints.

Specifically, those constraints were related to how individual parents perceived centers'

accessibility, availability, regulation, and affordability. If centers were not perceived to

be accessible, available, regulated, and affordable, which are each addressed in detail

below, then they were not considered reasonable and they were not included in the choice

set. In many cases, mothers indicated satisficing at this stage of the process because

optimal centers were eliminated due to lack of resources. With choice sets narrowed

significantly at the structural level, choice set construction became largely parent-level

driven. Reasonable choices for participants arose when centers made logistical sense for

the families and when mothers felt comfortable leaving their children under the care of

providers. At this stage in the process, the majority of mothers halted search when they

found a solution that fit this levels of needs. For some maternal primary caregivers,

however, the search did not end. Mothers, often after having removed a child from a

center deemed unfit to meet needs, felt they needed to take the process a step further due to child-level characteristics. Specifically, child characteristics became a significant factor when parents were concerned about children with special or exceptional needs and when children were perceived as in need of structure and/or socialization.

Now that descriptions of the choice process have been provided, this exploration turns to an analysis of the study's more exploratory research questions: In what ways does the childcare process continue to affect parents after initial enrollment decisions have been made? And the related question: How satisfied are parents with their childcare arrangements? Discussions on the management and satisfaction of childcare settings move the focus from an exploration of mothers' childcare searches to an exploratory analysis of mothers' feelings towards their current center-based childcare providers.

CHAPTER 6

CHILDCARE MANAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION

Introduction

Early childhood education is an encouraged, but not a mandatory education level in the United States. In my own experiences teaching and working in an urban, high-poverty center, I noticed throughout my tenure that there were periods of high levels of turnover for children and their families. When children in my class would stop coming, often abruptly and without notice, I always wondered why. I also wondered where they went and what they did instead. After designing the first part of this study, I started to think past the initial search and enrollment processes and thought that this study could be an opportunity to explore what happens post- enrollment from the perspective of the parent. I hypothesized that mothers continue to manage early childcare decisions on a daily basis, as they can just as soon as make other arrangements or pull their child out of care without truancy or penalty if they are dissatisfied or if the setting no longer meets the family's needs. I also wondered given Simon's (1986) bounded rationality framework about the relationships between satisficing behaviors and satisfaction levels with respect to their current centers. I hypothesized that parents would likely feel some satisfaction, otherwise they wouldn't stay, but that they may not been entirely pleased with all aspects of their care because they likely made a reasonable, not optimal, choice.

Since high quality programs provide short- and long-term benefits for minority children living in high-poverty neighborhoods, such as increases in academic performance and literacy attainment and decreases in the likelihood of early dropout and behavioral issues, it's important for parents to choose quality childcare (August &

Hakuta, 1997; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995; McLoyd, 1998; Wertheimer & Croan, 2003; Zill, 1999). Choice and enrollment, however, are just the first steps. In order for children to actually reap those benefits, they have to attend programs day-to-day and stay in settings over time. Therefore, it is also important to explore what happens after enrollment from the parents' perspective, especially considering that if dissatisfied, parents can remove children from care without notice or penalty.

The extant literature on childcare management and the lingering effects of childcare choices is sparse. The focus of most research has been placed on the circumstances and events that precede enrollment. However, research on maternal primary caregivers conducted in other fields, psychology in particular, overlaps in some ways with management aspects of childcare. A recent line of study, for example, has examined how mothers balance the demands of work and family life and how mothers manage the demands of their households (Romich, 2007; Kimmel & Connelly, 2007; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). A second line of research has begun to explore parents' use of multiple childcare arrangements, which to some extent requires parental management (Morrissey, 2008). While this literature is relevant, it still doesn't detail to what extent mothers continue to monitor and manage the centers they have chosen for their children. Based on my interviews with maternal primary caregivers, however, I argue that mothers remain highly vigilant in monitoring what happens at centers and consequently continue to manage their childcare settings. Further, a number of factors that influenced the choice process remained on mothers' minds as they navigated the management side of childcare.

Unlike childcare management, literature on childcare satisfaction has been conducted within the field of education. In fact, many studies have drawn a similar conclusion, namely that parents are generally satisfied with their childcare settings (Cryer, Tietze, & Wessels, 2002; King, Teleki, & Buck-Gomez, 2002; McWilliam et al., 1995; Holloway & Fuller, 1992). More recently, however, Knoche and colleagues (2006) have argued that since few current studies focus on parental satisfaction, the subject needs to be revisited. The authors points to the work of Wall and colleagues, which challenges the long-standing findings that parents are generally satisfied with their childcare arrangements. Wall and colleagues (2006) suggest that low-income parents and parents who have children with disabilities are less satisfied with their childcare due to heightened concerns about children's development and safety. Only research conducted internationally has interrogated what parental satisfaction looks and feels like from the perspective of parents. What this research has shown is that relationships between parents and caregivers are crucial in determining satisfaction levels and parents pay particular attention to daily communication as a measure (Drugli & Undheim, 2012). This study aims to build on Drugli and Undheim's (2012) work and better understand the nuances of what satisfaction with childcare looks and feels like from the perspective of mothers.

The circumstances and contexts within which maternal primary caregivers made their childcare choices did not disappear or change after those decisions were made. Post-enrollment, the resources, material and immaterial, that mothers relied upon to navigate the choice process were just as relevant to managing their childcare situations. Further, the interplay of family capital, which uniquely encompasses human, economic, social, and cultural capital, was still relevant in informing parental perceptions of and

orientations toward childcare settings. Though responsibilities shifted after enrollment, parents were still charged with securing transportation to drop off and pick up children daily, staying up to date on paperwork, paying for care weekly, submitting pay stubs to keep subsidies, getting to know providers and teachers, monitoring how children were fairing, and making sure that the centers they chose were fulfilling the expectations they believed they would. But were centers fulfilling the expectations of mothers? According to Simon (1990), that would depend on the role that mothers' satisficing behavior played in choosing the centers originally. And so, the relationship between satisficing and satisfaction for the maternal primary caregivers of this study warrants exploration.

The aim of this chapter is to provide descriptions of and insight into how mothers, who have enrolled their minority children in one of three urban, high-poverty childcare centers, experience childcare management and satisfaction. The chapter speaks to themes and findings related to the study's second, more exploratory research question: In what ways does this choice process continue to affect parents once an initial enrollment decision has been made? And an associated question: How satisfied are parents with their childcare arrangement? Throughout the analysis, I rely on the literature and theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 2, the methodology of the study shared in Chapter 3, the contexts of The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, and Children's Town described in Chapter 4, and insights into the choice process described in Chapter 5. Implications of the analysis from this chapter are addressed in the Chapter 7.

The Demands of Childcare Management

Childcare management is a largely unacknowledged consequence of choice and represents the ways maternal primary caregivers continue to have to manage their

childcare decisions after enrollment. I argue that maternal primary caregivers continue to monitor and assess the center, paying particular attention to the perceived comfort levels of children, the perception of whether or not children are "progressing," and the perceived receptivity of teachers and providers to parent concerns. In terms of children "progressing," perceptions of progress or growth appeared highly subjective and varied mother-to-mother. Generally, however, the types of progress that maternal primary caregivers monitored fell into one of three categories: physical growth, emotional/behavioral progress, or cognitive/academic growth. In addition, it remained important that the centers make logistical sense for the family and mothers had feel as though they were able to build relationships with providers and teachers. Relationship-building with fellow parents from a center was not as important. (See Figure 6.1)

Center Assessment Continues…

Throughout the interview phase of data collection, maternal primary caregivers described ways they managed their childcare settings after enrollment. The women spoke about continuing to monitor their instincts and described assessing centers on a daily basis, sometimes twice a day if they dropped off and picked up their kids. Often given the lessons many had learned the hard way with previous childcare settings, mothers paid particular and universal attention to three perceptions: the comfort levels of their children, children's physical, behavioral, and cognitive progress or growth, and the receptivity of teachers and providers to their concerns.

Table 6.1

Post-Enrollment Management Priorities Across All Participants

Priority	Description		
Monitoring Maternal Instinct and Continued Center Assessment	- Comfort Level of Children - Monitoring Progress - Receptivity for Concerns		
Managing Convenience and Logistics	- Financial Management - Relocation - Changes to the Family Structure		
Relationship Building	Providers	- Willingness to listen and respond to concerns - Keeping parents informed of daily activities - Providing children opportunities	
	Teachers	- Warmth of interactions - Communicating daily activities, events, or issues - Willingness to work with parents to address concerns	
	Other Parents	Not critical to care	

Comfort levels of children.

Across all three centers, maternal primary caregivers spoke about the importance of monitoring their children's comfort and happiness day-to-day as an indicator of centers' conditions. Mothers indicated two primary ways of monitoring and assessing these conditions on a daily basis. The first way was indirect and occurred through mothers' observations during drop off and pick up. Generally, if a child appeared to transition well without getting upset for a prolonged period of time, a mother perceived her child to be happy at the center. If, on the other hand, a child did not want to go to the center or did not transition well in the morning, a mother might perceive there to be an

issue at the center and feel the need to follow up with staff. The second way of daily monitoring and assessing was more direct and occurred through conversations with children about daily events. Almost all mothers reported asking their children about their day, what they did, what they learned, etc. typically on the way home or at home after care. If a child could tell the mother what he or she did that day and if he or she talked about teachers, "friends," and favorite activities, the mother perceived the child to be comfortable, happy, and adjusting well. Maternal primary caregivers reported questioning when their children either spoke about negative events that happened during the day or when they were uninterested in talking about the day.

At The Christian School, eight of the nine maternal primary caregivers felt their children were comfortable and happy. In terms of monitoring drop off and pick up, Drea shared, "He likes coming here, in the morning he's a little whiney but he loves coming here, he likes his friend, he likes his teachers." Barb found, "Some days she's like I don't want to go today. Once you get up and get her out, she's fine though," while Tameka shared, "He loves school. He wants to go. He has his moments when, 'My stomach hurts,' but when he get to school…nothing." According to Denise, her daughter "loves to go to school. She just loves it." Most mothers also pointed to conversations with their children as evidence of comfort levels and happiness. For example, Drea knew her son loved the computer and playing on the roof, while Barb said her daughter talked about what she liked at school so much, that "sometimes you just have to tune her out." Vi mentioned her grandson was learning to read and that he was happy, Anessa felt that for the first time her daughter was really enjoying school because of the environment, her teacher, and the activities, Vera described how her daughter would practice writing the

names of her "friends" at home. Vera felt she had "acclimated and she's thrived." Finally, Faith too talked about her daily drive home with her son. She explained, "He just runs his day down, he'll say, 'oh we did this in gym or computer, we played the games in computer or something like that.'" Jule did not share this experience and expressed that it was partially an indication that her son had not transitioned well. She explained, "When I ask him about his day and stuff, he doesn't really get into detail like that." Consequently, Jule decided to look for a new school better suited to her son's needs for the following year.

Similar patterns emerged at both Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town. At Celebrate Kids, all mothers reported feeling like their children were comfortable. However, only 12 of the 15 parents felt their children were happy attending the center day-to-day. First though, mothers including Keisha, Dawn, Felisha, Rhonda, Jacqui, Missy, and Trinity, described gauging their children's comfort levels during drop off and pick up. For example, Keisha talked about how excited her daughter was for school every day, while Felisha mentioned her daughter took to the center "like a duck to the water." Missy giggled as she talked about the days her son doesn't want to leave the center because he loved the computer so much. And though Rhonda and Dawn's sons had mornings where they didn't want to go to school, both felt their children were always fine as soon as they got there.

Many mothers also monitored center conditions through conversations with their children. Gina talked about how thrilled she was when her daughter talked about writing, Tanya was excited when her daughter came home singing the "ABC's" and counting, Kathy stated that she knew her daughter loved it because she came home singing the

school song. Alayah described feeling happy because her son was "coming out of his shell," telling her everything he was doing, while Rita's son once told her "he liked it." Tamara, Kim, and Fanta, on the other hand, expressed that while their children were comfortable at the center, they were concerned about their day-to-day happiness. Tamara's daughter was having issues transitioning in the morning and she explained, "I'm just concerned about the teacher she is with... I think my child did much better when the assistant was in there." Kim and Fanta also voiced concerns because their daughters reported doing "nothing" and "didn't really volunteer information" respectively. Their concerns, however, didn't prompt immediate action because both women were taking their children out of the center after graduation a few weeks.

Children's Town had the highest number of newly enrolled children. Still, however, all mothers described monitoring their children's comfort levels and feeling as though their children were both comfortable and happy. During the drop off and pick up period, Genesis knew her son was comfortable because he always hugged his teachers, while Fae's daughter ran up the steps every morning. When Kendria picked up her son, he never wanted to leave and was always "anxious to get back." Samira and Tami described how their children loved going to school so much that they asked to go on the weekends. Though Chanel's son was new to the program and wanted to stay home some days, he was "good" after they arrived.

Most mothers from Children' Town, including Margaret, Tasha, Florence, Maya, Zedra, Kadijah, Tiffani, Sanna, Trina, and Lisa, spoke about monitoring comfort levels through conversations with children. Margaret, for example, felt she had a good indication her son was happy when he asked her to buy presents for the teachers at the

store. Sanaa described how her daughter talked "non-stop" about her teacher at home. Tasha, Maya, Kadijah, Trina, and Tiffani's children came home talking about everything they did that day, while Zedra's daughter expressed how much she liked to read and draw at school. Finally, when Florence and Lisa asked their sons about school, Florence, whose son was new to the program, shared that "he likes it a lot better" compared to his previous one and Lisa's son "just loves it."

Monitoring "Progress."

Along with monitoring children's comfort levels, nearly all mothers also tracked their children's progress or "growth" as a reflection of the daily happenings at the centers. Perceptions of progress or growth appeared highly subjective and varied according to the participants. Generally, however, the types of progress that maternal primary caregivers monitored fell into one of three categories: physical growth, emotional/behavioral progress, or cognitive/academic growth. If children were not perceived to be growing day-to-day at the center, then mothers perceived there to be an issue.

Mothers from all three centers monitored physical growth as well as fine motor skills as indicators of children's progress. Dawn, Rhonda, and Trina, for example, were assessing their children's physical growth. "He was only ten months when he started, but he has grown here," Dawn described as she talked about how her son had progressed physically since his enrollment at Celebrate Kids Academy. Rhonda also from Celebrate Kids and Trina from Children's Town echoed this response. In discussing her son's growth, Rhonda said, "It's so spacious here. He has had room to grow, and he isn't crowded and on top of others." Margaret, Lisa, Rhonda, and Trinity meanwhile were

tracking their children's fine motor skill progressions. In talking about her son's fine motor skills, Margaret commented, "With writing his name and numbers straight, doing the little things… I've seen a very good fine motor progress here at Children's Town." Lisa from Children's Town and Rhonda and Trinity from Celebrate Kids Academy, on the other hand, voiced concerns about their children's fine motor skill development. Trinity specifically mentioned that she wanted the center to "work on it more" because her son's Sickle Cell had affected the use of his fingers.

Emotional and behavioral progress was also an important indicator of continued center assessment. Mothers, particularly those of children with special needs, closely monitored these aspects of development in relation to daily happenings at the centers. Felisha from Celebrate Kids Academy, for example, had a daughter with cognitive and speech delays. Felisha explained, "They think it was autism, dyslexic. She is smart as a whip. The thing is… is her focus. She's just below the level of focusing. Even though you think she is not paying attention, she is really paying attention. "Chanel from Children's Town had a son with severe cognitive and behavioral challenges. She felt she could track her son's progress week to week based on his interactions with other kids.

Some mothers, like Gina, Kim, Zedra, and Tameka, did not have special needs children but still monitored their kids' emotional and behavioral progress at their centers. Kim, Zedra, and Tameka talked positively about the social-emotional growth they had seen in their children. Tameka from The Christian School was particularly impressed, sharing, "I just like the progress that I've seen in him from September to now. And like I said, the conversations that he had, complete sentences, and too, if he doesn't like something I did, he says that I hurt his feelings and something." In talked about her

daughter, however, Gina expressed concern. She explained, "She's growing up, so I'm thinking ….I want her to use her words more instead of … she still points, she's still in a baby stage where she puts things in her mouth and I don't like it, but she still does that. I just want her to grow a little more." She hoped her teachers would work on those habits with her more.

