

SINGLE CANADIAN MOTHERS OF JAMAICAN HERITAGE SHARE
EXPERIENCES ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

by

ABRAHAM L. H. BLAIR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the experiences of four single Canadian mothers of Jamaican heritage with respect to their children's education. Four themes suggested in the literature—beliefs, practices, barriers, and supports—guided the research. The interviews with the mothers largely confirmed previous research in the field. As such, all the mothers believed that it was a shared responsibility between parents and teachers in supporting children's education. The mothers' practices included primarily at-home support and to a lesser extent at-school support but did not include strict discipline. The barriers most salient for these mothers were lack of time and resources. To help overcome these barriers, the mothers relied on domestic kin networks. From these findings, the thesis provides implications for both research and practice.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the 1960's, a large number of people immigrated to Canada from the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, Haiti, and Barbados (Milan & Tran, 2004). They came to Canada for a fresh start and a new life. Some of these immigrants of African heritage brought their children with them, while others arranged for their children to join them at a later date once they had established themselves in Canada. In either case, the children were to be educated here in the local elementary schools.

Elementary schools in Canada gave the appearance of another world, with the schools' huge walls, metal fences, large playgrounds, and grass fields. These physical barriers seemed to emphasize the large distance between the neighbourhood and the schools built for the children (Eggleston, 1967). The philosophy of Canadian elementary schools, built on the foundation of Euro Canadian/American educational systems and emphasizing Judeo-Christian values and beliefs, impeded some of these Black/African Canadian students from thriving (Eggleston, 1967). This problem continues to the present day as students of African heritage still struggle in Eurocentric schools (Crozier, 2005; Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992).

My parents were among the large number of people of African heritage to immigrate to Canada from England via Guyana in the late 60's. Although I was born and educated in Canada, I have a strong affiliation towards my Guyanese roots. I, myself, have experienced many difficulties in the Canadian elementary school system and have overcome them with the help and the support of my parents. I felt it was necessary to do my part and help other children, so I decided I could do this best as a teacher.

For the past five years, I have taught in two middle schools in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). I have been fortunate enough to teach children from many different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in low income neighbourhoods. Teaching has help me to realize what kind of influences I have on all my students. As a person of African heritage, I understand I can be a positive role model for students from a similar racial background. I have noticed, from my experience both as a student and as a teacher, that a large group of students are achieving limited success in education as compared to students of other racial backgrounds, namely, my students of African heritage.

There are numerous reasons why some children of African heritage do well, while others experience difficulty in elementary schools. One possible factor that helps determine the rate of success children of African heritage attain in school is the extent of involvement their parents have in their education. Parent involvement in children's learning at school and at home is considered a key component of school reform, but more information is needed about how the effects of this involvement vary for students from disparate racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds (Desimone, 1999).

These difficulties are compounded when the children receive support from one parent only. The challenges of a single parent of African heritage may prove to be more difficult than the challenges of a two-parent family due to lack of resources, such as time and income. One important use of resources is investment in human capital (skills, knowledge, and abilities). Children who belong to single-parent families are likely to suffer adverse consequences from this deprivation of resources (Beller & Krein, 1988). On the other hand, some single parents of African heritage can overcome difficulties they face in helping their children when it comes to education.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis was to understand how four single Canadian parents of Jamaican heritage perceived their experiences with respect to their elementary school children's education.¹ Using a case study approach, this study allowed for a greater understanding and in-depth look at these parents' points of view when it came to their children's education. The study of each participant allowed me, the researcher, to find familiar or common techniques, methods, and details among the cases. There were four research questions to guide this study:

1. What are the beliefs of these four single Canadian parents of Jamaican heritage with regard to the education system for their children?
2. What practices do these four single Canadian parents of Jamaican heritage use in helping their children in school?
3. What barriers do these four single Canadian parents of Jamaican heritage face with respect to their children's education?
4. What methods of support do these four single Canadian parents of Jamaican heritage use to help their children become successful in school?

Definition of Key Terms

For this research, I used and defined two terms: African heritage and single parents. Defining terms allowed for clarity and consistency, and also decreased the possibility of misunderstanding or misuse.

¹ I originally began my research with the intention of studying parents of African heritage. However, my participants were all of Jamaican heritage and preferred this term, so the terminology shifted in my purpose and research questions.

African Heritage

There are different names for races, nationalities, and ethnicities in North American society. These names or labels have been changing over time, and they mean different things to different people. For this research, four different terms were considered in naming the target population: Black, African American or African Canadian, a person of African heritage, and a person of Jamaican heritage.

Black is a term that has been used in some research and has been chosen as preferred by some persons. For example, in Boatswain and Lalonde's interview study (2000), 101 university students (54 women, 46 men, and one person who did not report a gender) stated they would prefer themselves to be labeled as "Black." The students saw themselves as Black because many of them believed it was the most appropriate term, and it was also a racial identity. Another study by Sigelman, Tuch, and Martin (2005) involved a phone survey of 2 382 individuals, about half of whom preferred to be called Black. However, the other half of the participants saw themselves as "African American." One reason for some individuals' rejection of the label "Black" is their desire to shift away from racial identity in favour of cultural or ethnic identity.

In fact, the phrase "African American" became publicly popular on December 21, 1988. The Associated Press reported a news conference in Chicago regarding the new Black agenda in the United States; there were 75 Black groups in attendance. During the conference, Jesse Jackson gave a speech and used the term "African Americans" to describe Blacks in America. "Every ethnic group in this country has a reference to some land base, some historical, cultural base. African Americans have hit that level of cultural maturity" (Martin, 1991). Jackson also said, "There are Armenian Americans and Jewish

Americans and Arab Americans and Italian Americans, and with a degree of accepted and reasonable pride, they connect their heritage to their mother country and where they are now” (Martin, 1991). Using the term “African American” helps because it identifies Black people’s ethnicity, geography, history, and culture (Tsehelska, 2002). However, some individuals do not identify with Africa and reject the “African” label as forefronting their racial identity.

Using the phrase “a person of African heritage” allows for the bonding of the West to the continent of Africa (Martin, 1991). Furthermore, the term “heritage” in recent years came into usage as a partial synonym for ethnicity, embracing culture and traditions that are taken from parents as a result of birth or natural situation. The word “heritage” traces back to people’s kinship and descent, denoting culture that was passed down from the preceding generations (Tsehelska, 2002). Some see themselves as belonging to their countries of birth or their parents’ countries of birth. However, it is possible that some persons of African heritage in Canada may want to see themselves in relation to a former national or regional identity when labeling themselves (e.g., Caribbean, Jamaican, Trinidadian, Bajan) because it can imply both race and culture (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000).

When examining the literature, I used the terms the researchers used for their studies. In interviewing single Canadian parents of African heritage, I asked them what cultural label would best identify them. None of the participants used the term African, whereas all participants spoke of Jamaican heritage. Thus, in referring to the participants collectively, I use the term “of Jamaican heritage.”

Single Parents

Over the past generations, in most situations, the term “single parent” has been defined as a parent raising and caring for his/her child by himself/herself. Single parents would raise their own children without partners due to many reasons including death, divorce, or separation. This definition is based on the marital status of the single parent. These single parents would usually be women who were the heads of the household and might have jobs or rely on government assistance to help them raise their children. However, times have changed, and society has redefined the term “single parent.” For this qualitative research study, I defined “single parent” not in terms of marital status but in terms of the living arrangement of the parent and the children (Bumpass & Sweet, 1992; Bumpass & Raley, 1995).

There were four types of living arrangements that the single parents of this study could have had: (a) single parents who were getting support from extended families, (b) two biological parents who no longer had a relationship with each other and were no longer living together, but were supporting and raising their children, (c) single parents who might have another partner who was supporting the children as well, and (d) single parents who were raising children on their own without the help of another partner or the support of the extended family. These single parents might combine any one of these situations in the living arrangement to support their children (Youmans, 2005). Although these four living arrangements were theoretically possible and may have described the single parents in the studies reviewed (many of which give limited information about single status), the participants in the present study were all mothers who were receiving support from extended families.

