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Leader-Parent Relationships in the Early Childhood Education Context: An Exploration of Testimonial and Epistemic Justice

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Leader-Parent Relationships in the Early Childhood Education Context: An Exploration of
Testimonial and Epistemic Justice

by

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study, I examined epistemic justice and testimonial injustice experienced by parents of children enrolled in preschool programs. I used a triadic model arising from the synthesis of Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice, Hoy and Tschannen Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust and Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration, and employed modified grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008). Public preschool programs often promise that they can ameliorate cognitive and experiential gaps experienced by children who at risk and allow them to enter kindergarten on an equal footing with their more privileged peers (Hulme, Goetz, Gooch, Adams & Snowling, 2007; Camilli et al., 2010; Fuller et al., 2010; Mashburn, 2008). There is evidence of success, but the current educators in preschool leadership positions have not benefitted from specialized training making many of them ill-prepared to deal with an early childhood population coming primarily from marginalized communities (Leurer, 2011). There are studies that call into question the efficacy of early childhood educational programs in closing the cognitive gap for children from marginalized communities. Weikart (1998) finds that while lasting impact is possible, the types of programs to which children are exposed is an important variable. I conducted the study in a suburban community of southeastern Virginia with demographics similar to inner city school profiles. I interviewed twenty parents, using trustworthiness strategies to ensure credibility. Through these interviews, the study revealed problems in communication that were interruptive of the formation of meaningful relationships between parents and leaders.

Running head: LEADER-PARENT RELATIONSHIPS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION CONTEXT

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents who would be so proud of a child with a doctoral degree. They were products of their time and culture, and along with that pride most likely would have wondered how their white child from the southern suburbs ever developed an interest in social justice and the needs of people in marginalized communities. Like my parents, I am a product of time and culture. I was a child during the Civil Rights Movement and carry the belief that furthering the cause of social justice is the right thing to do.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I examined epistemic justice and testimonial injustice experienced by parents of children enrolled in preschool programs using a model that incorporates Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice, Hoy and Tschannen Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust and Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration, synthesized to facilitate a triadic approach to understanding the data derived from this study. The study explored parents' experiences regarding their perceptions and experiences with the leadership of early childhood education programs, and considered how individual and social interactions with leaders shaped their epistemic agency and access to rhetorical spaces that recognize them as credible knowers. This study also examined whether parents experienced interactions that enhanced or undermined their ability to participate and share epistemic resources within a given epistemic community.

It has been well established that strong and effective leadership is a vital element in the success of educational programs (Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008; Ramgopal, Dieterle, McCreedy & Davis, 2009). The role of today's school leader has evolved far beyond that of administrators of the past. While modern leaders may execute many of the duties of yesterday's leader, new aspects of the job have accrued over time (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In order to manage the enhanced positions they hold, leaders share responsibilities through distribution, but maintain the responsibility of instructional leadership and shaping and maintaining the school culture (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2005). Today's school leaders also face a plethora of social and cultural issues affecting the students who enter their buildings each day (Theoharris, 2007). With many students living in poverty or in low-income households, coming from homes in which English is not the primary

language and/or having recently immigrated to students the U.S., the need for well-prepared leadership is critical (Gutman, Sameroff & Eccles, 2002).

Leaders face operational complexities rising from students' needs, yet the system itself has not changed in its response to students' social needs (Carnoy, 1995). Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) have reached down to the elementary school level to prepare students for increasingly technology-driven secondary programs and to facilitate informed curricular and career choices later (Education.gov, 2008). Likewise, Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses at the secondary level inform those same choices at the post-secondary level and provide real-life experience for students along with training in career paths (Feller, 2003).

The literacy challenge facing American educators may spring from disparities of income and social class. Children from communities of poverty enter kindergarten with a deficit of 15,000 words when compared to their more affluent peers (Denton, Solari, Ciancio, Hecht & Swank, 2010; Swick & Williams, 2006). They are likely to live in sub-standard housing, experience or witness violence in their neighborhoods, and are more likely than middle class children to have health concerns related to poor nutrition and environmental exposure to toxins like lead and second-hand tobacco smoke (Evans, 2004).

Given the challenges faced by school leaders discussed above, it is a fair assumption that many may be under-prepared to deal with the host of social and cultural issues presented by their students and their training has only recently come to include attention to the deep social issues affecting our students, and this is in the form of a limited amount of course time meant to address "diversity" (Reinke & Herman, 2003). Leaders are faced with the results of multiple systemic failures and heretofore have lacked the tools and the impetus to address the issues at their core.

A likely solution to the issues now faced by leaders is early childhood education used as an intervention (Swick & Williams, 2006). While preschool is touted by some as a solution to the disparities experienced by children from impoverished or marginalized communities, it does have its detractors. Some studies question its efficacy if making permanent or long-term changes in the cognition of at-risk children (Weikart, 1998). Similarly, Barnett (2011) found that while programs with varying objectives may achieve the long-term goal of disparity reduction, not all interventions are equally effective.

Quality and focus aside, the effectiveness of early childhood education may be diminished by a lack of leadership, leadership preparation, and research. Public school leaders are prepared by their training to administer programs beginning with kindergarten, not preschool. In spite of the bold claims about the roles leaders play in education, the major journals in K12 educational leadership have all but ignored the topic of preschool education. Further, there is a lack of attention to preschool leadership at the academic and professional levels. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) claim to strengthen programs through the creation of standard. Still, their standards lack attention to preschool (ISLLC Standards, 2017). This represents a major gap in the literature and a substantial gap in research that addresses leadership issues in early childhood education. This absence is even more remarkable given the central place that early childhood education occupies in the public and professional discourse and that many of the calls for attention come from leaders themselves (Ryan, et al., 2011.) Leaders in place, administering relatively new programs have voiced their need for coaching, mentoring and technical assistance as means of improving the services they provide (Schulman, et al., 2012).

Background of the Problem

One of the key features of early childhood education is its potential to help students from lower SES homes enter kindergarten on level footing with their more advantaged peers (Gutman & Sameroff, 2003). In this way, early childhood programming has clear social justice implications. At the same time, much of the current leadership literature points to what is assumed to be a pivotal role in shaping the instructional climate and assuring that high standards of learning are being achieved and that the goals of social justice and equity are sought and met (Hulme, Goetz, Gooch, Adams & Snowling 2007; Camilli et al., 2010; Fuller et al., 2010; Mashburn, 2008). The potential connects between the social justice goals of early childhood programming and the emergent agreement within the leadership field that supports student learning and social justice goals are clear. However, some have argued that “researchers have answered the question of what leaders of today’s schools need to know and be able to do” (Green, 2017, citing Frye, O’Neill, & Bottoms, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; The Wallace Foundation, 2013), suggesting that what’s needed is not so much new insights but the execution of what we already know. Interestingly, these studies ignore early childhood education entirely, making no mention of their importance in shaping the overall educational climate. This highlights the need to take a more tentative outlook about what questions have been answered within leadership and better understand dynamics between leadership and early childhood education.

The diverse student body served by US public schools includes an enormous number of students who are likely to face issues of equity and access (McConkey, 2004). It is possible for schools to intervene in this pattern of injustice through engagement. Parents who become part of the school in some capacity – through committee or PTA membership, for instance – are more

likely than those who are not participatory to see themselves as equals with teachers and administrators (Halgunseth, 2009).

One form of social injustice that educational scholars have yet to explore is the idea of epistemic justice (Fricker, 1998, 2013). This is particularly pertinent to the field of education given that our primary mission is the development of knowledge (Tschannen-Moran, 2013). Students' and families' senses of belonging to the community of knowers have major implications for their motivation, sense of ownership and buy-in (Goodenew & Grandy, 1993). The parent community, the larger community, and individual parents' involvement in their own children's educations all play a major role in shaping positive educational outcomes (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2008). It has been well documented that the most successful schools have engaged families, businesses, and industry (Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). This engagement takes the form of funding, volunteerism, and in-kind services but most important it infuses the school environment with input from a broadened pool of sources (Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001). This shared shaping of the educational system fosters not only a sense of trust through openness, but also ownership among stakeholders (Tschannen-Moran, 2013). Just as leadership has been assumed to matter in the success of student learning, so to have parent, family and community involvement (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2008).

Given the clear importance of parents in the experience of children in early childhood programs, how they communicate with school leaders and how this shapes their level of trust and acceptance in the community of knowers may have important implications for the ways in which they support their children's early childhood educational experiences. In the absence of clear understandings of the unique roles of school leaders within early childhood education programs, the potential of these programs may be negatively impacted. Developing greater understandings

of school leader's role in early childhood education as it relates to their work as instructional resources, as community builders and establishing trusting relationships with parents and community members would begin to fill an important gap in the current literature. Most importantly, for the purposes of this study, how school leaders build and sustain trusting relationships with parents has important social justice implications. Specifically this study seeks to address the nature of the parent/school leader relationship and how these interpersonal transactions shape parents' access to rhetorical spaces and acceptance in the epistemic community.

Statement of the Problem

The potential effect of the current leadership position in the public preschool setting is that early childhood education will continue to be left out of policy making on the jurisdictional and state levels, (Wise & Wright, 2012) and there will persist a lack of evidence-based information to guide policy development in leadership development in early childhood education (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2013). Failure to speak or be heard at the policy and/or research levels defines a type of epistemic injustice – one that casts early childhood education as a lesser discipline in the educational system. Its perpetuation by those with power is a representation of hegemony (Krieg, Smith & Davis, 2014). Finally, there is likely a communication barrier between practitioners and families of students enrolled in public early childhood programs (Lea, 2006). Within the public early childhood context, educational leaders represent the class of knowers and the parties who may confer credibility on a mostly impoverished and marginalized consumer group. They are also the parties that perpetuate hegemonic patterns that ensure that the situation never changes for the underclass, (Fricker, 1998, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

This research examined how individual and social interactions between parents of children in public preschool programs and preschool leaders shape their epistemic agency and their families' access to rhetorical spaces that recognized them and their children as credible knowers. It examined parents' experience and interactions and considered whether those experiences enhanced or undermined their ability to participate in a given epistemic community and share epistemic resources that allowed them to participate in knowledge production and revision of those same resources.

Theoretical Framework

Fricker's (2002) markers of epistemic justice served as an anchor in synthesizing her work with the works of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Lea (2006). Fricker operates from the philosophical perspective, describing the markers of epistemic justice as avoiding intellectualism which requires that the speaker be both competent and honest and the hearer may be uncritically receptive within the bounds of reason; becoming a responsible hearer of the words of others meaning that the hearer has arrived at an understanding through sensitivity to the reasons for and against the knowledge offered by others; testimonial sensitivity, meaning that that our responses to the testimony of others are learned and internalized through a process of epistemic socialization; and accurately assigning levels of credit to the words of others which means that one ensures in one's interactions that credit is not under or over assigned to the words of others.

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's Five Facets of Trust focus on the educational context. The five facets are benevolence indicating that the leader is acting in the best interest of others; reliability meaning that the leader is true to his or her word; competence that speaks to the leader's ability to carry out the tasks of his or her position; honesty, referring to the leader's

truthfulness; openness that means that the leader shares information freely. The Five Facets provide a framework for the formation of positive relationships between preschool leaders and families, specifically in the educational context, and through their practical nature, complement Fricker's more esoteric philosophical works.

I discovered Lea's work as a result of having to broaden the parameters of my research to compensate for the lack of literature related to preschool leadership. Lea's research was in the area of human service delivery, as she studied the collaborative relationships between adolescent mothers of children with developmental disabilities and the service providers with whom they interacted.

I found a clear analogy between Lea's population and the participants in my study – both demographically and in their social positions relative to the providers who served them. Like the participants in my study, the majority of the young women in Lea's study were from minority groups. Also like many of the participants in my study, the participants in Lea's study were less educated and from a lower socioeconomic position than the service providers. Her work resulted in the development of five markers of collaboration which I synthesized along with Fricker's markers of epistemic justice and Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's Five Facets of Trust. The markers are Respect: Just a Little, which refers to givers and receivers of services regarding each other with esteem; Walk a Mile in My Shoes, which refers to providers having an understanding of participants and their lives; Mean What You Say, which is a reference to participants being able to trust the words of providers; Fight the Power, a reference to the lack of power the participants felt in their own lives and in their interactions with providers.

I analyzed the three frameworks for overlapping themes and chose for my hybrid framework the markers that bore a kinship to the themes that I identified in my research. The

result of the synthesis was a new lens, closely related to the experiences of the people who volunteered to be part of my study, through which I could view and analyze data. The theoretical markers I used in data analysis are testimonial sensitivity, trust and respect.

Research Questions

Using a triadic lens born of the synthesis of Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice (2003), Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust and Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration, this study explored the experiences of parents of young children regarding their perceptions and experiences with the leadership of their children's early childhood education programs in the following ways:

- How these individual and social interactions shape parents' epistemic agency and their families' access to rhetorical spaces that recognize parents and their children as credible knowers;
- Whether parents experience interactions that are likely to enhance or undermine their ability to participate and share epistemic resources within a given epistemic community;
- Whether these interactions invite families to participate in knowledge production and revision of those same resources.

Miranda Fricker has written extensively on the subject of epistemic justice. In distilled form, her "framework" provided the lens through which this research was examined. Its major points are these:

- Injustice is more easily recognized than justice, so it serves to define justice.
- Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker receives a deficit in credibility based on his/her status.

- Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a person does not have the cultural knowledge or experience to understand or report an experience.
- Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice occur when someone is wronged in his/her role as a knower.
- “Reflexive Critical Openness” to the words of others is a safeguard against prejudices.

Significance of the Study

Early childhood education may have benefits that reach far beyond the preschool classroom, and has been shown to be an effective intervention in both cognitive and social terms in some studies (Denton, Solari, Ciancio, Hecht & Swank, 2010; Swick & Williams, 2006). While there is a mix of research findings on the topic, preschool is clearly taking its place in the K-12 environment, with most of its detractors focusing on program quality and variation (Weikart, 1998; Barnett, 2011). Families, like students, may benefit from inclusion in the life of the school, adding their voices to those that shape policy and practice (Halgunseth, 2009). It is therefore of the utmost importance that practitioners and leaders act intentionally to include families and to recognize and honor their knowledge. While there is ample research on parent-teacher relationships there is very little on the topic of relationships between families and leaders in the preschool context. A variety of factors contribute to this void, including issues of feminism in that practitioners are generally female and are cast by our culture into care-giving roles. In accepting this stereotype, professionals tend to remain in practitioner roles rather than assuming roles as researchers (Wise & Wright, 2012; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Some research has been done on a program-specific level as to quality, but the resulting markers of quality services remain inconsistently applied or even unknown to leaders and practitioners (Colmer, Waniganayake & Field, 2014). Landry et al., (2011) note that in addition to disparate

approaches and content, leaders and practitioners professional are not able to access professional development that contains a conceptual framework to support appropriate understanding of strategies and goals. According to the authors, the “lack of integration” - or connection - across professional development experiences compromises teachers’ ability to transfer and apply knowledge.

Definition of Terms

The following terms appear frequently in this research and are explained below:

- Coding is a qualitative research method of analyzing data wherein themes are identified based on theoretical deduction rather than observation.
- Disconfirming evidence, or negative cases, is often considered a valuable strategy for assessing the credibility or validity of qualitative research because it helps researchers avoid bias by challenging pronounced pre-existing views.
- Epistemic injustice occurs when a person’s knowledge is discounted for reasons of prejudice.
- Grounded theory is a research method used in qualitative research involving the construction of theory through methodic gathering and analysis of data. The current study employs modified grounded theory.
- Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a person’s experiences are misunderstood for reasons of prejudice.
- K-5, K-8, K-12 all refer to kindergarten through fifth grade, kindergarten through eighth grade and kindergarten through twelfth grade.
- Leader, instructional leader, principal, and administrator are terms used interchangeably to refer to building-level administrators.

- Member checking is also known as informant feedback or respondent validation, is a technique used to help improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of a study.
- Preschool, early childhood education, Pre-K, young children: These terms are used interchangeably and refer to children aged three to five years and the educational programs that serve them.
- Social desirability bias refers to responses that survey respondents may use to answer questions in a way that will be viewed favorably by the researcher or others. It may cause over-reporting favorable experiences or under-reporting undesirable experiences.
- Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings.
- Triadic framework is the hybrid framework arising from the synthesis of Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust and Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration. The triadic approach was the lens through which I viewed data for the current research.
- Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives is to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches.
- Trustworthiness consists of the following components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Triangulation and member checking are techniques used to establish trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is an important aspect of qualitative research because validity and reliability are not established in the same ways as in quantitative research. It was addressed through procedures and also through disclosure of

potential bias in the researcher due to past and contemporaneous employment situations and professional associations.

- Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) is the state-funded public preschool program in place in Virginia and in the locality where this study was conducted.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

My assumption was that this research would demonstrate that families are actively engaged in their children's education when they experience epistemic justice in their interactions with educational leaders. In such settings, leaders garner the trust of the families they serve and view them as equals. I assumed that this view would be clearly demonstrated in the communications between leaders, practitioners and families.

The study was qualitative and therefore somewhat limited to perceptions, but verbatim recording, member checking, inclusion of disconfirming evidence and data analysis according to predetermined criteria overcame many of its limitations. Disconfirming evidence is testimony by participants that conflicts with or contradicts testimony by other participants. Its use (reporting of participant responses, including those that contradicted emerging themes) is valuable in overcoming researcher biases by including all testimony offered, allowing readers to understand and evaluate the data. It also ensures that the voices of all participants are heard and honored. I also included member checking in my analysis. I carried out member checking in two parts. First, I transcribed electronic recordings verbatim, then I provided transcripts to participants and requested that participants clarify or explain any comments they felt did not accurately reflect their intent. Data were analyzed according to methodology consistent with grounded theory. Model building took place through iterations of coding and identification of themes and patterns, with theory arising from concepts and categories that emerged from the

data. These models were deductively tested through member checking with participants. I divided my analysis into Contributors and Detractors to Epistemic Justice. The disconfirming evidence was included in the Contributors discussion.

The study resulted in an examination of the quality of interactions and relationships between educational leaders and families of preschool students. It did not definitively determine if those interactions further epistemic justice, but provided a picture of the interactions between educational leaders and parents of preschool students from which inductive conclusions may be drawn.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

While research on the topic of early childhood education is rich and plentiful, the topic of leadership in early childhood education is seriously lacking. This represents a major gap in the literature and a remarkable dearth of research that addresses leadership issues in early childhood education. This absence is even more remarkable given the central place that early childhood education occupies in the public and professional discourse and that many of the calls for attention come from leaders themselves (Ryan, et al., 2011.) Leaders in place, administering relatively new programs have voiced their need for coaching, mentoring and technical assistance as means of improving the services they provide (Schulman, et al., 2012).

Many factors affect the conduct of research in the field, and they range from limitations in the integration of early childhood programs into the K-12 environment to reluctance of practitioners to assume leadership roles to sexism and the epistemic injustice experienced by both families and professionals involved in the education of young children. The review below describes these issues and others surrounding the topic of early childhood and the purpose of this study.