And finally, children's academic or cognitive progress was an indication of center conditions for a number of mothers. Rhonda, Anessa, Chanel, and Rita all believe their respective centers were contributing to growth in their children, while Fanta and Kim from Celebrate Kids Academy were not as convinced. In discussing her daughter's growth at The Christian School, Anessa explained, "You want to make sure they're growing and learning and when they're not with you they're in the best care. I wanted this formal school environment because she wasn't learning very well and was outgrowing the last one." Rita also felt her son had displayed growth, mentioning "Just overall education, most of all, how they handle things and I have really seen him grown. Grow up from the time that they started." Fanta and Kim, however, questioned their children's growth from the center. Fanta shared, "I'll say Celebrate Kids Academy did contribute, but I've worked very hard at home. I do stuff at home with her all the time so I'm not necessarily sure it's just Celebrate Kids Academy." And so, with mixed feelings the maternal primary caregivers from all three centers used the progress and growth they saw in their children to assess their choices.

Providers' receptivity to concerns.

In addition to monitoring their children's comfort levels and growth, the maternal primary caregivers also continued to assess teachers and staff. Specifically, many

mothers described a pattern of encountering aspects of care that bothered or did not sit right with them, approaching teachers or staff to talk about those concerns, and then ascertaining the responsiveness of providers. Such concerns generally occurred on one of two levels, the child-level or the environmental-level. If providers were receptive to concerns and mothers perceived concerns to be addressed, then good feelings were restored. At the time of the study, almost all mothers reported feeling as though their current centers were receptive to concerns.

At The Christian School, maternal primary caregivers primarily voiced child-level concerns and felt that the teacher, Mrs. Wild, was highly receptive to those concerns. Examples of child-level issues include Drea's concern her son was "a pushover with his friends," Barb's worry that her daughter was "too chatty catty," Vi's concern her grandson was "too shy," and Anessa's worry her daughter didn't "follow directions." The most concerned mothers at The Christian School were Jule and Tameka, who were both worried about their sons' attitudes. Jule lamented, "He doesn't listen. He doesn't want to listen and he's stubborn. He doesn't like to be told what to do. He wants to do things, but he doesn't know how to do them." Tameka mentioned similar, though more manageable behaviors, sharng, "I just need him to be able to express his feelings a little better without getting angry or upset all the time. If somebody tells him no, he just breaks down, like it's the end of the world. It's not the end of the world." Asked if teachers and staff were receptive to concerns, the women at The Christian School raved about Mrs. Wild's help, support, and communicative abilities. Only Jule's concerns were great enough to remove her son from care at the end of the year.

At Celebrate Kids Academy, mothers voiced both child- and environmental-level concerns. While teachers were not universally considered to be receptive, the owner, Mr. Marshall, and the director, Ms. Kiera, were. Examples of concerns with children included Keisha's worry over her child's sleeping habits, Tanya's concern over her daughter's temper tantrums, Dawn's anxiety that her son was the "follower of another little boy," and Jacqui's frustration over her son's attachment and immaturity. These mothers felt that their concerns were being adequately addressed and that teachers and staff had been receptive. Therefore, they were not considering taking their children out of the center.

At the environmental-level, many mothers expressed concerns. Rhonda, Felisha, Fanta, Keisha, and Kim felt there was inconsistency on a daily basis with ratios and the shuffling of children. Rhonda explained, "I voiced my opinion about him bouncing around from teacher to teacher… I'm understanding and I give you a chance to fix the problem, but they really, with the concerns I had, they handled them." The other mothers, however, disagreed their concerns were handled. Meanwhile, Tamara worried about the warmth of her daughter's teacher and Kathy was concerned her daughter was picking up foul language from her peers. Trinity worried about a teacher who had been "play fighting with her son and made him cry" then blamed her son by calling him "disrespectful." Gina, an employee, expressed concern about the lack of creativity and she, Jacqui, and Missy voiced concerns about the amount of chaos in the suites. Missy also reported asking staff about a summer curriculum, but found them unresponsive.

Asked if teachers and staff were receptive to concerns, mothers had mixed reviews about teachers. Fanta and Missy did not initially feel teachers had acted on their concerns so they went to Mr. Marshall and requested their children be put in different

classrooms. And while both Mr. Marshall and Ms. Kiera were perceived to be highly

receptive as administrators, a number of mothers reported becoming frustrated when their

receptivity did not incur change. Fanta, in particular, had a great deal to say about the

lack of change at the center. She explained, "I almost pulled her out twice. I almost

pulled her out one time because by that time she had got to the fourth teacher and it was

in like four months. The turnover was horrible" And while these mixed reviews seemed

to irritate mothers, none proved to be so grave that mother's were considering an

immediate change of care because generally "the good outweighed the bad" and because

a number of their children would be transitioning to kindergarten in the coming months.

The mothers of Children's Town also voiced both child- and environmental-level

concerns. The program's teachers and the owner/director Ms. Linda, however, were

perceived to be highly receptive to concerns by all moms. Child-level concerns were

more common and included Florence's concern her son wasn't patient enough to practice

writing, Tami's worry her daughter was being "lazy in school," Kadijah's concern that

her younger son might have had a speech problem, and Fae's worry that her daughter was

testing the teacher's limits. None of these problems as mothers described them, however,

warranted a change of childcare setting.

Environmental-level concerns were less common, but still expressed by some

parents. Tiffani, for example, had an issue with the shuffling of children to meet ratios

and the inconsistency of teacher schedules over the summer. Meanwhile, Genesis worried

her son would accidentally eat non-kosher foods and Chanel was concerned that the

teachers at Children's Town were teaching her son to pray before meals when the family

was Muslim. Maya expressed concern about the drop-off routine. Lisa worried about the

building's sanitation because her daughter had reported seeing bugs. The mothers with child-level concerns typically spoke to teachers, while those with environmental concerns went right to Ms. Linda. Most women reported staff to be receptive, though neither Chanel nor Lisa had seen the changes they were looking for yet. Further, the mothers did not mention considering a change of childcare setting.

The Logistics Continue…

In addition to continuing to assess centers, all maternal primary caregivers who were interviewed for this study also described a continued need for their chosen centers to make logistical sense. For this population, CCIS interruptions, job changes, relocations, and the addition of siblings were all common occurrences across all sites and for all women. Specific attention to how maternal primary caregivers continued to manage their childcare choice in relation to finances, relocation, and changes to family structure is addressed.

Financial management.

As documented, the maternal primary caregivers interviewed study had fewer financial resources to pay for childcare. All mothers explained that they were heavily influenced by the cost of childcare during the decision-making process. Further, over half of the women relied on subsidies to pay for childcare and nearly all mothers received some type of financial assistance, either from family members, the school, or subsidies. While financial limitations and acceptance of subsidy greatly impacted choice, the need to pay for and financially manage childcare week-to-week did not end upon enrollment. As parents continued to manage how they were paying for care, the two most common

types of financial strain were related to job disruptions or increases in cost and interruptions in CCIS.

At the time of the study and across all three sites, job disruptions were more common than increases in cost. For parents who paid out of pocket, both Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town were consistent in their weekly charge and had been over the past few years. The Christian School, on the other hand, had raised tuition for the following year, leaving a number of mothers scrambling to access funding. Vi, Barb, and Vera all mentioned the increase as putting their access to kindergarten in jeopardy. Vi explained, "We're working on the tuition situation now," while Barb shared, "I got to do what I got to do. I want her to go here." The day of my interview with Vera, she was meeting with the tuition coordinator afterward to "hopefully work something out."

Across all centers, a handful of mothers who paid out of pocket and who paid with subsidy co-pays were affected by job disruptions that impacted their ability to manage the cost of childcare week-to-week. Trina from Children's Town, for example, had lost her job in the education field between the time we set up her interview day and when she came in for her interview. Explaining that she had stopped working a week ago, Trina was concerned about finding work soon so CCIS would not drop her again for being out of work. Other parents or their partners who had recently experienced job disruptions included Jule from The Christian School as well as Tanya, Jacqui, Kathy, Alayah, and Trinity from Celebrate Kids Academy and Florence, Samira, Kadijah, Trina, Chanel, and Genesis from Children's Town.

As documented, the most common financial management issue was related to disruptions in access due to CCIS issues. Of the 19 families from Celebrate Kids

Academy and Children's Town on the CCIS subsidy specifically, 16 mothers expressed

frustration with the CCIS system because their children had been dropped or they had

been threatened with getting dropped. Further, a number of mothers from both centers

were working out problems with subsidy at the time of their interviews. Rita from

Celebrate Kids Academy, for example, had just received a notice that her child had

missed over 20 days, a new subsidy policy, and CCIS was threatening to drop her. Rita

explained,

> "I'm actually trying to get that straightened out because there was one time she
> was sick this year and she was off for two weeks and I think they counted that.
> They're saying that even with a doctor's note, it doesn't matter, which I think is
> very unfair because if someone is sick like that, I don't think they should be in
> daycare."

Trinity from Celebrate Kids Academy had a similar issue because her son with Sickle

Cell had also missed over 20 days and was going to be dropped. From Children's Town

current subsidy management issues spanned from Kendria who was trying to get a new

caseworker at the time of the interview because she had been dealing with a "nasty one"

to Lisa who had been cut off for six months because her caseworker had entered a wrong

code into her file.

Relocation.

In addition to having to managing financial aspects of care, a number of maternal

primary caregivers in this study had to manage recent or current relocation-associated

issues. Across all three centers, a population of mothers had recently moved, which made

their current choices logistically easier for some and more difficult for others. Further,

there was also a population of mothers who shared their plans to move in the near future,

which also would impact their management of childcare.

Over a quarter of the mothers in the study had recently moved and reported their move as affecting their childcare management. Four mothers, Drea, Dawn, Kathy, and Trina, moved but kept their center arrangement. The impact of the move was "reasonable" for Kathy and Trina, who had only relocated to nearby neighborhoods. Dawn moved across town, but explained, "When I moved from up here to the west, I'm like maybe it'd be best if I move him down to a day care that's closer. But being as though I have clients that's still in the area, there's no need for me to … because I know if anything was to happen I'll be in distance of Celebrate Kids Academy." Drea had also moved across town, but kept her son enrolled in The Christian School; she considered pulling her son out because it was "hectic," especially when she had been pregnant. Eight additional mothers, Alayah, Jacqui, Kathy, Tamara, and Tanya from Celebrate Kids Academy and Chanel, Samira, and Trina from Children' Town, had also recently moved. These women, however, opted to change childcare settings after moving. Tami, on the other hand, had no intentions of moving but location was becoming an issue. Though she was an employee at Children's Town, she had begun to fear that the center was too far with three small children. Consequently, she had begun to consider switching settings.

A number of maternal primary caregivers, including Kathy, Jacqui, and Rhonda from Celebrate Kids Academy and Fae and Samira from Children's Town, shared their hopes to relocate in the near future during interviews. Jacqui, for example, had recently relocated from New York to be near family. Unhappy with the job opportunities, Jacqui shared, "I might just go back to New York and work and live out there." Rhonda meanwhile was considering moving to a nearby state, while Kathy and Samira were hoping to leave the city altogether. Finally, Fae, who had a lengthy history of moving

around and mentioned four relocations since her daughter's birth, shared, "Yeah, I've moved and things like that. If I move to a different location, I would change the daycare." And so, the frequency of relocation factored into childcare management for a significant population of maternal primary caregivers.

Changes to the family structure.

The final aspect of managing logistics relates to changes in family structure. For the mothers who were interviewed, and it is important to remember these women had young children or grandchildren between the ages of three and five, the two most common changes to family structure were the births of younger siblings and the divorce or splitting up of parents. As previously mentioned, 13 of the maternal primary caregivers of this study had infants or toddlers younger than their three to five year-old children. Further, 25 of the women participants, over half, were single mothers or grandmothers who had split from their partners since children's births and were raising their children or grandchildren alone.

The additional of siblings to the family structure was a common occurrence. Drea and Jule from The Christian School had infants, while Felisha, Kim, Fanta, Kathy, Alayah, and Rita from Celebrate Kids Academy had other infant or toddler-aged children. Samira, Tami, Kadijah, Trina, and Genesis also had added younger siblings to the family dynamic within the last few years. The addition of younger siblings to these families impacted the management of childcare centers for all of these mothers. While some mothers incorporated their younger children into the same childcare arrangement, others did not and instead chose a different childcare option, meaning they were now managing two arrangements. Only half of the mothers with younger children at Celebrate Kids

Academy had enrolled their infants or toddlers at the same center. The remaining women had found other arrangements either with family or in home care settings. Drea and Jule from The Christian School did not have the option to enroll their children at the site because the center only accepted four year-olds; both women were managing alternative arrangements as well. On the other hand, all of the participants at Children's Town had enrolled their younger infants, toddlers, or Pre-K age children at the same site. Still, however, the addition of siblings to their young families made childcare adjustments necessary.

The second change to family structure, which also affected the management of childcare, was related to parental divorce or separation. Over half of the maternal primary caregivers in the study, 25 of 40, were single mothers raising children on their own. Tasha from Children's Town was an exception; though still with her daughter's father, he had recently deployed overseas for an extended military tour and would not be home for at least a year. Tasha talked about the difficulty of raising her daughter and managing her daughter's schedule on her own. Other mothers, however, had simply split with their children's fathers and were left to manage childcare on their own. In talking about splitting with her daughter's father, Barb from The Christian School shared, "Whatever. She's still going to get whatever it is she needs with or without him. He's not in her life really in any way. His loss." Other mothers echoed similar sentiments. For example, when I asked Sanaa about challenges in childcare, she explained, "Divorce … At the time I had my first child, I was working and starting to work full-time. Had my relationship not dissolved, I don't know if I would have gone part-time and been able to stay home. Being a single parent, I had to work full-time and put them in daycare." Consequently,

maternal primary caregivers who split from, were separated from, or had divorced

children's fathers were often left to monitor, manage, and pay for childcare settings on

their own.

Relationship-Building…

A third aspect of choice management is centered in relationship building with a

specific emphasis on communication as a means to establish good relationships. All

maternal primary caregivers who were interviewed for this study highlighted the

importance of providers and teachers' willingness to communicate with them on a daily

basis. Mothers expressed that when the communication was good, they were inclined to

perceive relationships with providers and staff to be good. In instances where

communication broke down, however, relationships were no longer perceived as in good

standing. In these situations, parents had to decide whether to pull their child out of the

center or if they would be willing to give teachers and staff another chance. According to

mothers, relationships with center providers were the most significant; relationships with

individual teachers, especially at Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town were

also important, though not as critical. Relationship building with other parents, families,

and center-based community members, on the other hand, was not a significant

management priority.

With providers.

Maternal primary caregivers managed relationships and assessed communication

on an on-going basis; overwhelmingly, mothers viewed those with their providers as

most important. Though who exactly was perceived to be the "provider" varied site-to-

site, generally providers were viewed as those with the most authority. The nuances of

what constituted good communication with providers varied, but overall parents were most concerned with feeling informed. Providers keeping parents informed related to their willingness to listen and respond to concerns, the importance of which has been addressed as well as their willingness to keep parents abreast of the centers' daily activities and provide opportunities for children.

At The Christian School, the program itself functioned independently; though the principal oversaw the program, the teachers ran the program day-to-day and handled much of the administrative duties. Consequently, Mrs. Wild was considered by parents to be the provider, though she was also the teacher. Ms. Wild's efforts at communication were highly praised across all mothers and in turn, parents were universal in describing good relationships with her. Mrs. Wild was also perceived to be adept at communicating daily activities and providing children with opportunities. Siting notes, calls, texts, and weekly class letters, maternal primary caregivers like Jule, Vera, Tameka, and Faith praised Mrs. Wild for her efforts to keep parents informed. Faith, for example, exclaimed, "I love Mrs. Wild. I like that she's very easy to contact. She's been very open from the beginning. She gave us her contact information. We normally contact via email. She gives me information when I need and she answers when I email her about certain things she answers back fairly quickly. I'm actually going to miss her." Other mothers concurred, emphasizing their appreciation for the opportunities Mrs. Wild provided. Anessa praised Mrs. Wild for hosting the "fairytale ball," Barb gushed that she had taught her daughter to Irish dance and sent educational CD's home, and Vera appreciated the take-home packets made to reinforce the educational components. Speaking more

generally, both Denise and Vi stated that their favorite things about the program were their relationships with Mrs. Wild.