Overview of the Thesis

In the first chapter, I introduced my thesis topic, the purpose of the study, and the four research questions. I also defined key terms of this study: African heritage and single parents to give a clear understanding of how the terms are used. In the second chapter, I examine the literature using the four themes of this study: beliefs, practices, barriers, and supports. The third chapter describes specific research methods used, focusing on the data collection and analysis. In the fourth chapter, I take the data from the interviews to provide portraits of the four participants. In the final chapter, I connect data from the interviews with the literature. I then describe the limitations of my study, implications for practice, and my final thoughts on this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is examined in four different sections to help distinguish the themes of this research: beliefs, practices, supports, and barriers. In the first section, I examine the beliefs of parents, moving from more general studies of parental beliefs to more specific studies focusing on single mothers of African heritage. In the second section, I follow a parallel structure in investigating parental practices with respect to schools. The third section analyzes the barriers parents face, particularly single parents of African heritage, in creating connections between the home and school. Finally, the fourth section considers the supports these parents receive from domestic kin networks and how schools might supplement these supports.

Beliefs

In general, parents believe that they play a key role in their children's education. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) reviewed psychological theory and research critical to understanding why parents hold such a belief (see also Hoover-Dempsey and Sander, 1997). Based on the educational literature, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) concluded that parental beliefs can be classified in three ways: (a) an active role construction for involvement and a positive sense of efficacy for helping the child learn, (b) perception of invitations to involvement from the school, teacher, and student, and (c) important elements of parents' life context that allow or encourage involvement.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) described the first type of belief, the parents' construction, as basically what parents should do or what they think they should do in

relation to their children's education and development. For example, parents might believe that, with positive support, their children will accomplish success resulting in a sense of efficacy. Parents might believe they have the power to control their children's schooling. The second type of belief rests on the school environment's ability to allow the parent, school, and the children to collaborate towards achievement. The third type of belief is influenced by the elements of the parents' lives. Factors influencing their beliefs include the parents' time, resources, and the energy that will allow possibilities of parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) also suggested that these parental beliefs were not effective unless the children's schools supported the students. To support students, parents, teachers, and children needed to work together to help create an environment that would allow for freedom, empowerment, involvement, goals, and opportunities for student success. Additionally, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) stated that there could be a limitation to parents' involvement due to parents' socio-economic status (SES). Socio-economic status can be described as factors about a person's lifestyle including job, earnings, and education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The higher the SES, the greater chance the parents will be involved in their child's education.

While Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) presented three cogent types of beliefs that guide parental involvement in children's education, they failed to examine the role that issues of race and marital status could play in enacting such beliefs. Unfortunately, by failing to do so, they suggested that all parents share the same beliefs and have the ability to practice them. This assumption is likely erroneous.

Another study by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) explored marital status and race in more depth. In this study, the researchers examined the educational literature from different points of view based on culture, race, socio-economic status, marital status, and nationality. This approach differed from Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) by explaining that parents were involved to the degree that they felt supported. Further, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) wrote that parents often considered enhancing their children's academic achievement as part of their 'job' as parents. In other words, both studies concurred that parents need to model, set high expectations, teach values, and help children develop and build on life skills.

While Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) considered culture, race, socio-economic status, marital status, and nationality, their broad-based approach makes it difficult to uncover themes related specifically to these constructs. In contrast, McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) explicitly targeted low-income and single parents' beliefs, which they found to be slightly different from middle-income and two parent families' beliefs. McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) reported results from focus group interviews of teachers and parents in low-income settings. The six mothers in the focus group (three African American, two Puerto Rican, and one White) believed that teachers influenced their children's school success and suggested that their children would benefit if they had 'good teacher(s)'. Good teachers were described as those who complimented the children often about their work and made them feel great about being in school. The participants also reported that teachers should communicate more frequently with parents and be more prominent in the community. From these comments, it seems clear that the mothers positioned themselves outside their children's schooling.

Along the same lines as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), Elder, Eccles, Ardel, and Lord (1995) considered the possibility that single parents of African heritage might have more difficulties with parental involvement and their children's schooling because of economics. Elder et al. (1995) surveyed a sample of 429 inner city families, two-thirds of whom were African Americans; for 90% of the families the mother was the primary caregiver. Among the families surveyed, economic hardship was found to be the main reason parents did not follow through with their beliefs. In addition, the authors discovered that for African American parents, there were additional challenges: (a) parental emotional distress represented an important rift between family economic hardship and parental ineffectiveness in beliefs; (b) the family structure (single parenthood) and social emotional support might be lacking; and (c) single parents tended to have a lesser sense of efficacy, leading them to transfer all responsibility to the school (Elder et al., 1995). While Elder et al.'s (1995) inclusion of ethnic groups is laudable, they neglected to expound on the reasons behind the similarities and differences between the various ethnic groups' beliefs regarding education, and the effect these differences might have on their involvement in children's education.

While a number of studies have investigated parental beliefs in general or using broad-based samples, few studies have examined the beliefs of single parents of African heritage towards the education of their children. Seaton and Taylor (2003) are an exception. These authors interviewed a sample of 171 rural African American single mothers with low SES and whose children ranged in age from 12-18 years. Each participant was interviewed, and, from the data, many themes emerged. These African American single mothers believed in creating routines for their children to help them in

school. The routines provided a structured and organized environment that was positive and supported their children's schooling. Due to the low SES of the African American single mothers, some became depressed, thereby affecting their ability to establish routines at home. In turn, this lack of routine had a negative effect on their children's education. At the same time, the authors found that parental optimism could create a positive effect insofar as some African American mothers believed that they could overcome their economic situation and still attain the routines at home that supported their children's education (Seaton & Taylor, 2003). Seaton and Taylor (2003) limited their study to rural African Americans. There are likely different problems confronting urban African American families than rural African American, such as living in high crime areas and having different employment opportunities. In addition, the study failed to discuss the effects if there was a change in routines due to loss of or changes in employment. It is possible that many African American families need to go through these changes to help or improve their SES situation.

Similarly, Brody and Flor's (1998) study used a sample of 156 rural African American single mothers whose children ranged in age from 6 to 9; 82% of these mothers lived in poverty. However, one theme is different from the other studies' themes: the belief in religion and education. The authors argued that these parents believed that if the children had a strong faith or background in religion, they became self-reliant and self-regulated adolescents. By being self-reliant, the children, in turn, became successful in school (Brody & Flor, 1998). Furthermore, these single parents of African heritage shared the same beliefs as two-parent families: parents' construction of parental

responsibilities, sense of efficacy in helping their children, and the ability to feel welcomed by the school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Like Brody and Flor (1998), Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert, and Stephens (2001) suggested that positive parental role modeling creates self-reliant children. Murry et al.'s (2001) study examined the literature of African American single mothers and their role in child development. Similar to the Seaton and Taylor (2003) study, this study discussed the role of creating routines. However, Murry et al. (2001) discovered that certain behaviours of African American single mothers that disrupted routines could precipitate both negative and positive effects on their children. For example, if African American single mothers abused alcohol or drugs, this behaviour would affect their children's involvement in school. Likewise, if African American single mothers went to church, had frequent parent-child communication, served as positive parental role models, and were supportive of their children's schooling, the children would show greater self-reliance, better school engagement, less problem behaviour, and less psychological distress (Murry et al., 2001).

In summary, the literature indicates that parents seem to share different viewpoints regarding their roles and the beliefs they hold about supporting their children. Some parents believe it is their duty as parents to be there for their children in times of need, while other parents place more responsibility on the teachers. Furthermore, single African American parents who have a strong faith in religion believe that if their children are religious, they become self-reliant and then, in turn, apply that attitude and use that strength in school. In creating solid routines, parents can provide support for their children at home especially for families with low SES. These differences in research

findings indicate the need for further study into the beliefs of single parents of African heritage.

Practices

Regardless of race or marital status, parents see their involvement with their child's schooling as related to the child's success (Mapp, 2003). In this section, I describe some studies that provide practices that parents use to help their children's education.

Greenwood and Hickman's (1991) literature review examined practices of parents from different cultural, ethnic, SES, and racial groups, such as Whites, Blacks, and Spanish. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) analyzed six types of approaches that parents can enact to help support their children's schooling: (a) parent as audience, (b) parent as volunteer, (c) parent as paraprofessional, (d) parent as teacher of own child, (e) parent as decision maker, and (f) parent as learner.