Literature Search Criteria

The literature reviewed and synthesized for this work was harvested from a number of sources. First, numerous searches were carried out online using the Old Dominion University (ODU) Library. Another source was Google Scholar. The key words used in searching the ODU Library and Google Scholar were: universal preschool, preschool leadership, early childhood education, preschool family engagement, epistemic justice and other terms directly related to the topic of early childhood preschool leadership. The website of the school division in which the

study took place provided data pertaining to student demographics and program admission criteria, including locally determined criteria under the Virginia Department of Education guidelines. A number of resources were provided by the author's faculty advisor, and the Virginia Department of Education website offered information on programs and services available to the target population. Finally, staff of the Division's Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation along with individual leaders and practitioners provided testimonial information.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

This study examined epistemic justice and testimonial injustice experienced by parents of children enrolled in preschool programs using Fricker's, (1998, 2003, 2013) theory as an anchor. It explored their experiences regarding their perceptions and experiences with the leadership of early childhood education programs, and considered how individual and social interactions with leaders shaped their epistemic agency and their families' access to rhetorical spaces that recognized parents and their children as credible knowers. This study also considered whether parents experience interactions that enhanced or undermined their ability to participate and share epistemic resources within a given epistemic community.

Drawing from iterative nature of qualitative research, I came to see a clear relationship among three related theories that formed the basis of a theoretical lens that guided my analysis. I coded data using a triadic approach arising from the synthesis of these three separate frameworks. First, I used Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice as an anchor for the synthesis. The markers are: *Avoiding Intellectualism* which requires the speaker to be both competent and honest and for the hearer to be receptive within the bounds of reason; *Becoming a Responsible Hearer of Others' Words* which requires the hearer to arrive at an understanding, through sensitivity to the reasons for and against the knowledge offered by others; *Testimonial*

Sensitivity which means that our responses to others' testimony is are learned and internalized through a process of epistemic socialization; *Accurately Assigning Levels of Credit to the Words of Others* means avoiding over or under crediting meaning or relevance to others' communications. The second framework used in this study was Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust. The Five Facets are: *Benevolence*, meaning that a leader is concerned with protecting the well-being of others; *Reliability*, which indicates that the leader is one who will come through with what is needed; *Competence* indicating that the leader is equal to the task at hand; *Honest*, referring to the leader's character in that his or her word can be counted upon; *Openness* refers to the leader's sharing of relevant information. Finally, I used the Markers of Collaboration described by Lea (2006) in her research on the collaboration between adolescent mothers and the service providers with whom they interacted. These markers are: *Respect*; *Just a Little* referring to two parties regarding each other with esteem; *Walk a Mile In My Shoes* which refers to the extent to which professionals understand and are able to empathize with the people they serve; *Mean What You Say* which refers to the level of trust between two parties; *Fight the Power* references the lack of power held by the subjects in this study. This lack of power was exemplified in their lives and in their relationships with service providers.

Because this is a qualitative study, I am naturally concerned with trustworthiness. In order to ensure trustworthiness, I used Guba's (1981) model that employs the following principles: credibility in preference to internal validity; transferability in preference to external validity; dependability in preference to reliability; confirmability in preference to objectivity. Creswell and Miller (2000) also discuss the challenges in establishing validity in qualitative inquiry, and refer to triangulation as a procedure where the researcher seeks convergence among three different types of validity procedures. They also list Member Checking as a validity

procedure that places establishment of validity in the hands of the subjects by seeking their confirmation of the narrative accounts of their testimony. My study is informed by these validity procedures, particularly with Member Checking. I used this method by providing verbatim transcripts to all participants and asking that they clarify or expand their statements if needed.

Because of my current employment as an employee of the district in which I conducted this study and my past position as a preschool special education teacher, I may have carried my own bias into the study. I safeguarded against this by using pre-established questions in my interview and also by refraining from injecting myself or becoming involved in any way in situations participants described during interviews.

Another challenge to the trustworthiness of this research was the need for a translator in one of the interviews. I provided questions in writing in the participant's language (Spanish) to both the translator and the participant. I also provided all other documents (including the informed consent form) in Spanish. Further, I provided the transcript in Spanish. I used Google Translate to convert documents from English to Spanish.

My literature review led me to the serendipitous discovery of the work of Davenia Lea (2006) that provided the third element of my triadic instrument. This lens helped me go beyond simple triangulation by using a triadic approach through the synthesis of the frameworks described above. This methodology uses the convergence described in triangulation, but evolves into a more dynamic process because of the close relationship among the three frameworks. Fricker's (1998, 2003, 2013) writings on epistemic justice come from a philosophical perspective while Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) are oriented to the educational context. Lea's (2006) work is in a human service delivery context. Hoy's and

Tschannen-Moran's (1999) and Lea's (2006) works in the context of human service give life to Fricker's (1998, 2003, 2013) theoretical works. Despite their distinct perspectives, the authors' works do not just converge, they are stunningly analogous and their synthesis is entirely natural. The hybrid lens resulting from the synthesis provided a way to appropriately code data and honor participants' testimony.

Review of Research

Overview of the Importance of Early Childhood Education

importance of early childhood education and educational intervention has been established, and is well documented. The benefits to students occur not only in improved cognitive skills (Greenwood, Bradfield, Kaminski, Linas, Carta, et al., 2011) but also in the affective realm (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan & Barnett, 2010). Simply put, children who attend quality preschools are better prepared for their kindergarten experience (Hulme, Goetz, Gooch, Adams & Snowling 2007; Camilli et al., 2010; Fuller et al., 2010; Mashburn, 2008). The results of the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) in preschool indicates that regular assessment and targeted intervention result in enhanced kindergarten readiness and decreases in later special education placement (Greenwood, et al., 2011). The research findings are mixed on the topic of preschool efficacy in erasing the cognitive disparities experienced by children from marginalized communities. The criticism of early childhood focuses on the wide variation among programs in terms of quality and foci (Barnett, 2011; Ryan, et al., 2011). Regardless of these findings, policy makers have seemingly ensured preschool's place in the public school environment.

While universal public preschool is not yet a reality, millions of American children participate in organized early childhood education programs. Of all four-year-olds, 74% attend preschool. 64% of low-income four-year-olds and 64% of those who live in poverty attend

preschool. 53% of all three-year-olds, 41% of low-income three-year-olds and 45% of those who live in poverty attend preschool (Barnett & Nores, 2012). These data suggest that regardless of income, the majority of children in America attend some type of preschool program.

As public preschool programs develop, the initial target population is made up almost exclusively of students from at-risk groups including those from low income and impoverished communities (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). Participation offers students an opportunity to enter kindergarten on equal footing with their more affluent and less challenged peers, and as a result of their participation deficits in language development and literacy for which they are at risk will be overcome or moderated (Hulme, Goetz, Gooch, Adams & Snowling, 2007; Camilli et al., 2010; Fuller et al., 2010; Mashburn, 2008).

Evolution and Changes in Early Childhood Education Programs

Public preschool programs are a new addition to the world of K-12 education, and are still evolving. The good news and proven benefits notwithstanding, there is little evidence that practitioners and leaders in the emerging preschool field are able to develop or apply a generally accepted set of principles for instruction (Barnett, 2011). In fact, remarkable achievement gaps are present when children arrive at kindergarten entry, reflecting the ongoing variation in the quality of preschool experiences (Zazlow, Martinez-Beck, Tout & Halle, T., 2011).

Despite the known benefits of preschool, it remains a field without a clear direction (Ramgopal, Dieterle, Aviles, McCreedy, et al, 2009). Research findings related to program design and specific outcomes are disparate and while it is known that cognitive and social gains are only possible in high quality programs (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2011), the inherent variability among programs and lack of agreed-upon best practices make thorough program appraisal challenging (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan & Barnett, 2010). While

some researchers have assessed the efficacy of specific programs, the resulting markers of quality services remain inconsistently applied or even unknown to leaders and practitioners (Colmer, Waniganayake & Field, 2014). Landry et al., (2011) note that in addition to varying approaches and content, professional development frequently lacks a conceptual framework to undergird appropriate understanding of strategies and goals. The authors note that the “lack of integration” or connection across professional development experiences compromises teachers’ ability to transfer these experiences into effective classroom practice” (p. 973). Policy research suggests a disparity in preschool delivery quality, noting the unique benefit of quality programs on children at risk and advocating for effective training models (Barnett, 2010; Elmore, 2002; Kagan, 2009; NAEYC 2011). This variation presents a compelling need to examine effective means of training teachers and directors in quality adult-child interactions, which are known to have a direct impact on gains for children’s learning and development (Haynes, 2009). Until opportunity gaps at this critical stage of a child’s education are overcome, we are destined to continue replicating disparate socio-economic trajectories (Cunha & Heckman. 2006).

Leadership in Early Childhood Education

There is an enormous gap in the literature on early childhood program leadership, and because we know little of the field through research, leaders face enormous challenges at the division level and at the school levels. They work with the reality that preschool’s goals and approaches differ on a fundamental level from K-12 education (Ramgopal, et al., 2009), yet are rooted in the scientific management model employed by K-12. This model, which became popular in the early 1900’s, has enjoyed a resurgence of late with high-stakes testing and classroom practices dominated by scripted corporate curricula designed to instruct to those tests (Au, 2011). Where K-12 educators seek to teach skills, preschool educators are hoping to

overcome cognitive and affective disparities through exposure, experience, and exploration (Assel, et al., 2006). The preschool leader is also the advocate for the child and the family facilitating their entry to the school system and helping to enhance their access to educational opportunities and the larger community (Leurer, 2013). This difference in mission and purpose calls for differentiated leadership (Ramgopal, et al., 2009). Raising the quality of early experiences is critical to closing the achievement gap, yet only with quality professional development can the quality of programs be increased (Assel, et al., 2007; Frede & Barnett, 2011).

Quality, targeted professional development cannot occur ahead of the inquiry that will give it direction and purpose. Yet research within the field is scarce and the topic remains undeveloped. There are many contributors to the lack of research, some of them related to issues of feminism. According to it Wise and Wright (2012) and Woodrow and Busch (2008), because early childhood practitioners are generally female they are cast by culture into nurturing roles. Many – if not most - accept the stereotype, remain in practitioner roles, and become consumers of research rather than producing new knowledge.

Because the lack of research was so pronounced, it was necessary for me to broaden the parameters of this research. Following a protracted search, I discovered the work of Davenia Lea (2006) that examined the communication and relationships between adolescent mothers of children with disabilities and the service providers with whom they interacted. This work is analogous to the works of Fricker (1998, 2003, 2013) and Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) in that she considered the relationships and communication between the powerful and the powerless. Her qualitative inquiry focused on collaboration among professionals and between families and professionals, and examined the perspectives of six adolescent mothers. Her

analysis was informed by the work of Coll (1993) who put forth a cultural variant perspective that Lea used in coding. The cultural variant perspective refers to the rich diversity in social practices that different cultures exhibit around the world and Lea used it in her study because of the cultural differences between the mothers in her study and the providers who served them. All but one of the mothers in the study were from minority communities. Most providers (twelve of twenty) were Caucasian and were also separated from the mothers by age differences and social status.

One of Lea's primary findings was that the service providers did not know details of the lives of the mothers with whom they were interacting, so they were unable to place services in relevant contexts, and were unable to relate in a personal way to the women they served. Lea also found that the services were more child-centered than family-centered and seemed rushed in their delivery. Of particular interest is the finding that when asked about the quality of their service provision, nine of the twelve providers acknowledged that their services were not collaborative. They conjectured that the problems in service delivery were related to their inability to relate to the mothers as competent knowers and as valuable members of their children's care teams. In short, Lea has confronted the same issues facing providers of early childhood education – the cultural disconnect between providers and consumers and issues of epistemic justice that prevent or enable families to be recognized as valuable knowers and contributors to their children's services.

Themes in the Literature

Three distinct themes emerge from the literature on early childhood leadership. First, is acknowledgment that there is a lack of evidence-based information to guide policy development in leadership development in early childhood (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2013), and that there is a

need for qualified leaders at every level to ensure clarity of mission, reduce ambiguity and address regional issues of preparation and compensation equity (Ramgopal, et al., 2009).

Through consistent policy, the disparities highlighted by Colmer, Waniganayake and Field (2014) can be addressed, leading to better quality programs. Public preschool programs are currently serving children at risk due to economic and social issues, and current policy research has revealed disparity in preschool delivery quality, further highlighting the need for quality programs on children at risk (Barnett, 2010; Elmore, 2002; Kagan, 2009; NAEYC 2011).

Consistent application on policy will move the field toward consistent and predictable outcomes.

The second theme is the acknowledgment that preschool is not a natural fit in the K-12 environment, but its isolation as a separate program takes it out of the policy-making arena (Woodrow & Busch, 2008). This isolation may be the root cause of the lack of research in how leaders foster professional development in early childhood teachers and as a result, new learning is not embedded in practice and the pace of practice changes is overwhelming to teachers (Colmer, et al., 2014). Because early childhood educators are often perceived as caregivers (Wise, & Wright, 2014) they are not afforded testimonial sensitivity as described by Fricker (2003) when compared to other K-12 educators.

Finally, the literature reveals a constellation of issues related to feminism. Simply stated, our culture casts women in the role of nurturers rather than leaders or controllers, and women tend to accept this role. This acceptance creates a tendency for professionals to focus on practice instead of management (Krieg & Davis, 2014; Wise, & Wright, 2014; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). These issues reinforce the isolation mentioned above and cause early childhood programs to become exclusively consumers of research without producing new knowledge to inform the field (Wise, & Wright, 2014).

In the current educational climate, early childhood education has been held up as an ideal that can help to mitigate some of experiential deficits that appear to start kindergarten students off on their school experience on unequal footing. To date, the literature has not adequately addressed the role school leaders' play in helping to meet the potential of early childhood programs. One particular area that has not been explored is the role school leaders' play as community builders and establishing and building trusting relationships with parents and the community and how this role may serve to either replicate or diminish hegemonic patterns that tend to limit perceptions of minority students' epistemic credibility.

Leadership and Parents/Communities

Service to a population that is subject to marginalization and exclusion from the larger community necessitates specific culturally appropriate outreach (Auerbach, 2009). It requires that leaders build relationships with families based on trust, provide advocacy, and teach parents to self-advocate to ameliorate the effects of social and cultural biases that may replicate hegemonic patterns and promote epistemic racism (Ramgopal, et al., 2009). These efforts may be beyond the expertise of K-12 leaders who administer preschool programs, who find themselves at a training disadvantage due to the combined effects of the poor fit of Pre-K in the K-12 setting and their lack of specialized training (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2013; Ramgopal, et al., 2009).

In order for leaders to function in these roles, they must understand and practice the foundational activities needed establish trusting relationships with parents. In ordinary circumstances, leaders are afforded a modicum of trust based on their positions, and this token may be used as transactional currency in the earliest relationship building efforts (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, Lea, 2006). It is important that leaders continue to display qualities associated with trust in all of their interactions with parents in order to progress beyond the positional trust

conferred by families in order to be viewed as truly trustworthy. The leader is obliged to continuously work for the welfare of students and families, share information, tell the truth, keep obligations and promises and show the ability to perform the actions of his or her position (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Fricker (2003) and Lea (2006) also posit markers of epistemic justice and collaboration required to be in continuous use in communication and relationship building between providers and consumers. The process of relationship building may be complicated by unique factors in the lives of parents from marginalized groups. It follows the same progression described above, but progress will likely be slower and obstacles more pronounced than with more privileged populations. Families from communities of poverty often have past negative experiences with professionals and institutions and therefore regard education leaders with caution if not suspicion (Lea, 2006). They also encounter both psychological and structural barriers to actually meeting with leaders, reducing their opportunities for relationship development. These often operate in tandem with cultural barriers and may include simply addressed issues like transportation and scheduling, but may extend far into the cultural milieu when families discourage contact. The cultural issues are compounded when influenced by fear, discomfort, and lack of knowledge and experience (Leurer, 2011). Overcoming structural barriers may require planning and creativity. Overcoming the cultural issues requires that professionals develop deep knowledge and true understanding of the cultural issues at play.

Epistemic Justice and Rhetorical Space

Because educational leadership as a field has historically viewed education as a system of management rather than one of learning, it is likely to view students as the product of itself and ignored the capacity and need for students to become active agents in their own learning. Perhaps still mired in the factory school concept of the nineteenth century or in a newer business model,

it is drawn to the promise of efficiency and greater productivity. School leaders have often engaged in a misguided pursuit of structural and managerial solutions to the ecologically and cognitively complex challenges of education. This while the learning sciences literature clearly point to the conception of the student as an active and deliberate agent in his or her own learning (Alexander & Murphy, Lambert, McCombs, 1998; Vosoïadou, 2003; Lucariello, et al., 2015). As a result, there are debilitating disconnects between what learning sciences researchers have discovered and the field of educational leadership. I argue that this has important implications for social justice, particularly the concept of epistemic justice (Fricker, 2003). Epistemic justice is concerned with the “conferral of credibility upon knowledge claimants” and emphasizes that credibility is achieved by one’s active participation and acceptance in one’s epistemic community (McConkey, 2004, p.198). This is critical to equity and social justice because knowledge has material, economic, social, political, civic and symbolic value, and the perceived credibility of a given knower shapes their access to and use of these knowledge resources. Importantly, the learning sciences research highlights that knowledge is constructed through the learner’s deliberate and active behaviors in a reciprocal interaction between their propensities as a learner, their prior knowledge and schema and the social and educational context (Alexander, Schallert and Reynolds 2009; Bandura, 1978). In this way a socially just outlook on learning isn’t merely that all people should have access to existing standards of knowledge, but invited to become members of the community of knowers who actively engage in constructing, co-constructing and reconstructing knowledge in new and innovative ways. Members of a community of knowers are valued for their pluralistic and dynamic outlooks rather than pressured to passively conform to existing canons of knowledge.

This view of education is unlikely to be an experience of the families of children entering

public preschool programs. Instead, they come from marginalized communities and their families do not represent the community's dominant group or hold the power to determine credibility of knowledge claims, (McConkey, 2004). Their minority status makes them outsiders to the group of knowers within the school community and this epistemic injustice devalues them and their knowledge. They are not allowed to share their knowledge because it may represent alternative views, experiences and ways of knowing, (McConkey, 2004). This type of epistemic injustice can be deliberate as in the stereotyping of individuals or communities based on race, gender, sexual orientation or socioeconomic class, but within the educational system is often the result of unconscious acts of well-meaning individuals who are adhering to the status quo (McConkey, 2004). In addition to biases based on race and other factors, persons from marginalized groups may be further isolated based on age. This bias may affect very young parents still viewed by educators as childlike or students whose epistemic abilities differ at various developmental stages, and could also apply to students with disabilities (Carel & Gyorffy, 2014). Because the dominant group by will or by omission silences members of marginalized groups, their viewpoints are never communicated effectively and the dominant group cannot begin to understand their perspectives or grant them membership in the community of knowers.