At Celebrate Kids Academy, Mr. Marshall and Ms. Kiera were considered to be the center's providers. Though Ms. Kiera was officially the center director, mothers reported that when they "went to the top," Mr. Marshall, the owner, was the person they wanted to see. Mothers were not universal in feeling as though the providers communicated well and as a consequence reported having mixed feelings about their relationships. Some mothers were concerned about receiving mixed messages regarding their children's daily activities and opportunities. In terms of communication and daily activity, the overwhelming majority of mothers, including Keisha, Tanya, Dawn, Felisha, Kim, Rhonda, Fanta, Jacqui, Kathy, Alayah, Rita, Tamara, and Trinity, expressed concern that the shuffling of children to maintain ratios made it difficult for them to get a clear picture of what happened day-to-day. With children in the care of up to four or five different teachers in a single day, which displeased parents, Mr. Marshall and Ms. Kiera were faulted for shuffling children so much.

And in terms of providing children with opportunities, a number of mothers expressed concerns over the communication of events, including picture day, graduation, and field trip. Kim explained her position, saying, "The communication is just bad… There was like an email tree that will go around, but sometimes you get the emails, sometimes you don't…. They told us graduation was during the day so I took off, now I just heard it's at night. That's frustrating." Though other mothers shared these concerns, as Kim went on to say, the "good still outweighs the bad." Kim, like most other mothers,

reported appreciating that Mr. Marshall and Ms. Kiera did seem receptive to concerns, which was enough to keep her child put until graduation.

Finally, Ms. Linda, the director and owner of Children's Town, was considered by parents to be the center's provider. Though the center had other administrators and co-owners, such as Ms. Linda's mother, mothers were universal in referring to Ms. Linda as the sole provider. In terms of relationships and communication, there were two categories of women at this center: those who felt Ms. Linda communicated well and established good relationships and those who were newer to the center and preceded their explanations with phrases like "so far" or "its too early to tell, but…" The mothers were split evenly with the former category including Margaret, Tasha, Tami, Zedra, Tiffani, Fae, Trina, and Genesis while the later included Kendria, Florence, Samira, Maya, Kadijah, Sanaa, Chanel, and Lisa. Ms. Linda was perceived as adept at communicating daily activities and providing opportunities by the first category of women. Tasha summed up her position by explaining, "The director, she's just straightforward with everything. You can tell that she has a passion for what she does, like it's not just about money or anything. She cares about the children and her staff, the parents. She looks out all the way around, so it's a good thing." Mothers also highlighted the providing of opportunities in broader terms, such as Ms. Linda's ability to control the stability of the environment, create a "family-like atmosphere," offer resources, and help secure CCIS.

The second category of mothers was more reserved, though pleased thus far, with Ms. Linda's communication and relationship-building efforts. Kadijah, for example, had only had her children enrolled a few weeks, but shared, "Before my kids started, I called three or four times. I met with the owner. She knows me. I absolutely love her. She

knows my life story. We sat down and we had all the conversations about each other's story and everything. Yeah…" Absent any complaints or issues, the second category of mothers also seemed to be pleased with communication and the provider, Ms. Linda.

With teachers.

Teachers were perceived be important to relationship-building, though they were not as critical as providers. Across all sites, maternal primary caregivers managed relationships and assessed communication on an on-going basis with their children's teachers. At all three centers, but to varying degrees, children's teachers were susceptible to change on a daily basis. The Christian School, however, had the most consistent set-up. In establishing relationships with teachers, the majority of mothers expressed the importance of teachers showing warmth in interactions, communicating daily activities, events, or issues, and a willingness to work with parents to address their concerns.

At The Christian School, Mrs. Wild was considered both provider and teacher. Her assistant, Mrs. Wagner, was rarely mentioned in interviews. Universally, Mrs. Wild was praised for her communicative abilities in handling the more teacher-inclined aspects of her job. In terms of the warmth of interactions, Tameka, like other mothers, was struck from the start. She recalled her son's first day of the program, sharing, "She did a little poster board, and they had they hand prints on it. And she did this, because it was our first day. It was just, so, 'Oh, this is going to be a great year.' And then, once we started doing correspondence, and it looked like, 'No, this teacher really cares about these kids.'" As Anessa explained, "her little cute activities continued throughout the year" and her daughter "just loved them." And in terms of her willingness to work through concerns, Jule appreciated Mrs. Wild's efforts to work with her son, though she felt they weren't

altogether successful. Jule shared, "It's pretty good, relationship is pretty good. Always try to communicate with them by seeing them, phone, whatever works… I just don't think they're ready or really set up to deal with children that have real, real behavioral problems."

At Celebrate Kids Academy, teacher turnover was high and parents reported having varying levels of knowledge of and relationships with their children's teachers. Still, teacher warmth through interactions, the communication of daily activities, and a willingness to work with parents to address concerns remained a common theme across all mothers. Warmth of interactions and the communication of daily activities as part of relationship-building were important to Gina, Keisha, Felisha, Rhonda, Missy, and Alayah. Keisha, as an example, shared, "I always ask her how her day was, and if she has any homework or anything, or does she need anything, or whatever. We talk everyday, usually when I … well, she was actually here this morning. I talked to her. Usually when I pick her up, I talk to her." Alayah, on the other hand, talked about how "the staff is nice" and how impressed she was they teach different religious holidays. A willingness to talk about concerns was important Tanya, Dawn, and Jacqui. Tanya explained that she wanted to know if her daughter's "not learning something fast enough, or she's not writing her name the right way, or she needs some more help with this or that, they let me know." Dawn and Jacqui echoed similar sentiments.

Some mothers, however, expressed concerns about their relationships with teachers. Kim, for example, described a tumultuous start to her relationship with her daughter's teacher after the teacher did not administer asthma medication on time. Fanta, on the hand, simply did not like her daughter's first teacher and was prepared to pull her

our unless she got a "consistent, seasoned teacher." Kathy and Rita were pleased with the teachers overall, but did not actually know their children's main teachers due to recent turnover. Tamara was especially concerned about her daughter's teacher. She described how her daughter wasn't responding to a teacher, who was particularly stern, and began having a hard time transitioning in the morning. Tamara went directly to Mr. Marshall and asked for her child to transfer to a new classroom. And finally, Trinity mentioned possibly taking her son out in the future. She explained, "He don't need no frilly little teacher that just started out. I'm like, okay. But they want me to keep him here and I have been thinking about it but I don't know."

At Children's Town, mothers were also concerned about building good relationships with teachers. Warmth of interactions and the communication of daily activities were highlighted by most, including Margaret, Zedra, Tasha, Kendria, Samira, Kadijah, Tiffani, Fae, Lisa, and Genesis. Tasha, for example, talked about the importance of communicating her daughter's daily activities, explaining, "She has certain needs to be met, you know, well, or whoever her teacher is, we just work along. We work with each other side by side. There's nothing … she's getting to where I feel like she needs more of it … everything is almost perfect." Though her daughter's teacher was new, Tiffani reported she was "very pleased" with Miss Kim so far. Tiffani had expressed concern over a previous teacher and was prepared to take her daughter out of the center if the situation was not corrected.

Mothers newer to the center appeared pleased with early communication efforts on the parts of their children's teachers. Again, however, this group spoke more in terms of "being in the process of still getting to know them," as Florence described her

experience. Tami, Maya, Sanaa, Trina, and Chanel echoed her sentiments and also shared that while pleased, they too felt like they were still getting to know either the teaching staff or the new teacher, Miss Kim. And so, for many mothers developing good relationships with their children's teachers became an important aspect of managing childcare.

With fellow parents.

Relationship-building and communication with fellow parents was the least prioritized aspect of management, though it was still important to a number of maternal primary caregivers from each center. Mothers mostly described communication in terms of saying "hi" and "bye" during drop off and pick up, while a few spoke about organizing play dates or seeing other families outside of the center. Maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School placed the most emphasis on getting to know other parents, while building parent relationship was not emphasized as much at Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town.

At The Christian School, almost all parents reported making an effort to get to know other parents, though it wasn't spoken about as a critical aspect of childcare management. Barb, Vi, and Tameka, for example, had become friendly with each other after waiting for their children on the sidewalk each day at pick up. According to Barb, "Me and Tameka… I talk to her often. The parent's day now, we wait for the kids and everybody talk, like Vi. I talk to her when she is here, outside of school sometimes. Me and Tameka, we'll do play dates off and on and stuff like that." Anessa knew a co-worker with a child in the class and communicated with her often. Drea and Vera also mentioned having gotten to know other parents and establishing relationships. Denise communicated

with parents "sometimes with the dropping off and picking up," as did Faith, who clarified by stating, "It's not really a relationship. I see them when we're coming up after school or we're going to functions or you know things school-related then we'll talk and things like that… that's about the extent of it." And finally, Jule mentioned that she didn't really know a lot of parents.

Mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy described their relationships with other parents mostly in terms of being "cordial." Keisha, for example, shared, "I don't know them by name. We kind of know each other by face." Tanya mentioned "talking to a few of the parents," while Gina explained, "everybody's so cordial." Felisha had gotten to know "some of the kids," but not parents and Kim had known another family whose child had graduated. Fanta worked in the area and mentioned getting to know parents, but mostly through her work with children's older siblings at the local elementary school. Missy had "met one parent and suggested a play date," but it had not yet happened. Tamara mentioned having "spoken with some" parents. About half of the women, including Dawn, Rhonda, Jacqui, Kathy, Alayah, Rita, and Trinity did not know other parents. Dawn explained she only talked to the teacher, while Kathy simply stated, "I'm not that kind of parent."

The mothers of Children's Town felt similarly to those from Celebrate Kids Academy. Mothers like Tami and Maya knew another parents who had referred them or who they had referred to the center. Zedra knew a number of parents as an employee and explained, "They are like a big family here." Tasha also knew some parents, sharing, "Me and a couple of the parents were … we were like workout buddies at a period of point in time… I don't know what happened, but yes. We started this whole workout group, and

everything just stopped." Margaret talked about taking her son to birthday parties if invited but clarified, "not that I hang out with any of them." The remaining women, Kendria, Florence, Samira, Kadijah, Tiffani, Sanaa, Fae, Trina, Chanel, Lisa, and Gensis, either described knowing fellow parents in passing or not knowing other parents at all

Significance of Acknowledging Management

The management of childcare continued to affect maternal primary caregivers beyond their initial choice and enrollment decisions. The mothers interviewed for this study described three specific ways that they managed their centers: by continuing to assess centers, by balancing center and family logistics, and by building relationships with providers, teacher, and sometimes fellow parents. The descriptions that this group of women provided support that the demands of navigating the world of early childhood education do not end with enrollment. In fact, many factors that influenced the choice process stayed with mothers and carried over into the management phase. During management, questions from the search process, like "Do I feel comfortable?" or "Does this center work for my family?" or "Does my child have environmental needs?" could be monitored and assessed, for example, by gauging children's happiness, the weekly payout, and children's progress day-to-day. Other management demands, relationship building in particular, emerged only during this phase and had not been considerations during the search process.

Methodologically, the number of times that mothers changed settings throughout their histories, coupled with the demands of center management, supports the need to start a conversation about the post-enrollment effects of childcare on parents. The stakes in better understanding the management side of childcare are extremely high because this

group of parents manages childcare for a population of children that need to be attending

quality settings on a consistent basis (August & Hakuta, 1997; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan,

1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995; McLoyd, 1998;

Wertheimer & Croan, 2003; Zill, 1999). The most comprehensive way to conduct

research on management is by using methods and frameworks that allow for deeper and

more realistic picture. The descriptions that mothers provided of how they managed care

illustrate that contexts and resources continue to matter as well.

Satisfaction Levels of Maternal Primary Caregivers

Satisfaction levels are a second consequence of childcare choice. Though

satisfaction levels of parents have been explored in previous literature (Cryer, Tietze, &

Wessels, 2002; King, Teleki, & Buck-Gomez, 2002; McWilliam et al., 1995), there is

still much more that needs to be understood about the nuances of this consequence.

Center satisfaction runs deeper than mothers answering the "yes" or "no" question: Are

you satisfied with your childcare? In my interviews with maternal primary caregivers, I

was looking for a deeper understanding of satisfaction. Thinking about what types of

questions might speak to that understanding, I asked mothers to talk about their favorite

things about the centers, their least favorite things, and what they would change if they

could. Satisfaction in this study speaks to how mothers answered these questions, to the

ways they described feeling towards their current centers, and to what issues or problems,

if any, they experienced. Just as with all prior analyses, in order to realistically

understand satisfaction from the perspective of this group of mothers, consideration has

to be given to the context within which and the resources by which childcare decisions

were originally made. Simon's (1990) concept of satisficing proved applicable, particularly when without being asked, some mothers described their ideal centers.

The maternal primary caregivers interviewed for this study felt satisfied overall with their current choices, which supports literature on the subject (Cryer, Tietze, & Wessels, 2002; King, Teleki, & Buck-Gomez, 2002; McWilliam et al., 1995). Generally high satisfaction levels, however, cannot be dissociated from the journeys that these women took to find their centers or from the value of the experiences and knowledge accumulated along the way. Further, center satisfaction is just as nuanced and fluid as management, the construction of choice sets, and the factors that influence choice. When I asked the "yes" or "no" question, are you satisfied with your center? The majority of mothers responded affirmatively. When I probed deeper and asked more open-ended questions, however, it became clear that the majority of mothers were by no means completely satisfied with all aspects of their childcare setting. Further, all mothers remained extremely dissatisfied with and frustrated by the structural barriers that continued to plague their experiences, a reality that has been well documented throughout this study. With regard to their satisfaction with settings though, maternal primary caregivers described two distinct parts of a satisfaction/dissatisfaction dichotomy. The first part related to aspects of care mothers personally felt pleased or displeased with and which affected them as parents. The second part spoke to elements of care, typically environmental, that mothers felt happy or unhappy with on behalf of their children. The nuances of the alignment between center practices and maternal satisfaction proved to be highly personal and varied, distinctly in some cases, from parent-to-parent.

The Satisficing Effect

If, as Simon (1990) theorized, mothers engaged in satisficing behaviors when they chose their respective centers, and if mothers did so using the limited family capital Diamond and Gomez (2004) theorized, I wondered what bearing these contexts might have on maternal satisfaction post-enrollment. Early on in the interview process it became apparent that both satisficing and family capital shaped satisfaction in significant ways. Though they did not use the term, a number of mothers referenced the negative effects of satisficing when, without being asked, they talked about their dream or ideal centers and criticized the lack of viable alternatives in their high-poverty neighborhoods. Experiences with prior childcare settings for this group of women, however, turned out to have positive effects on family capital and led to increases in human capital specifically.

Alternatives and ideals.

Across all parents, the highest and most consistent evidence of dissatisfaction surrounded the ways structural barriers continued to plague maternal primary caregivers beyond enrollment. Given what families could access and afford and what was deemed regulated and available, mothers could only consider those centers that became "reasonable" choices in the construction of choice sets. Though parents talked about feeling generally satisfied with their settings, they also referenced satisficing behaviors when they described their centers as being good enough or saying, "it's not ideal but…" as Kathy phrased it.

Part of the reason that mothers stayed at their centers, including those who shared their complaints, was the perception of a lack of viable alternatives in their neighborhoods. All 40 women had been through the search process, most more than once,

and when they talked about satisfaction, many mothers pointed out that they gave their centers more leeway when issues or problems arose due to a lack of alternatives in their neighborhoods. Specific areas of discontent varied and are addressed in depth in the following section, but it is important to note that mothers also reported that the headache of looking for alternative care when minor issues arose simply was not worth the effort.

A number of women also talked about their "fantasy" care centers, or the sites that in an ideal world without structural constraints and with endless resources, they would send their children too. Alayah from Celebrate Kids and Genesis and Kim from Children's Town had found their ideal centers outside the city, but they were "not convenient" to their neighborhoods and too expensive. Kathy from Celebrate Kids also had her fantasy center. She recalled, "I was looking for a more diverse place. I think that that is something that we had to sacrifice for the other things that we got here. It was diverse there, but coming farther and farther away from downtown and farther into a predominantly Black area, it was something we just had to sacrifice." Tiffani from Children's Town had visited her dream center in the city "just for fun." She referred to it as "world-renowned," but said "You gotta put your baby on the list when you're thinking about getting pregnant and it's too expensive." Kadijah's ideal center was a "school-school" or she wanted her boys in a Head Start, but wasn't able to get them in.