According to Greenwood and Hickman (1991), parents can be an audience by helping their children in the traditional ways, such as during parent-teacher conferences, on field trips, at open houses, in communication through child delivered notes, or when attending classroom activities and events. Parents can also be volunteers in the classroom or can act as paid paraprofessionals; these roles allow the teacher and the parents to play active roles together in helping all children learn (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Parents' roles as teachers usually become most visible at home. While it is the teacher's responsibility to plan, select, and develop homework for the child, the parents also need to monitor and to evaluate the child's progress (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

Likewise, parents' role as decision makers allow them to be involved in school governance activities such as Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), school advisory boards, or parent advisory councils. These associations allow parents to have input over decisions that will affect their children. Finally, parents can participate in activities such as workshops relating to parent growth, or, if they are new to the country, they can take courses such as English as a Second Language. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) suggested that parents' contributions towards their children's schooling in the form of these approaches should help create a positive atmosphere at school as well as at home. This positive atmosphere would benefit students' school achievement.

While Greenwood and Hickman (1991) investigated parent involvement across multiple contexts, Epstein and colleagues (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & Lee, 1995) examined teacher practices and parent involvement specifically in inner city schools. Epstein and Dauber (1991) collected their data from 171 teacher surveys from five elementary schools and three middle schools in low income neighbourhoods in the city of Baltimore. According to Epstein and Dauber's data, teachers felt that parents and educators needed to adopt five practices: (a) basic obligation of families, (b) basic obligation of school, including communication with families, (c) involvement at school, (d) involvement in learning activities at home, and (e) involvement in decision making.

The first basic obligation Epstein and Dauber (1991) described encompasses the provision of care and a healthy home environment for children. Parents prepare their children for school and build positive home conditions that support school learning and behaviour. The second basic obligation, the authors explained, requires communication

from the school with the parents about school programs and the children's progress. This communication includes phone calls, memos, notices, report cards, and conferences. The third practice Epstein and Dauber described was direct involvement at school, for instance, parents and other volunteers helping teachers and children in the classroom as assistants or in other areas in the school, such as coaching or supervising in the lunchroom. The fourth practice that the researchers deemed necessary was parent involvement in decision-making, which may come in the form of a position or participation in the parent council committees, the parent-teacher association, or in the Parent Advisory Council. The fifth practice the researchers suggested was involvement in learning activities at home. These activities should coordinate with the children's class work. While Epstein and Dauber provided useful information, parental views would have complemented their data.

Later, Epstein (2001) expanded her theories on parent involvement in their children's schooling in a book. Epstein (2001) created what she called six typologies consisting of: (a) parenting, (b) communication, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision-maker, and (f) collaborating with the community. The first five typologies map onto the practices from the previous work. The final typology, collaborating with the community, occurs when parents and teachers make connections with community agencies in ensuring student success. These typologies are ideal if the parent, teacher, and the child are working together in supporting the child's education. However, Epstein recognized that there exist hard-to-reach families, who, for whatever reasons (economic, ethnic, cultural, health), are not able to respond to the six typologies.

Mapp's (2003) study showed how parents who were involved with their children's school supported their education. The author collected data for this study in the form of one-on-one, in-depth interviews with 18 parents (16 females, two males) with similar SES: nine African Americans, eight Caucasians, and one Hispanic American; two couples (wife and husband), five married individuals, and nine single mothers, three of whom were divorcees. The parents described two types of practices in which they engaged: at-home involvement and at-school involvement. At-home involvement consisted of communication between parents and children about the importance of a good education, help with homework, and support for children's future educational goals. At-school involvement included attending school events, communicating with teachers, volunteering, and participating on school committees. The parents saw these forms of involvement as crucial for their children's educational success.

The practices described in these three lines of research, each using a different perspective (literature review, teacher survey, parent interview), seem to work well for many parents. However, these practices may be more difficult to accomplish for parents of lower income ethnic groups due to such factors as SES, single parenthood, and personal school-age experiences that inform their decision-making and practices. Thus although they covered considerable ground, the Epstein and Dauber (1991), the Greenwood and Hickman (1991), and the Mapp (2003) studies failed to look at another practice in which parents may engage because of the situation they are experiencing, such as single parenthood or lower SES, namely, strict discipline. In contrast, Nix et al. (1999) found that single parents needed to establish disciplinary practices with their children to force them to behave appropriately. In their study, Nix et al. interviewed and gave

surveys to 277 single parent families with children between the ages of 4 – 6 (inclusive). The single parents were mostly European American, and a small percentage was African American, Asian American, Latin American, and Native American. Nix et al. (1999) also had the children's teachers fill out surveys.

From the data, the authors concluded that these single parents were likely to practice strict discipline because they had been victims of child abuse or had been subject to harsh discipline themselves as children. As well, some single parents held jobs, such as shift work, which generated high levels of stress. For these parents, it was easier to practice strict discipline to support their children in education rather than to take the time to implement the other approaches that Epstein and Dauber (1991) or Greenwood and Hickman (1991) suggested. The study did not analyze in detail the barriers these parents faced or posit possible solutions to problems to facilitate parents' support for their children's education more.

More congruent with the present thesis, Kelley, Power, and Wimbush (1992) explored the situation of single African American mothers with low SES and their practices in helping with their children's education. Kelley, Power, and Wimbush (1992) used open interview questions with 42 single parents (mothers) of African American children between ages 3 and 6 years (inclusive). What emerged from Kelley, Power, and Wimbush's (1992) study was that these single mothers' disciplinary practices required that their children must yield obedience to parental authority. Single African American mothers used this approach when their children's behaviour was unacceptable at school.

What is also apparent from the data was the fact that single African American mothers engaged in this type of action to help protect their children because they lived in

low income/high crime areas. In other words, if their children became involved in any trouble and needed to leave school before they graduated, the children's chances of securing better situations than those of their mothers were greatly reduced (Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992). While this study showed how single parents used strict discipline to support and protect their children, it did not examine some of the more positive practices that parents of lower SES could and likely did engage in supporting their children's education.

To what extent do these differing parental practices influence valued outcomes for children? In a quantitative study, Prevatt (2003) used surveys from 80 mothers (60% White, 11 % African American, 16% Hispanic American, 5% Native American, and 7% of mixed ethnicity). Eighty percent of the women in this study were married, and 20% were divorced, single, or widowed. Their children ranged in age from 6 – 12 years. Prevatt's findings suggested that protective factors, such as family cohesion, family social support, and family morale, were related to children's adaptive behaviour in school. In contrast, externalizing behaviours were related to family risk and poor parenting. Family risk was defined as family stress, family conflict, parent psychopathology, and low SES, while poor parenting was operationalized as poor monitoring/supervision, inconsistent discipline, and corporal punishment. Parenting practices were unrelated to academic success. Thus while this study gave information relevant to the current thesis, it focused more on married parents whose SES differed from the single parents in the current thesis. In addition, it did not specifically examine the parenting of the African American mothers.

The literature reveals that there are three kinds of approaches that parents practice in helping their children's schooling: at-home involvement, at-school involvement, and strict discipline. At-home, for example, parents can help their children with their schoolwork and create a positive environment. At school, parents can come to their child's school to communicate with teachers or help volunteering. Parents practicing strict discipline require that their children yield obedience to parental authority. While parents see these practices as being beneficial to their children at school (Mapp, 2003), there is evidence (Prevatt, 2003) that parental practices affect students' behaviours but not their academic success.

Barriers

While there are approaches and practices in which parents can engage to be more involved in their children's education, barriers may hinder this involvement. Mannan and Blackwell (1992) reviewed barriers that parents face in supporting their children's academic development in the school system. Based on the educational literature, Mannan and Blackwell (1992) concluded that there are six types of barriers or reasons that may prevent parents from supporting their children's schooling: (a) parents' lack of skills to help, (b) lack of communication between the school and the parents, (c) lack of parent control, (d) lack of meaningful policies for parent involvement, (e) lack of recognition of parents from schools, and (f) lack of time due to the world of work that does not impact positively on parenting abilities and opportunities.