The foregoing issues have resulted in the formation of a fractured system that is unable to respond to the needs of the families of children served in early childhood settings (Wise & Wright, 2012; Goncu, Main, Perone, Tozer, et al, 2010; Auerbach, 2009). Specifically, developing greater understandings of the following leadership implications for early childhood education are critical to meeting their potential:

- School leaders may serve as instructional guides/supporters to support the entry of young

children and their parents into the educational system. Early childhood educational experience is related to later school and life success, so its importance cannot be overstated (Goncu, Main, Perone, Tozer, et al, 2010);

- School leaders can be community builders and establishing/building trusting relationships with parents and community members to ensure that they are able to fully access the education community and the larger community in which they live. While this type of leadership is critical to the growth of professionalism and legitimacy to the field of early childhood education, numerous issues such as the rise of mandated curricula and traditional roles of women in education inhibit the emergence of effective leadership (Mills, Taylor & Schuiringa, 2012; Woodrow & Busch, 2008);
- Quality early childhood education has clear social justice implications, particularly in the replication of hegemonic patterns. As Anderson (2012) points out, “Theories of justice often take as their object of assessment either interpersonal transactions (specific exchanges between persons) or particular institutions.
- Similarly, as Anderson (2012) suggests, while individual relationships shape access to rhetorical spaces and epistemic justice we also need to consider the role social systems (such as schools) play in shaping the epistemic climate

I identified three major problems in this review of literature. First there is a remarkable lack of research in early childhood education. The newness of public preschool offers an incomplete explanation for the lack of research. According to it Wise and Wright (2012) and Woodrow and Busch (2008), issues relates to feminism limit the participation of early childhood professionals in the production of research. Female practitioners and leaders are cast as nurtures. The often accept the stereotype and remain in practitioner roles and consumers of research rather than

producers of new knowledge.

Second, the purpose and mission of preschool differs from the K-12 system in that rather than teaching academic skills as in K-12, early childhood educators are hoping to overcome cognitive and affective disparities through exposure, experience, and exploration (Assel, et al., 2006). The preschool leader is also the advocate for the child and the family facilitating their entry to the school system and helping to enhance their access to educational opportunities and the larger community. To achieve this goal, leaders must form relationships with families (Leurer, 2013). In these earliest days of public preschool programs, children “at risk” are targeted for services. Income, parental age and educational completion and deployed military status are all criteria for admission, and relationship formation with families from these marginalized communities necessitates culturally sensitive and appropriate outreach (Auerbach, 2009).

Finally, the formation of real relationships in the preschool context is dependent on an interweaving of epistemic justice, trust, and collaboration. In developing my triadic model, I synthesized Fricker’s (2003) markers of epistemic justice, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran’s (1999) Five Facets of Trust and Lea’s (2006) markers of collaboration. The resulting assimilates the cross cutting themes of the three frameworks and results in the use of the three markers of testimonial sensitivity, trust and respect. The synthesis that resulted in a new framework is described below:



Figure 2.1. *Triadic Model*

CHAPTER 3

Research and Design and Methodology

Using Fricker's (1998, 2013) theory of epistemic justice and testimonial injustice, this study explored the experiences of parents of young children regarding their perceptions and experiences with the leadership of their children's early childhood education programs.

Triangulation is a method used to establish validity in qualitative research (Creswell and Miller, 2000). I went beyond triangulation to employ a triadic approach to data analysis by synthesizing the three separate frameworks of Fricker (2003), Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Lea (2006) to create a holistic lens for data analysis. Fricker's position in the literature is philosophical while the work of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran is rooted in educational practice. Lea conducted her research in the human service delivery field, with a subject population that closely resembled the population in the current study in socio-economic status and in relationships with practitioners. Lea's work was instrumental in the completion of the triad because it provided an element of population-specific authenticity. I used this triadic lens to consider how individual and social interactions with leaders shape parents' epistemic agency and their families' access to rhetorical spaces that recognize parents and their children as credible knowers.

A challenge to the trustworthiness of this study lies in the biases that I carried into the data collection and analysis phases. First, I am a teacher in the division where the study took place. Further, I have served as a preschool special educator. Both my current and past roles in the division give me knowledge and experiences relevant to the study. For instance, I am aware of the location of certain programs and the procedures in place governing many services. I have also gained firsthand knowledge of some educators' negative reactions and negative treatment of families from marginalized communities. This experience predisposed me to the notion that

participants might report experiences that undermine epistemic justice. My safeguard against this bias was to carefully craft my questions and probes in a neutral way and to conduct the interviews in keeping with the predetermined format. Additionally, knowing that my status gave me an informational advantage, I disclosed my present and past roles to participants. I avoided intervening directly in any situation described by participants, but did refer a participant to a specific individual in the Division's Department of Special Education.

This study considered how individual and social interactions with leaders shape parents' epistemic agency and their families' access to rhetorical spaces that recognize parents and their children as credible knowers. As mentioned in the literature review of this document, individuals can be denied a platform for expressing their ideas and knowledge through design or omission, but in either case their expressions remain unheard (Fricker, 1998, 2003, 2013). This study examined whether parents experience interactions that enhance or undermine their ability to participate and share epistemic resources within a given epistemic community. Only when both leaders and parents recognize the equality of families and professionals in the educational context can parents experience epistemic justice. Finally, the study considered whether these interactions allow families to participate in knowledge production and revision of those same resources.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

This study used qualitative research methods consistent with modified grounded theory to examine the experiences of parents of children enrolled in preschool programs and their perceptions of the leadership of their children's education programs. Because the issue under investigation is not well understood and there are no established means of measuring it, the inductive nature of qualitative research is well suited to the purpose of the research and the

research questions. Inductive inquiry begins with general observations and systematically looks for themes, patterns and commonalities that provide insights about the issue making it the most appropriate method for these purposes (Gioia, Corely & Hamilton, 2012). Moreover, this work rejects the positivist, non-positivist research methods dichotomy, what Howe (2009) describes as the “fact/value dichotomy”. Instead this work considers research paradigms on a continuum of deductive and inductive reasoning perspectives (Onwuegbuzie, 2002) fostering an inductive approach to better understand a largely unexplored topic within its larger context. Perhaps more importantly, qualitative research is well positioned to address social justice issues because it fosters sensitivity, flexibility, and creativity to help make sense of complex sociocultural situations and develop new theories from examination of its data (Mayan & Daum cited in Denzin & Giardina, 2014). To these ends Denzin and Lincoln (2011) assert that “qualitative researchers are called upon to make their work relevant” to pursue social justice agendas, to advocate for human rights and to honor the “core values of human dignity” (ICQI, 2011). Similarly, Charmaz (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) emphasize that because social justice research provokes controversy and disagreements, it requires clear boundaries and makes the parameters of the research transparent to the reader which will better allow readers to make connections between theoretical grounding, the evidence and the conclusions drawn. Furthermore, “grounded theory tools for studying action – collective as well as individual action – can make social justice analysis more precise and predictive” (Charmaz, 2008 p.209).

Also critical, and indicative of the value of qualitative research, is this study’s situation within an epistemic frame. As Fine, Weis, Wessen and Wong (2000) emphasize, the positivist assumptions dominant in the field can reify the hegemonic assumptions that school leaders “cause” improvement in schools and student learning. In this way the epistemic authority of

school leaders cannot be assumed as this, by its very nature, may undermine the epistemic agency and parents and their families' and limits access to rhetorical spaces that recognize these families' credible knowers. To these ends, both the concept and process of modified grounded theory (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is well suited for social justice focused research of this nature, particularly because it can foster sensitivity, flexibility and creativity in making sense of complex sociocultural situations (Mayan & Daum cited in Denzin & Giardina, 2014) that might be overlooked by ignoring the dominant positivist assumptions. As Charmaz (2008) emphasizes, grounded theory requires that the researcher defines contextual and ecological factors of the research setting, which aids in the researchers sensitivity to social justice issues and their ability to identify the potential previously unidentified latent social justice processes. In my use of modified grounded theory, I used the approach described above.

Research Design

This study drew from the grounded theory tradition and modified that tradition, allowing me to map the way parents experienced their relationships with school leaders and how these relationships shaped their access to epistemic resources. It explored and analyzed epistemic racism in relationships between parents from historically marginalized groups and their children's preschool administrators. Its examination of these issues is through the lenses of epistemic and testimonial injustice and the role of trust in relationship formation. Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) provides a rigorous qualitative process that allows the researcher to generate a conceptual model or theory that is "grounded" in the data. In this study, in-depth qualitative interviews explored the experiences of approximately twenty low-income parents, or parents whose children otherwise met eligibility criteria for the local Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) program. All of the children were enrolled, in the process of enrolling,

or had been found eligible for enrollment in early childhood education programs. Modified grounded theory methods were used to build a model that identified the latent epistemic space parents occupy as shaped by their relationships with their children's school and its leadership. The study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews such as the modified grounded theory used in this study informed by phenomenological traditions, as well as unobtrusive observations of parent-leader interactions.

I recognized that there is a possibility of selection bias in my study. The individuals who responded to my invitation to participate may have had particular experiences in the preschool context that were not typical of the experiences of the entire population. In this regard, Shenton (2004) says, "To allow transferability, they provide sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork for the reader to be able to decide whether the environment is similar to another situation in which he or she is familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting." (Shenton, 2004, p. 63). Further affecting transferability is that the population under study was made up of public school students. The public schools in Virginia are providing services to children it defines "at risk" and has attached income tests to admission to most of the students it approves for enrollment. Children from more affluent homes who are enrolled in preschool are receiving those services in private settings. The results of this study are unlikely to transfer to private settings.

Data derived from the interviews were coded using a synthesis of three different frameworks. The primary, or anchor framework was Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice. The second was Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust, and the third was Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration. The elements of the three frameworks were analyzed and synthesized to derive a new framework for coding. The chart below shows the comparison

of the elements of the three frameworks.

Table 3.1

Comparison of Fricker (2003, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Lea (2006)

Fricker	Hoy & Tschannen-Moran	Lea
Avoiding intellectualism	Competence, honesty	Mean What You Say Respect: Just a Little
Responsible hearer	Benevolence	Walk a Mile in My Shoes
Testimonial Sensitivity	Openness	Respect: Just a Little
Accurate assignment of credit	Competence	Competence Fight the Power

The overlapping elements of the three frameworks were collapsed into three Broad categories ultimately used in coding participants' statements. These are Testimonial Sensitivity, Trust, and Respect. My inquiry was guided by qualitative research, which invited me to explore and identify multiple traditions through an iterative process. It also allowed me to include the work of a third researcher. I was led to the work of Davenia Lea (2006) through this discovery process. My reading of Lea led to an understanding of the importance of the role of respect in understanding data. This process of exploration led me away from a pure *a priori* approach in coding my data and toward the use of a modified/hybrid analytical lens. Pure *a priori* would have caused me to discard anything outside of the tradition and I would have lost some of the testimony offered by participants. Instead, I allowed modified grounded and *a priori* approaches to shape each other, and the voices of the study's participants. The result is that I included Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration and thereby achieved a more powerful approach in unearthing the voices of the participants. The figure below illustrates the fusion of the works of Fricker (2003), Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Lea (2006):



Figure 3.1. Synthesis of works of Fricker (2003), Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Lea (2006).

Research Foci

Problem Statement

The public preschool system serves a population made up of children from communities of poverty and other “at-risk” or marginalized communities (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). The parents of many (if not most) have experienced negative interactions with institutions and institutional leadership (Lea, 2006). The preschool leaders in place generally lack specialized training in administration of preschool programs and lack much if not all training and expertise in working with people from marginalized groups or groups that do not represent the community's dominant culture (Leurer, 2011). The opportunities afforded by preschool are many. Participation offers students the chance of entering kindergarten on equal footing with their peers who do not face the challenges of poverty or marginalization (Hulme, Goetz, Gooch, Adams & Snowling, 2007; Camilli et al., 2010; Fuller et al., 2010; Mashburn,

2008).

This research examined how parents' individual and social interactions shape their epistemic agency and their families' access to rhetorical spaces that recognize them and their children as credible knowers. It asked if parents' experiences and interactions enhance or undermine their ability to participate in a given epistemic community and to share epistemic resources that allow their families to participate in knowledge production and revision of those same resources.

Population Currently Served

One of the key features of early childhood education is its potential to help students from lower socioeconomic homes enter Kindergarten on level footing with their more advantaged peers (Head Start Impact Study, Final Report, 2010). However, in the absence of clear understandings of the unique roles of school leaders within early childhood education programs, the potential of these programs may be negatively impacted (Colmer, et al., 2014). Specifically, developing greater understandings of leadership implications for early childhood education are critical to meeting their potential. These issues are exacerbated by the service being rolled out in stages. In Virginia, children "at risk" are the first served in a program that is envisioned by localities as one that will eventually serve all children. The defining term – "at risk" – includes students with family income at or below 200 percent of poverty, those who experience homelessness, students whose parents or guardians are school dropouts, or family income is less than 350 percent of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities. Further, the 2016 Appropriation Act enacted in the 2016 General Assembly Session included a budget language provision allowing "up to 15 percent of a division's [Virginia Preschool Initiative] slots may be filled based on locally established criteria "so as to meet the

unique needs of at-risk children in the community that could have a negative impact on their ability to learn” (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). In the locality under study, the locally determined criteria call for inclusion of children of deployed military members and children of parents below the age of 21 (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). The inclusion of military families makes sense given that the region is home to one of the largest concentrations of military bases in the United States and that almost 6% of the adult population are active members of the military, with each military family contributing an average of 1.4 children to the student population in the region (Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, 2016). This particular sub-population is included due to its experience with certain family stressors related to deployment separation as well as other characteristics of military parents such as extreme youth, limited education and parenting skills, distance from family, and lack of personal infrastructure (Beardslee, et al, 2011). The second group identified locally - parents under the age of 21 – are vulnerable to exposure to stressful life events such as poverty and low levels of maternal education (Carothers, Borkowski & Whitman, 2006). By selecting these groups for inclusion in the first wave of preschool services, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has created a student body that is composed almost exclusively of students from marginalized communities (Virginia Department of Education, 2016).

While the district is in a locality accurately described as “suburban”, the demographics and character of the schools are closely akin to those found in urban districts. The community is majority-minority with Caucasian residents comprising less than 50% of total residents. The racial composition of the schools is predominantly African American, comprising more than half of the total students enrolled, followed by Caucasian students at approximately 25% and other minorities (Hispanic, Asian, Native American and others) making up the remainder.

Demographic data also reveal that almost half of students' families are low income (Virginia Department of Education, 2016).

The participants in this study were 45% African American, 20% Caucasian and 20% Hispanic (one individual required a translator). There was one male participant and nineteen female participants. Of the female participants, two were the spouses of a deployed military member, one was the custodial grandmother of a child whose father was a deployed member of the military and one was the parent of twins deemed "at risk" due to their low birth weight. Nine of the female respondents were single parents. The male respondent was also single. Most of the participants lived in single-family homes. Their neighborhoods ranged from low-income to middle-class. Most lived in working-to-middle class neighborhoods.

Data Collection

The Potential participants were contacted by letter about the study and invited to participate (See Appendix A). An incentive was offered to all respondents. (The incentive was a \$20.00 gift card to a local grocery store. One participant acted as translator for another, and I gave her an additional gift card.) They were all parents of children enrolled, in the process of enrolling or approved for enrollment in public preschool programs in a suburban school district in southeastern Virginia. In order to protect their privacy, I provided letters in postage-paid sealed envelopes to the Division's Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation. Employees of that office labeled and mailed the letters. An attempt was made to contact all families of enrolled students and students approved for enrollment, but twenty-seven of the six hundred sixty-eight letters were returned, marked undeliverable. Three successive mailings were carried out between April and June of 2017. Respondents could call, email or text in response to the letters, and twenty-three parents responded. Two did not keep their appointments for interviews and were

not responsive to follow-up. One respondent was the step-grandfather of a preschool student and had no direct contact with the preschool program, so his interview was not included. (He was given an incentive in consideration of his time given for the interview.)

When participants made contact with me, their meetings were scheduled as quickly as convenient for both parties. Meetings were held in participants' homes, in restaurants, at the researcher's and participants' workplace. All participants signed research agreements in advance of any data collection and were advised verbally and in writing that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants' self-assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality, and these pseudonyms were used in transcriptions and in writing about the interviews. Individual interviews were recorded and transcribed, and internal validity was protected through member sharing, so a transcript of interviews was given to each participant within one week of the interview. Data from unobtrusive observations were collected via field notes of observations made in real time for later transcription (See Appendices F and G).

All respondents were parents of children enrolled, in the process of enrolling or approved for enrollment in the VPI program operated by the school district. They therefore are members of marginalized groups as included in the local at-risk criteria for preschool (i.e. family income at or below 200 percent of poverty, homelessness, student's parents or guardians are school dropouts, or family income is less than 350 percent of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities.) Local criteria include extreme parental youth, meaning parents are under 21 years of age and children of families in which at least one parent is a deployed military member.

Interview Procedures

Participants were read an introduction that provided the following information:

- An explanation of the purpose of the research;
- Offered a written description;
- Informed them that as volunteers they were free to withdraw from the research at any point;
- Informed them that they would receive a written transcript of their interviews;
- Asked for clarification of the contents of the transcript within one week of receipt;
- Informed them that their privacy would be protected;
- Asked that they choose a pseudonym for my use in the interview, the transcript and future writings;
- Informed them of an incentive;
- Secured informed consent.

Following the introduction, I asked a series of pre-determined open-ended questions about parents' experiences in the preschool program, gradually narrowing the focus to interactions with the programs' leaders (See Appendix A). I did offer probes when parents' responses were monosyllabic, very brief or indicated that they might have additional comments pertinent to the topic or earlier comments. There were seven questions in all, with the final questions simply asking if there were any other statements the participant wished to share. I transcribed all interviews and mailed them to participants within ten days of the interview. Two participants contacted me to confirm the accuracy of the transcript. None contacted me to clarify, revise or refute any portion of their transcripts.

Unobtrusive Observation

On August 15, 2017, I attended an orientation meeting for parents of students enrolled in the preschool center conducted by the site principal. This individual also serves as the

administrator of the District's VPI program. The central site serves approximately 200 students including 16 who are served in self-contained special education classes, which are not part of the VPI program. There are four satellite sites serving approximately 475 additional VPI students. In the additional sites the individual teachers conduct orientation. Orientation is a requirement of the VPI program is mandatory prior to students' admission to a preschool class

Data Analysis

In grounded theory, and in the modified approach used in this study, data analysis revolves around model building, which takes place through iterations of coding and identification of themes and patterns, inductively deriving theory from concepts and categories that emerge from the data. I used modified grounded theory methods to deductively tested through member checking with participants and by theoretically sampling new cases seeking to verify or falsify the emergent theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998). This iterative process of inductive-deductive reasoning can be repeated and sampling continued, until theoretical redundancy is achieved. The quality of participants' experiences and interactions with leaders can easily be determined by use of this method. Data display will include responses categorized by type with comparisons to trust criteria as described by Tschannen-Moran and others (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Lea, 2006; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran. 1999).