Mounting knowledge.

As discussed, 38 of 40 maternal primary caregivers had previously enrolled their children in other childcare arrangements. The primary reason for pulling children out of prior settings was dissatisfaction with one or more aspects of care, including a traumatic event, a lack of receptivity for concerns, settings not meeting children's or family's needs

or values, a need for socialization, and so on. Only a small portion of women switched settings due to convenience and logistics-based causes, such as relocation, changes to family structure, and prior settings closing. If mothers pulled their children out of settings because they recognized centers were not treating their children well or were not meeting their children's need, it could be said that they had accumulated knowledge. On some level, they had increased their human capital. Human capital, the intangible skills and abilities that are passed from one generation to the next based on a family's level of social capital, is measured by parents' education levels and "provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning" (Coleman, 1988, S109).

Mothers often referenced their accumulation of knowledge and described how what they had learned from past experienced informed their later searches. Tameka, for example, shared, "I just don't think they prepared him to go to Pre-K. So I'm kind of glad I made the decision that I made to take him out. I mean, the teachers were great, maybe it was just the curriculum that it wasn't good, you know what I mean?" Tameka then described knowing to ask future centers about their curricula during visits. Genesis from Children's Town had also learned from a negative experience. At a prior center, she recognized a staffing issue, sharing, "We experienced a lot of issues there. I don't think it was adequately staffed." Like Tameka and many other mothers, Genesis's search then became shaped by the shortcomings she herself had recognized in the center. And so, armed with more information and knowledge than when they had made their first, second, and in some cases third or fourth choices, maternal primary caregivers learned to look for sites that were better able to satisfy their wants and needs.

The Nuances of Maternal Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

As hypothesized, mothers felt generally satisfied with their current centers. If they hadn't, however, they likely would not have stayed as most demonstrated a willingness to intervene and remove children from settings. Those satisfaction levels, however, were much more nuanced and subjective than I had expected or than prior research has explored. Mothers described their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in terms of how they felt and in terms of how they perceived their children to feel. Among the three centers, maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School spoke most highly about their center, followed by mothers from Children's Town. Though mothers from Celebrate Kids had many good things to say about the center, they had many more complaints.

The Christian School.

Maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School, the one STAR center, were overall the most highly satisfied with their childcare. When asked generally about satisfaction, all nine maternal primary caregivers gave the center high marks, though their comments about what aspects of care contributed to this satisfaction varied from mom-to-mom. Generally, these women described their own satisfaction in terms related to the teacher, Mrs. Wild, the learning environment and curriculum, the little activities and events provided to children, and their comfort levels as parents. Asked to describe their satisfaction, mothers from this center had laundry lists of aspects of care they were pleased with. (See Figure 6.2)

Barb, for example, "loved the school," was glad her daughter was there, raved about the teacher and learning environment, and stated that she wouldn't change a thing. Vi felt similarly, sharing, "We have no complaints. I am very happy." Vi also said she

"wouldn't change anything." Anessa described herself as "elated" and "on cloud nine."

She felt her daughter was in the best care, loved the curriculum and values, and felt her

daughter was safe and supervised. She also was highly satisfied with the teacher and

communication. Drea described the center as "really good, especially academically." She

appreciated the trips and different activities her son did and she was happy about her

son's experience, the teachers, one particular sharing activity, and she too would not

change anything. Tameka "loved it" and shared her son had "the best Pre-k teacher in the

nation" as far as she was concerned. She also highlighted the communication, how much

the teacher cared about the kids, the little activities her son did, and the diversity between

the boys and girls. Vera talked about how impressed she was with student engagement,

the enthusiasm for learning instilled in children, the overall environment, and the little

projects her daughter had done throughout the months. Faith highlighted her love of the

teacher and how easy to contact she was as well as the safe environment. And finally,

Denise explained that she "never had a problem with The Christian School." She talked

about feeling satisfied with the exceptional staff and feeling both comfortable and

impressed with "a good school." All eight of these maternal primary caregivers did not

make a single negative comment about their experiences.

Four women from this center also brought up perceptions of their children's

feelings in discussing their satisfaction with The Christian School. Child-specific

elements of satisfaction were primarily related to children's growth or progress and the

perceived comfort or happiness of their children. Vi, for example, highlighted how happy

and satisfied her daughter felt with her progress throughout the year and raved about how

much she continued to progress. Anessa too felt her daughter was happy because she was

growing and learning. She talked enthusiastically about the changes she had seen even since her daughter's late enrollment in January. Vera relayed just how remarkable she though it was to have a four year old "get up and want to come to school every day." She too highlighted her daughter's progress. And finally, Drea was happy that her son felt so comfortable in this setting.

Table 6.2
Satisfaction Levels at The Christian School

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Parent	- Teacher - Learning Environment and Curriculum - Activities and Events Provided - Comfort Level of Mothers	None
Child	- Children's Growth and Progress - Comfort and Happiness	Special Needs Children

Jule was the sole maternal primary caregiver not unanimously satisfied with her experience at The Christian School. She felt that The Christian School was "a good school," but was dissatisfied with their capacity to handle her son. Jule's son had special needs, specifically cognitive delays and behavioral challenges. She explained, "I think it's a good Pre-K. I think his teacher is really good, but they're just not … I don't think they're too good at handling how many kids and how he is… I don't think they're ready or really set up to deal with children that have real, real behavioral problems or issues." Jule went on to say that Mrs. Wild suggested her son be transitioned into a smaller setting. She was particularly concerned that "they" weren't pleased with his behavior and she feared he would be suspended, which she didn't want to happen. Asked if she would

do anything differently, Jule said that she would have kept her son in the Head Start

setting she had pulled him out of for The Christian School. She also thought The

Christian School needed "additional help" so that when they enrolled children like her

son, they could "learn how to deal with it and if the parent really wants them to stay at the

school they'll be able to stay."

Children's Town.

Mothers from Children's Town, a three STAR center, were not as satisfied as

those from The Christian School, but were still generally satisfied. Like those at The

Christian Center, mothers talked about satisfaction in highly personal terms. Some

mothers highlighted their personal feelings and those of their children, while others

focused on one or the other. Twelve mothers, in particular, discussed aspects of the center

that they personally were pleased with, including the learning environment and

curriculum, interactions with the teachers and Ms. Linda, and their own comfort levels.

Asked more specifically about their satisfaction, mothers from this center too tended to

rattle off a list of aspects of care they were pleased with, which is reflected in the

following overview of their comments. (See Figure 6.3)

Margaret felt Children's Town was a very open school with a very structured

learning environment, she enjoyed the field trips and curriculum, and felt very

comfortable having her son there because she knew the staff so well. Tasha loved the

center so much she reported begging Mrs. Linda to open a charter or private school so her

daughter could attend. She was satisfied with how professional and organized the center

was and how straightforward and passionate Ms. Linda was. Samira "liked this place,"

and highlighted the curriculum, weekly activities, "feeling satisfied with everything," and

feeling very comfortable. Tami loved Ms. Linda because she made sure the staff was "there for the children and not for themselves," while Maya felt the staff was responsive, worked her son hard, and was accommodating. Tiffani was pleased with her daughter's teacher and felt very satisfied with the communication and how the staff listened to concerns. Sanaa too "liked the school" because it was safe, the teachers care about the students and really work with them, and they have a great program.

The remaining five mothers were equally as pleased. For example, Fae highlighted the "family-oriented" atmosphere, how much she liked the staff and Ms. Linda, how determined the teachers were to teach kids what they needed to know, and she also said it was "the most satisfied of all daycares." Chanel described Children's Town as "a good place" that teaches the kids and encourages them to grow. Genesis focused on how pleased she was with the staff helping her "potty train" her kids, she felt the center was very accommodating, had a high quality of care, and made parents feel very comfortable with their handling of issues and incidents. And finally, Florence talked about how comfortable she was leaving her son, while Zedra thought the center was excellent and she had a "really good experience."

Twelve mothers also highlighted satisfaction in terms of their children's happiness. Though there was overlap, these mothers were not the same twelve who spoke about their own, personal satisfaction. Generally, children's satisfaction was related to their happiness or comfort, children's relationships or interactions with the staff, and how much progress and learning mothers saw in their children. In describing her son's relationship with the center, Margaret spoke about her satisfaction, sharing, "He loves to come to school. He loves his teachers. He talks about his teachers all day long. He'll be

at the store and he'll want to buy his teacher something." Samira's son and Tami's daughter also "loved school." Samira's explained she was happy her son was "doing pretty good," loved going to school, and asked to go to school on the weekends, while Tami's daughter loved all the teachers, the children, and also asked to go to school on the weekends. Genesis was highly satisfied her children loved the teachers, sharing, "They really love the staff. They interact with them. It's not like it's just someone that they see here. If they would see them outside, they would run up to them and give them a hug. That means a lot."

Zedra, Kadijah, Tiffani, and Trina also highlighted their satisfaction with how much their children were learning and progressing. Zedra talked about her daughter's progress and growth and how the staff felt like an extended family for her child and Kadijah was impressed her son's were learning and could tell her "step by step what they did everyday." Tiffani was also impressed when her daughter made a pattern at home because that wasn't something she had worked on her with. Tiffani was also satisfied because her daughter was "genuinely happy." Trina's daughter was also happy, which made her happy, and she compared the growth she saw in her daughter at Children's Town to a lack of growth at her previous center. Tasha and Fae felt satisfied because they daughters looked forward to school each day and were "excited" at drop off, while Florence reported feeling comfortable now that her son was "liking it a lot better." Finally, Lisa was also "relieved" she had finally found a place with a helpful staff that her daughter "loved."

While mothers reported being overall satisfied with their center, Children's Town's parents were not without their complaints. Six women spoke specifically about

aspects of care that they had become dissatisfied with. Those aspects were extremely individualized; in many cases, what bothered one mother, didn't appear to bother any others. Tiffani, for example, reported dissatisfaction with a transition period her daughter had recently experienced because her daughter had appeared unhappy. Tiffani explained, "She wasn't the same; she didn't want to come to school. If she starts showing signs of her not being happy, that makes me unhappy. Definitely, I was just, 'Oh, my God; maybe I need to pull her out.'" Tiffani asked Ms. Linda to move her daughter and felt the situation had been resolved for the time being.

The remaining mothers were dissatisfied not because their children were unhappy, but because they were unhappy. Chanel, for example, was Muslim and was upset that her son had come home saying, "Oh, thank you for my food. Amen." She had not yet addressed the situation with staff, but was not happy with teachers imparting religious beliefs on her son. She also felt dissatisfaction with a lack of take-home work or homework so she could help her son "get ready for school." Lisa's major complaint, on the other hand, dealt with the conditions of the center. A self-described "germaphobe," Lisa though some of the building was a little shabby and her daughter came home saying she had seen bugs. Lisa took the issue up with Ms. Linda and was awaiting resolution.

Other mothers, like Maya and Trina, had minor grievances. Maya was dissatisfied with the drop-off procedure and wished it would be easier to transition, while Trina wanted to center to offer a second language. Florence wasn't necessarily dissatisfied, but also wasn't fully satisfied either. She shared, "I can't really say much because he just started. Maybe in a couple months I'd be able to say something." Except for Tiffani, whose situation had been resolved, none of the mothers reported their dissatisfaction as

high enough to pull their child out and not all mothers reported their issues to staff or Ms.

Linda.

Table 6.3
Satisfaction Levels at Children's Town

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Parent	- Teachers and Director - Learning Environment and Curriculum - Comfort Level of Mothers	- Lack of Respect for Religious Practices - No Homework - Not Clean
Child	- Children's Growth and Progress - Comfort and Happiness - Relationships/Interactions between Children and Staff	Transition Periods

Celebrate Kids Academy.

Parents from Celebrate Kids Academy, a two STAR center, also reported feeling

generally satisfied with the care their children were receiving. Compared to the maternal

primary caregivers from The Christian School and Children's Town, however, these

mothers were the least satisfied with 12 out of 15 reporting complaints. In terms of

parental satisfaction, 14 of 15 mothers discussed aspects of care that they were happy

with. Comments and discussion generally related to the center's accommodations and

resources, the education and learning environment, and the teachers and directors. (See

Figure 6.4)

In terms of the accommodations and resources provided by Celebrate Kids

Academy, five mothers highlighted one or more as aspects of satisfaction. For example,

Felisha spoke about how she appreciated the space for her daughter and the classroom

setting. She believed the set-up would allow her daughter to "get more interaction with

different types of kids." Jacqui also liked the setup, sharing, "I don't like too much of a

closed classroom and stuff like that, so when I saw this I was like ... because he's four, and the five-year-olds are right next to him. At least he can interact with them in a sense." Jacqui also highlighted the security door and the punch-code system as making her feel more comfortable. Alayah also liked the set-up; she felt the open windows enabled her to "see everything that's going on. Alayah also appreciated that they taught multiculturalism during holidays and that there was a psychologist on staff. Fanta was happy that the center was clean, mentioning her satisfaction with its cleanliness three times. And finally, Missy called the center "life savers" and liked the fact that they provided children with the opportunity to use computers.

Education and learning environment were also elements of satisfaction highlighted by one-third of the mothers, including Rita, Kathy, Rhonda, Tamara and Kim. Rita explained, "I really like it. Just overall education, everything I think he should be learning is what they're teaching him. I'm happy that it's not just a daycare where they're just being watched and not learning or anything." Kathy thought the center balanced the mix of learning through play and incorporating academics well. She mentioned that her family took "a lot of pride" in her children attending Celebrate Kids Academy. Rhonda reported that she loved the center and though it was fantastic. She shared, "It lived up to my expectations and it exceeded my expectations. I didn't expect my son to be learning foreign languages at three-years-old. It was good. It's really a good experience for him." Tamara and Kim spoke more in terms being satisfied with the vision for center's educational model, but did not necessarily feel satisfied with the education their children had received. Tamara explained, "I like the CEO's vision for the academy and his vision was basically to bring good quality education and outside resources into an

urban community and continues to do that. I really like that." Kim echoed Tamara saying, "His vision is very education based and … what would I say … I think it's progressive in thinking about education."

And finally, the greatest number of mothers, nine in total, weighed in on their satisfaction with the teachers and staff at Celebrate Kids Academy. Trinity described the staff as "really attentive" and appreciated the care they took of her son with Sickle Cell as well as the efforts that were made to keep her informed. Alayah felt it was the best school her son had been in so far. She talked about how they were very organized and nice; she also appreciated that they contacted her if there were issues and that they sent home a daily sheet informing her about what he did every day. Missy appreciated the fact that the staff seemed to be really engaged with the kids, while Fanta liked that Mr. Martin was "a pretty open door" and she could "skip the middleman" when she had a problem. Fanta also felt the staff was generally knowledgeable. Rhonda and Dawn too appreciated that whenever they had issues or questions, they had been able to get them answered. Rhonda described her experience as "good," while Dawn sought comfort in that as a first time mom, she could always get staff advice. Tanya highlighted how well the teachers worked with the kids and appreciated that the staff had helped her potty train her daughter. She felt the staff would always take care of her child and she was well supervised. Gina also thought the teachers worked well with children; she was satisfied in how they took time to interact with her and how they would let her know if something was going on with her daughter. Finally, Jacqui liked the fact that all the teachers were required to continue their education in childhood development.

A number of mothers discussed their satisfaction in terms of what their children had learned and how happy or comfortable their children seemed at the center. In terms of learning, Gina, Tanya, Missy, Rhonda, and Alayah all highlighted the academic progress they had seen their children make. Gina was pleased her daughter was writing her name, knew her birthday, and could count to ten in Spanish, Chinese, and English. Tanya felt she had no idea what she was doing as a first-time mom and the staff had really helped her. She appreciated that her daughter came home singing the ABC's and was learning numbers; she felt her daughter was getting well prepared for kindergarten. Missy relayed her satisfaction with the staff teaching children sign language because she had been passionate about it when she was in school. Missy also talked about how her son produced work on a daily basis and was "always showing [her] something he made." Alayah also appreciated the projects her son brought home. She shared, "If I don't see these things, that means he's not doing anything. But here, he's bringing home things all the time. I'm always seeing his work hung up in his classroom all the time. So I know he's actually doing things." And finally, Rhonda was also happy with the progress she saw in her son's reading skills.