Lack of skills consists of some parents not having the formal education and skills necessary to help meet their children's educational and social needs. Culture shock and cultural barriers may also challenge immigrant parents. While some schools provide

parent education courses, these courses are marginal at best. Lack of communication between the parents and the school is caused by various factors. For instance, there is sometimes a class/income division between parents and teachers in urban schools; parents are made to feel unwelcome by the schools. Another factor is the language barrier that could affect communication between the teachers and the parents. Lack of control arises when parents perceive some programs to be prescriptive as opposed to collaborative. Indeed, many of these programs are created based on what schools think the parents need rather than what the parents actually need. This view may make several parents feel that they are being provided services because they are perceived to be incapable of acting on their own.

The fourth barrier, schools' lack of meaningful policies for parent involvement, indicates that the school's policy is generally to contact parents at report card time and/or when the children violate a school rule. Thus policies represent only evaluation and punishment without other forms of parental involvement. The fifth barrier emphasizes the way parents feel when they receive little recognition from the schools. It is essential that positive reinforcement structures are created to keep parental motivation high enough for the arduous task of parenting. As it stands, parents only hear from the schools when their children are either disobedient or are experiencing academic problems. Rarely do parents hear good words or receive praise notes about their children in schools. As well, when parents do hear positive messages from schools, the credit almost always goes to the children, not to the parents and their parenting skills. The final barrier is our world of work that does not impact positively on parenting abilities and opportunities. To maintain the family's standard of living despite the rising costs of living, parents work. Not only

do they work harder and longer hours, but often both parents have to work to help support their children. Consequently, they lack the time to help their children with school.

From their review of the literature, Mannan and Blackwell (1992) established six types of barriers and offered some ideas regarding what parents, teachers, and schools can do to help children achieve success. However, they failed to analyze the literature on single parents who may face other barriers that two parents in low income neighbourhoods do not necessarily face, such as the social pressure of having to raise children on one's own. A focus group or interviews with parents regarding the barriers they face in the support of their children in schools would also have been useful.

Similarly, Kemple, Carlisle, and Stanley (2005) analyzed the literature on families' involvement in their child's school. The researchers concluded there were many factors that parents saw as obstacles to their involvement in their child's education: (a) parents' prior education experiences, (b) work schedules, (c) teachers' attitudes, (d) teacher and school expectations, (e) family structures, and (f) family ethnicity.

The first four factors are comparable to those found by Mannan and Blackwell (1992). However, Kemple and colleagues examined two different factors from Mannan and Blackwell: family structures and family ethnicity. The structure of the family can affect parents' ability to support their child. The more stable a household in terms of two parents and higher SES, the greater the chances for parent involvement in their child's school. Children who come from families with divorces, single parents, and grandmother as head of the house or other family members as a guardian have a lesser chance of parent involvement. Children whose parents are married and living together have a higher chance for their parents to be a presence in their school and look after them both during

and after school. In terms of family ethnicity, schools have become increasingly diverse populations with students coming from all around the world. However, the teacher population does not have similar diversity. As a result, there are a large number of students whose parents have a different background from their teachers. These parents may feel that their child's teacher does not understand or respect their culture. They then choose not to be involved in their child's schooling.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) also reviewed educational literature on parents' involvement in their children's education (see above for details). Similar to Mannan and Blackwell's (1992) study, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) described barriers to parental involvement related to lack of time and work. However, an additional barrier Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) suggested that single mothers are more prone to face is the state of their maternal psycho-social health, more specifically, depression, which could have a negative impact on their involvement. Maternal depression was explored as a risk factor because depression is associated with a general lack of motivation, energy, and confidence, and depressed people elicit negative responses from others (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). The single parent status was negatively related to parental involvement at school, the teachers' perceptions of the parent, and the quality of the parent-teacher relationship. Notably, single parents seemed to focus their energies in the home. Given the research results, home is where these parents can expect their biggest return on effort; however, when not present in school, they run the risk of teachers' negative perceptions (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Although fairly thorough, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) did not investigate the race of single parents, nor did

they question if the level of depression was different across the single parents' cultures, genders, and ethnicities.

From focus groups with six low-income single mothers (three African American, two Puerto Rican, and one White), McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) identified two types of barriers that these parents faced that were explored in Mannan and Blackwell's (1992) study: difficulties with communication and lack of time because of work. However, McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) identified an additional barrier for these parents: the social barrier presented by a Eurocentric school.

From the focus groups, the feeling arose that there was a social barrier between these parents and the school. Parents felt that the school did not support different ethnic groups. The focus group revealed parents' perceptions that schools represent the values and interests of established White America and not the needs of low-income people of colour (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Parents saw schools as racist institutions where the majority of the teachers were White, and they described the teacher/parent relationship as "We and Them." Other social barriers affecting the relationship between schools and families were differences in skin colour, ethnicity, culture, and language. These were issues to which parents were highly sensitive, and worried about whether or not the teachers respected their children. Furthermore, the parents said they could recognize when teachers did not appreciate their children. These issues created barriers, especially when parents felt it was easier to say that they were too busy and were unable to attend school events rather than face these types of treatment from the school (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000).

Many studies on the difficulties that parents, especially single mothers, face in becoming involved in their child's schooling focus on lack of time and money. In this vein, Roy, Tubbs, and Burton (2004) examined how low SES mothers had many obligations such as work, transportation to and from work, family, and children, leaving them very little time for anything else. In their study, over a four-year period in Chicago, Roy et al. interviewed 75 mothers: 36 of Latino or Hispanic ethnicity, 28 African American, and 11 White. Half of the participants were under the age of 30 and were receiving government assistance such as welfare. In total, about 57% of the mothers were single, while another 18% were not married but still receiving support from a partner. Another 16% were married and living with a partner, and finally 9% were married but separated from their spouse. All parents had children between 18 months and school age (Roy et al., 2004).

A researcher visited each participant once a month over a period of three years to discuss how she was dealing with the time in supporting her children. Roy et al. (2004) concluded that it was difficult for mothers who lacked the time and the resources to deal with the typical "9-5" schedule. From the interviews, the researchers discovered that these mothers were motivated to provide for their families but were constantly discouraged by lack of funds. This situation would allow mothers to try new ideas to support their family, for example, trying to leave welfare because of time constraints, leave their partner who did not provide any support for their family, or quit their jobs if its work hours did not allow them to provide support for their children.

This study shows the challenges which mothers face in supporting their children. These mothers were continually making adjustments to their lives by finding new jobs or

other supports like welfare to balance the lack of time and resources to provide for their children. However, this study failed to look at other means of support that a mother could use to help, such as friends and families, people who could help these mothers overcome the barriers of time and money to create a positive and less stressful environment for their child.

Some studies concentrate more specifically on African American parents without examining single parenthood. Similar to McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) and Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), a study by McKernan McKay, Atkin, Hawkins, Brown, and Lynn (2003) analyzed parent involvement both at home and at the children's schools. This study used a sample of 161 parents, all of whom were African American and had children who attended an elementary (K-8) inner-city school. At least half of the parents had at least one child attending the school, while the rest of the parents had two or more children. The authors also surveyed 18 teachers at the school, about half of whom were African American, while the other half were White. The researchers created six different variables that parents would see as barriers or supports for involvement at home and at school: the school climate, formal contract with the school, social support, racism awareness, religiosity, and cultural pride (McKernan McKay et al., 2003).

Two areas seemed to act as barriers affecting parents' involvement in their child's school: racism awareness and cultural pride. McKernan McKay et al. (2003) first believed that the schools, parent, and teachers needed to improve racism awareness because parents felt that they would not involve themselves at their child's school due to racism from the school. Second, cultural pride was a source of tension between African American parents and the White teachers. The researchers suggested that, to improve the

cultural gap between teachers and parents and to improve involvement of parents both at home and at school, there needs to be more communication between the parties involved. However, this study failed to look at the relationship of single mothers and how their involvement could affect their support of a child's education.

Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, and Efreom's (2005) study of 159 disadvantaged African American parents/guardians (all female; 93% single parents) of school-aged children in urban settings suggested that the parents' behaviour could affect their ability to help their child's education. If parents had high educational desires for themselves and their child/children; if they regularly attended church; if they participated at the community centre; and if they perceived themselves as welcome at their child's school, they were more likely to be involved in the school. Thus low educational desires, non-involvement in church and/or community centre, and lack of school receptivity acted as barriers. However, this study did not explore the mechanisms between these behaviours and low school involvement. As well, the study failed to examine why some schools did not try and make parents feel welcome when these barriers created divisions between the school and the parent, which would potentially affect the child's education in the long run.