Twenty parents (including one custodial grandparent) public preschool students were interviewed between April 20, 2017 and July 23, 2017. There were 23 respondents, but two were not available for interviews and did not respond to follow-up for rescheduling. One of the respondents was a non-custodial step-grandparent with no school contact. His interview was not transcribed or included in the data, although I did provide him with an incentive in recognition of his willingness to participate. Data from participants' interviews were analyzed through repeated

readings of transcripts of semi-structured interviews and was conducted in four stages. First, broad themes from all interviews were stated and an initial impression from the interviews was assigned to each theme. Next, comments within each category were counted and respondents' statements were attached to each category. Similar categories were collapsed into a reduction from an original count of twenty-one to thirteen themes. These themes were then placed in rank order in terms of frequency from the interviews to determine predominance among superordinate themes. As a final step, the themes were again collapsed – this time into three large categories and one small category. These were Communication and Relationships, Access, Input, Sense of Credibility and Participation, and Meeting Children's Needs. The final and smallest category only contained three subcategories, but reflected comments from all parents who received any special education services. The services their children received ranged from 100% self-contained settings to inclusion in the general education setting to the receipt of only one related service like speech therapy. Without exception, these parents experienced remarkable barriers to access. While their experiences were not universal, they raise an important issue of access.

The data for this study were coded in a process informed by and reliant on three separate frameworks. They include Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust and Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration. These frameworks all offer a lens for the viewing of relationships between individuals – especially individuals who occupy different positions in the hierarchical environment of education. Their synthesis into a single framework offered a dynamic means of coding and understanding the data.

Fricker's (2003) focus is on social justice and the ways in which disparate positions in social hierarchies can be leveled, and are easily applied to research in many settings. The first

marker is the avoidance of intellectualism in communication, which requires the speaker to be both competent and honest. The second marker requires leaders to act as responsible hearers, meaning that they have arrived at understanding through sensitivity to the reasons for and against the knowledge offered by others. The third marker, showing testimonial sensitivity, means that leaders' responses to the testimony of others are learned and internalized through a process of epistemic socialization. Finally, responsibly assigning credibility means that leaders must be careful to neither under nor over credit the words of others.

The second framework was Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's Five Facets of Trust (1999). The facets are benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness. Benevolence requires that the leader act in the best interest of others. Reliability requires that the leader be true to his or her word. Competence demands that the leader possesses the ability to accomplish that which is promised. Honesty demands truthfulness and Openness accomplishes the free flow of communication from the leader and implies that the leader is operating in "good faith" without ulterior motives. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) focus on trust as the foundation of all productive relationships, and the Five Facets are easily applied in educational settings and to relationships between leaders and families.

Finally, Lea (2006) conducted research on the communication between adolescent mothers and their service providers. All of the subjects in her study were from marginalized communities and experienced epistemic injustice in their relationships with their service providers who generally represented the dominant culture. Lea's Markers are: Respect: Just a Little which asks for mutual regard in relationships between providers and consumers of services; Walk a Mile in My Shoes which applies to the need for service providers to seek understanding of consumers and their experiences; Mean What you Say which refers to trust

between provider and consumer and the consumer's appraisal of the provider's honesty; Fight the Power refers to the powerlessness of the consumers in Lea's study that was evident in their lives and in their interactions with the service providers. In applying these markers to the analysis of the interactions between consumers and providers, Lea illustrated the status disparity and the communication disconnects between the two groups. The mothers were all from historically marginalized communities and the service providers were often from the dominant culture. Though the providers were well meaning, the social and cultural disconnects between them and the consumers in the study presented many challenges to smooth communication and collaboration.

In establishing a procedure for coding the data, I used Fricker's markers of epistemic justice (2003) as the anchor or primary framework for analysis. Parallels between these markers and those of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Lea (2006) reveal the repetitive and overlapping themes found in the data. The three frameworks approach communication, relationships and social justice from distinct positions, and their synthesis is revealing of the study's data trends. Finally, the three frameworks were synthesized into a new lens through which data maybe viewed and analyzed.

Trustworthiness Strategies

Trustworthiness refers to the study's validity and the degree to which it accurately reflects participants' statements (Hunt, 2011). One of the criteria I used to establish trustworthiness was confirmability. Confirmability establishes the data faithfully represents participants' intent (Hays & Singh, 2112). I sought confirmability through member checking. This process is key to maintaining the validity of the research findings as it includes confirming the accuracy of transcripts with participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). Member checking of this

research took place in two steps. First, all participants were provided transcripts of their own interviews to ensure that their responses were accurately recorded. In the second step, participants were asked to clarify any portions of the transcripts that they believed to be inaccurate. The purpose of step two was to ensure that the trends accurately reflected participants' experiences. All respondents either tacitly accepted the content of their interviews or directly stated that the content was satisfactory. I recorded and retained comments that contradicted the dominant themes as a means of employing negative case analysis for disconfirming the dominant themes (Creswell, 2012, 2013). I discuss and present the negative testimony in my findings as a way of honoring the experiences of all of the study's participants and providing disconfirming evidence.

Creswell and Miller (2000) speak to triangulation as a means of establishing validity in qualitative research. Triangulation involves the investigator seeking convergence from different sources to form themes. The researcher sorts data by eliminating overlapping or repetitive areas and may gather data from multiple sources like interviews, observations, and document review. My study goes a step beyond triangulation with synthesis of frameworks and uses a triadic approach to data analysis. As stated above, I employed the validity procedures put forth by Creswell and Miller (2000) and the synthesis of the three separate frameworks of Fricker (2003), Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Lea (2006) to create a holistic lens through which data may be viewed. I believe that my approach, resulting from this synthesis, has resulted in a new lens for coding and understanding qualitative data. Of particular note is that my exploration of the literature resulted in the discovery of Lea's (2006) study. This work spoke to me because of its structure as a tool for relationship analysis and because of the analogous nature of my study's population and Lea's. Lea was working with adolescent mothers of children with developmental

disabilities. Her purpose was to study collaboration between the mothers and their service providers. She was informed by Coll's (1993) cultural variant perspective, which seeks to preserve diversity by promoting culturally sensitive practices. Her study included six mothers all of whom with only one exception were racially and/or culturally different from the dominant culture. All of them were from marginalized communities. Like the parents in my study, these young women, in the course of receiving services, faced a corps of providers whose experiences and cultural identities were unlike their own. The system of service delivery described by Lea was, like the educational system, was large and often confusing to outsiders – especially outsiders with experiential and cultural/linguistic barriers.

Fricker's framework (2003) and the work of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) both lend themselves to applications in the educational setting. Indeed, most of Tschannen-Moran's work focuses specifically on the educational setting (Tschannen-Moran, 2015). Lea's work compliments and makes even more relevant the works of these authors because of the population it studies and because of the approach.

CHAPTER 4

Research Findings

This qualitative study examined the interactions between parents of public preschool students and the leaders of their children's schools. It considered how their interactions shaped their epistemic agency and their families' access to rhetorical spaces that might allow them to participate in their children's educations and be recognized as credible contributors. The research was guided by one research focus: How do parents' experiences and interactions with school leaders enhance or undermine their ability to participate in a given epistemic community and share epistemic resources that allow them to participate in knowledge production and revision of those same resources? Two sub-questions supported this inquiry:

1. What was the nature of communication with parents initiated by the leader?
2. What was the nature (if any) of the relationship between parents and the leader?

In analyzing the interview data, I initially identified 21 themes, and through successive iterations, reduced the number to thirteen. I ultimately reduced the number to three through successive reviews. I analyzed the interview data using the themes *Communication and Relationships, Access, Input, Sense of Credibility and Participation* and *Meeting Children's Needs*. I employed a dual approach of using the framework to guide my analysis while also using a modification of grounded theory approaches that allow the voices to speak for themselves.

My research was guided by the basic premise of qualitative inquiry – exploration. Qualitative research itself invited me to explore and identify multiple qualitative traditions that drove the iterative process of data analysis and ultimately led to my discovery of the work of Lea (2006). Lea was not an educator and conducted her research in human service delivery. However, her subject population of adolescent mothers they shared many characteristics with the

participants in the current study, both demographically and in their positions in the social strata relative to their providers. From Lea, I discovered the importance of respect of participants; not only in direct contact, but also in the way data are analyzed. Her work led me to the work of Creswell and Miller (2000), which speaks to disconfirming evidence as a means of establishing validity *and* preserving the words of dissenting voices. Lea's work also referenced the work of Coll (1993) whose cultural variant perspective seeks to preserve diversity by promoting culturally sensitive practices in data collection. This exploration led me away from pure a priori analysis to a modified/hybrid analytical lens. Modified grounded theory and a priori shaped each other, and the voices of participants caused me to include Lea's work. Had I maintained a pure a priori approach, I would have had to discard anything outside of the pure a priori tradition, including the rich data and some of the testimony of the people who volunteered to take part in my study.

As a result of my exploration of the literature and the different research traditions, I developed a hybrid approach that blends modifications of grounded theory traditions with a literature-based framework that guided my analysis. The frameworks are Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice that include avoiding intellectualism, becoming a responsible hearer of the words of others, testimonial sensitivity and accurately assigning levels of credit; Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust that include Benevolence, Reliability, Competence, Honesty and Openness; and Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration that include Respect: Just a Little, Walk a Mile in My Shoes, Mean What You Say, and Fight the Power. The serendipitous discovery of Lea's work was critical to the completion of the triad that led to my framework for analysis in its provision of a highly relevant third set of markers. I synthesized

the frameworks for commonalities and overlapping themes and developed a hybrid framework that I used in my data analysis.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I conducted an unobtrusive observation to help establish trustworthiness and also to secure disconfirming information. Unobtrusive observations do not require subjects to interact with researchers and therefore they are less likely to alter their behavior in any way. There therefore is an assumption that the threat of bias in research is reduced (Hayes & Singh, 2012). My observation was of a parent orientation meeting at the main preschool center by that site's leader. This leader is also the administrator of the Division's VPI program and has supervisory authority over all satellites. My impression from this meeting is that parents without deep knowledge of the educational system and of the local division are likely to remain uninformed following the parent orientation meeting. The hard facts of the meeting were emphasized and reinforced in writing at the conclusion of the meeting. The "softer" information was less obvious and parents' lack of thorough understandings may lead to misunderstandings later. For example, one parent complained about her child's delayed admission to the program. She was never informed (or never heard) that orientation is a state-mandated prerequisite to admission, so its imposition caused her to view the leader as rigid and arbitrary. (Her opinion of the leader as arbitrary was reinforced by later incidents, and other parents shared similar experiences.) The markers testimonial sensitivity and trust are applicable to this observation. The first because it seems that the leader's communication does not take into account parents' likely lack of experience with the system and the possibility of their misunderstanding the leader's words. I apply trust here because I was among the audience at this event and heard the comments of parents who felt that safeguards against the abuse of their children might be insufficient.

Participant Demographic Profiles

The participants in this study were parents of students currently enrolled, in the process of enrolling, or approved for enrollment in early childhood programs in a suburban school district in southeastern Virginia. In keeping with enrollment criteria set forth for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) program, participating families are those deemed “at risk” because they are from low-income communities or meet the local criteria including low parental age or military deployment of at least one parent (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). As stated in Chapter 3 of this document, 45% of the participants in this study were African American, 20% Caucasian, and 20% Hispanic (one individual required a translator). Nineteen of the twenty participants were female, and of the female participants, one was the spouse of a deployed military member, and one was the custodial grandparent of a child whose father was a deployed member of the military. One participant was the parent of twins deemed “at risk” due to their low birth weight. Eight of the female respondents were single parents. The male respondent was also single. All respondents were over the age of eighteen years by their own statements. All participants chose their own pseudonyms for use in transcription and in this document.

All participants responded to the research questions about teachers and leaders in their children’s schools. Most participants seemed very comfortable disclosing details about their communication and relationships and shared both positive and negative comments openly. Only two participants seemed reticent in offering any comments that might be construed as critical of the professionals controlling their children’s receipt of services, or the programs that they viewed in a positive light. In both of these cases, the participant described their relationships with the leaders as “good” but could not recall the leaders’ names. In another example, a participant who

was effusive in her praise of the leader, when probed about events at school disclosed that she had to “investigate” in order to learn about services and events because of communication issues.

Background Information on Participants

Angelique is an African American single mother of five children. She is in her 30’s and is from a family of low socioeconomic status and lived in a low-income neighborhood. She did not attend college or any other post-secondary training. Angelique indicated that educational leaders do not take her concerns and comments seriously.

Rose is an African American single mother of one. She is in her early thirties and is from a middle class family. She attended college and is very well spoken. Rose feels that the system is stretched and that educators in general do not communicate enough with parents. She had negligible contact with the leadership of her child’s school.

Roo is a Caucasian woman in her 50’s. She is the custodial grandparent of a child whose father is a deployed military member. Roo lives in a mixed-race working class neighborhood. She is very articulate and highly involved in her grandchild’s education. Roo has experienced negative interactions with school personnel and feels that the system can be rigid and difficult to navigate. She called upon the school leader for assistance and the situation was resolved.

Lauren is an African American, single mother of two children and is pregnant with her third. She lives in a working-class neighborhood. Lauren described an incident in which the leader of her child’s school acted in an inflexible manner and also caused her to feel embarrassed in a setting where her privacy was not protected.

June is a married Caucasian woman in her early thirties. She is college educated (master’s degree) and is employed as a teacher in the Division in which the study took place. June lives in a middle-class neighborhood and her child meets the eligibility criteria for

preschool because June's husband is a full-time student. Although June is one of the study's "insiders" she experienced nearly insurmountable obstacles in securing speech therapy for her otherwise typically developing child. June's knowledge of the system allowed her to circumvent it and secure services informally.

Elen is a married mother of four children in her early 30's. She is originally from El Salvador, but moved to Spain as a child and where she studied law as an adult. Elen lives in a rented townhouse in a lower middle-class area. Elen came to the United States when her oldest child was an infant. She later separated from the child's father and then met and married her current husband. Elen is very articulate in English, but said that she feels that no one is interested in listening to her insights regarding her child's behavior and education. She states that there is very little communication between the school's leader and parents. Elen believes that the leader perceives her as a threat and reports that the leader has secured a restraining order to bar her from entering the school.

Kay is an African American, single mother of two in her early 30's. She lives in an apartment in a lower middle-class area. Kay completed high school and is employed as a school custodian in the division in which the study was completed. While Kay is happy with the results of her child's preschool experience, she stated that she was not welcomed into the classroom.

Sue is a Caucasian, married mother of three children. She is college educated and is employed in the mental health field. She lives in a middle-to-upper middle-class neighborhood. Two of her children are enrolled in preschool because they are deemed to be at risk due to low birth weight (they are twins). Sue described the "front office" as cold and unfriendly and said that there is very little communication or contact between the leadership and parents.

Ashley is a Caucasian, married mother of one child. She is in her 30's and is college educated (master's degree). She is employed as a teacher in the division in which the study was conducted and lives in a middle-class neighborhood. Ashley's child meets the eligibility criteria for preschool because Ashley's husband is a full-time student. Ashley was formerly employed as a preschool teacher in her child's school and is a personal friend of the leader. She also formerly worked at the preschool center and witnessed rigid and arbitrary behavior in its leader.

Mildred is a Caucasian, married mother of two children. She is in her 30's and lives in a middle class neighborhood. Mildred's husband is a deployed member of the military, and his status qualifies his and Mildred's child for preschool services. Mildred is college educated (Master's degree) and is employed as an instructional assistant in her child's school. (She recently received her master's degree and was planning to seek employment as a teacher). Mildred is content with the academic progress her child has made, experiences no barriers to access and finds the leader to be open and supportive of her and her family.

Tiffany is an African American single mother of one child. She is in her 20's, has some college education and lives in a working-to-middle class neighborhood. Tiffany's child's eligibility for preschool is predicated on a need for speech therapy. Tiffany has had no contact with the school's leadership and does not participate in activities in the school. She is happy with the academic progress her child has made.

Dee is an African American, single woman in her 30's. She is the single mother of one child and completed high school. She is employed full time on the night shift so that she can be available to her child in the afternoons and evenings. Dee lives in a working-class neighborhood. Dee expressed satisfaction with the preschool program and all its employees.

She stated that she has a “good” relationship with the school’s leaders, although she could not recall their names.

Miss Gibbs is an African American, single woman in her 30’s. She has three children and lives in a working-class neighborhood. Miss Gibbs expressed great satisfaction with the preschool program, teachers and leaders. When probed, Miss Gibbs could not name the leaders and stated that she had to “do research” to learn about school activities because the communication link between parents and the school leadership was lacking.

Rio is an African American, single father of one child. Rio is in his 30’s. He has very little contact with the school because of his work hours. He is impressed with the academic progress his child has made and feels that the teachers and leaders would be more communicative if he had more time away from work.

Xander’s Mom is from Puerto Rico. She is very well educated (a master’s level registered nurse) and is articulate. She lives in an apartment in a lower-to-middle class area of the city. She is not familiar with the rights of students with disabilities under state and federal law. As a result of her lack of knowledge, Xander’s Mom was unable to secure services for her child. She encountered multiple barriers and received contradictory information.

Jenna is a Caucasian, married mother of two children. She is in her 30’s and is college educated. She lives in a working-class area and her child is eligible because he receives special education in an inclusion setting. Because of her child’s enrollment in both systems, Jenna is dealing with both the general and special education systems. Jenna encountered multiple barriers in both systems in getting her child enrolled in school. She also encountered rigid and arbitrary behavior from the leader.

Lily is a Caucasian, single mother of two children. She is originally from Spain and immigrated to the United States when she was a child. She is in her 30's and is college educated. Lily is employed in the mental health field and lives in a middle class neighborhood. Lily is articulate and very active in her child's education. She has experienced many barriers to access and has had negative interactions with the leader of her son's school. Lily reported that the school's leader officially barred her physical access to the school because of these interactions, although she reported that the frequency of her visits was cited as the reason for her being barred.

Aster is a married, biracial mother of two children. She is college educated and lives in a middle-class neighborhood. Aster's child met the eligibility criteria because he receives speech therapy. Aster's sister-in-law is a teacher in the division in which the study was conducted. She has been able to offer Aster information and advocacy in navigating the system. Nevertheless, Aster has encountered many barriers to her child's access and expressed great frustration.

Yarle is a married mother of five children. She is from Honduras and does not speak English. (One of the other respondents acted as translator for this interview). Yarle and her family live in a working-class neighborhood. Yarle is happy with the quality of the educational services her child has received, but requires a translator. Whenever she has attended meetings at the school, she has been promised translators in advance. When the meeting time arrives, Yarle has been notified that there is no translator. Her school-aged children speak English and the teachers are able to communicate with Yarle using Class Dojo (a phone and computer app) that includes an English – Spanish translation feature.