In terms of children's comfort levels and happiness, mothers such as Tanya, Felisha, Keisha, Rhonda, Jacqui, and Alayah, spoke about their satisfaction. Specifically, Tanya and Keisha were thrilled that their daughters were always excited and couldn't wait to go to school. Keisha further described how much her daughter loved being with her friends, singing, and eating the food provided by the center. Jacqui's son had been out of school for a period of time due to subsidy issues and asked her every day when he could go back. She was happy because her son "basically loves everything about

Celebrate Kids" and talked endlessly about his teachers when he got home. Felisha had initially been nervous to transition her special needs daughter into the setting, but was highly satisfied when her daughter "took to it like a duck to the water." Rhonda was also nervous after her son had a rough first week at the center. However, she was pleased when he grew to love it and she felt extremely comfortable leaving him every day. And finally, both Alayah and Rita felt satisfied because their children were shy and had started talking more, or "coming out of their shells" as Alayah put it.

With 12 out of 15 parents addressing aspects of care they felt dissatisfied with, the maternal primary caregivers at Celebrate Kids Academy expressed the most dissatisfaction. While complaints remained subjective on many levels, a number of parents, though not all, had issues that overlapped. Common grievances included parents who were upset with teacher turnover and the shuffling around of children for ratios, the learning environment, and a lack of communication on the part of teachers and staff. More individualized complaints stemmed from the mishandling of two incidents, languages not actually being taught, and the center simply not being one mother's preferred setting.

Teacher turnover and the shuffling of children around for ratios was a highly referenced complaint. Keisha, Kim, Gina, Fanta, Rhonda, and Felisha all took issue with what they described as a daily occurrence at the center. Keisha was dissatisfied because her daughter would get acclimated to one teacher and then struggled with the transition when she was switched. Keisha explained, "The only thing I think I would change would be that they change teachers sometimes. You know how the kids have their favorite teacher? Sometimes they have a really good teacher, and then they leave." Kim echoed

her sentiments and elaborated to say she felt that the high turnover led to breakdowns in relationships and communication, while Gina confided she considered pulling her daughter out after a teacher left and her daughter wet the bed during nap for a week straight. Fanta was the most emphatic about her dissatisfaction with turnover, sharing, "My daughter had six teachers her first year. I was very dissatisfied. I was disgusted." Fanta met with both Ms. Kiera and Mr. Marshall and still thought seriously about pulling her daughter out because "the situation was so horrible," but decided against it.

Rhonda and Felisha were also dissatisfied with the shuffling of their children for ratios. Rhonda did not understand why her son was bouncing around from teacher to teacher every day, while Felisha recognized that she had enrolled her daughter in a daycare, not a school and that it would have "growing glitches." After three years there, however, she remained unhappy with the shuffling. Felisha relayed, "You don't feel like there's a stability. Kids like stability. Parents like stability. We can accept change a little bit better than they can, but kids need to be stable. Trying to guess what classroom they've got to go to that morning or whatever because of lack of staff…I'm not with that."

In addition to issues of turnover and ratios, mothers including Gina, Jacqui, and Missy, took issue with the academic environment of the center. Gina, an employee of Celebrate Kids Academy who worked on the first floor with toddlers, felt the Pre-K age rooms were too chaotic and lacked creativity. Gina explained, "Upstairs is way different than downstairs. My room is closed in, so it's much more calm. We have more peace and more creativity." Jacqui and Missy, who both described themselves as "traditional," also were dissatisfied with aspects of the environment. Jacqui was concerned that there were

"no tables and chairs, no classroom setup for four-year olds to be ready for kindergarten."

She worried that her son was acting out in the unstructured environment because the

teachers had been telling her he wasn't listening. Missy also mentioned wishing there was

a more traditional classroom set-up in the Pre-K age classrooms. She had made

arrangements to take her son out of care for the summer due to lack of a curriculum.

Missy shared, "I talked to a couple of the teachers here and I just asked them pretty much

what is it that you guys typically do throughout the summer. I didn't get a great response.

I just said, 'Well I'm just not going to keep him here then.'" Missy also spoke about

dissatisfaction with the academic learning environment, siting she wished they were more

aggressive with reading, writing, math, and sight words.

A third aspect of dissatisfaction related to issues with communication. Kim,

Tamara, and Trinity each shared their frustration with what they perceived to be repeated

breakdowns in communication between center staff and parents. After being told first that

the upcoming graduation for her daughter would be held in the morning then being told it

was actually in the evening, Kim was blunt in her assessment. She shared, "The

communication is just bad. When you have children and your life revolves around their

life and you're trying to make plans based on them and what's going on in their life, it

can be …frustrating." Trinity felt similarly after a recent miscommunication about the

center's picture day. She relayed that she had put a nice outfit on him to take his picture

for three days in a row and he still hadn't gotten his picture taken. Trinity explained that

while it "wasn't enough to get the center shut down," it had started to add up for her.

Tamara was also frustrated over a lack of daily communication about her daughter with

special needs. She had found the teacher had not been filling out her daily report

properly. Tamara lamented, "If the daily report is asking you a question, I expect that to be completed and that's not happening all of the time. I don't need generalizations, I need my child's daily report to be individualized. That's a big concern of mine and I think about it."

Table 6.4
Satisfaction Levels at Celebrate Kids Academy

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Parent	• Teachers and Directors • Learning Environment and Curriculum • Accommodations and Resources	• High Teacher Turnover • Shuffling for Ratio • Chaotic Learning Environment • Poor Communication • Foreign Languages Not Offered
Child	• Children's Growth and Progress • Comfort and Happiness	• Incidents of Putting Children At-risk

Kim and Trinity also relayed specific incidents where they felt their children were put at-risk. Kim described an instance in which she became very upset after her daughter was not properly administered asthma medication during a flare-up. She felt the staff had been neglectful of her child and the incident "skewed" her feelings towards them. Trinity, on the other hand, described an instance in which a teacher was play fighting with her son and made him cry. The teacher, no longer employed by the center, had her son for part of the day and would tell him he was a "disrespectful little boy." Trinity lamented, "I couldn't even believe it, that was our teacher of the month too."

In addition to these incidents, a handful of mothers expressed more individualized grievances. Both Missy and Kim brought up the fact that while the school advertised

children learning Spanish and Chinese, in reality, the foreign languages hadn't been taught in months to their children. Alayah also weighed in on foreign language, expressing her disappointment that they didn't offer French instead. And finally, though Kathy was not dissatisfied with specific aspects of the center or its care, she was blunt in stating that it was far from her ideal center and her hopes that sooner than later, she would "get out to suburbia as fast as possible."

At all three centers, mothers described aspects of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Maternal primary caregivers at The Christian School were most overall satisfied with their center and spoke about satisfaction in terms of their feelings and those of their children. The only area of dissatisfaction was related to the program's ability to work with students with special needs and was expressed by one mother. Mothers from Children's Town were generally satisfied as well, highlighting the good learning environment and curriculum, interactions with the teachers and Ms. Linda, their comfort levels, children's happiness and comfort, children's relationships with the staff, and how much progress they saw in their children. Areas of dissatisfaction were related to classroom transitions, religious practices, the cleanliness of the facility, and the drop off procedure. Finally, the maternal primary caregivers from Celebrate Kids Academy were also generally satisfied, though they had the highest number of complaints. Mothers spoke highly of the center's accommodations and resources, the education and learning environment, the teachers and directors, how much their children had learned and how happy or comfortable their children seemed. Aspects of dissatisfaction were related to teacher turnover and ratio shuffling, the learning environment, a lack of communication, the mishandling of incidents, and foreign languages.

Networks of Trust Revisited:
Would mothers recommend their centers?

Networks of trust were hugely influential during the search process when mothers were looking for childcare. In fact, thirty-nine of the study's forty maternal primary caregivers described hearing about their current center from a trusted source within their own network. I became interested to know whether or not the women had recommended or would recommend their current center to fellow parents and if so, why. I hypothesized that another way gauge satisfaction and better understand how information about childcare gets passed along would be to ask mothers these types of questions. Despite the varying degrees of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, when I asked this question, almost all of the mothers from all three centers answered positively, sharing that they had or would recommend their center to family, friends, or co-workers. Some mothers, however, had reservations and shared those as well.

Maternal primary caregivers of The Christian School responded in one of two ways when asked if they would give their recommend the center. The first set of mothers had already recommended the program and did so without reservations or conditions, while the second set either had not recommended the center or did so with conditions. Included in the first group of maternal primary caregivers were Drea, Barb, Denise, Faith, Tameka, and Vi. Denise and Vi stated simply that they had recommended the program and did not elaborate further. Drea recommended the program to her sister, who had missed the enrollment date. Barb had suggested a friend enroll her child, but the situation did not work out. Faith and Tameka had both recommended multiple fellow parents in their networks, including Faith's co-workers and Tameka's co-worker, cousin, and really

"anybody who will listen." Both mothers reported that those they had recommended were on the waiting list.

The second set of maternal primary caregivers either had not recommended the center or did so with some reservations or conditions. Jule, for example, explained that she would recommend the center "if a child's behavior was ok" and that she had spoken to fellow parents about the school. Anessa also had recommended the center, but did so with reservations due to the lengthy waiting list. She shared, "I have some friends that I've raved about and they've tried to get their kids in who are maybe in kindergarten or first grade. I'm like, 'I'm sorry. We don't have any openings.'" Vera, on the other hand, said she had not recommended the center, though she "might have talked to others" and encouraged them to see if the program fit their children.

The mothers of Celebrate Kids Academy also had a variety of responses to the question of whether or not they would recommend the center to family, friends, or co-workers. The majority of mothers shared that they had or would suggest other parents in their networks enroll their children. Gina and Felisha had both recommended families who had enrolled. Gina suggested her godson attend and he did, while Felisha joked that Ms. Kiera told her "to stop recommending because they were overflowing here." Trinity relayed that she had recommended "a lot of parents," Keisha suggested the center to a couple of people she knew who were looking for daycare, and Alayah had just been talking about the program to a neighbor. Dawn, Rhonda, and Rita had all also recommended friends enroll their children, but the location was not convenient for them. Tamara and Tanya both explained that they "had and would" recommend the center, but did not elaborate, while Jacqui thought for a moment before saying only "probably."

Kathy did not say that she would or would not recommend Celebrate Kids Academy to fellow parents; instead she simply stated, "I'm not that kind of parent."

Kim, Fanta, and Missy, all private pay parents, responded that they would recommend the center, but with reservations. Kim specified, "I wouldn't not recommend it but it's one of those things you recommend with reservations. You wouldn't say, 'I'm going to give you five stars' but you would say, 'I'll give them three stars and here's why…'" She went on to say that she was not sure if she could "live" with the center for three more years and therefore had not yet enrolled her younger daughter. Fanta, on the other hand, had recommended other families, but she too specified that she only suggested the program to those of a certain "average demographic." She qualified that she would not recommend "peers or colleagues." And finally, Missy was coy in answering the question and covering her mouth before whispering, "I would recommend it only if they could get Ms. Clarkson as a teacher because she's been here awhile." These three private pay parents, the only parents paying full price from the center's participants, each expressed hesitations about recommending the program to mothers in their networks.

Finally, the mothers at Children's Town reported either having recommended parents in their networks who had enrolled or stating that they would recommend the center without reservations. Mothers who recommended fellow parents and those parents then enrolled included Margaret, Tasha, Zedra, Sanaa, Fare, Tiffani, and Genesis. Margaret talked about telling all her friends and talking about the center on Facebook, while both Tasha and Zedra shared that they made referrals "all the time." Genesis relayed how much closer she became to Ms. Linda after recommending the program to

family and friends, recalling the times Ms. Linda would say "Thank you! Thank you Carpenter family, we love you!" Tiffani too had referred "a couple of parents" who had subsequently enrolled their children and were pleased with the center. Fae and Sanaa both shared that they had recommended friends who had come and they would continue to do so.

The remaining half of the participants, Kendria, Florence, Samira, Tami, Maya, Kadijah, Trina, and Chanel, shared that they had or would recommend the center to parents in their networks who were looking for childcare. Florence, for example, had recommended a friend look into the program, while Maya also suggested Children's Town to a friend and Kadijah had suggested an aunt try enrolling her children. Tami and Trina "absolutely" recommended Children's Town to parents in their networks. Tami, an employee, was confident the center offered better quality than competitors and went as far as to suggest parents to visit competing centers for comparison. Trina recommended both parents and those in her network who were interested in teaching at the early childhood level. Kendria had not yet recommended anyone enroll, but definitely would if it was "something that floats them in this way." Samira and Chanel also had not yet made recommendations, though they both expressed that they would. Lisa too would "probably" recommend the center and went on to say that while new to the program, she didn't see anything wrong her daughter's experience thus far. Unanimously then, the mothers of Children's Town agreed that they would recommend the center to parents in their networks looking for childcare. Further, none of the mothers qualified those recommendations with reservations or conditions.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that childcare management is a largely unacknowledged consequence of choice and that maternal primary caregivers continued to monitor and assess centers post-enrollment. My interviews with mothers demonstrated how and in what ways management was required. Specifically, mothers described paying attention to the perceived comfort levels of their children, the perception of whether or not children were "progressing" physically, socially, and cognitively, and the perceived receptivity of teachers and providers to parent concerns. In addition, it remained important that centers make logistical sense for the family and mothers had feel as though they were able to build relationships with teachers and providers. Relationship-building with fellow parents from a center was not as important of an aspect of childcare management.

I then argued that while childcare satisfaction is a well-researched effect of childcare choice, to meaningfully and realistically get a picture of all that satisfaction entails, research needs to ask open-ended, not "yes" or "no" questions. While mothers reported feeling generally satisfied with their current centers, open-ended questions were met with numerous and subjective complaints. Mothers from Celebrate Kids Academy were the unhappiest with aspects of care, followed by mothers from Children's Town. Maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School had the least number of complaints. Mothers from all three centers also described the post-enrollment effects of satisficing behaviors. Though they did not use the term, a number of mothers referenced the negative effects of satisficing when, without being asked, they talked about their dream or ideal centers and criticized the lack of viable alternatives in their high-poverty neighborhoods. Finally, I was able to get a more complete picture of satisfaction and

better understand how information cycles among mothers by asking if participants would recommend their current center. The majority of mothers from all three centers shared that they would recommend their settings, though some had reservations and explained those as well.

This study was informed by two research questions. When the study was designed, I became interested in understanding the factors that most influenced maternal primary caregivers when they chose to enroll their children of color in high-poverty, urban center-based childcare arrangements. I also wanted to get a more complete picture of how structural, parental, and child-level factors, which have been consistently identified in the literature as salient, intersected in the choice process. I was interested in exploring the effects of choice post-enrollment. I wondered in what ways the choice process continued to affect parents once initial enrollment decisions had been made and how satisfied mothers felt with their current arrangements. The significance of these findings, as well as those presented in Chapters 4 and 5, are addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative interview study has explored early childcare settings and the parental enrollment process from the perspective of maternal primary caregivers who enrolled children of color in one of three high-poverty urban centers. The study focused on two specific aspects of the enrollment process, how mothers experienced finding care and making childcare choices and also how those choices continued to affect mothers after enrollment. The perspectives offered in Chapters 5 and 6 were those of mothers with children attending The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, or Children's Town. All three centers were located in high-poverty neighborhoods of a large metropolitan city on the East Coast and each was participating in the state's quality rating system. According to that rating system, the programs varied in quality. The Christian School was a one STAR Pre-K program housed in and affiliated with a non-profit K-8 religious school located north of the city center. Celebrate Kids Academy was a two STAR for-profit daycare center located in a large storefront also north of the city, while Children's Town was a three STAR for-profit daycare center run out of a row home on the city's west side.

Data for the study was collected through observations at all three centers and through interviews with 40 maternal primary caregivers, nine from The Christian School, 15 from Celebrate Kids Academy, and 16 from Children's Town. Analysis of data shed light on the complex and fractured nature of the childcare system. Data illustrates that navigating this system is a difficult and frustrating process for most mothers and the demands of the system do not end with enrollment. In fact, maternal primary caregivers

continued to monitor and assess their childcare settings, which in turn yield feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction towards aspects of care. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the findings of the study and discuss implications of this research for the literature, for parents with children in childcare, and for policy reform. I will also identify areas of need and directions for future research.