The research and the literature regarding the different barriers parents face in supporting their children in school suggest that there are many factors that keep parents, especially low SES parents, from being successful in helping their children. From the data, the one common barrier that constantly emerges as a hindrance to parents' support is the lack of time due to work. Parents who have low SES, low skills, or are single tend to face the greatest challenges in finding time to support their children. They are often

employed in poorly paid positions, and many parents have shift work, which does not allow them to spend time with their children after school. These types of jobs offer parents few benefits or security. Just to visit the school requires a great deal of planning to take time from work and to arrange for transportation, which many of these parents have a hard time doing. Thus parents do not have the time or the resources to support their children—the very children who need it the most (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). There are different methods that school's policies, principals, and teachers can utilize to help parents, especially low SES single parents from different cultures, races, and ethnic backgrounds, to support their children in school. There are also other groups who can provide this support.

Support

Most parents have a strong desire to help their children succeed, but they face different challenges such as time and resources (Mannan & Blackwell, 1992). To help overcome these challenges, parents need their own support system. For single parents of African heritage, support comes primarily from their domestic kin network, which can include friends, and secondarily from schools.

From generation to generation, African Americans have used domestic kin networks to support each other's families (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005). Family members feel a sense of obligation to help each other, extending material support, such as income, childcare, and household maintenance (Lamborn & Nguyen, 2004). Also, families provide help in other more emotional and social ways (Hunter, 1997; Lamborn & Nguyen, 2004; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005). Overall, domestic networking can

create and support a child's growth towards a positive path in life (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005).

These multigenerational systems are usually supported and often organized by a dominant person. The person who takes charge of the domestic networking tends to be the grandmother who keeps the family together (Lamborn & Nguyen, 2004; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005). This tradition is particularly strong among African American grandmothers. There is a higher chance for African American grandmothers, compared to Latinas or Whites, to help create a domestic network to keep families mobilized due to divorce or single parenting (Goodman & Silverstein, 2006; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005). In using domestic networking, single mothers can take advantage of their family's help and find greater employment opportunities that would be difficult without support (Hunter, 1997; Jarrett, 1994; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005).

Murry et al. (2001) reviewed the literature on African American single mothers and their children, and how they were able to support themselves. This research showed that a support system of a domestic kin network comes in three parts: co-residence, co-parenting, and social support. Many African American mothers live in the same residences with their extended families. Within these homes or co-residences, the mothers are the primary caregivers for the children, the grandmothers are secondary, and both are working as co-parents in supporting the children. The social support of families and friends allows these mothers some level of self-efficacy. If not, these single African American mothers would rely on professional agencies, such as welfare, as a means of support. Developing a domestic kin network of support allows single parents to provide more care and support for their children. Families and friends can provide both financial

and emotional support for the single parents, which, in turn, allow single parents to overcome the challenges they face in helping their children.

Hunter (1997) suggested that parenting support from grandmothers is part of the African American heritage. Hunter's study used a sample of 487 parents whose ages ranged from 18 to 34. The grandparents, specifically grandmothers, were relied upon heavily by their children for child support and parental guidance. They were also viewed as co-parents to provide stability for the mother and her children and reduce the levels of stress for both (Hunter, 1997; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005). In addition, mothers would rely more on child support and parental guidance than they would on fathers.

Likewise Jarrett's (1994) study, which involved 10 focus groups of 82 single Black mothers, revealed a similar theme of support. One single mother living with her mother stated:

When your money is gone and you at home with your mama, you don't have to worry about where you getting your next meal from because mama is always going to figure out a way how can get your next meal. ... And your mama would be there to depend on; you can depend on your mama. (Jarrett, 1994, p. 41)

This single mother and her child were relying on her mother to support them. Another single parent used her grandmother, mother, and sister as a system of support in helping look after her child:

Well, on the days Damen has school, my mother picks him up at night and keeps him at her house. And then when she goes to work in the morning, she takes him to my grandmother's house. And when my little sister gets out of school, she picks him up and takes him back to my mother's house. And then I go and pick him up. (Jarrett, 1994, p. 42)

By developing a large domestic network, these single Black mothers can provide better care for themselves and their children. Family members can provide shelter, money, food, child care, advice, guidance, and help with the cooking and cleaning (Jarrett, 1994).

Similarly, Jackson (1998) did a study with 188 single Black mothers in a low-income neighbourhood in New York. These mothers were interviewed at their homes, and similar themes of domestic kin network, that is, seeking the support of grandmothers, as well as friends, were found. One single Black mother stated:

If I need to do an errand, I can easily find a friend or relative living nearby to watch my children. If I need a ride to get my child to the doctor, there are friends I could call to help me, and if I need to buy a pair of shoes for my children, but I am short of cash, there is someone who would lend me the money. (Jackson, 1998, p. 368)

Indeed, along with family members, friends can provide emotional, economic, and physical support to single parents.

Another study (Stevens, 1988) involved a comparative examination of low-income Black teenage mothers, Black adult mothers, and White adult mothers. In this study, 62 Black adult mothers, 62 White mothers, and 74 Black teenage mothers were interviewed. The study revealed that both Black teenage and adult mothers would look for support from friends and families, while White mothers would look for support in the form of professional help. It seems that the themes of developing domestic kin networks are common amongst Black families. However, the situation is different for White mothers; it seems they prefer to seek help from social workers and other professional services for support for themselves and their children than from their families (Stevens, 1988).

Fathers or interested father figures may also provide support for the children, while offering the possibility of economic partnership with single mothers. McCabe, Clark, and Barnett's (1999) study involved interviews with 64 Grade 6 African American boys regarding their methods of seeking support from a father or a father-like figure such as an uncle, cousin, or coach. This seeking of support by the boy is seen as another supporting strategy for the mother. In addition, according to Jarrett's (1994) study, many of these single mothers wanted to get married to their boyfriends or the fathers of their children to improve their SES. However, factors such as compatibility, fidelity, and commitment prevented some of these single Black mothers from getting married.

While, in most situations, single mothers of African heritage choose not to receive help from schools or community agencies but from family or friends, some authors have suggested means by which schools could provide support. For example, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) listed seven such methods: (a) communicate clearly that all parents have an important role to play in the children's school, (b) give parents specific information about what they can do to be involved, (c) give parents specific information about the general effects of involvement on student learning, (d) give parents specific information on how their involvement in activities influence learning, (e) give parents specific information about curriculum and learning goals, (f) offer parents positive feedback on the effects of their involvement, and (g) create and support parent and parent-teacher networks in the school.

Similar to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), Kemple et al. (2005) provide nine suggestions about how teachers can support parents' involvement in their child's schooling. Three of these are written specifically for parents who are from low SES,

single parents, and visible minorities: (a) reflect on your attitude and perceptions of parents, (b) individualize strategies to accommodate families' specific needs, and (c) consider the special circumstances of homeless families.

First, teachers need to reflect about their beliefs or attitudes towards parents. Teachers should ask questions about themselves such as if they are biased towards parents because of past experiences. Second, teachers should be flexible and create individualized strategies to accommodate all parents' specific needs, such as arranging for child-care during meetings and other at-school activities. Teachers can provide a variety of meeting times for all different types of schedules, which should include weekends. Finally, teachers must be fully aware of special circumstances of homeless families. Many parents are dealing with more problems such as spouse abuse, lack of funds, and depression.

Mapp's (2003) study examined parental views of how they were being supported by a school (O'Hearn Elementary School) dedicated to parental involvement. This approach, called the joining process, consisted of: welcoming, honouring, and connecting. The joining process helped create a culture that enabled the parents to feel like partners or members of the school.

To welcome parents, the school had initiated a home visitation program, and held new-parent breakfasts every year in the family centre. Furthermore, the physical environment of the school—with children's pictures on the walls and the overall cleanliness of the school—helped add to the feeling that the parents belonged there (Mapp, 2003). Parents were honoured by respecting their strong points and their efforts in supporting their children's schooling. Parents were treated as partners and were

encouraged to join and help in different groups, projects, and committees. In addition, parents felt connected to the school. The view was that all home and school activities, like school plays and open houses, existed to help support the educational achievement of all children. Parents and school were working together for a common goal that would benefit what was important to both of them: the children.