Table 4.2
Demographic Table

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/ethnicity	SES status	Child w/disability	ESL?	Military?
Angelique	30's	Female	African American	Lower	Yes	No	No
Rose	30's	Female	African American	Middle	Yes	No	No
Roo	50's	Female	Caucasian	Working	No	No	Yes
Lauren	20's	Female	African American	Working	No	No	No
June	30's	Female	Caucasian	Middle	Yes	No	No
Elen	30's	Female	Hispanic	Lower Middle	No	Yes	No
Kay	30's	Female	African American	Lower Middle	No	No	No
Sue	30's	Female	Caucasian	Middle/Upper Middle	No	No	No
Ashley	30's	Female	Caucasian	Middle	No	No	No
Mildred	30's	Female	Caucasian	Middle	No	No	Yes
Tiffany	30's	Female	African American	Working/Middle	Yes	No	No
Dee	30's	Female	African American	Working	No	No	No
Miss Gibbs	30's	Female	African American	Working	No	No	No
Rio	30's	Male	African American	Working	No	No	No
Xander's Mom	30's	Female	Hispanic	Lower/Middle	Yes	Yes	No
Jenna	30's	Female	Caucasian	Working	Yes	No	No
Lily	30's	Female	Hispanic	Middle	Yes	Yes	No
Aster	20's	Female	Biracial	Middle	No	No	No
Yarle	20's	Female	Hispanic	Working	No	Yes	No

Themes

Through multiple readings and repeated analysis of the transcripts, I identified three superordinate themes: *Communication and Relationships*, *Access, Input and Sense of Credibility and Participation* and *Meeting Children's Needs* (See Table 4.1). The analysis of the interview transcripts and field notes was based on an inductive approach geared to identifying patterns in the data by means of thematic codes. "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306). Further, the process facilitates the creation of new theories by steering researchers away from the scientific method traditionally used in research and thereby encouraging creativity (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2012).

Table 4.1 List of Themes and Subthemes

1. Communication and Relationships
 - 1.1 Poor Communication With Leader
 - 1.2 Poor Communication With Teacher
 - 1.3 Good Communication With Teacher
 - 1.4 Poor Relationship With Leader
 - 1.5 Good Relationship With Leader
 - 1.6 Good Communication With Leader
2. Access, Input, Sense of Credibility and Input
 - 2.1 Parent Able to Provide Input
 - 2.2 Parent Not able to Provide Input
 - 2.3 Parents Perceived as Threat to Leader

2.4 Leaders' Behavior Appears Rigid/Arbitrary

2.5 Parents Experience Marginalization

2.6 Insiders Use Connections

2.7 Parents Unwelcome in the School

2.8 Parents Welcome in the School

3. Meeting Children's Needs

3.1 Systematic Barriers to Access

3.2 Parents Experience Frustration

I used a modified grounded theory method in my study. "A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the circumstance it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Further, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) underpinned my study. In using this approach, my interpretation of events and situations involving participants provided the building blocks for theory construction. A constructivist-interpretive paradigm produces substantive-formal theory grounded in the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Substantive theory is developed for a substantive or an empirical area of inquiry; formal theory is developed for a formal or a conceptual area of inquiry.

I analyzed data using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) whereby line, sentence, and paragraph segments of the transcribed interviews and field notes were reviewed to decide what codes fit the concepts suggested by the data. The interview data were given more weight in the analysis than were the non-participant observation and the document reviews. Each code was constantly compared to

all other codes to identify similarities, differences, and general patterns. My dissertation contained a detailed description of the coding process.

In summary, data were reduced and analyzed by means of thematic codes and concepts in a three-level process. Themes gradually emerged as a result of the combined process of becoming intimate with the data, making logical associations with the interview questions, and considering what was learned during the initial review of the literature. At successive stages, themes moved from a low level of abstraction to become major, overarching themes rooted in the concrete evidence provided by the data. These emerging themes together with a substantive-formal theory of “development-focused collaboration” became the major findings of my study.

I organized my data using a table created in word. The table evolved over successive iterations of data analysis with the earliest version identifying over twenty themes and the final version narrowing to three. The resulting three became the superordinate themes in my data analysis. I also used the tables to track supporting comments from participants with frequencies. An example of this table is in my appendices (See Appendix F).

At the conclusion of my analysis, my impression was that the communication between the leader and participating parents was very poor, and issues of testimonial sensitivity and respect permeated these interactions. The quality of the communication included messages that reinforce parents’ feelings of marginalization, and in some cases the contentiousness of relationships was extraordinarily intense and is reflective of issues of trust and respect. Insiders were able to access services with relative ease, but one parent – a teacher – reported that even with her status as an insider, there existed numerous barriers requiring that she manipulate the system and use resources not available to others. Issues of trust and honesty are raised by parents’ inability to access services to which their children are entitled.

Superordinate Theme One: Communication and Relationships

The theme of Communication and Relationships contained the largest number of subordinate themes because it is the main focus of the research and because all participants offered multiple relevant comments. It includes descriptions of ordinary informal communication along with more formal interactions between participants and educators. For example, participants reported friendly communications with leaders that were limited to social greeting exchanged at arrival and dismissal. One report of positive communication with a leader was a description of a leader dropping in on a holiday celebration and having her picture taken with students. Some participants reported that they rarely heard from leaders and when they did it was through robo-calls. One parent reported that after a serious incident at her child's school, she received no communication from the leader for several days, and then it was through a letter placed in her child's identification pouch. (Preschool students wear an identification badge with a pouch when they ride the bus so that they and the adult at their homes may be identified.) Participants also described regular informal communication with general teachers via communication folders and frequent glimpses into the classroom with electronic applications. The teachers were also able to use the electronic methods to send home forms and notices. Their efforts contributed to the formation of relationships with parents and were in sharp contrast to the scant or absent communications from special education teachers and leaders.

Poor Communication with Leader. Most of the participants' comments regarding communication with leaders were negative and four are reports of contentious communications with leaders, who were said to have made comments like the following: "She said I was acting crazy...she even called the police on me! She sent me a letter not allowing me to go back on the

school property.” These comments reflect leaders’ lack of testimonial sensitivity and respect, two of the three markers of the triadic lens, and two of the elements of epistemic justice.

Several participants report “robo-calls” from schools, which they perceived negatively: “About once a month he does this robo-call thing...and we don’t get much communication from anybody.” Some participants were not sure which person should be called leader and state that teachers run the preschool: “I’ve never met the principal...” and “Was there a leader in the building?” or “Who is the leader?”

Many participants saw a need to contact the leader only if there is an issue requiring intervention by a person from outside of the preschool program. In this vein, one participant said of leaders, “It’s really up to the teacher to run the program, and it’s only if there is a big issue that you go to the principal.”

The subordinate theme shows disturbances between the leader and parents. See Figure 4.1 below.



Figure 4.1 *Poor Communication With Leader*

Poor Communication With Teacher. Communication with teachers was almost universally poor when students received special education services, even when in inclusive settings. Jenna said of her child’s special education teacher, “Our lead teacher...wasn’t the best

teacher and she didn't communicate clearly and she was often late with information" and "I could wait up to a week with no information and they were supposed to communicate daily."

In the case of one general education student, Yarle, who did not speak English, and only the ESL school secured translators for conferences. She said, "...the teacher would say 'I will find a translator' and the day before the conference she wouldn't have one." Rose, also the parent of a general education student, said that she heard very little from teachers, but would have preferred more. Her comment was, "[when the teacher communicates] it gives me an idea what to ask. I don't automatically know what is going on."

As in the discussion of relationships with the leader, these qualities of communication show a lack of respect and testimonial sensitivity on the part of educators because they completely discounted the value of parental input (and the parent's right) as a participant in matters related to her child's education. Failing to provide a translator effectively silenced the parent without physically preventing her from attending a meeting.

The subordinate theme shows disturbances in the communications between teachers and parents. See Figure 4.2 below.



Figure 4.2 *Poor Communication With Teacher*

Good Communication With Teacher. Parents of general education students were universal in their positive statements regarding communication with teachers. Mildred said of

communication, “The teacher is very open and if I have concerns I can call her or email her.” Another said, “It’s very, very good and the door is always open.” The high quality of communication with families is bolstered by a universal system in place that employs an interactive communication folder that travels with students from the classroom to their homes and back again to school. Participants loved these folders and Miss Gibbs proudly showed me her son’s folder with a calendar of completed home activities, saying, “Every day they send the folder home and you just look at it to see what’s going on. They send important paperwork and information about what’s going on in the school. Everything gets sent home in that folder”. Additionally, teachers use various electronic applications to maintain communication, sharing information daily. This application also facilitated the linguistic translation of messages for parents who do not speak English. The teachers’ efforts reflect respect and testimonial sensitivity, and clearly support epistemic justice. The subordinate theme shows the positive communication practices between parents and teachers. See Figure 4.3 below.



Figure 4.3 *Good Communication With Teacher*

Poor Relationship With Leader. Some parents report conflicts with leader resulting in the parent being barred from the building. (The leader wrote letters to Elen and Lily after incidents telling them that they were not allowed on school premises. Elen reported receiving a restraining order.) Other parents report the leader’s behavior as seeming so arbitrary that its purpose must have been to maintain the upper hand in an interaction and to maintain the parents

in a subordinate position in interactions with the leader. Jenna said: “You can say ‘Look, this paper is red. Do you see the color?’ And she will say it is blue...I don’t know how to explain”. In Lily’s case, the leader used a Lily’s number of visits to the school as the rationale for barring her from the building. Lily reported that she had earlier required the parent to come into the building to get her child for dismissal each day, a practice that resulted in a large number of school visits by the parent. She related, “...any time I go into the classroom, it has to be approved not only by the teachers but by the administration. I was given basically a stay-away order because they had counted how many times I had been in the classroom. Now mind you, one of the reasons I go in is after the incident that occurred in December where he hit somebody while in after-care in the parent pick-up after school, he was no longer allowed back there...” These actions by leaders reflect a lack of trust (resulting in restricting the parent’s access to the school building) and a lack of respect for parents in interactions. If the participants had perceived the leader as respectful, they would not have felt that their subordinate positions in interactions were important to the leaders or that the leader needed to maintain the upper hand.

The subordinate theme shows disturbances in trust and relationship formation between parents and leaders. See Figure 4.4 below.



Figure 4.4 *Poor Relationship With Leader*

Good Relationship With Leader. Most participants indicated no relationship at all with the leader. June and Ashley (both white, both teachers in the division) reported that they used leaders to intervene in situations involving their children’s transportation or instructional issues. June said: “[After an incident] I emailed the assistant principal and she said she would make sure the policy was enforced.” The parents’ use of leaders reflected their respect for the leader and their trust in his or her ability to settle conflicts and resolve issues. They believed that the leader’s communication would display testimonial sensitivity in dealing with others.

The subordinate theme shows the formation of good relationships between parents and leaders. See Figure 4.5 below.



Figure 4.5 *Good Relationship With Leader*

Good Communication With Leader. Mildred described good communication with the leader. She is Caucasian and a member of the instructional staff at her child’s school. A native of the community where this study was conducted, she attended her child’s school when she herself was a child. She expressed a deep sense of connection to the school and its faculty and staff. Her quote (below) might rise from her status as a staff member and not as a parent. Mildred believed that the leader showed her respect. Further, she expressed that the leader showed trust in her ability as a professional and she trusted the leader to act in a professional

manner. She also expressed that the leader communicated effectively with her, other staff members, students and family, saying “She is amazing....she is very positive and I love it that she is approachable.” She also said, “I absolutely love working with my principal. ...and the fact that she gave me a job, and she’s so easy to get along with. If something is wrong, she doesn’t show it. She’s always smiling or laughing – she’s very pleasant”. This participant’s statements indicate that the leader displayed testimonial sensitivity in her interactions and respected the participant as a contributor to the school. The subordinate theme shows the formation of good communication practices between parents and leaders. See Figure 4.6 below.

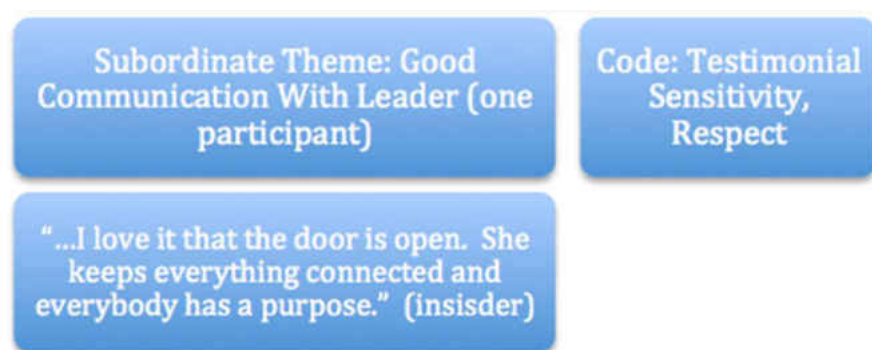


Figure 4.6 *Good Communication With Leader*

Superordinate Theme Two: Access, Input and Sense of Credibility and Participation

This category included discussion of parents’ ability to participate in their children’s education. It included comments from those who enjoyed easy access as well as parents who encountered barriers to access. As in earlier discussion, participants whose children were served in general education programs made more positive comments than those with children who received special education services. Mildred, the parent of a general education student said, “It really hasn’t come up. I did ask at the meeting about reading. He seemed to be memorizing instead of reading. But now he’s reading”. Dee responded to my question about participation by saying, “The teacher helps me. If they do something today in class, I’ll ask her what letter or

number are you working on and she'll say, 'Well this is how we did it in class'. It may be repetitious, but if he learned it that way, I want him to continue to do it that way". Clearly, these experiences support relationship formation and the establishment of a just environment.

Unfortunately, they contrasted with the experiences of families of students receiving special education services. Lily said, "...if I said anything, they would just tell me he was fine. If I told them about something that has worked for us, or something that had not worked, they would just say he was fine or that they would handle it". Her words were discounted and there was no basis for relationship formation due to the lack of respect shown for the parents and the teachers' not exercising testimonial sensitivity.

Parent Able to Provide Input. In general, parents of students in general education either saw no need to provide input or encountered no barriers in doing so. The "insiders" had first-hand knowledge of the curriculum and had professional and/or personal relationships with their children's teachers. Ashley said, "I feel like I haven't had to do that. I've actually taught pre-k in the past, so I know what's expected, I know what my son is doing. I taught that curriculum for five years, you know, I don't feel that I have had to have much input". They were well aware of both content and expectations and were able to monitor their children's progress independently. They described the teachers as "very open" and individualizing the lesson plan. Kay reported: "... so what I tell her works at home, she implements in the classroom." Ashley, who was once a teacher in the VPI program reported: "I've felt that I really didn't have to do that. I've taught preschool in the past, so I know what is expected. I taught that curriculum for five years...". Lily reported that: "They wanted my input". These interactions reflect testimonial sensitivity on the part of the educators because they heard and understood the

words of parents. They also respected the potential for the parents as contributors to their children's learning and trusted them to participate in the life of the school in a positive way.

The subordinate theme shows that parents are able to provide input into their children's educational programs. See Figure 4.7 below.

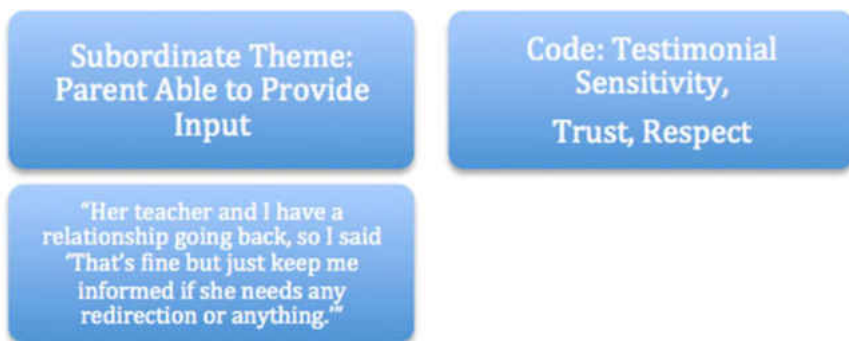


Figure 4.7 *Parent Able to Provide Input*

Parent Not Able to Provide Input. Participants with children who received special education services found their input generally unwelcome by teachers. With only one exception, the participants were aware that their input was required in the development of their children's IEP's, yet their input (and sometimes physical access to the classroom) was blocked. In one example, Angelique reported that her child was receiving Applied Behavior Analysis services from a provider outside of the school. Collaboration among the provider, the home and the classroom is a critical element of this treatment, yet the teacher discounted or ignored parents' input. Angelique said, "that they don't allow the outside workers to come in to see what is being done with that child to come in and see what is being done with that child so that when they are working with them at home, it can be coordinated together. And I feel as though that's wrong". Many participants (particularly those whose children received special education services, but including some parents of general education students) expressed that they were simply not seen as credible sources of information regarding their own children and were excluded from

participation in the shaping of their children’s educational experiences. Jenna reported, “If I told them about something that has worked for us, or something that had not worked, they would just say he was fine or that they would handle it. It was a brick wall and I was more frustrated than anything”. These interactions indicate that the teachers did not display testimonial sensitivity or respect. Further, they did not display trust in the parents’ knowledge of their children’s needs or ways of learning. The subordinate theme shows that parents’ input was ignored or discouraged by educators. See Figure 4.8 below.

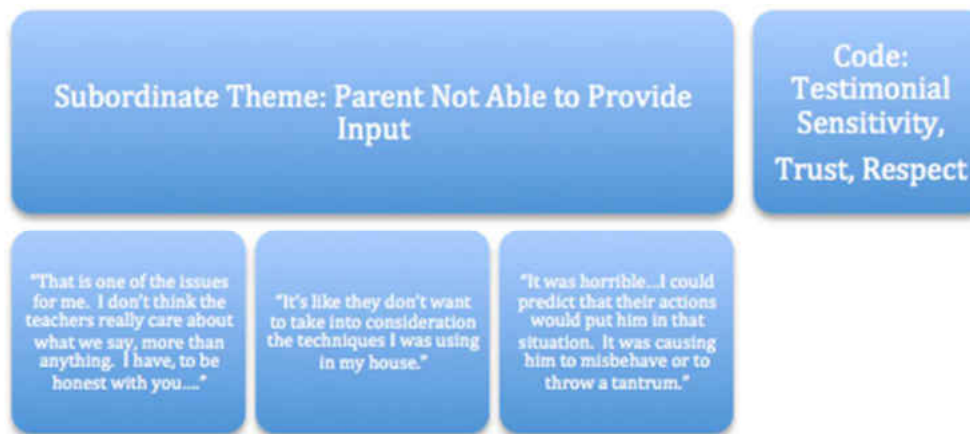


Figure 4.8 *Parent Not Able to Provide Input*

Parents Perceived as a Threat to the Leader. Some parents report contentious relationships with the leader resulting in their being “banned” from the school after conflicts with the leader. Lily received a letter from the leader instructing her to stay off of the school premises while Elen reported being issued a restraining order. When Elen insisted on entering the school, a police officer escorted her to her child’s classroom at the leader’s request. Elen’s report was, “...I thought she had something against me, because every time we come here it is to complain about things that make sense and she says, ‘No, you are acting crazy. You are going overboard. There is no need for this.’ She even called the police on me! ...She sent me a letter not allowing me to go back to the school property”. Elen also reported that a police car was stationed at the

school for the rest of the school year, and she assumed that that its presence was to ensure that she did not enter the school. Aster reported that while the teacher expressed that parents are welcome, she seemed uncomfortable with the parent’s presence and hurried her out., “They say they have an open door, but when you get there they usher you out. They really don’t want you there”. These relationships show the leader’s lack of trust and respect for the parents as active participants in their children’s educations on the part of the leader. The leader’s perceived inability to respond appropriately to parents’ communication indicates a failure in testimonial sensitivity, trust and respect. See Figure 4.9 below.