Understanding Early Childcare Settings and The Parental Enrollment Process

To understand early childcare settings and the parental enrollment process is to understand how parents navigate a system that is both complex and fractured. The experiences of the maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, and Children's Town contribute a layer of depth to current conversations around childcare choice. These experiences support that early childcare enrollment is a process, not a static one-time decision, and once enrollment choices have been made, they have to subsequently be managed as the lives and circumstances of families, parents, and children change.

Qualitative in-depth interviews on this process have not been conducted since before Welfare Reform in the late 1990s. More recently, the literature on the decision-making process has suggested that three levels or sets of factors have roles in influencing choice. Those levels include: structural factors, like the availability of care, the availability of subsidies, and the supply of care in different neighborhoods, which parents largely cannot control; parent factors, or aspects of care that parents will look to align with their needs or preferences and may include family values, parents' positionality in society, parental agency, and family structure; and children's qualities, which may or may not be unique, and may require or lead to parents make certain choices. In the

literature, these three sets of factors have largely been examined in isolation. Within the last year, however, Grogan (2012) began a conversation around choice that challenges examining choice using the multiple, distinct categories that previous research has relied heavily upon. The perspectives of the maternal primary caregivers interviewed for this study have added to this emerging conversation and shown childcare choice to be an intricate, complex, and nuanced process.

As beneficial as it might be, early childhood education is not a mandatory education level in the United States. In order for at-risk children to actually reap the benefits of good childcare, they have to attend programs day-to-day and stay in settings over time. So why has attention not been given to what happens after enrollment from the perspective of parents? Literature on childcare management and the lingering effects of childcare choices is sparse. The focus of most research has been placed on the circumstances and events that precede enrollment. Attention has, however, been given to satisfaction levels and has found parents are generally satisfied with care (Cryer, Tietze, & Wessels, 2002; King, Teleki, & Buck-Gomez, 2002; McWilliam et al., 1995; Holloway & Fuller, 1992). Generally high satisfaction levels, however, reflect responses to "yes" or "no" questions. Asked open-ended questions, childcare satisficed proved to be just as nuanced and fluid as the choice process and many mothers shared their complaints.

The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, and Children's Town were located in high-poverty neighborhoods and had racial compositions that were almost entirely African-American. Examinations of childcare from the perspective of mothers from these centers therefore cannot be dissociated from the distinct sets of circumstances

within which and the resources by which this population made and managed decisions. To fully understand parental choice processes, it is important to consider that parents have bounded rationality, or limited cognitive resources, information, and time, and call upon heuristics or shortcuts to make reasonable, not optimal decisions (Simon, 1986). It was not possible for this group of mothers to have considered all 683 childcare possibilities in this one city. Simon (1990) would argue that mothers would have satisficed. In satisficing, they called upon their resources and experiences to evaluate centers and to construct expectations of how of good potential choices might be. They enrolled children in these three centers because they were perceived to be reasonable, rather than optimal choices.

The context within which this population of mothers constructed their choices was also constrained by the limited resources or capital that they brought to the decision-making process. In the childcare search process, access to valued resources matters greatly, but mothers of children of color living in high-poverty neighborhoods had fewer. Consequently, the process became more complex because their resource-related considerations were extensive. Such considerations spanned from contextual questions, like how did mothers view the purpose of early childcare and what were parents' educational backgrounds, to logistical questions, like how they would get children to and from care everyday and how would they pay for care weekly. While Bourdieu (1977) and Coleman (1988) posited theoretically useful models on education and separately addressed aspects of human, social, cultural, and economic capital, their theories individually could not answer the extensive number of resource-related considerations this population faced when making childcare decisions.

This study needed a theory of capital that at once incorporated economic, social, cultural, and human capital and offered a broader conceptualization of a capital-based framework. Family capital, though newer and not as widely used, accounts for the intersection of all four resource bases and has previously been applied to work around parents and school choice (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). This theoretical framework offered a lens with the latitude to look at once at race and class, social position, power dynamics, values, the intersection of competing factors, and could also account for all of the nuances and intricacies that made navigating childcare setting pre- and post-enrollment the complex process that it proved to be.

The circumstances and contexts within which maternal primary caregivers made their childcare choices did not disappear or change substantially after decisions were made. Post-enrollment, bounded rationality and the resources that mothers relied upon to navigate the choice process remained just as relevant when they managed their childcare situations day-to-day. Though responsibilities shifted after enrollment, family capital continued to offer the latitude to account for mothers' on-going realities, like the fact that they still had to secure transportation to drop off and pick up their children, stay up to date on paperwork, pay for care weekly, submit pay stubs to keep subsidies, get to know providers and teachers, monitor how children were fairing, and make sure that the centers they chose were fulfilling the expectations they believed they would.

Overview of the Study's Findings

Factorings Influencing Choice

When I interviewed maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, and Children's Town, each woman described what their

experiences finding childcare had been like since their children's births. An understanding of the influences that led to choice illustrates how the same four factors shaped the decision-making processes for all mothers.

Networks of trust and maternal instincts.

Networks of trust and maternal instinct emerged as common themes across all maternal primary caregivers and were an unanticipated finding of the study. Networks of trust refer to the trusted persons, almost always fellow maternal primary caregivers, who women spoke with during their childcare searches. Often family members, close friends, neighbors, or co-workers, mothers described relying on people they perceived to be knowledgeable within their individual networks for recommendations and advice on childcare settings. Thirty-nine of the study's forty parents described talking to trusted sources during the decision-making process and had heard about their centers from someone in their networks. When mothers toured or visited centers for the first time, all 40 described relying on their maternal instincts to assess them. Maternal instinct was frequently spoken about in terms of "gut feelings" and "comfort " levels.

Lessons learned: Past childcare experiences.

All of the maternal primary caregivers who participated in this study also had past histories with other childcare settings, which became a second unanticipated finding of the study. Margaret and Tami, who were employees and mothers from Children's Town, had taught in other centers. The remaining women had sent their children to different childcare arrangements before their current ones. Experiences with relative-case, home-care settings, other centers, and Head Starts created childcare histories for all mothers. When mothers described their histories, they cited their primary reasons for switching,

which could be attributed to one of two things. Either arrangements no longer met children's needs or there was a traumatic or negative experience. Issues with socialization, supervision, safety and cleanliness, relationships with teachers and staff, communication, and a lack of education and structure were most often as described as reasons for leaving prior arrangements.

Educational values and next steps.

One of the more anticipated factors that influenced maternal choices was educational value and the consideration of children's futures. All mothers described being influenced by the fit between their own educational values and center environments during childcare searches. Though ideal fits were often difficult to find in their neighborhoods, maternal primary caregivers had also given thought to their children's educational next steps, kindergarten and beyond, prior to childcare enrollment. Often citing negative lessons learned navigating the childcare system, mothers became influenced by the overlap between centers' teaching and learning environments and their own educational values. Mothers most often evaluated center structure or daily schedule, class-sizes/ratios, curriculum and learning material, and teacher or staff knowledge/experience during assessments. Long-term hopes, dreams, and goals for their children also influenced the decision-making process. Mothers in this study most frequently referenced plans for kindergarten and elementary school, educational attainment expectations, and general hopes for children's futures when discussing educational next steps.

Logistics and cost.

The most practical, yet constraining factors that influenced choice were the logistics and cost of care. Logistics and cost represented what mothers considered to be the more practical matters in their searches. Logistics refers to considerations of the center's location, hours, annual schedule, and the availability of infant-toddlers rooms or school-age programs. Cost, on the other hand, represents out of pocket payments and subsidy-related considerations. Factors impacting cost often related to family demographics such as the number of children and parents in the household and parent employment status. A handful of parents who were interviewed described experiences with lower wages and/or job loss as the result of the recent recession. Consequently, the effects of the recession were incorporated in relation to cost.

Intersection of Structural, Parental, and Child-Level Factors

Salient factors influencing parental choice have consistently been identified and described in terms of three sets or levels of factors: (1) structural characteristics and policy contexts; (2) parental characteristics and practices; and the least researched (3) perceptions of child characteristics. Building on the work of Grogan (2012), this study described what the intersection of all three sets of factors looked like during the search process by described how mothers constructed their sets of choices. As the process began, the first barriers that mothers encountered were in the form of structural constraints. Those constraints were related to how individual parents perceived centers' accessibility, availability, regulation, and affordability. If centers were not perceived to be accessible, available, regulated, and affordable then they were not considered

reasonable and they were not included in choice sets. Structural barriers were largely

perceived to be outside of parents' control.

With choice sets narrowed significantly due to structural barriers, choice set

construction became largely parent-level driven. Reasonable choices for participants

arose when centers made logistical sense for the families and when mothers felt

comfortable leaving their children under the care of providers. At this stage in the

process, the majority of mothers stopped their search when they found a solution that fit.

For some maternal primary caregivers, however, the search continued because their

children had certain needs. When parents were concerned about children with special or

exceptional needs and when children were perceived as in need of an environment that

would provide structure or socialization, the search continued until this level of needs

was also met.

The Demands of Childcare Management

Childcare management is a largely unacknowledged consequence of choice and

speaks to the ways maternal primary caregivers continue to have to manage their

childcare decisions after enrollment. Post-enrollment mothers described continuing to

monitor and assess centers, paying particular attention to the perceived comfort levels of

children, the perception of whether or not children were "progressing," and the perceived

receptivity of teachers and providers to their concerns. Perceptions of progress or growth

were subjective and varied mother-to-mother, but generally fell into one of three

categories: physical growth, emotional/behavioral progress, and cognitive/academic

growth. It also remained important that centers make logistical sense for the family;

mothers also had to feel as though they were able to build relationships with both

providers and teachers. Relationship-building with fellow parents from a center was not as important.

Continued assessment.

Post-enrollment, mothers continued to monitor their instincts and assessed centers on a regular basis, sometimes daily if they dropped off and picked up their kids. Often given the lessons they learned the hard way with previous childcare settings, mothers paid particular to the comfort levels of their children. Maternal primary caregivers spoke about the importance of monitoring their children's comfort and happiness day-to-day as an indicator of centers' conditions. Mothers monitored and assessed these conditions on a daily basis through observations during drop off and pick up and through conversations with children about the day's events. Another way maternal primary caregivers continued their assessment of centers was by monitoring their children's progress. Some mothers monitored their children's physical growth and/or fine motor skills, while others paid attention to their children's emotional and behavioral progress. Mothers of children with special needs were particularly in tune with these aspects of development. A number of mothers also monitored children's academic or cognitive progress as an indication of center conditions.

Logistics.

In addition to continuing to assess centers, all maternal primary caregivers who were interviewed for this study also described a continued need for their chosen centers to make logistical sense. For this population, CCIS interruptions, job changes, relocations, and the addition of siblings were all common occurrences across all sites and for all women. While financial limitations and acceptance of subsidy greatly impacted

choice, the need to pay for and financially manage childcare week-to-week did not end upon enrollment. As parents continued to manage how they were paying for care, the two most common types of financial strain were related to job disruptions or increases in cost and interruptions in CCIS. Across all three centers, a population of mothers had also recently moved, which made their current choices logistically easier for some and more difficult for others. There was also a population of mothers who shared their plans to move in the near future, which also would impact their management of childcare. Finally, mothers experienced change to their family structure. The two most common changes to structure were the births of younger siblings and the divorce or splitting up of parents.

Relationship-building.

Relationship-building with an emphasis on good communication was a third way that mothers managed their childcare settings. All maternal primary caregivers who were interviewed for this study highlighted the importance of providers and teachers' willingness to communicate with them on a daily basis. Mothers expressed that when the communication was good, they felt good about relationships with providers and staff. In instances where communication broke down, however, relationships were no longer perceived as in good standing. According to mothers, relationships with center providers were the most significant; relationships with individual teachers, especially at Celebrate Kids Academy and Children's Town were also important, though not as critical. Relationship building with other parents, families, and center-based community members, on the other hand, was not a significant management priority.

The Nuances of Satisfaction

Mothers felt generally satisfied with their current centers, which supports literature on the subject (Cryer, Tietze, & Wessels, 2002; King, Teleki, & Buck-Gomez, 2002; McWilliam et al., 1995). Generally high satisfaction levels, however, could not be dissociated from the journeys parents took to find their centers or from the value of the experiences and knowledge they had accumulated along the way. In fact, center satisfaction proved to be just as nuanced and fluid as their childcare management and the search and enrollment process. Asked the "yes" or "no" question, are you satisfied with your center? The majority of mothers responded affirmatively. Probed deeper, however, mothers made it clear that they were by no means completely satisfied with all aspects of their current settings.

Specifically, all mothers remained extremely dissatisfied with and frustrated by the structural barriers that continued to plague their experiences. Mothers typically described specific aspects of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in terms of either how they felt and or in terms of how they perceived their children to feel. Maternal primary caregivers from The Christian School spoke most highly about their center, followed by mothers from Children's Town. Though mothers from Celebrate Kids had many good things to say about the center, they had the most complaints.

Accounting for the Findings

Many of the frustrations mothers experienced while navigating childcare can be attributed to the way the system operates in both the United States and in the city where the study took place. Early childhood education, while encouraged, is not mandatory and parents are not required to enroll their children in any settings prior to elementary school.

Within the early childhood world, there are many different avenues parents can choose for care, including non-relative care, relative care, informal care, center care, daycare, family or home care, preschool, learning centers, Pre-K, Head Start, Montessori. Even the different names for settings and arrangements can be confusing. While parents are able to choose the arrangements that work best, so many avenues breeds disconnect across the system. Absent any true governing body, parents largely have to rely on their own resources to accumulate knowledge about how it all works and those with fewer resources are at a disadvantage.

In the city where this study took place, agencies and institutions with their hands in center-based care only, excluding most other avenues, include government agencies like the state, the department of welfare, the CCIS subsidy offices, the school district, the early childhood education office, school district initiatives like the Pre-k Counts program, and the STARS rating system, and private agencies like ChildLink and Elywn, who manage special needs services, and associations for childcare providers at the national, state, and local levels. In the high-poverty neighborhoods where The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, and Children's Town were located, both daycare and homecare options, often opened as private business ventures, appeared abundant. And so, in addition to accounting for the various avenues of childcare and the agencies and institutions with hands in center-based care governance, we must also remember that childcare centers are largely operated and run as business enterprises. According to Mr. Marshall, lucrative ones too. Therefore, it becomes important to consider who opens childcare settings and why.

Young children also represent a vulnerable population. After children's births, many parents, including all of the mothers in this study, looked for childcare out of necessity, as they had to work to support their families. Many parents in this study spoke about the relief they felt when their young children could finally talk and share with them what they did day-to-day in care. Though children's verbal abilities were comforting, mothers indicated that the sense of worry that comes from leaving such young children in the hands of providers, sometimes strangers, never fully goes away. Complicating matters is the alarming number of women from The Christian School, Celebrate Kids Academy, and Children's Town who recounted illegal activities, children coming home with injuries and no incident reports, children watching television or doing nothing all day are, and other negative experiences with childcare. These types of incidents call into question the regulation of childcare settings and they lead parents to become suspicious of and fearful of childcare for good reason.

Implications for Literature

This qualitative interview-based study added a layer of depth to understanding how maternal primary caregivers chose to place their children of color in urban high-poverty childcare centers. The study also explored the extent to which mothers remained actively engaged in managing their choices after enrollment. Nearly all of the research that has been done on parental choice and early childcare settings is informed by rational choice and/or social exchange theories, guided by a positivist epistemology. In the literature, when parents make childcare choices, they weigh various elements of a childcare decision against one another before making a static, one-time decision (Blau, 1964 and Hofferth, et al., 1996).

Childcare choices, however, are not static, one-time decisions; they are part of an on-going process. When parents start looking for childcare, they often talk to other parents, assess potential choices by relying on instincts, consider what they have learned from past histories with other settings, think about their children's educational futures, and consider both the cost and the logistics required to make centers work for their families. As parents become engaged in this process, they construct choice sets with centers that are viewed as reasonable to consider. Parents have to determine which centers are accessible, available, regulated, and affordable to them and which centers make logistical sense for the family. Parents also must feel secure leaving their young children in the care of the providers. In some cases, centers also have to provide environments that fit children with special, exceptional, or additional needs.