Insightful as it was, given that the study only involved 18 parent interviews, generalizations beyond this study are questionable. Also, unlike the participants in the current thesis, the interviewees came from a variety of racial backgrounds, and not all the parents were single.

Single parents use two types of support in helping with their children's education: domestic kin networks and supports from school. Creating a domestic kin network permits single parents the time, resources, and the emotional support needed to surmount barriers. Friends and family members give single parents more opportunity to overcome these barriers. Schools can provide supports for single parents such as the joining process of welcoming, honouring, and connecting. This joining process allows the parents to feel supported and a part of their children's school (Mapp, 2003). However, single Black mothers tend to rely on support from domestic kin networks rather than schools. In contrast, White single mothers tend to use community agencies or schools for support rather than domestic kin networks (Stevens, 1988).

Summary

Literature exists on the beliefs, practices, barriers, and support that parents hold, engage in, encounter, and receive (respectively) when making an effort to support their children's educational development; however, this research has generally not included single parents of African heritage. Research on this population, therefore, needs to be conducted because: (a) children of African heritage are not generally experiencing success in school, (b) parents may influence this success, and (c) we do not yet know enough about these parents. These four case studies try to find answers to these questions in regards to what beliefs these parents hold, the practices they undertake, the barriers they encounter, and the supports they have in helping their children achieve school success.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

In this chapter, I describe specific research methods that I used to collect and then analyze the data for this study. The first section provides a rationale for choosing qualitative research. In the second section, I give an overview of the participant recruitment methods, selection criteria, and a brief description of each individual. The third section describes the data collection process, including the selection of interview questions. The final section of the chapter explains the approaches to analyzing the data through transcribing and coding to help understand how these four single Canadian mothers of Jamaican heritage share experiences with respect to their beliefs, practices, barriers, and supports about their children's schooling.

Choice of Research Method

As a researcher, I believe that qualitative inquiry provides an opportunity to delve deeply into the relationship between these four Canadian single mothers of Jamaican heritage and the public education system. Qualitative inquiry allows for a particular arrangement of conversation between the participants and the researcher (Warden et al., 2003). A qualitative study can also help to open up a world and allow the reader to understand better what is studied, through rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative inquiry provides the opportunity to look at my research questions and understand the cultural background of these four Canadian single mothers of Jamaican heritage and the kinds of guidance they provide to their children about education issues.

Knowledge about one culture is but one tool that I can use when suggesting solutions for a school's difficulty in educating diverse African Canadian/Black children (Delpit, 1992). As well, qualitative inquiry allows for developing rapport with participants and discussing in detail aspects of their lives (de Marrais & Lapan, 2004). Since each participant was unique, each qualitative interview in this study was unique (de Marrais & Lapan, 2004). Using qualitative inquiry allowed me to spend a substantial amount of time interviewing and in personal contact with each participant. The primary reason I decided to use qualitative inquiry for my research questions is the quality and depth that characterize such studies.

Participants

I am a single African Canadian male from a two-parent family, I have two brothers and one sister. I am the youngest in the family. Although I am the only teacher in the family, my parents instilled in all of us as we were growing up the value of a good education. Thus I entered this research with the bias that education was critical in children's lives and should be supported by their parents.

To find participants for this study, I targeted a local low socio-economic background neighbourhood in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) with a large population of people of Jamaican heritage. This neighbourhood is culturally diverse, with inhabitants coming from the Caribbean, Africa, South America, and Asia. I grew up in this area and attended one of the three public high schools located in this community. I chose this local neighbourhood because I am quite familiar with the neighbourhood and understand its culture. I felt it was necessary to choose Jamaicans for my study because I wanted to

narrow my data to the largest population of people of African heritage in Canada (Milan & Tran, 2004).

I had four selection criteria for this study. Participants (a) were mothers who were first or second generation of Jamaican heritage, (b) had children of elementary school age (4 -14), (c) had been single for two or more years, and (d) were not romantically involved and/or living with a partner. They could, however, be living with friends and/or family members.

Since I was working with human subjects, I applied and was given ethical clearance for this study by Queen's University General Research Ethics Board. To ensure compliance with ethical guidelines, all participants received a Letter of Information (see Appendix A) telling them what this study was about and that their identity would remain confidential. Each participant signed a Consent Form (see Appendix B) stating that their participation in this study was voluntary. The main concerns for ethical consideration for these case studies were to be the confidentiality of the participants and the private nature of the data. To protect the confidentiality, I allowed the participants to select their own pseudonyms (with the exception of Reba who was unable to suggest a pseudonym; therefore, I picked her pseudonym myself). To ensure the private nature of the data, I kept all data stored in a locked place in a secure location with both hard and electronic copies.

To find participants for this study, I decided to use snowball sampling. Snowball sampling occurs when you ask someone if she or he knows anyone who fits the criteria of a study. In asking a number of people, the 'snowball' gets bigger and you find more and more participants for a study (Patton, 2002). I was able to locate participants for this

study by using the snowballing sample. Through this method, I recruited six participants who met the criteria for this study. I then decided to pick the four who were available to do an interview. One participant came from my personal acquaintance, and another came from a friend who knew someone who fit the criteria of this study. The first participant suggested the two other individuals. If I had not been able to recruit enough participants for this study through snowballing, I would have made an announcement in a local church bulletin (see Appendix C). The snowballing method meant that the four participants came from fairly similar backgrounds, although their children attended three different elementary schools.

The four participants in this study were Carvel, Reba, Kelly, and Laitishia.

Carvel, a 35-year-old single parent of two children, was born in Canada and is second generation Jamaican Canadian. She has two young boys (ages 12 and 13) who attend the same middle school in Toronto. Carvel did not complete high school. Carvel was the first person I interviewed, and she afterwards directed me to the next two participants: Reba and Kelly; Reba, a 34-year-old single parent of one child, and Kelly, a 40-year-old single parent of three. Both Reba and Kelly were born in Jamaica. However, Reba came to Canada as a child, and Kelly came as an adult. Reba has one son who is 13 years old, while Kelly has two girls and one boy whose ages are 16, 15, and 9 respectively. While Reba and Kelly completed high school, Reba graduated from college as well. The final participant for this study, Laitishia, is a 35-year-old single parent of five children, two boys and three girls, ages 17, 15, 13, 5, and 3. Laitishia did not finish high school. She heard about the study from a personal friend. She was interested and called me to arrange for an interview.

Data Collection

All four participants answered the same questions in a semi-structured interview format. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable environment of the participant's own choosing. For example, Reba and Kelly were interviewed in their home with no children present. Laitishia was also interviewed at home, with her three daughters present. Carvel was really busy, and we were unable to carry out the interview at her home. With limited time and space, we held the interview in her car in a plaza parking lot. Each of the four interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes. In addition, all interviews were taped to allow thorough analyses of the data.

Interviews allow for participants to divulge life accounts and tell their life stories alone (Gubrium, Jaber, & Holstein, 2002). Interview data are useful because they are able to address individual experiences. Interview data allow a rich, in-depth experiential account of events or episodes in the lives of the participants (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Open-ended interview questions with the four participants allowed a degree of consistency in the data that I collected while, at the same time, I was able to probe to help the participants provide further details about their experience (Gibson & Duncan, 2000). Individual interviews were better for this study than having a focus group because some single mothers might feel uncomfortable in telling their stories in a group setting, or some might begin to feel that they were not raising their children well compared to other single mothers in the group.

First, I went over the questions with one of my committee members, Dr. Colgan, who helped me refine the questions. Second, Dr. Freeman, my supervisor, made more suggestions and changed and deleted some questions. Third, I interviewed an

acquaintance for a pilot test, which I later transcribed. This process allowed me to refine my interview questions again. It also helped me to think of probing questions to use when I interviewed the four participants should they give me answers that were limited, short, or unclear. In addition, I deleted more questions from my list for this study. The mock interview was not used for data in this study. The final list of questions is found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proved to be the most difficult and one of the most crucial aspects of this study. The data from this qualitative research are from interview transcripts. I also made some additional notes about the four participants to help me have a better understanding of the mothers (Skinner, Tagg, & Holloway, 2000).

I first transcribed Reba's interview. This process took a great deal of time so I decided that it was necessary to pay for someone to transcribe the other interviews for me. This individual was able to transcribe the other three interviews in a single day, which allowed me to start coding the interviews.