Figure 4.9 *Parents Perceived as Threat to Leader*

Leaders’ Behavior Appears Rigid/Arbitrary. Some participants reported incidents in which the leaders’ behavior appeared arbitrary. In one instance, the participant’s child was transferred from a satellite preschool site to the main center. The student was not allowed to start school until the participant attended an orientation meeting. The delay resulted in the participant incurring childcare costs and having to take time off from work. Lily reported, “The first day of school, anyone who missed the orientation was turned away and they couldn’t leave their kids there. So the first two days of school, we couldn’t be at school. We missed everything and they had to make a second orientation for everybody. I don’t know if that was something specific to

VPI or to this school because of the leadership. It was hell. I’m talking a filled cafeteria, not just a few stragglers. I had to get a babysitter for my son because I knew he would never make it. I had to attend this orientation which you could barely hear because the microphone was so low and then go home and get him and bring him back for the first day of school”. I learned (in a private conversation with the leader, following an orientation meeting) that attending orientation is a regulatory requirement of the VPI program and not the mere whim of the leader. The resulting negativity between the parent and the leader could have been avoided if the leader had offered an explanation to her and other parents.

In other instances, participants reported that the leader seemed to be creating obstacles in response to their persistence in seeking information or action. In one instance, the leader simply refused to share student information with a parent. Jenna said, “I asked her to please check to look and see if she had an email about my son. She flat out refused multiple times. I kept saying that it wasn’t difficult because she was looking at the screen – it was between us. And she refused.” These reports by participants show problems in communication that reflect a lack respect for the parent on the part of the leader. See Figure 4.10 below.



Figure 4.10 *Leader's Behavior Appears Rigid/Arbitrary*

Parents Experience Marginalization. Several participants reported that leaders marginalized them because of their socioeconomic status. One leader reportedly chided a parent who picked up a student early from school because her child was receiving preschool services at public expense. Lauren commented, “Well, one day I went to pick my son up early because I had my Mom’s car, and I had to take her car back, and by the time I would do that, there wasn’t enough time cause she was getting off work. So I went to get him from school early and she yelled across the whole office, she was like ‘Why are you picking him up early?’ and I was like ‘My Mom needs her car back.’ And she was like ‘Well, you don’t need to pick him up early because we’re paying his tuition.’ All across the whole office. Then the secretary said ‘She’s right’. Then other people were chiming in and I was like ‘That’s not your place.’ It’s not like I’m picking him up every day – it was just that one time I had to pick him up early.” In another account, the leader told a parent at orientation that she should be grateful that her child was given a benefit at public expense that was unavailable to children of more affluent parents. Mildred’s statement was, “[The leader said that parents] should be grateful to be participating because VPI is income based and then there is a priority list”. In this instance, the parent was the spouse of a deployed military member, and the family was not low-income. In both situations, participants felt that the leader had implied that the low-income clientele of the VPI was receiving special favors at taxpayers’ expense. These reported actions and statements are clear indications of a lack of respect for the parents involved. Additionally, parents trust leaders to behave in a discreet manner, especially when discussing confidential matters of family income. The leader’s reported statements, made in a public location, are indicative of a violation of trust. See Figure 4.11 below.



Figure 4.11 *Parents Marginalized by Leaders and/or the System*

Insiders Use Connections. I use the term “insider” to refer to participants who are teachers, instructional assistants or relatives of teachers in the Division in which the study took place, and several insiders took part in the research. Ashley was once a preschool teacher who was assigned to the preschool center and at the time of the study was at a satellite location. June was a gifted resource teacher, Mildred was a special education instructional assistant who had just gotten her master’s degree in special education, and Aster was the sister-in-law of a special education teacher. All of these participants but one recognized that their positions gave them an advantage over other parents. June was able to use professional relationships and connections to circumvent obstacles in securing services for her child. She also had a long-time professional relationship with her child’s teacher and was confident of her competence and judgment. She related that, “I didn’t have a background in education and psychology, I might not know exactly where my child needs to be and exactly what to do to get her there, so when all of those things didn’t work I used my resources as a teacher in the system. And I did what I needed to do for her instead of relying on the system. So, it’s a blessing that I have the background, but at the same time I wonder about these other children whose parents don’t know what to do or don’t have access”. Ashley (the former preschool teacher) was versed in the preschool curriculum and was able to judge her child’s performance. Her comment was, “I taught that curriculum for five

years, you know, I don't feel that I have had to have much input". Mildred, the special education instructional assistant, had deep personal ties to the school to which she was assigned and had developed firm professional relationships with the leader and other members of the staff. She commented, "The teacher is very open, and if I have any concerns or problems I can talk to her or email her".

Students with disabilities are promised services under the law. The failure of the educational system to extend guaranteed services violates the trust that citizens place in public systems. The ability of "insiders" to access needed services is evidence of a system that is equipped to respond to students' needs in a preferential manner, presenting another violation of trust. Further, when parents' requests are unheard, educators are operating without testimonial sensitivity. The subordinate theme shows violations of trust between parents and educators and a lack of testimonial sensitivity on the part of leaders within the system. See Figure 4.12 below.



Figure 4.12 "Insiders" Use Connections

Parents Unwelcome in the School. Some parents stated that when they offered to volunteer in the classroom, they were repeatedly informed that the class would be doing something else that day. Roo reported, "Well the teacher just said the day I did ask about volunteering, she said they had something going on". Dee reported that her older child's Head Start program had consistently invited parents to come to the school, and that there was no such effort in her

younger child's preschool. Her statement was "but in my son's case they did so much more in parent involvement. And, I think I was at his school three times a week. Whereas with my daughter, I may have been there five times the whole year". Teachers discouraging parents from participating is reflective of a lack of testimonial sensitivity, a lack of respect for their role in their children's lives and a lack of trust in their ability to contribute in a meaningful way. See figure 4.13 below.



Figure 4.13 *Parents Unwelcome in the School*

Parents Welcome in the School. Three parents – two of whom were insiders - reported that they were free to “drop in” to the school at breakfast or lunchtime or even during instructional time. None were concerned about school protocol or teacher preferences regarding scheduling of visits. Tiffany said “I do go up there and eat lunch with him. I have been in the classroom quite a few times, and she does welcome parents coming in and sitting in the room. She doesn't care – she'll pull up a chair and let us sit right beside them”. The welcome these participants experienced was an indication that they were respected and trusted to be present and contribute in a meaningful way to their children's school experience. The subordinate theme shows that parents are granted access and that their input is welcome. See Figure 4.14 below.



Figure 4.14 *Parents Welcome in the School*

Superordinate Theme Three: Meeting Children’s Needs

This theme relates to a small number of participants who are parents of students receiving special education services. They universally reported that the enrollment process for special and general education is unfriendly. Several parents report rules and procedures they perceived as arbitrary that impeded children’s enrollment. Parents express frustration and stress in dealing with unwieldy system. Not only is the process of eligibility and enrollment cumbersome, it takes an emotional toll on parents. Xander’s Mom said: “It was a lot of paperwork. The paperwork is repetitive, in different formats. It’s not just repetitive; it gets the best of you. They drill into your head...that there is something wrong with your child.” June, who had the “insider” advantage said: “They didn’t reach out to us. I did my own research to see if he would be eligible.” Zander’s Mom also reported that hers and her family’s needs in advance planning for meeting and evaluations were not considered. She said: “They reached out to like at the deadline, like ‘You have to have this tomorrow, or – deadline’.” Participants found the processes of eligibility and enrollment to be emotionally exhausting and in some cases daunting. When participants’ children would be receiving special education services in an inclusion setting, they found that both systems became intractable. The words of the parents were ignored, reflecting issues of testimonial sensitivity and a lack of respect. See Figure 4.15 below.



Figure 4.15 *Systematic Barriers to Access*

Summary

I created a hybrid framework for coding the data I gathered from interviews with twenty parents of students enrolled in, in the process of enrolling or approved for enrollment in publicly operated preschool programs. The triadic hybrid that was meaningful in its reflection of participants' testimony, and contained the markers testimonial sensitivity, trust and respect.

My framework came from the synthesis of the following:

1. Markers of Epistemic Justice (Fricker, 2003)
 - a. Avoiding Intellectualism. This requires that the speaker to be both competent and honest and the hearer may be uncritically receptive within the bounds of reason.
 - b. Becoming a Responsible Hearer of the Words of Others. This means that the hearer has arrived at understanding through sensitivity to the reasons for and against the knowledge offered by others.
 - c. Testimonial Sensitivity. This means that our responses to the testimony of others are learned and internalized through a process of epistemic socialization.

- d. Accurately Assigning Levels of Credit. Means ensuring that the hearer avoids biases that may cause over or under crediting the words of others.
2. Five Facets of Trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)
- a. Benevolence. This means that the leader is operating from a position of care for the welfare of others.
 - b. Reliability. This means that the leader is true to his or her words.
 - c. Competence. This means that the leader is able to perform the tasks of his or her position.
 - d. Honesty. This means that the leader is true to his or her word.
 - e. Openness. This means that the leader shares information.
3. Markers of Collaboration (Lea, 2006)
- a. Respect: Just a Little. This means that service providers and recipients have esteem for each other
 - b. Walk a Mile in my Shoes. This means that the service providers understood the recipients and their experiences.
 - c. Mean What You Say. Means that service recipients trust that providers' words are truthful.
 - d. Fight the Power. Means that the service recipients have little power in their own lives and that they perceive themselves as without power to make their own decisions.

Participants in this study reported good communication from general education teachers and poor communication from special education teachers in both self-contained and inclusive settings. Most participants reported poor communication with leaders. The exceptions were

“insiders” employed by the division where I conducted the study. Communication was generally reflective first of the triadic marker testimonial sensitivity and second respect.

Most participants reported good relationships with teachers. The few exceptions are parents of special education students. Some parents report highly contentious relationships with leaders resulting in their being barred from access to the school building. “Insiders” report good long-term relationships with leaders. Some participants, parents of both general and special education students, experienced obstacles in enrollment of their children in preschool. The obstacles are doubled when the children are special education students served in inclusive settings. “Insiders” acknowledge the obstacles inherent to the system, but are able to navigate around them through use of system knowledge and professional relationships. They were aware that they enjoy an advantage in their knowledge of the system and their relationships with teachers and leaders. Parents of preschool students begin as naïve to the requirements of the system and their place in it. In the case of one participant, the large and confusing system was not manageable and her child went un-served for a whole school year. (I was able to connect this individual with an advocate and also gained direct access for her with a leader in the central office to help her overcome the issues she encountered.) The marker respect applies to these relationships, whether the participant was afforded respect or disrespect. Further, the markers trust and honesty are applicable because it was violated when participants were unable to access services guaranteed to their children under the law.

Some parents experience marginalization when interacting with the system and leaders. They have experiences scheduling issues that make it impossible for them to participate in school activities because of their use of public transportation. They have also reported having conversations with leaders in which the leader pointed to their socioeconomic status as a means

of receiving special services in free preschool. The markers testimonial sensitivity and respect are applicable in these cases because they report that their words were unheard or misunderstood and because as they report they were addressed in a disrespectful or demeaning manner by leaders.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of parents of young children regarding their perceptions and experiences with the leadership of their children's early childhood education programs. Through this process, I hoped to learn how individual and social interactions with leaders shape parents' epistemic agency and their families' access to rhetorical spaces that grant credibility to parents and children. Individuals can be denied a platform for expressing their ideas and knowledge through design or omission, but regardless of the cause, their expressions remain unheard. This study examined whether parents experience interactions that enhance or undermine their ability to participate and share epistemic resources within a given epistemic community. Only when both leaders and parents recognize the equality of families and professionals in the educational context can parents experience epistemic justice.

This study, in methodology a hybrid of modified grounded and a priori traditions, sought to contribute to the bank of knowledge on the quality of communication and relationships between educational leaders and families of children enrolled in public preschool programs. It was guided by the research question: What are the experiences of families of preschool students in their interactions with school leaders? The two sub questions that further guided my study were:

- a. What was the quality of communication between leaders and families?
- b. What was the quality of relationships between leaders and families?

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 parents of children enrolled, in the process of enrolling or approved for enrollment in public preschool programs. (One of the "parents" was actually a custodial grandparent.) I inquired about their communication and

relationships with teachers and leaders, using a series of open-ended questions. I added probes to the questions when participants' answers were very brief or monosyllabic. I also probed when the quality of the answers indicated that there was more information to be had through deeper inquiry. I analyzed data from these interviews and constructed three superordinate themes that were descriptive of the data: *Communication and Relationships*, *Access, Input, Sense of Credibility and Participation* and *Meeting Children's Needs*.

I viewed and coded my data through the hybrid lens resulting from the synthesis of three frameworks – Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust and Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration. Three markers emerged from the synthesis. These are testimonial sensitivity, trust and respect – the three markers that best tie the data to the research questions.

I have divided my discussion of data into two parts – contributors and detractors to epistemic justice. Although the contributors are fewer in number, I have discussed them first. I placed them so because I wanted to acknowledge that there were positive voices in the study and I want to honor my commitment to all of the people who added testimony to my study. These comments act as disconfirming evidence as discussed by Creswell and Miller (2000). Disconfirming evidence calls for the researcher to first establish themes and then search for evidence that is consistent with or contrary to those themes.

Contributors to Epistemic Justice

The most important contributor to epistemic justice, and the dominant superordinate theme reported, was Communications and Relationships. The positive subordinate themes were "Good Communication With Teacher" reported twelve times, "Good Relationship With Leader" reported four times, and "Good Relationship With Leader" reported once. The participants

whose statements are reflected here benefited from the teachers' and leaders' respect, testimonial sensitivity and trust. As a result, they were able to have trust in the teachers and leader.

Twelve participant reports were placed in "Good Communication With Teacher". These were parents of children in general education or special education students in inclusion classrooms. The general education teachers went to extraordinary lengths to maintain strong communication with families. Their efforts included low-tech interactive communication folders and the use of electronic applications, phone calls and email. The communication folders were ubiquitous in that participants reported their presence across the Division. Communication occurred through multiple channels daily. Participants reported that they even received pictures of their children in the classroom in real time through the "Class Dojo" electronic application. These participants experienced respect and testimonial sensitivity in their interactions with the teachers. Further, they were able to trust the teachers to provide a positive educational experience for their children.

All four of the reports of "Good Communication With Leader" came from "insiders", people employed in schools as instructional staff or who were the relative of an educator. All of the participants but one who made these comments were very open in acknowledging that their status as "insiders" afforded them special access. Some acknowledged contemporaneous or past professional and/or personal relationships with leaders. They experienced trust, respect and testimonial sensitivity in their interactions with leaders and had trust in the leaders' actions in the school.

The second-most prominent superordinate theme was Access, Input, Sense of Credibility and Participation. This superordinate theme refers to participants' ability to participate in their

children's educations in a meaningful way. The subordinate themes identified as contributors to epistemic justice are "Parent Able to Provide Input" and "Parents Welcome in the School".

I found the subordinate theme "Parent Able to Provide Input" six times. The reports indicated that providing input was not difficult and was welcome in general education. Even when participants had not provided much input, they felt that they were able to rely on the strength of the curriculum and teachers. In short, parents of students in general education either saw no need to provide input or encountered no barriers in doing so. Additionally, the "insiders" had first-hand knowledge of the curriculum and had professional and/or personal relationships with their children's teachers. Participants experienced testimonial sensitivity in their interactions with teachers when providing input into their children's educations.

The subordinate theme "Parents Welcome in the School" included reports by two participants who felt that they were free to "drop in" to the school. Both of these participants were "insiders" with professional and/or personal relationships with teachers and leaders. These participants experienced respect and trust in their interactions with teachers and leaders.

The final superordinate theme was "Meeting Children's Needs". None of the reports in this theme were contributors to epistemic justice. This theme was common to parents of children receiving special education services, and reflected their struggles in securing services that are promised under special education law. The difficulties they experienced were not tied to severity, and even an "insider" encountered obstacles when attempting to have services put in place.

Detractors from Epistemic Justice

As stated above, "Communication and Relationships" was the dominant superordinate theme in my study. Anderson (2012) points out, "Theories of justice often take as their object of

assessment either interpersonal transactions (specific exchanges between persons) or particular institutions”. The negative (or absent) communications that were reported to me clearly maintain a separation between families and educators. Because they occur at the beginning of children’s school careers, they logically set the tone for subsequent interactions. The evidence of negative communication in my research is overwhelming, and I included the contrary testimony above to honor the words and efforts of the speakers.

Initial communication occurs at the foundational level of relationships when leaders communicate their trustworthiness to families. In doing so they use the token trust awarded their positions as transactional currency in forming deeper and more meaningful relationships (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1999). The process makes them vulnerable and requires their trust in families. Fricker (2003) says that testimonial sensitivity is the result of a process of epistemic socialization, so the absence of communication may be a side effect of leaders’ lack of specialized training and relevant experience as discussed by Heikka and Waniganayake (2013) and Ramgopal, et al. (2009).

I placed nineteen comments under the subordinate theme “Poor Communication With Leader” and nine comments under “Poor Relationship With Leader”. “Poor Communication With Leader” was the predominate subordinate them, and I have drawn a line between it and relationship formation. The issues participants encountered in communication must contribute to the poor relationships they report with the leaders of their children’s schools. Within the relationship subordinate theme, some participants reported conflicts with leaders while others reporting feeling slighted or ignored. Others reported that the leader’s actions seemed to reflect her efforts to establish dominance over parents. These situations indicate that leaders did not respect the participants and that leaders did not demonstrate testimonial sensitivity.

One participant was actually surprised that there was a leader with supervisory authority present in the building. Others reported “good” relationships, but when probed could not recall leaders’ names and described relationships that consisted of social greetings exchanged at morning arrival or at dismissal. In these instances, participants were shown courtesy but no depth of communication or relationship building was present.

Participants made four reports of being marginalized by the leader (“Parents Experience Marginalization”). These comments, placed under the Superordinate Theme 2: Access, Input and Sense of Credibility and Participation, referred directly to demeaning statements made by leaders to parents. Specifically, three parents were reminded publically that their low socioeconomic status was the determining factor in their children being eligible for preschool services. In other instances, unrealistic expectations were placed on participants who use public transportation. In another example, educators promised that a translator would attend a meeting and then failed to secure one. My analysis of the participant statements within the communication subordinate theme mirror the comments about relationships in that they indicate that communication is often absent, took the form of “robo-calls” or was perceived as demeaning. All are interruptive of the relationship formation process and reflective of a lack of respect for families’ roles in shaping their children’s educations. Respect refers to people regarding one another with esteem and is critical in establishing collaborative relationships in education. The absence of respect, or regarding others with esteem, makes impassable the road to formation of these relationships. Perhaps the overwhelmingly negative response to my question is due to the lack of specialized training discussed by Heikka & Waniganayake, 2013; Ramgopal, et al. (2009). They describe administrators who find themselves in the position of having to administer an unfamiliar program that does not mesh with the K-12 environment

whose families most often come from marginalized communities (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). In this regard, the problem, as it has been described offers its own solution. Leaders' inability to provide testimonial sensitivity or respect is a demonstrated need for training in the administration and leadership of this new component in public education.