This process is demanding, frustrating, and difficult to navigate for many parents and it does not end when a choice is made. In fact, many of the elements of the search process, like logistics, cost, and parent/child comfort, carry over after enrollment because mothers continue to monitor them on a regular basis. Through monitoring settings, mothers start to identify aspects of care that they feel happy with and aspects of care that they become unhappy with. If unhappiness reaches past a certain threshold then in most cases mothers will remove their children from the old arrangement, and take up the search process all over again, except this time using their dissatisfaction to inform the new search. Describing how these processes work supports the need for literature to examine the childcare system using methods and frameworks that support deeper and more realistic understandings of it.

Implications for Parents

Given experiences navigating the childcare system, a number of mothers asked directly for support during their interviews. Chanel, who was out of work, had a special needs son, and was a single mom with two children, pleaded, "It's like a struggle for moms like me and then I got two sons and I'm only by myself. They take a lot of programs and different stuff away from us. It's really making it harder for us. I'm just trying to make it work and stay strong." Based on mothers' experiences and feedback, I feel parents could benefit from the following: (1) Increases in neighborhood-level resources for moms from children's birth through kindergarten; (2) Neighborhood-level forums for sharing concerns; and (3) An increase in cohesion across city-based childcare agencies.

If this process can feel demanding and frustrating and is both complex and ongoing, it could be beneficial for mothers who have young children to see an increase in neighborhood-level resources. As new moms, mothers will likely always talk to fellow parents in their networks and will always trust their maternal instincts, but the addition of resources could supplement or formalize that reliance on networks of trust and instinct. Because frustration with agencies and fear of some providers at times breeds mistrust, resources would be most beneficial if offered within families' communities. During the search process, such sources could be local early childhood representatives or offices available to answer questions, community services that would offer seminars or distribute checklists detailing what parents should look out for during tours of potential centers, or orchestrated mother's groups or mom-to-mom mentoring programs.

After enrollment, the demands of childcare continue. A number of mothers shared anxieties over children's progress, educational next steps, and incidents or situations with providers. Parents then might also benefit from a coordinated effort at the community-level to support what happens after enrollment. Guidance on the search and enrollment processes for kindergarten, resources for working with kids at home, and assistance navigating the referral process for children with special needs are current areas of need. Mothers of children with special needs would also benefit from guidance or resources to help them transition those special needs services from Elwyn, the agency that provides services for three to five-year-olds, to the public school system, the institution that takes over the distributions of special needs services from kindergarten on.

Parents could also benefit from a meaningful forum, such as a hotline or office, where they could voice concerns about providers and receive follow-up information when they file complaints. Though parent accounts offered only one-side of the story, the number of traumatic events that preceded changes in childcare seems problematic. Many of the parents in this study recounted incidents in which their children were not cared for properly by childcare providers during their interviews. Children coming home with a black eye like Anessa's daughter, a hickey like Lisa' daughter, and bleach on his clothes like Missy's son were just a few of the traumatic incidents recalled by mothers. While mothers from the current study recognized that they could have reported traumatic incidents or negative experiences with providers to the state, the overwhelming majority did not because they did not feel anything would be come of their report. Instead, they removed children from care and searched for better ones. A handful mothers, however,

did mention using internet sites or blogs to pass along or gather information about experiences with providers.

In addition to effectively reporting concerns, parents might benefit from increases in the regulation of daycare providers and the building of trust within the local childcare system. The mothers who offered their perspectives for this study showed little faith in the system in general, many for the reasons they spoke about. Incidents with providers and issues with the Department of Welfare and the CCIS subsidy have led to the greatest frustrations. Easier means of reporting and stricter regulations for providers could help, as could stricter requirements for the education and training of childcare directors and staff. The CCIS offices and some daycare providers, like Celebrate Kids Academy, face high employee turnover. Incentives or incentive-based programs, continued education, and higher pay could possibly help retain staff members. Further, though the STARS rating system was instituted to aid parents in their choice processes, the majority of maternal primary caregivers of the study did not use the system as it was intended. A more cohesive partnership among the STARS and other childcare agencies could help bolster the system's legitimacy among urban maternal primary caregivers living and working in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Implications For Policy Reform

In a word, the childcare system in the city where this study took place is fractured. The greatest area of need, which would stand to most benefit all parents, is for the major agencies and parties with stakes in the early childhood education system to bolster communication and partnerships via initiatives or a task-force. Undoubtedly the situation is a complex one and there are many parties involved, including government agencies

like the state, the department of welfare, the CCIS subsidy offices, the school district, the early childhood education office, school district initiatives like the Pre-k Counts program, and the STARS rating system, and private agencies like ChildLink and Elywn who manage special needs services and associations for childcare providers at the national, state, and local levels. From the perspective of parents, the governance of the childcare system feels highly disjointed and it is parents who suffer the effects. With each agency seemingly in charge of overseeing different aspects of childcare, mothers were easily frustrated by the time, effort, travel, resources, and energy it required to find and coordinate care.

Many maternal primary caregivers had hoped they would get advice about finding childcare when they went to access funding from the Department of Welfare and the CCIS offices. While there is a computerized referral system provided by the offices, none of the women interviewed for this study used it. Instead, they applied for subsidies and turned to friends, family, and co-workers for guidance on finding good care. When the Department of Welfare wasn't helpful, some mothers, including Chanel, Felisha, and Kadijah, turned to the School District for help, which took additional time and effort. Parents who had children with special needs or had children waiting to be evaluated carried an additional burden. Because ChildLink, Elwyn, and the School District seemed to work independently to provide services for children in certain age brackets, parents had to submit and resubmit requests for services three times before kindergarten enrollment. Maya from Children's Town, for example, had waited over a year for her son's speech therapy services to return after he turned three and transitioned from ChildLink to Elwyn.

The exact degree to which these agencies and parties communicate and work together for the benefit of the early childhood education system and high-need families remains unknown. However, it is clear from talking to parents with children who would benefit greatly from quality early childhood education programs that there is a substantial need for increased cross-agency efforts. Perhaps looking toward other states' models for insight would make a coordinated effort possible. Parents like Jacqui, Rhonda, and Samira specifically mentioned they were considering relocating to nearby states in part because of they had more efficient, better childcare systems.

The fostering of partnerships among agencies or an early childhood education initiative supported by community leaders could help with the coordination of such efforts. In the meantime, however, basic information and resources should be made available to parents early and often. Even soon-to-be mothers would benefit from support, resources, and information, especially considering the majority of children enter the childcare system within weeks or months of their births. Hospitals, maternity wards, and pediatric offices could all be vehicles through which parents gather information or receive support. The public school system and the welfare offices, though unfavorable in the eyes of many mothers, could reach out and better serve new parents by increasing their efforts to support them. And more generally, since a significant population of mothers from the study reported changing childcare settings for "socialization" purposes when their children were between two and three-years-old, there appears to be a critical window during which guidance toward school readiness and curriculum-based programs could make a profound difference for many children.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research related to early childcare settings and the parental enrollment process should continue to understand the world of early childcare as a complex one with many levels and layers. There is still much to examine and explore, but the stakes for the children and families engrossed in the system remain high in the meantime. And so, though this study was small in scope, its findings suggest areas of need and directions for future research.

Specifically, we need to better understand the nature of early childcare settings in high-poverty neighborhoods, particularly those like centers, home, and family care settings where providers have the most latitude in determining day-to-day activities, setting curricula, hiring staff, etc. Having a better understanding of the relationship between the natures of these settings, their quality, and the short and long term cognitive, behavioral, and social outcomes for at-risk children would enhance our understanding of how significant of a role these settings play in children's academic experiences. Additional research on such childcare settings could also shed light on best practices and practice-based areas in need of improvement or resources.

Access to high quality programs for urban parents living and working in high-poverty neighborhoods proved particularly problematic for the population of participants in this study and also warrants further exploration. Also problematic were the relationships or lack thereof between parents, providers, and stake-holders in the early childhood education system in this particular city. Expanding the scope of this type of research could garner deeper insight into how these problem areas affect different populations in different settings. Comparative studies across socioeconomic,

races/ethnicities, and contexts could yield insight into how finding and managing childcare arrangements vary across those lines. Comparative studies across socioeconomic groups would be particularly interesting because they could speak in more descriptive terms to the roles that bounded rationality, satisficing, and family capital play in parental choice processes. Comparative studies across metropolitan regions and states could also prove beneficial, especially if they involved cities or states that operate their childcare systems more efficiently.

Given the difficulty I had in securing three centers to participate in the study, I also continue to wonder what the best and most effective ways to access childcare settings from a researcher's perspective might be. It took many months and some convincing to be able to observe in the centers that I did. Though I understand completely that providers want to protect young children, I also wonder to what degree, if any, some might want to protect themselves or their practices as well. If access were possible, I think it would be interesting to learn if parents in other parts of the city had similar experiences with their childcare settings of if their experiences differed in any significant ways. Regardless, we must continue to deepen our understanding of choice and center-based care in urban, high-poverty neighborhood because the stakes for families and at-risk children are high and because academic achievements in all levels of education are built upon the outcomes of this one.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TWELVE ASPECTS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009)

Life World- the topic of qualitative interviews is the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it.
Meaning- the interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject, the interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said as well as hit it is said.
Qualitative- the interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language, it does not aim at quantification.
Descriptive- the interview attempts to obtain open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the subjects' life worlds.
Specificity- descriptions of specific situations and action sequences are elicited, not general opinions.
Deliberate Naiveté- the interviewer exhibits openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than having readymade categories and schemes of interpretation.
Focused- the interview if focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standard questions, nor entirely "nondirective."
Ambiguity- interviewee statements can sometimes be ambiguous, reflecting contradictions in the world the subject lives in.
Change- the process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness, and the subject may in the course of the interview come to change his or her

descriptions and meanings about a theme.
Sensitivity- different interviewers can produce different statements on the same themes, depending on their sensitivity to and knowledge of the interview topic.
Interpersonal Situation- the knowledge obtained is produced through the interpersonal interactions in the interview.
Positive Experience- a well carried out research interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into his or her life situation.

APPENDIX B

2012-2013 KEYSTONE STARS PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
General	Must maintain Regular Certificate of Compliance and/or meet program standards.[1]	Must meet all standards for STAR 1 and maintain Regular Certificate of Compliance.	Must meet all standards for STAR 1 and 2 and maintain Regular Certificate of Compliance.	Must meet all standards for STAR 1, 2, and 3 and maintain Regular Certificate of Compliance.
Director Qualifications[2]	**Complete professional development on the Core Body of Knowledge/ Professional Development Record (CBK/PDR) and Foundations of the Environment Rating Scale (ERS).**	1. Complete professional development on Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), the Facility Professional Development Plan (FPDP), and the Learning Standards[3]. **2. Complete professional development in the ERS scales appropriate to age groups in the facility.** 3. Attend child abuse mandated reporter professional development that reflects the most current laws in Pennsylvania.	1. Complete STARS Orientation Part 2. 2. Level V or above on the Career Lattice.	Level VI or above on the Career Lattice.
Director Development[4]		1. Annual professional development plan is developed based on needs identified in the Professional Development Record (PDR).[5] 2. Annually participate in 1 professional growth and development activity. 3. 15 annual clock hours of professional development based on the PDR, including the Director's section.	1. Annually participate in 2 professional growth and development activities. 2. 21 annual clock hours of professional development based on the PDR, including the Director's section. 3. Complete the PA Director's Credential.[6]	*1. Annually participate in 3 professional growth and development activities. 2. 27 annual clock hours of professional development based on the PDR, including the Director's section.*

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
Staff Qualifications[7]		1. New Staff Orientation[8] completed by all aides and new staff within 90 days of start of employment. 2. 50% of Teachers/Group Supervisors (GS) at Level V or above on Career Lattice; 50% of Assistant Teachers/ Assistant Group Supervisors (AGS) at Level II or above on Career Lattice; and 100% of Aides at Level I or above on Career Lattice.	100% of Teachers/Group Supervisors (GS) at Level V or above on Career Lattice; 75% of Assistant Teachers/ Assistant Group Supervisors (AGS) at Level III or above and 25% of Assistant Teachers/Assistant Group Supervisors (AGS) at Level IV or above on Career Lattice; and 25% of Aides at Level II or above on Career Lattice.	100% of Teachers/Group Supervisors (GS) at Level V or above and 50% of Teachers/Group Supervisors (GS) at Level VI or above on Career Lattice; 50% of Assistant Teachers/Assistant Group Supervisors (AGS) at Level IV or above and 25% of Assistant Teachers/ Assistant Group Supervisors (AGS) at Level V or above on Career Lattice; and 50% of Aides at Level II or above on Career Lattice.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
Staff Development[9]		1. Annual professional development plan is developed for each staff member based on needs identified in the Professional Development Record (PDR) and documented on the Professional Development plan in the PDR. 2. 12 annual clock hours of professional development, based on PDR, taken by each staff member.[10] 3. One staff member from each classroom must have current pediatric first aid certification. 4. All staff must have two hours of health and safety professional development annually.[11] 5. All staff must attend at least two hours of professional development annually on child observation, inclusive practices, and/or ERS.[12]	1. For each Teacher/ Assistant Teacher[13], 18 annual clock hours of professional development based on PDR[14]; each Aide 12 total hours based on PDR. 2. Annually, all staff involved in 1 professional growth and development activity. 3. All staff must have current pediatric first aid certification. 4. Teachers/Assistant Teachers must attend at least two hours of professional development annually on curriculum, program or child assessment, the age-appropriate Learning Standards and/or ERS.[16]	1. For each Teacher/ Assistant Teacher, 24 annual clock hours of professional development based on PDR[15]; each Aide 15 clock hours based on PDR. 2. Annually, all staff involved in 2 professional growth and development activities.

LEARNING PROGRAM

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
Child Observation/ Curriculum/ Assessment	Site obtains and maintains copies of the appropriate Learning Standards for all age groups in the program.	1. A developmentally appropriate screening of the child is completed and shared with family within 45 days[16] of program entry. 2. Learning Standards are used as a resource for staff in classroom planning and documentation of children's learning. 3. Provider selects an OCDEL approved assessment tool.	1. All demographic information, including child, program and staff information, is recorded timely and accuracy is maintained in the Early Learning Network (ELN)[17,18] 2. Based on ongoing child observations, developmentally appropriate authentic assessments of the child are completed and reported electronically into an OCDEL approved assessment tool following the tool's specified timeframes.[19,20] 3. Results from authentic assessments are used for curriculum, individual child planning, and referral to community resources. 4. Implement a learning curriculum that incorporates the Learning Standards, including a written curriculum statement.	Program utilizes a curriculum that has been aligned to the Learning Standards for Early Childhood. If the program's curriculum has not been aligned, the provider must crosswalk the curriculum to the Learning Standards.[21]

LEARNING PROGRAM

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
Environment Rating	Complete the Learning Environment Checklist.	1. ERS self-assessment of every classroom/age group must be completed annually by the director or a staff member who has completed approved ERS professional development.[22] 2. A written Improvement Plan is developed to address any ERS subscale score below a 3.0.	1. The average facility score of all sampled classrooms/age groups assessed by a STARS ERS assessor must be 4.25. 2. Each individual sampled classroom/age group must have an ERS score no less than 3.50. 3. A written Improvement Plan is developed to address any ERS subscale score below a 3.50.	1. The average facility score of all sampled classrooms/age groups assessed by a STARS ERS assessor must be a 5.25. 2. Each individual sampled classroom/age group must have an ERS score no less than 4.25. 3. A written Improvement Plan is developed to address any ERS subscale score below a 4.25.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY & COMMUNITY