The key to understanding and analyzing the data from the interviews is the recognition of the themes emerging (Charmaz, 2002). This process was done through coding four initial categories (beliefs, practices, barriers, and support) and searching for possible additional themes. Coding requires me, the researcher, to attend closely to the data (Henning, Gravett, & Van Rensburg, 2004). I familiarized myself with the data by thoroughly and repeatedly reading and studying the interviews. I used line-by-line coding, which helped me examine the codes and capture participants' implied and

explicit meanings (Flick, 2006). Since my questions were designed to give responses to four themes, I generated a chart with one column for each theme. Then I looked for interview segments with each of the four Canadian single mothers of Jamaican heritage that addressed the themes. I highlighted specific segments in each transcription and used colour codes: beliefs—blue, practices—pink, barriers—orange, and, support—purple. These four themes included all the relevant data in the transcripts. I then transposed the statements from the colour-coded transcripts to my chart, so I could examine patterns for each participant and across participants.

The next chapter provides the in-depth results of the four interviews of single mothers for this study. I examine each individual separately using the framework of my four themes. In the fifth chapter, I compare information across participants with respect to the literature.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, four single Canadian parents of Jamaican heritage share experiences about their children's schooling. They describe the beliefs they have about education, the practices they use with respect to their children's schooling, the barriers they encounter in undertaking these practices, and the supports they receive to overcome these barriers. These mothers, Carvel, Reba, Kelly, and Laitishia present unique stories of their lives as single parents of elementary school-aged children.

Carvel

Background Information

Carvel is 32 years old. She is a slim, tall woman with long, shoulder-length hair. Carvel was born in Toronto, Canada and does not have a Jamaican accent; however, she identifies herself as a "single, Black, Jamaican woman." At the time of the interview, she is employed as a receptionist, having been in the same position for the past five years. Carvel is presently living in an apartment with her two children, boys whose ages are 12 and 13 years. Both children attend the same middle school and are in Grade 7 and 8, respectively. Carvel herself did not finish high school, although she completed Grade 11. She never married the children's father, although they were living in a common-law relationship for a few years before they finally separated. Carvel has legal custody of the children, but the father has visitation rights and spends time with the boys when he is available.

Although her voice is firm, loud, and sharp at times during the interview, Carvel answers some questions with uncertainty and trepidation. She feels somewhat hesitant and unsure as to what kind of response is required from her. As the interview progresses, however, Carvel gradually starts to gain self-assurance and is able to provide answers about her struggles in raising two boys. Whenever she speaks about education, she appears to become a little troubled and starts to speak faster to get her point across. Through actions and words, she conveys the impression that she wants to make sure her boys do not make the same mistakes that she made in school.

On the day of the interview, Carvel's grandmother takes ill and is admitted to hospital. As the illness is not extremely serious, Carvel is still able to find time to participate in the interview. I hold the interview in her car, which is parked in a shopping centre parking lot. We are alone during the interview while her children are with their great-grandmother at the hospital.

Beliefs

Carvel discusses her beliefs regarding the education system for her children in three sections. First, Carvel believes parents and teachers have a responsibility in helping children's schooling by supervising activities such as homework, communicating with each other, and addressing issues of social justice. Second, Carvel feels that her culture puts her children at a disadvantage because of the stigma attached to her race. Third, Carvel shares the belief that her children have more support now than she did as a student in dealing with negative or positive influences in our society that can affect children's education, such as peer pressure.

First, Carvel believes it is imperative that parents be involved in their children's education. "I think they should be very involved. I think it's important to know what your children are learning and to help them with homework, and it's important for parents to be involved." She values the importance of knowing what the child is learning and attempting to support the child with tasks such as homework.

Carvel also believes that teachers play an important role in helping her children's schooling by working and communicating with the parents. "Teachers are also responsible, and I think by keeping in contact with parents and working together with parents so both sides know what's going on with the children inside school hours and after school." She describes the role as a partnership, so both parent and teacher are working together in supporting the child's education. Keeping constant contact with the teacher, Carvel feels, will help with her children's education.

Carvel also believes that now teachers are more helpful and understanding in dealing with social justice issues facing children and their education. She states that teachers today are better educated on different issues children face in school than in the past. As a student, Carvel felt teachers lacked the knowledge vis-à-vis the problems she faced in her neighbourhood. "I think they have, I think teachers are better qualified and know a bit more about society and what's going on inner city wise to help kids with issues that I didn't have as a student." Carvel thinks students have it easier today because of the support they are getting from teachers that she did not receive as a student.

Second, Carvel explains that, due to their race and background, her children are not treated equally in society due to stereotyping. "I feel that our culture has, their culture has a bad rap and that sometimes people look at them, and just by knowing where they're

from or what their family heritage is, that sometimes it's a disadvantage to them." She also feels that society will not give her children a chance because of the negative bias with which society views their race. "People might not give them the fair chance that they might give to someone that isn't of their race. I feel like society sometimes already has their future laid out for them, and they don't expect anything more from these kids."

Carvel feels that the stereotyping her children face will not only affect their education but may affect their future.

Third, according to Carvel, peer pressure also plays a role in her children's education as it did in her own schooling. On the one hand, Carvel believes that when she was a student, poor performance in school was her fault. "Only myself prevented me from doing well at school." On the other hand, she does go on to say that

Friends, falling in with the wrong crowds and with people that didn't have the same ideas for me as my mom had, friends that didn't really care if you succeed or not, they just are about the time (Not concern about their future, just the present).

Carvel thus acknowledges that peer pressure did affect her ability to stay focused on her education.

Carvel states that her children must deal with more issues surrounding peer pressure than she dealt with as a student. "Oh such as so much peer pressure where drugs are concerned, sex, gang wise, uh, there's a lot more pressure now for youth to be involved in things like that." She never had to deal with these issues because she grew up in a different neighbourhood than where she presently lives. "When I was a student, it wasn't so prevalent in the city or in the, where I grew up." Carvel shares the belief that peer pressure played a role in schooling in the past, and it could affect her children's schooling as well.

Practices

Carvel explains the methods she uses to help her two children in their education. These practices arise from her experiences of being a child of a single mother herself. First, Carvel's mother was a positive role model to her as a student. Second, Carvel describes the hands-on approach she received from her mother as well as her teachers. Carvel tries to emulate these practices for supporting her children by being a role model and using a hands-on approach.

Carvel's mother wanted to be a positive role model for her daughter. She found it essential to explain to Carvel how tough it was for her as a child. Her mother faced a plethora of challenges in Jamaica, and her mother's perpetual wish for Carvel was for her to have a better life. "She had it very difficult back in Jamaica where she went to school, and she saw how important it was for education here." Carvel's mother wanted a better life for her daughter here than she had experienced in Jamaica. "Knowing about her, how she grew up and how hard it was for her, it makes me know how lucky I am to have the chances that I have in Canada." As Carvel describes her mother's past in Jamaica, it becomes evident that Carvel had made the conscious decision that it was necessary for her to be a positive role model for her children the way her mother was for her.

Furthermore, Carvel uses and describes her own past to her children the way her mother related her life story to Carvel. In other words, Carvel is following her mother's example and makes a conscious effort to show them that she, too, is a positive role model. "I am always a positive influence for them, always emphasizing how important it is to get a high school education, to finish school, to be attentive in school, and to want to

get good grades.” Because of her own experience of not completing high school, Carvel maintains that she only wants a better situation for her own children.

Carvel’s mother used a hands-on approach with her to help her stay focused. “My mother helped me...She helped me just to stay focused and to remember that it’s all worthwhile and that everything pays off.” Carvel’s mother helped out with her homework and was supportive of her at school. “My mother kept track on my homework; she tried to come to all events.”

Likewise, Carvel is extremely involved in her children’s education. “I help them with their homework. I make sure assignments are done.” This hands-on approach helps her to engage with her children and their learning. She feels this approach is the best way for a single mother to be involved in her children’s learning.

In addition to providing support at home, Carvel works closely with the school to help to make sure her children are receiving the attention they need. Carvel’s children’s teachers use the hands-on approach that Carvel uses so that both parties can work together to support her children. “Their teachers are hands-on with me and working together with how we can resolve issues, whether it’s behaviour or mostly behaviour in school.” This strategy of hands-on support by teachers not only addresses academic issues, but also behaviour issues that may be difficult for Carvel to handle by herself as a single parent.