I placed fifteen reports under the subordinate theme "Poor Communication With Teacher". This testimony came from parents of children receiving special education services – both in self-contained settings and inclusion settings. Their complaint was that the communication they received was scant, unclear or not timely. None of the participants complained of negative communications. Again, a lack of communication speaks of issues of testimonial insensitivity causing the inability of collaborators (parents and educators) to move forward in establishing relationships. Open communication is important in education, especially when children are very young and/or vulnerable due to disability. My findings indicate that there is unanimous approval of the communication with general education teachers. Perhaps these teachers provide a template for meaningful communication with families. The low-tech communication folders of the general education program are low cost and useful. They give parents a daily report on students' classroom behavior and participation. They provide a monthly calendar of skill-based home assignments for families to complete with students. They also serve as a vehicle for notices of school events and services. The electronic applications like Class Dojo offer a daily glimpse into the classroom. Parents are able to receive information in real time regarding their children. Teachers send pictures, work samples and messages to parents' computers and smart phones during the school day. They are also able to send copies of documents on request. The applications also translate English into other languages, further

facilitating school-to-home communication. If special education teachers adopted these efforts, they would be filling the information void experienced by the families they serve.

Access, Input, Sense of Credibility and Participation was the second-most prominent superordinate theme. This theme relates to participants' ability to contribute in meaningful ways to their children's educations. It included their feelings of welcome in schools and their perceived ability to provide input to classroom teachers in meeting their children's needs. It also included parents' participation in activities offered by schools like PTA and family engagement programs. According to Leurer (2013) it is critical to children's success as learners that the preschool leader advocate for the child and the family, facilitating their entry to the school system and helping to enhance their access to educational opportunities and the larger community. In order to serve in this role, leaders must ensure access to the educational institution and the community within. Auerbach (2009) also speaks of engagement efforts and the necessity that leaders take proactive steps to draw families into schools and make them part of the educational process. The result of full family participation in learning is the increased chances of children's long-term educational success, and like preschool initiatives, research on family participation is relatively new on the scene. Still, early research indicates that robust engagement with preschool families bodes well for future success (Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004).

I placed participant comments under "Parents Unwelcome in the School" six times and placed seven comments under "Parent Not Able to Provide Input". The first group of comments includes parents not being able to access volunteer activities or feeling like the front office staff members were cold and unwelcoming. One participant reported awkward feelings in the classroom that led her to believe that her presence was not wanted. The second group refers to

participants' reports that they were ignored when they requested conferences or that their suggestions were either ignored or brushed aside, as in suggestions for behavior management being disregarded or ignored. One participant reported that when she attempted to give teachers information about her child's behavior, she was told firmly that the teachers would handle it. She perceived that her input was not wanted and that her information was discounted. These comments came from participants with children in general and special education. Their presence was generally discouraged and their input was often rejected. Again, going back to the work of Auerbach (2009), it is important to recall that the success of the educational process is dependent on the inclusion of families. Rejecting their input is discounting their wisdom gained from being their children's first teachers and as the people who know them best. Within my synthesized framework, this is clearly a deficit in testimonial sensitivity that can be overcome through greater experience and training. Like the issues with communication, it may be the result of limited or absent specialized training in working with diverse families of very young children.

I placed comments under the subordinate theme "Insiders Use Connections" six times. This is particularly interesting for several reasons. First, it was completely unexpected because I did not anticipate educators would be in the pool of potential respondents. Second, the educators described inherent obstacles to service delivery and their ability as "insiders" to circumnavigate the system, and I was surprised that the system would be unyielding to "insiders". All "insiders" reported struggles and frustration with the enrollment process, particularly when their children received any support from special education. Their statements reinforced the assertions of other parents' experiences in accessing the system and show the stark contrast between the ultimate success of participants who are able to work around obstacles using relationships and first-hand knowledge of the system and the struggles of participants who lacked these resources. These

experiences show a lack of respect for parents seeking services for their children and contribute to parents' lack of ability to place trust in a system that promises but does not deliver services.

The four comments under the subordinate theme "Leader's Behavior Appears Rigid/Arbitrary" refer to participants' perception of the leaders' inflexible and arbitrary behavior that they believed was intended to maintain a dominant role in interactions. One participant reported that the leader would argue any point in order to maintain an opposing position to that of a parent. Another described a situation in which the leader refused to share enrollment information in order to ensure her control. More remarkable still were comments under the subordinate theme "Parents Perceived as Threat to Leader". These comments occurred only twice, but both reports were remarkable. I was incredulous the first time a participant reported an incident in this category. She stated that after a serious incident involving her child, the leader barred her from returning to the school. School personnel had placed her child on the wrong bus at dismissal from school, and she and her husband left their jobs to follow numerous busses from the school. They finally located their child on a bus several blocks from their home. The participant approached the leader about the incident and acknowledged that she was outraged and very emotional. She stated that the leader ordered her from the building saying that she was "acting crazy". Her experience was similar to that of another participant who was also barred from entering the school building following negative interactions with the leader. These experiences seem so bizarre that I thought that though true, must be flukes. Later, a participant who was a teacher in the Division reinforced these statements. This participant had once taught under the supervision of the leader mentioned in by the participants who reported being barred from the school and according to the third participant was known to teachers to be over-reactive and controlling and to seek dominance over parents and teachers. All of these leader behaviors

are reflective of leaders' lack of respect and for parents. These behaviors make trust in the leader impossible for parents and prevent the formation of productive collaborative relationships.

I used the subordinate theme "Preschool Not Part of K-12" six times. The comments I placed here refer to participants' perceptions that there is no clear leadership in place and that the teachers are in charge of the programs. Two participants indicated that there was no real need for administrators unless an unusually large issue arose in preschool. One participant was not aware of leaders assigned to her child's program. Two participants related incidents in which they involved school leadership. One was a transportation problem and the other was an incident in which a parent felt that a teacher had crossed a professional boundary. Both of these participants were "insiders" and in the second instance, the conflict was between the parent and teacher who was a former friend. These comments lend further credence to the words of Heikka and Waniganayake (2013) and Ramgopal, et al. (2009) regarding the lack of specialized training in preschool leadership. Relationship formation is impossible if parents are unaware of leaders or see no need for their presence in preschool, and many of the issues between parents and leaders could be avoided with greater knowledge and sensitivity in leaders who interact with a new and diverse community.

The final superordinate theme was "Meeting Children's Needs". The subordinate themes "Systematic Barriers to Access" reported seven times and "Parents Experience Frustration" reported three times. These subordinate themes referred specifically to the enormous barriers to access experienced by parents of students with special needs – regardless of the severity of the students' disabilities. The system (which is large and complicated) is new to parents of very young children. The myriad details and deadlines are overwhelming and the problems are multiplied by problems with meshing the special and general education systems for children in

inclusion settings. The result of their struggles means that parents are confused and frustrated and their children may unnecessarily go without needed services. Participants reported a cumbersome and redundant application process. They are new to the educational system and when the complexities of the special education system are added, they find themselves unable to navigate. One of the parents who spoke with me struggled with the system for a whole school year without having her (eligible) child ever enrolled school. She was not notified of her child's eligibility, and I only surmised his eligibility because of the family's inclusion in notification of my study. Other parents reported similar struggles with the system, and many found their problems compounded when their children were placed in general education settings with special education supports. In these cases, the two disparate systems only mesh when parents persist and leaders accommodate. The difficulties encountered by parents in accessing services are reflective of leaders' lack of testimonial sensitivity.

Benefits of Epistemic Justice

Early childhood education holds the promise of ameliorating the disparities between children from low-income communities and their more affluent peers, and its immediate and long-term effectiveness is well documented (Swick & Williams, 2006). Its effectiveness may be undercut by deficits in leadership, leadership preparation, and research. It is under-researched and the major journals in K12 educational leadership have all but ignored the topic. There is a resulting gap in the literature and research that addresses leadership issues in early childhood education.

The availability of quality preschool education presents has social justice implications. Much of the current leadership literature points to what is assumed to be its role in ensuring that the instructional climate is marked by its meeting the goals of social justice and high standards of

learning (Hulme, Goetz, Gooch, Adams & Snowling 2007; Camilli et al., 2010; Fuller et al., 2010; Mashburn, 2008). The potential connects between the social justice goals of early childhood programming and the evolving leadership field that supports student learning and social justice goals are obvious.

As public preschool programs take their place in the existing K-12 environment, its student body is as diverse as that of US public schools in general. It includes and many students who are likely to face issues of equity and access (McConkey, 2004), and schools may interrupt pattern of injustice through engagement. Parents who become part of the school in some capacity – through committee or PTA membership, for instance – are more likely than those who are not participatory to see themselves as equals with teachers and administrators. Developing their ability to view themselves as equal partners with educators in their children’s educations is one tool educators can use to overcome the injustice families face (Halgunseth, 2009).

Educational scholars have yet to explore of epistemic justice, (Fricker, 1998, 2003, 2013). Students’ and families’ senses of belonging to the community of knowers has important implications for their motivation, sense of ownership and buy-in (Halgunseth, 2009). Parental involvement in their children’s educations plays a major role in shaping positive educational outcomes (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2008). Engagement by families, businesses, and industry results in successful schools. Engagement increases funding, volunteerism, and in-kind services, and helps the school take its place in the community through ownership and input from a large pool of sources (Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001). This shared shaping of the educational system fosters not only a sense of trust through openness, but also ownership among stakeholders (Tschannen-Moran, 2013). Just as leadership has been assumed to matter in the

success of student learning, so to have parent, family and community involvement been emphasized in the literature (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2008).

Implications for Leaders and Leadership Development

Public preschool is a newcomer in the world of K-12. Its current state is reflective of its novelty and the need for adjustment in its operation and in the response from the educational system. The results of this study suggest several implications for both public preschool leaders and educators. The first is that because the data show that participants, almost without exception held negative views of their communications with leaders. In some cases, communication was absent and in others it was described as intensely negative. Some participants believed that leaders' behavior was deliberately obstructionist. In my unobtrusive observation, I learned that the requirements seen by a parent as arbitrary were reflective of state procedural requirements. The misunderstanding that ensued could have been avoided with more attention to thorough communication. In other instances participants reported that the leader spoke to them in a demeaning manner. This communication showed a lack of sensitivity and disrespect for the parents involved. In earlier chapters of this document (and earlier in this chapter), I cite the works of others who point out the need for specialized training for preschool leaders. If - as it is predicted - universal preschool becomes reality, specialized training would become part of K-12 leadership preparation. This training could assist aspiring leaders in understanding the importance of communication with families, and perhaps teach them effective communication relationship-building techniques (Landry et al., 2011).

One aspect of communication that seemed lacking in all of the participant comments was the visibility of leadership in the school buildings. Their visibility would have communicated presence, but because they were not often visible and their communications were scant or absent,

participants often saw the teachers as the real leaders. In their words, the leaders were superfluous to the operation of the preschool except when situations arose requiring intervention or participation from authority figures beyond the preschool classroom. The perceived absence of leaders reinforced the separation of preschool from the rest of K-12. This separation is noted in the literature, specifically in the writing of Wise and Wright (2012) who posit that this separation will have a self-perpetuating effect by keeping preschool leaders out of policy formation. There is also physical separation contributing to the lack of integration. The preschool program exists in two types of settings. The first is a large center serving only preschool students and the other is in satellite settings in K-5 and K-8 schools across the division. Obviously the center is a segregated site, but in the other locations participants indicated that the preschool classes were in located “their own pods”, and also separated by scheduling from the K-5 or K-8 students and the from the rest of the school.

The communication from special education leaders and educators was regarded negatively, yet the general education program represented in the study received unanimously positive comments regarding teachers’ communication. I would suggest that it therefore might offer a template for communication improvement for special education teachers. The tools undertaken by general education teacher are low cost or free and require minimal effort. The results are of great benefit to teachers and parents in aiding in relationship formation.

Limitations

I recognize that there are several limitations in this hybridized qualitative study. There is always the potential for researcher bias to influence the study at various points. I made efforts to avoid bias through the inclusion of disconfirming evidence as discussed by Creswell and Miller (2000). Disconfirming evidence is useful in assessing the credibility or validity of qualitative

research because it helps researchers avoid bias by challenging pronounced pre-existing views. I also employed member checking as a way to ensure validity. Triangulation is another strategy employed by researchers to ensure validity. I went beyond triangulation to the development of my triadic framework that synthesizes Fricker's (2003) markers of epistemic justice, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) Five Facets of Trust and Lea's (2006) markers of collaboration. Not only are these three separate frameworks; they come from three separate perspectives. Fricker's work is philosophical; Hoy and Tschannen-Moran came from the educational context and Lea's perspective is human services.

The issue of transferability is frequently discussed in relation to qualitative studies, and is an issue in this study. Gioia, Corely and Hamilton (2012) state that qualitative research is transferable if it possesses relevance in wider domains. The findings of this study may be generalized—or transferred - because of its relevance to the emergence of preschool programs into the K-12 context. Moreover, the setting, population and program components of this study are similar to those of other communities.

Because I am neither employed in the preschool program nor have family members who are students may have helped prevent bias. I was formerly a special education preschool teacher in the District, and I taught an older child of one of the participants, but had not seen the participant for several years and did not know her younger child. Neither she nor I were immediately aware of our prior relationship.

Since the data collection was based solely on self-report, the possibility of social desirability should be considered as participants may have responded to my questions in a way they believed would be acceptable to me. In fact, I believed that two participants were responding in such a way and I used probes to get more complete responses to my questions. In

one case, the participant had reported a good relationship with the school's leader. When probed, she could not recall the leader's name and described the "good" relationship as one that consisted of social greetings exchanged at morning arrival and at dismissal. Another parent described her communication with the leader as "good" but when probed stated that she was not regularly informed of school activities and services and had to "research" to get information.

Some of the participants' statements were extremely critical of the leaders and teachers. During these points in the interviews, I did not ask many probing questions out of concern that I might lead the participants' statements. As a result of the lack of deeper questioning, I might have missed some detail in participants' descriptions of their experiences and interactions. I designed the sequencing of the interview questions to lead participants from classroom/teacher experiences to leader observations and interactions. I did this to increase participants' comfort levels with the interview process (and with me) before discussing leaders. It was my intention to reduce my influence on participants' responses by reducing the number of probes necessary to elicit complete responses.

Another limitation of the study was member checking. I did member check after the interviews by providing a transcript to each participant and asking that they contact me if they needed to clarify or add to any of their statements. I did not follow up with the participants, but relied on them to contact me if needed. Two participants did contact me to confirm the accuracy of their transcripts.

Future Research

The results of this study suggest that bettering communications and relationship formation between leaders and parents of preschool students should be a priority in the field. While there were instances of miscommunication or misunderstanding by participants, there

were also reports by participants of negative, even demeaning comments by leaders. There were also multiple reports of actions taken by leaders that were perceived as controlling and arbitrary. In other reports, the leader banned parents from the building following negative or contentious exchanges. In one case, a police car was stationed outside of the school for the rest of the year following the interaction, and the parent assumed the police presence was intended to keep her out of the school. These reported leader behaviors are detrimental to the formation of trusting, collaborative relationships with families. Future research might include refocusing leadership preparation in K-12 to actually include specialization in leading preschool programs and in building relationships with people from diverse communities.

Future research should also include seeking a better understanding of the experiences of parents of very young children in dealing with their children's entry into the special education system. My research exposed me to parents who had suffered greatly through the eligibility process and whose children were exposed to delays in the receipt of services. Part of the issue is the disconnect between the dual special and general education systems. Their failure to "mesh" reportedly causes delays and break-downs in both systems when students are served in inclusion settings. The special education system is huge and complex, bound by federal law and state level regulations that dictate timelines according to complex formulae. Parents enter this system unprepared for the challenges they will face in securing services for their children. While there are some resources available, parents are not automatically connected with them, and the confusion they experience in dealing with the unwieldy special education system may make it difficult for them to access the help that is available. Perhaps the real issue is that well-meaning professionals – both leaders and teachers - are not able to understand the challenges that parents

face in the earliest days of their special education experiences. Research in this area could help prepare professionals to smooth the entry process for children.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of parents of young children regarding their perceptions and experiences with the leadership of their children's early childhood education programs. I hoped to learn how individual and social interactions with leaders affect parents' epistemic agency access to rhetorical spaces that recognize them as credible and accepts their contributions to their children's educations. This study examined whether parents experience interactions that enhance or undermine their ability to participate and share epistemic resources within a given epistemic community.

This was a qualitative study and efforts to interviewed twenty parents of children enrolled in, in the process of enrolling or eligible for enrollment in a public preschool program in a suburban school district in southeastern Virginia. The interviews were semi-structured, asking open-ended questions that included probes when needed. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and copies were provided to participants for member checking.

There is little research on leadership in preschool. There are a variety of factors that contribute to the lack of research ranging from the newness of the field to issues of feminism among practitioners cast by our culture in caregiver roles. There seems to be an acceptance of the role assignment as practitioners rarely transition from consumers of research to producers. Because preschool is new to the K-12 environment, its leaders have not had the benefit of specialized training. The effects of this deficit are problems with communication and relationship formation.

In addition to the above, preschool services are extended to students who receive special education services. In providing these services in inclusion settings, the special and general education systems must mesh. My research revealed that the systems are yet to facilitate a smooth entry for students, and smoothing the process would be helpful.

Finally, the entry into special education is overwhelming to parents of young children. The system is large and complicated and has proved daunting even to “insiders”. The problems are compounded when the parent is naïve to the system, is from a minority community or is culturally different from the majority community.

The qualitative nature of this study makes definitive findings impossible. As already stated, answers in qualitative research are largely dependent on impressions. Having said this, it is clear from participants’ testimony that the epistemic climate they experience is far from inviting. Their descriptions of communication and relationships with leaders (and some teachers) are overwhelmingly negative. Their accounts make it reasonably safe to infer that their experiences do not enhance their epistemic experiences or make it possible to share in epistemic resources.

Summary

Communication and Relationships was the dominant superordinate theme in my results. While most of the comments under this theme were reflective of communication difficulties, there were near universal reports of good communication from general education teachers. A few also reported good communication with the leader and there was one report of a good relationship with the leader. Many of the positive findings in my research generally relate to the experiences of participants with students in general education, and special educators could use their practices and procedures to improve communication with families.

Many participants reported poor or absent communication and difficult relationships with leaders. Leaders were viewed as incidental or unnecessary to the preschool programs. There were instances when participants used the leader's influence to settle issues the participant viewed as beyond the teacher's purview. "Insiders" made both of these reports, suggesting that their more informed understanding of the school's supervisory hierarchy than that of other parents.

Participants whose children received special education services reported numerous obstacles. "Insiders" employed by the division where I conducted the study were able to rely on past or contemporaneous relationships to carry them through the sea of barriers to their children's access. Parents of preschool students usually begin as naïve to the requirements of the special education system and their place in it. In the case of one participant, the large and confusing system was not manageable and her child went un-served for a whole school year. (I was able to connect this individual with an advocate and also gained direct access for her with a leader in the central office to help her overcome the issues she encountered.) Specialized training, greater visibility and a higher level of sensitivity to a diverse community of families and students may ameliorate these issues and help leaders respond to families with greater respect and testimonial sensitivity.