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
Community Resources/ Family Involvement	1. At enrollment, families are provided with information regarding public, social, and community services.[23] 2. The program collects child-centered information at enrollment to facilitate responsive care that is mindful of the needs of individual children and families. A family meeting is offered within 45 days of enrollment to encourage program-family partnerships and share initial observations and goals for the child.	1. At a minimum of once per year, written information on topics including health and human services, wellness, nutrition and fitness, and/or child development is given and explained to families and staff. 2. If applicable to the child, provider requests from families copies of child's IEP or IFSP, written plans, and/or special needs assessments completed by professionals to inform classroom practice. 3. Individual child information is shared in written form with families on a daily basis for infants and toddlers, and there is a format and procedure for use on an as needed basis for other age groups. 4. Specific group or classroom information is shared with families daily using a visual communication format. 5. A minimum of one family conference is offered per year to discuss the child's progress and behavioral, social and physical needs.	1. A plan is written and implemented describing procedures to refer families to appropriate social, mental health, educational, wellness, and medical services. 2. Coordinate a minimum of one annual group activity to involve families in meeting program learning goals.[24] **3. A minimum of two family conferences are offered per year to discuss the child's progress and behavioral, social and physical needs. Authentic assessments of the child are shared with the family a minimum of two times per year.[25]**	1. If applicable to the child, provider, in conjunction with families and service providers from public social and community service organizations, implements activities appropriate to meet IEP or IFSP goals and/or special needs plans and objectives. 2. Program has policies that demonstrate engagement and partnership with families in program planning and decision making.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY & COMMUNITY

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
Transition	Program provides general information to families regarding transitioning[26] children to another classroom or educational setting.	1. Program transfers child records, at the request of the family, when the child transitions to another educational setting. 2. Program creates, with input from families, a list of community/school stakeholders regarding child transition. 3. Program includes age-appropriate activities for children to prepare for transition.	1. Families are offered a group meeting to provide information regarding a child's transition to another classroom or higher educational setting and to encourage families and their children to connect to the school setting by visiting. 2. Program sends letter of introduction to appropriate community/school stakeholders outlining goal to partner in child transitioning efforts from childcare to school setting. 3. Program participates in community/school transition activities as available.	1. Program offers families an individual meeting to share specific information regarding the child's transition to another classroom or educational setting and to give families written information about the child's developmental progress. 2. Program develops and shares a written plan for child transition with families and community/ school stakeholders.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
Business Practices	Program develops and distributes a Family Handbook.	1. Program creates a projected one-year operating budget, including a statement of income and expenditures. 2. A financial record keeping system for revenue and expenses is in place. 3. Organizational structure and job descriptions[27] are included in a personnel policy manual that is shared with staff.	1. A policy and procedure manual[28] is developed and available to the staff at all times. 2. A financial system with quarterly comparisons of expenses to revenue is implemented. 3. The program creates a mission statement	1. Annual operational business plan to address organizational stability and to implement quarterly reconciliation. 2. Program establishes a written code for professional conduct of staff. 3. Annual independent financial review by a CPA is conducted.[29] 4. Risk management plan[30] is written and developed that identifies potential operational risks and specifies ways to reduce or eliminate risks.
Continuous Quality Improvement	1. Annual site-based professional development plan completed. 2. Program uses documents for tracking illnesses and injuries, including plans of action to prevent further occurrences.	1. Complete and provide an annual Facility Professional Development Plan (FPDP) (or equivalent). 2. System of site safety review including strategies for supervising children and corresponding plan of action are instituted.	*Provider develops and implements a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan using multiple sources[31].*	*A Strategic Plan is aligned with the program's mission statement and put in place.*

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR CENTERS	STAR 1 Performance Standards	STAR 2 Performance Standards	STAR 3 Performance Standards	STAR 4 1. Performance Standards, or 2. NAEYC/NAA Accreditation and bold/italicized Performance Standards
Staff Communication and Support	1. Program provides documentation of a staff meeting held within the last six months. 2. Director develops and annually implements a plan for sharing information about Keystone STARS, continuous quality improvement, strategies for supervising children and professional development with staff members.	1. Each staff person must participate in a staff meeting at least once per month. Staff meeting must include discussions of quality and its impact on the Learning Program. 2. Director meets with each staff member using the plan developed in STAR 1. For new staff, this meeting is held within 90 days of start of employment.	1. Teachers and Assistant Teachers are provided at least two hours per month[32] of paid curriculum and lesson planning/preparation time away from children. 2. Annually, at least two classroom observations[33] are conducted and feedback regarding job performance is provided to the staff member. 3. Annual performance evaluation provided in written format to employee.[34]	1. Teachers and Assistant Teachers are provided at least four hours per month of paid curriculum and lesson planning/preparation time away from children.[30] 2. Staff members are offered a minimum of 15 minutes with no program responsibilities for each 4 hour period worked.
Employee Compensation		1. List of all staff by positions, salary, and tenure. 2. At least 2 employee benefits given to staff.[35]	1. A salary scale based on level of education/training and years of ECE experience is documented. 2. At least 3 employee benefits given to staff[33] and explained in the Policy and Procedure Manual.	At least 4 employee benefits given to staff[33] and explained in the Policy and Procedure Manual.

APPENDIX C

CENTER AND CLASSROOM PROTOCOLS/FIELD NOTE GUIDES

CENTER: DATE:

KEYSTONE STARS RATING/ADDITIONAL ACCREDIDATIONS:

OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL: CENTER, FIRST OBSERVATION ONLY

Neighborhood Description-

Physical Description-

Reception/Security-

Atmosphere/Hallway Displays-

Personnel/Staff Interactions-

OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL: CLASSROOM

OBSERVATION #
        START TIME:
        END TIME:

CLASSROOM NUMBER: TEACHERS:

STUDENT AGES:

OF STAFF PRESENT:

OF STUDENTS PRESENT:

RATIO:

SPACE AND FURNISHING

Indoor space

        Furniture

        Room arrangement

        Privacy

        Children's displays

Outdoor space

        Gross motor equipment

PERSONAL CARE

Greeting/Departing

Meals/Snacks

Nap/rest

Bathrooms

Health and safety

CLASSROOM RESOURCES

Fine motor

Art

Music/movement

Blocks

Sand/water

Dramatic play

Nature/science

Math/numbers

Technology

TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

How are students spending time (SCHEDULE)

Group learning/Individual learning/Free play

Language/Communication

Literacy/Books

Math

Students with disabilities

INTERACTIONS

Learning interactions

Staff-child interactions

Supervision

Discipline

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Evidence of parental involvement

Provisions for parents

Parent/Staff Interactions

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Introductory Questions

Can you tell me about your son/daughter?

Can you tell me about your family?

Do you have other children?

Who lives in your house?

Do you work? Who is the primary provider for your family?

How long has your child been enrolled in the center?

How would you describe this center? What feeling do you get when you come here?

2. The Process

Thinking back through the past few years, can you describe your experiences with childcare?

What was your search like?
Follow up: Did you research the center? If so, how?

How did you come to pick this one?

Did your child attend any other childcare arrangements before the center?
Follow-up: Why did you switch?

Does your child go somewhere else besides the center? If so, when and for what reasons?

Can you talk about some things you considered or thought about when you were looking for a center?

What did you consider to be really important?
Follow up: Did you have any must haves? Deal breakers?

Why did you pick this center?
Follow up: Who had input in the decision? Did you seek advice from anyone?

Did you talk to other parents or family members when you were deciding?

3. The Intersection of Structural, Parental, Child Factors

Structure-based Questions:
>   Thinking back to your process, did it feel like to you that there were many centers to choose from?
>
>   Do you receive funding or subsidies to attend this center?
>   Follow up: How did you go about accessing funding?
>
>   Was your childcare choice impacted by the recession?
>
>   What was the paperwork like to enroll your child?
>
>   Were ratings or accreditations important to you when you were choosing?

Parent-based Questions:
>   As your child's mother, what felt most important to you as you were looking for centers?
>
>   What drew you as a parent to this center?
>
>   Were there any other centers you knew something about, but didn't consider at all?
>
>   Did you visit other centers before you settled on this one?
>   Why did you not choose them? What made this one a better fit?

Child-based Questions:

>   You've told me a little about your son/daughter and I would love to hear more…
>
>   What are your child's favorite things to do at the center? Outside of the center?
>
>   Did you consider your child's gender when you enrolled here?
>   If applicable, follow up with race and language
>
>   Have you thought about kindergarten at all?
>
>   What would you like your son/daughter to do or be when he/she grows up?
>
>   What is your child good at? What are his/her strengths at the center?
>
>   Does your child have any special needs or exhibit any worry some behaviors?

Is there anything you would like to see your child work on or improve while they attend the center?

What skills do you hope your child learns at the center this year?

What skills is your child working on right now?

What skill do you hope your child learns by the time they leave the center?

4. Satisfaction Level and Management Concerns
How do you feel about the center?

How does your child feel coming here everyday?

What is your relationship like with….
The staff?
His/her classroom teachers?
The other parents?
Does your child see other children from the center outside the classroom?

As a parent, what is your favorite thing about the center?
What do you think your child's favorite thing is?

Are you unhappy with anything or is there anything you would change about your experience?

Has there ever been a time when you have considered not sending your child anymore for any reason?

Have you or would you recommend that other parents enroll their children here?

Are there days you don't sent your child to the center?
Where do they go?

What do you do if your child is sick?

Do you have back-up care?
What is it? How reliable?

5. Follow-up
Is there anything else you would like me to know about your child?

Is there anything else you would like me to know about this center or your experience in choosing it?

Is there anything else you would like me to know about how satisfied you are with the center?

Additional Question (Added to reflect preliminary data analysis):

1. What advice would you give mothers such as yourself trying to find childcare?

Site-Specific Questions

The Christian School:
Did religion have anything to do with your decision to enroll here?

Celebrate Kids Academy:
Do you live or work locally/in this neighborhood?

Children's Town:
Do you live or work locally/in this neighborhood?
Was the Pre-K Counts Program a factor in your decision?

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the research study: Early Chilcare Settings and the Parental Enrollment Process: Insights from the Maternal Primary Caregivers of Children Attending High-Poverty Urban Childcare Centers

Name and Department of investigator:
Erin McNamara Horvat, Department of Teaching and Learning, College of Education
Kaitlin Moran, Department of Teaching and Learning, College of Education

This study involves research. The purpose of the research is to understand how short-term study abroad programs impact community college students.

What you should know about a research study:

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- You volunteer to be in a research study.
- Whether you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide, it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before and after you decide.
- By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of the legal rights that you otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

The estimated duration of your study participation is one to two hours total**.**

The study procedures consist of one interview. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one one-hour interview about your experience finding early childcare for your child.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study.

The benefit you will obtain from the research is knowing that you have contributed to the understanding of this topic**.**

If you agree to take part in this study, we will give you a $10.00 gift certificate for your time and effort.
The alternative to participating is not to participate. If you agree to take part in the research now and you stop at any time, it will not be held against you.

Please contact the research team with questions, concerns, or complaints about the research and any research-related injuries by calling 610-304-1908 or e-mailing kaitlin**.**moran@temple.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Temple University Institutional Review Board. Please contact them at (215) 707-3390 or e-mail them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following: questions, concerns, or complaints about the research; questions about your rights; to obtain information; or to offer input.

If you agree to participate, your interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed so the information provided can be analyzed by the researcher. You may be asked to provide additional information to clarify your answers in a follow-up interview.

Are you willing to be audiotaped?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Confidentiality: Efforts will be made to limit the disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. However, the study team cannot promise complete secrecy. For example, although the study team has put in safeguards to protect your information, there is always a potential risk of loss of confidentiality. There are several organizations that may inspect and copy your information to make sure that the study team is following the rules and regulations regarding research and the protection of human subjects. These organizations include the IRB, Temple University, its affiliates and agents, Temple University Health System, Inc., its affiliates and agents, and the Office for Human Research Protections.

Signature Block for Capable Adult
Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS DATE → | 12/30/2014 |

_____   _____
Signature of subject   Date

_____
Printed name of subject

_____   _____
Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

_____   _____
Printed name of person obtaining consent

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE CONSENT FORM

<u>Permission to Audiotape</u>

Investigator's Name: Kaitlin Moran
Department: Department of Teaching and Learning, College of Education
Project Title: Early Childcare Settings and the Parental Enrollment Process: Insights from the Maternal Primary Caregivers of Children Attending High-Poverty Urban Childcare Centers

Subject: _____   Date:

I give _____ permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used only for the following purpose (s):

(Choose one)

___   <u>CLINICAL</u>

This audiotape will be used as part of my treatment. It will not be shown to anyone but my treatment team, my family, and myself.

___   <u>EDUCATION</u>

This audiotape may be shown to education professionals outside of
for educational purposes. At no time will my name be used.

_X_   <u>RESEARCH</u>

This audiotape will be used as a part of a research project at _____. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

___   <u>MARKETING/PUBLIC INFORMATION</u>

This audiotape will be used to promote _____ to educational or health professionals, referral sources, and/or the general public. At no time will my name be used.

___   <u>OTHER</u>

Description:

Permission to Audiotape - Page 2 of 3

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?

I agree to be audiotaped during the time period: April 2013 to September 2013.

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from: April 2013 to May 2014.

Data will be stored for three (3) years after completion of the study.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Kaitlin Moran or Temple University in any way.

OTHER

I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Investigator's Name: Erin McNamara Horvat

Department: Department of Teaching and Learning, College of Education

Institution: Temple University

1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122

Phone: (215) 204- 6178

This form will be placed in my records and a copy will be kept by the person(s) named above. A copy will be given to me.

Permission to Audiotape - Page 3 of 3

<u>Please print</u>

Subject's Name:

Date:

Address:

Phone:

Subject's Signature:
(Or signature of parent or legally responsible person if subject is a minor or is
incompetent to sign.)

Relationship to Subject:

Subject cannot sign because:

but consents orally to be audiotaped under the **conditions described above**.

Witness Signature	Date

Witness Signature	Date

ESTIMATED TIME LINE

Phase	Methodology	Duration
Phase I	Recruitment from multiple centers with varying ratings on the Keystone Stars quality assessment measure	Approximately 1 Month
Phase II	Site Observations- to coincide with recruitment, approximately 5 visits per center, each lasting 2-3 hours. Observations will be recorded in field notes guided by protocols that the researcher has developed.	Approximately 1.5 Months
Phase III	Approximately 40 in-depth interviews with the maternal primary caregivers of children who are poor, minority, and are enrolled in a center in the metropolitan region; an even distribution of boys and girl, racial and ethnic distribution of participants will reflect the racial/ethnic composition of the center	Approximately 3 Months
Phase IV	Follow-up interviews/observations, if and when necessary	Approximately 2 weeks

ACTUAL TIME LINE

Center	Phase	Methodology	Duration
The Christian School			
	Phase I	Recruitment from multiple centers with varying ratings on the Keystone Stars quality assessment measure	Approximately 2 Months January-February 2013
	Phase II	Site Observations- to coincide with recruitment, approximately 5 visits per center, each lasting 2-3 hours. Observations will be recorded in field notes guided by protocols that the researcher has developed.	Approximately 2 Weeks April 2013
	Phase III	Approximately 40 in-depth interviews with the maternal primary caregivers of children who are poor, minority, and are enrolled in a center in the metropolitan region; an even distribution of boys and girl, racial and ethnic distribution of participants will reflect the racial/ethnic composition of the center	Approximately 1 Month May 2013
	Phase IV	Follow-up interviews/observations, if and when necessary	Approximately 1 Week June 2013
Celebrate Kids Academy			
	Phase I	Recruitment from multiple centers with varying ratings on the Keystone Stars quality assessment measure	Approximately 2 Months April-May 2013
	Phase II	Site Observations- to coincide with recruitment, approximately 5 visits per center, each lasting 2-3 hours. Observations will be recorded in field notes guided by protocols that the researcher has developed.	Approximately 2 Weeks June 2013
	Phase III	Approximately 40 in-depth interviews with the maternal primary caregivers of children who are poor, minority, and are enrolled in a center in the metropolitan region; an even distribution of boys and girl, racial and ethnic distribution of participants will reflect the racial/ethnic composition of the center	Approximately 1 Month June 2013
	Phase IV	Follow-up interviews/observations, if and when necessary	Approximately 1 Week June 2013
Children's Town			
	Phase I	Recruitment from multiple centers with varying ratings on the Keystone Stars quality assessment measure	Approximately 1 Month August 2013

	Phase II	Site Observations- to coincide with recruitment, approximately 5 visits per center, each lasting 2-3 hours. Observations will be recorded in field notes guided by protocols that the researcher has developed.	Approximately 2 Weeks September 2013
	Phase III	Approximately 40 in-depth interviews with the maternal primary caregivers of children who are poor, minority, and are enrolled in a center in the metropolitan region; an even distribution of boys and girl, racial and ethnic distribution of participants will reflect the racial/ethnic composition of the center	Approximately 1 Month September 2013
	Phase IV	Follow-up interviews/observations, if and when necessary	Approximately 1 Week October 2013