Some participants' reported intensely negative experiences, including the marginalization they experienced when interacting with the system and leaders. These interactions are indicative of serious failures in respect resulting in interruptions in communication and relationship formation. Participants reported having experienced scheduling issues that make it impossible for them to participate in school activities because of their use of public transportation. They have also reported having conversations with leaders in which the leader pointed to their

socioeconomic status as a means of receiving special services in free preschool. These point to lack of respect and understanding of the obstacles external to the educational system that have a direct impact on preschool families.

I conducted an unobtrusive observation of a parent orientation meeting held at the main preschool center by that site's leader. This leader is also the administrator of the Division's VPI program and has supervisory authority over all satellites. My impression from this meeting is that parents without deep knowledge of the educational system and of the local division are likely to remain uninformed following the parent orientation meeting. The hard facts of the meeting were emphasized and reinforced in writing at the conclusion of the meeting. The "softer" information was less obvious and parents' lack of thorough understandings may lead to misunderstandings later. For example, one parent complained about her child's delayed admission to the program. She was never informed that orientation is a state-mandated prerequisite to admission, so its imposition caused her to view the leader as rigid and arbitrary. (Her opinion of the leader as arbitrary was reinforced by later incidents, and other parents shared similar experiences.)

My finding is that the communication between the leader and parents is very poor. The quality of the communication includes messages that reinforce parents' feelings of marginalization. The contentiousness of some relationships is extraordinarily intense. Insiders are able to access services with relative ease, but one parent – a teacher – reported that even with her status as an insider, there existed numerous barriers requiring that she manipulate the system and use resources not available to others.

Public school demographics are changing, and universal early childhood education is coming to public schools. Even so, leadership training has not changed to prepare leaders to run

the programs and respond to a new and diverse population of learners and families. The educational leadership standards currently in place do not address preschool leadership (Interstate School Leaders Consortium, 2008) and the leaders in place have likely not had any specialized training in administering early childhood programs or in working with diverse populations (Leurer, 2011).

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Questionnaire

(To be read to participants)

- I have provided an information sheet that I would like for you to complete now. I need this information so that I can mail your copy of the transcript of your interview. I will not include this information in any documents and will destroy the information when my research is complete. As a volunteer participant, you are free to withdraw from this project at any time. Also, as a volunteer you will receive a gift certificate to a local grocery store.
- Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. As I explained to you, I am in the process of conducting research about the interactions between educators and parents.
- I have a small packet of information for you that includes my contact information and a brief description of my project.
- I will protect your identity and none of your information will be shared with anyone. In order to protect your identity, I ask that you choose an alias that I can use in making references to your interview. While I am recording, I will address you by the alias you choose. I will give you a copy of the typed interview, and ask that you read it to ensure that I accurately recorded your statements. If you have any concerns, please contact me within a week of receiving the transcript. I have a consent form for you to sign before we begin the interview. Do you have any questions at this point?

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your experiences as a parent at your school.

2. Please describe your communication with your child's teacher. (Describe how and why the communication takes place.)

3. How do you provide input in developing strategies to best educate your child?

4. Please describe your relationship with the school's leader.

How have you felt about interactions with the school leadership and teachers?

5. Have you had any contact with leaders from the central office?

Please describe the circumstances and setting

6. Please describe your participation in school-related groups.

Have you participated in any planning for the school?

How did you get involved in these activities?

What suggestions are you able to make in the interest of the school and students?

How have your suggestions been received or implemented

7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that we did not cover?

Thank you for giving your time to this project. I will mail your gift card to the address you provided. Also, please remember that you may withdraw from this project at any time.

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email if you have any questions.

<p>Date:</p> <p>Time of Interview:</p> <p>Location:</p>	
<p>Facts and Details in the Interview</p>	<p>Interviewer Comments</p>
<p>Reflective Summary:</p>	

Participant Contact Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Alias: _____

APPENDIX B

PARENT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Eileen Adams
3900 Roads View Avenue
Hampton, Virginia 23669
757-602-9512
sadams5@hampton.k12.va.us

May 31, 2017

Dear Parent:

I wrote to you at the end of April about an opportunity to participate in a research study about the effects of parents' interactions with school leaders. I would like to extend the opportunity again for anyone who still might be interested.

I am conducting this study with Dr. Steve Myran at the Old Dominion University Darden School of Education. It will examine the ways in which parents' interactions with school leaders shape their involvement in their children's educations. There is limited research that explores parents' experiences and I am seeking parents who are willing to participate in a study that captures their voices and experiences.

All of the parents who take part will participate in an interview that will take 30-45 minutes. Following the interview, I will share a transcript of our discussion with each participant and provide an opportunity for you to add comments and /or clarify any of your responses. As soon I am sure that you are satisfied with the accuracy, I will destroy the recording of our interview. As a courtesy, I will give each participant a gift card to a local grocery store. All participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

I will interview each participant at a mutually agreeable place, and have in the past used school conference rooms, library meeting rooms, recreation center, and even the family's homes. I will work with you to choose the most convenient and comfortable location.

I am contacting you because I have approval from Hampton City Schools. I also have approval from ODU's Independent Review Board to conduct research on human subjects. None of your personal information has been released to me, and if you choose to participate, you will choose an alias to protect your identity. Only I will be able to identify the participants in the study.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please call or text me at 757-602-9512. You may also reach me by email at sadams5@hampton.k12.va.us. Please leave a message with a number for me to call you back. If you contact me for information about the study, it does not mean that you are automatically enrolled.

Thank you for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Eileen Adams

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

By signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	Date
Witness' Printed Name & Signature (if Applicable)	Date

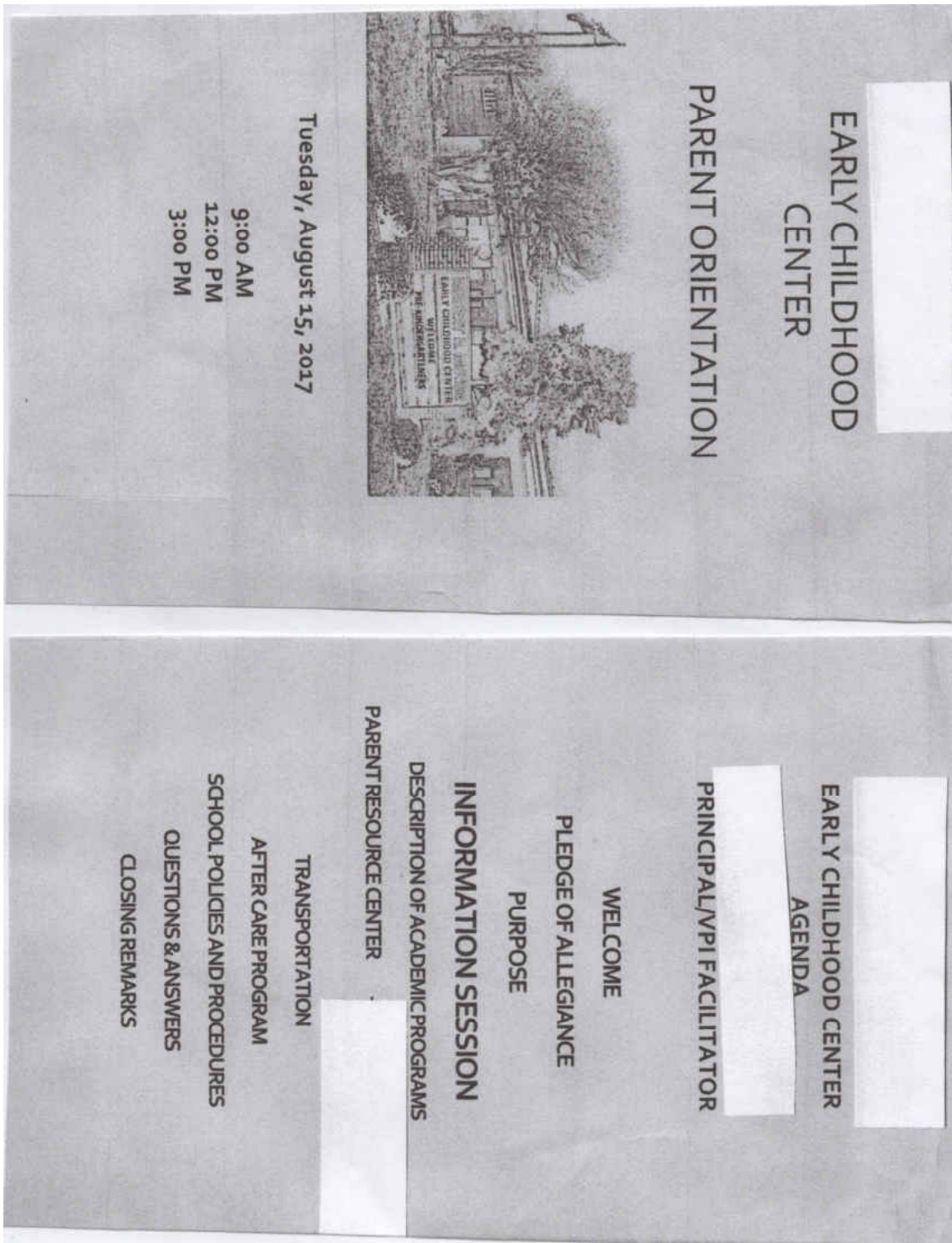
INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	Date
--	-------------

APPENDIX D

PARENT ORIENTATION PROGRAM FROM UNOBTRUSIVE OBSERVATION



APPENDIX E**PARENT INFORMATION SHEET FROM UNOBTRUSIVE OBSERVATION**

[REDACTED] Early Childhood Center

2017-2018

THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Students **must** meet the **mandatory health requirements and documentation** established by the Commonwealth of Virginia for school entrance. **All school physicals and immunization requirements must be met prior to September 5, 2017.**
2. **Tuesday, September 5, 2017, all students report for the first full day of school.** The school opens at 8:00. The instructional day is 8:20 a.m. to 2:55 p.m. The [REDACTED] Department is offering an on site before and after school program. You must register your child in **advance.**
3. **Bus routes and time schedules** will be furnished to [REDACTED] families through the [REDACTED] Transportation department at [REDACTED]. **Specific** transportation information will be available from the [REDACTED] Website and from assigned classroom teachers at **Open House.** Transportation cards and identification pouches will be issued at Open House.
4. **Morning arrival** – Children who are not bus riders should arrive at school no earlier than **8:00 a.m.** **There is no adult supervision before 8:00 a.m.** [REDACTED] **Early Childhood Center students will not be permitted to be dropped off or stand in front of the school building unsupervised.**
5. **Tuesday, September 5, 2017, will be the first day breakfast will be served.** Breakfast will be served **beginning at 8:00 daily.** **ALL** [REDACTED] families regardless of income **MUST** complete a free and reduced meal application.
6. The [REDACTED] Schools Office of Early Childhood will provide your child with a book bag. Please **label** the book bag with your **child's name.**
7. Make sure your child has a fresh change of clothing at **all** times (seasonal).
8. Requests for **transportation changes** must be made **in writing.** Please allow **3 days, after approval** from the [REDACTED] Transportation Department, for the requested change to take place.
9. Parent pick-up changes must be requested **in writing.** School office personnel cannot honor telephone parent pick-up requests, for they cannot identify the caller.
10. Please be prepared to show your **pictured identification daily** when visiting the school and when picking up you child from school.
11. Inform the [REDACTED] school nurse and the classroom teacher of all allergies, asthma, medication and other health related issues of importance.

APPENDIX F
DATA TABLE

Major Emergent Themes	Through your lens of Trust and Epistemic Justice and Credibility (what would the literature say about these things?)
1. Communication and Relationships	
a. Good communication with teacher	Fricker, the leader is a responsible hearer, avoids intellectualism and assigns correct levels of credibility. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, the leader is open and honest. Lea, Respect: Just a Little
b. Poor communication with teacher	Fricker, inaccurate assignment of levels of credibility; not a responsible hearer; not showing testimonial sensitivity. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, the teacher is open. Lea, Respect: Just a Little
c. Good relationship with leader	Fricker, accurate assignment of levels of credibility; a responsible hearer. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader is open. Lea, Respect: Just a Little
d. Poor relationship with leader	Fricker, inaccurate assignment of credibility; irresponsible hearer. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks openness. Lea, Walk a Mile in My Shoes
e. Good Communication with leader	Fricker, leader is a responsible hearer; correct assignment of credibility; avoids intellectualism. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader is open and honest. Lea, Respect: Just a Little
f. No communication with leader	Fricker, leader is not a responsible hearer of others' words, assigns incorrect level of credibility to speakers. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks openness and benevolence. Lea, Respect: Just a Little

g. Poor communication with leader	Fricker, leader is not a responsible hearer and assigns inaccurate levels of credibility, Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, the leader lacks openness and honesty Lea, Mean What You Say
2. Access, Input, Sense of Credibility and Participation	
a. Parent able to provide input	Fricker, Leader is a responsible hearer and assigns correct levels of credibility. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader is open Lea, Fight the Power
b. Parent not able to provide input	Fricker, leader is irresponsible hearer and assigns incorrect levels of credibility. Lea, Fight the Power
c. Parents do not have credibility	Fricker, leader does not assign the correct level of credibility; leader lacks testimonial sensitivity. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks benevolence. Lea, Fight the Power
d. Parents perceived as a threat to leaders	Fricker, leader does not assign the correct level of credibility; leader is not a responsible hearer. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks openness. Lea, Fight the Power
e. f. g. Leader’s behavior appears rigid/arbitrary	Fricker, leader uses intellectualism in communication. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks openness. Lea, Walk a Mile in My Shoes
h. Leader’s behavior appears controlling	Fricker, leader uses intellectualism in communication. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks openness. Lea,
i. “Insiders” use connections	Fricker, leader is irresponsible hearer, leader assigns inappropriate levels of credibility. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks competence. Lea, Walk a Mile in My Shoes

j. Marginalized by leaders and/or system	Fricker, Leader uses intellectualism in communication; leader assigns inappropriate levels of credibility. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks benevolence. Lea, Fight the Power
k. Barriers to full participation	Leader uses intellectualism in communication; leader assigns inappropriate levels of credibility. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks benevolence.
l. Parent welcome in the school	Fricker, leader assigns accurate levels of credibility. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader is open. Lea, Fight the Power
m. Parent unwelcome in the school	Fricker, leader is irresponsible listener, shows no testimonial sensitivity Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader is not open Lea, Respect: Just a Little
3. Meeting Children's needs	
a. Systematic barriers to access	Fricker, leader uses intellectualism in communication, does not use testimonial sensitivity. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks competence. Lea, Fight the Power
b. System rigid and unresponsive to children's needs	Fricker, leader does not show testimonial sensitivity, uses intellectualism in communication. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks openness. Lea, Fight the Power
c. Frustration with system	Fricker, leader does not show testimonial sensitivity, uses intellectualism in communication. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, leader lacks openness. Lea, Walk a Mile in My Shoes

APPENDIX G
IRB APPROVAL



OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH



Physical Address
4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508
Mailing Address
Office of Research
1 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone(757) 683-3460
Fax(757) 683-5902

DATE: April 2, 2017

TO: Steve Myran, Ph.D
FROM: Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [817039-1] The effects of parent-leader interaction on the epistemic agency of parents with children in preschool

REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: March 23, 2017

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # [6.2]

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Petros Katsioloudis at (757) 683-5323 or pkatsiol@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

APPENDIX H

CURRICULUM VITA

Shirley Eileen Adams
3900 Roads View Avenue
Hampton, Virginia 23669
Home: 757-722-7064 Cell: 757-602-9512
sadams5@hampton.k12.va.us

Educational Endorsements, Certifications:

Reading Specialist K-12	Intellectual Disabilities K-12
Middle School Language Arts	Early Childhood Special Education Specific
Learning Disabilities K – 12	Emotional Disturbance K – 12
Visual Arts Pre-K-12	

Post Graduate Professional License PGP-562669, July 1, 2017

National Board Certification, Certified November 2008

NBCT Candidate Mentor, Certified 2009

School Leadership Activities:

Developed, staffed and operated Literacy Intervention Program, 2013-14

NBCT Candidate Mentor, 2010 - present

Building-Level United Way Campaign Coordinator, 2010 – present

Supplemental Education Services Coordinator 2010 – 2012

Classroom Management Coach, 2009 -2010

Instructional Leader for Special Education, 2005 -2009

School Leadership Team 2005-2008

New Teacher Mentor, 2004 – 2008

Education:

Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership
Old Dominion University
Anticipated December, 2017

Education Specialist, Curriculum and
Instruction, Reading Education
University of Virginia
December, 2012

Special Education Endorsement Program
Old Dominion University
(24 graduate credit hours)
June 2001 – December 2002

Master of Arts, Special Education
Louisiana State University
May, 1982

Bachelor of Fine Arts
Louisiana State University
December, 1977

Professional Experience:

Reading Interventionist, Hampton City Schools

August 2015 to present

Provide instruction to students identified as in need of Tier III services under the Response to Intervention model.

Early Childhood Special Education Teacher, Hampton City Schools

March 2003 to August 2015

Provide educational services to 2, 3 and 4-year-olds in a self-contained language based classroom.

Reading Teacher, Hampton City Schools

Summer 2015

Provide reading instruction to fourth and fifth grade students enrolled in summer school.

Scoring Director/Scorer, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards,

Pearson Education

Summers 2013 & 2014

Trained employees to score submissions. Scored applicant submissions from professionals seeking certification.

Reading Tutor, Peninsula Metropolitan YMCA

November 2012 to present

Provide assessment and remediation to struggling readers in grades K – 5.

Emotional Disability Self Contained Teacher, Norfolk Public Schools

September 2002 – March 2003

Reading Teacher, Sylvan Learning Center

June 2002 – March 2003

Special Education Teacher, Cumberland Hospital

West Point, Virginia

January 2001 – June 2002

Adjunct Professor, Thomas Nelson Community College

January 1998 - May 2000

Provided instruction in grant writing and group dynamics to community college students.

Executive Director, Peninsula AIDS Foundation

Newport News, Virginia

August, 1996 – December, 2000

Provided management of programs, staff and fundraising. Grant writing and management.

Regional Vice President

Volunteers of America – Chesapeake Region (position located in Virginia Beach, Virginia)

July 1991 – August, 1995

Provided management of programs, staff and facilities.

Executive Director/Services Director

Family Services of Tidewater

June, 1984 – July, 1991

Served as executive director of Association for Retarded Citizens-Tidewater until merger with Family Services. The title changed to Mental Retardation Services director maintaining managerial responsibilities over programs and staff. Offered direct services to persons with disabilities living in the local community.

Program Director

Volunteers of America – Greater Baton Rouge

Provided management of large community-based residential program for adults with intellectual disabilities. Managed admissions, staff, facilities, funding and licensure compliance.

Special Education Teacher, St. Agnes Vocational Center

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

April 1978 – May 1981

Provided work readiness assessment and instruction to secondary special education students.