Barriers

As a single parent of two pre-teen boys, Carvel faces different barriers in terms of helping with their schooling. She describes these barriers in three different areas: (a) the lack of support from teachers towards her when she was a student and now towards her

children as students; (b) poor influences from friends, TV, and video games; and (c) lack of time as a single parent.

Carvel explains that some teachers can be really helpful, while others can be quite unsupportive. When she was a student, she felt that teachers did not take the time to go above their regular duty in the classroom. “Well, they weren’t very helpful but they ... they didn’t. I mean they took care of the situation at the time. They, it’s not like there was an outreach of help for if you needed extra help.” Carvel still believes that some teachers gave her just the minimum when they could have made a difference in her life.

Carvel sees this lack of support as compounded by race. She believes that teachers are stereotyping her children in terms of race. “A few years ago, I felt like one of my children was kind of becoming the underdog at school.” According to Carvel, her children are not perceived as equal to the other children. For this reason, Carvel believes her children are picked on unjustly by their teachers. “I felt like people were just against him because of his race, and that he was being blamed for things that weren’t his fault, and that it was easier for teachers to blame him.” Carvel stresses that this type of stereotyping can hinder teachers from recognizing the real problems with which her children may be dealing in school. “Put everything on him than to address bigger issues about why he might have been misbehaving.”

With regard to influences on her schooling, Carvel claims that friends were a key factor. As a student, she felt that she had time on her side, and she could do whatever she wanted to do. “Too much time with friends and ... yeah too much time hanging out and thinking that that was, that there wasn’t time to waste.” Carvel was not concerned about her future schooling and the time she was wasting hanging out with her friends. “You

know, that time was, was not precious and we had all the time in the world, so we could just waste our time away.” All her friends felt time was not important, and, before she realized it, Carvel missed opportunities to do well in school.

At present, Carvel states that there are several poor influences on her children’s schooling. She believes that friends, TV, and video games affect her children’s schooling. “Sometimes it’s hard to get your kids to not want to play with their friends, and not want to watch television, or play video games.” Carvel explains that children want to have fun, but she would rather see them do something fun and positive at the same time: “Something constructive like reading or drawing or ... so sometimes it’s a challenge.” She also finds it difficult to get her children to focus on doing their homework. “Sometimes I think that what they watch on television and video games hinder the amount of homework and the amount of learning time that I would like them to have.” Carvel sees these poor influences as a barrier to her children’s education, especially as a single parent.

Another barrier that keeps Carvel from providing the support she would like to give her children is the time constraint she has as a single mother. Carvel finds it extremely challenging to make time for her children’s schooling. Sometimes she even finds it difficult to be there for her children at school. “Sometimes it’s hard with, when you’re a single parent and you’re working and they need the extra time, whether it’d be to meet with teachers before or after school, to attend special events that they’re having at the school.”

Carvel fears that the lack of time may make her children feel that they are not important. “Sometimes it is hard because the child thinks that you don’t want to be there

when ultimately it's because you're trying to make a better future for them." Carvel explains that she needs to work and help to secure a better future for her children, yet at the same time she needs to find the time and help with their schooling now.

Support

Carvel states that she has two important sources of support in helping her children's education. First, her family, which includes her mother and sister, has supported her as a student and are now helping her own children with their education. Second, Carvel uses after-school, family, and youth outreach programs offered by the local community centre to help support her children.

When Carvel was a student, her mother supported her in her schooling. As a single parent as well, Carvel's mother did her best to help Carvel. "She definitely tried to help. She never tried to prevent my success." Her mother always tried to lead by example in supporting her daughter. "Yeah, she was always a positive role model even when I didn't want to hear what she had to say and, you know, what she thought was best for me from her experiences." Carvel's mother wanted her to have a better life than she had. "She just wanted me to not have to go through the same things that she went through."

Carvel not only had support from her mother in her schooling, but also from her sister. "Maybe just my mother and my sister, they help a lot with, (pause) sometimes if the children don't want their mother to help them." If the topic was something that she would rather not ask her mother, Carvel would turn to her sister for support. "Sometimes it's easier to have a family member or someone that's close to them that isn't a parent and can get through different topics with them that maybe they don't feel as embarrassed to

talk to a parent about.” Carvel has a close relationship with her sister, which stemmed from having a good relationship and source of support in the past.

Carvel states that she uses different family programs to support her children’s education. She receives support from her family and support programs. “What supports do I have? I have my family, local community centers, and youth outreach programs there’s after-school programs.” She uses these programs because they provide her children with a place to go after school before she comes home from work. “That parent is welcome to (bring) and keep kids structured until parents come home from work.”

Carvel also explains the extra value of these programs. “They keep, they keep my kids busy when, if they didn’t have these programs they could be, you know, out playing with people or hanging around people that maybe aren’t a good influence on them.”

Carvel is helping her children by encouraging them to associate with people who can have a positive influence. “They’re taught sports and, you know, they do their homework, and they teach them about peer pressure, and about saying no to drugs, and sex education, and I think that it’s better time spent than kids just doing or being reckless.” Carvel feels that it is necessary for her children to hear the messages about peer pressure, drugs, and sex from someone besides herself to help them succeed in their schooling.

Summary

Carvel’s experiences include dealing with many challenges in supporting her boys’ schooling. One concept that emerges from the themes is the role in being a positive role model that her own mother played in helping Carvel with her schooling in the past. Now Carvel is using the same positive role her mother used in helping her children.

Carvel describes her experiences as a single mother in the past and in the present. Her mother was an important figure in her life as a student. A single mother herself, she tried to be a positive role model for Carvel. Her mother, having been born and raised in Jamaica, wanted a better life for Carvel. She helped Carvel with homework, attended parent interviews, and helped Carvel stay focused on the importance of a good education. Carvel's mother was a constant fixture in her life as a student, and Carvel wants to duplicate the role of a positive role model to her children.

Now as a single mother herself, Carvel is also a positive role model and gives guidance and support with her children's schooling. Carvel wants to lead by example and is very hands-on with her children. She is always there for her children and educates them about the value of a good education. Carvel acknowledges the value of having her mother as a positive role model and tries her best to duplicate her experience as a child in her own mothering.

Reba

Background Information

Reba is 34 years old. She has a small build and is about 5 feet tall. She was born in Kingston, Jamaica and came to Toronto, Canada in the mid 1970's. Because Reba came to Canada at an early age, she sees herself both as Jamaican and Canadian. "You know, I was born in Jamaica and came up here when I was 3, and I know both lifestyles like you know. I think I am Jamaican, and I came up here and adapted Canadian ways." At the time of the interview, Reba is employed as a daycare worker. She is presently living in an apartment with her son. Reba only has one 13-year-old son who is in Grade

8. Reba graduated from high school, attended college, and received a diploma in Early Childhood Education (ECE). She gave birth to her son during her time in college. She married her son's father, but divorced him a few years later. Reba is currently single, and her son's father is still involved in their son's life.

During our interview, Reba is totally focused. She has a soft, kind voice and at times speaks with a slight Jamaican accent. She never appears to raise her voice, but she does demonstrate some excitement or agitation when relating the difficulties that she has faced in the past. Reba displays independence and the willingness to acquire help in times of great necessity. She is incredibly serious and wants to provide clear and comprehensible answers when telling stories regarding her efforts in simultaneously raising a child and attending college. What really impresses me are the pride and sense of accomplishment she feels with regard to her academic achievement and its benefits. She knows she needs to do more to help herself and her son.

We conduct the interview in the living room at the apartment that she is renting from Metro Housing. We face each other on the couch. We are alone during the interview while her son is at school, although he is expected home shortly after the interview.

Beliefs

Reba discusses her beliefs about education in three ways. First, Reba believes that both parents and teachers should be involved together in helping with children's schooling. Second, Reba feels that her experiences as a student in the past differ from what her son faces in the present. Third, she believes that stereotyping and negative beliefs about her culture have detrimental effects on her son's education.

For Reba, parents and teachers should have a working relationship in supporting children's education. In these relationships, the parent has a significant role. "I think the parents should be involved in their children's education 100%. They should be able to communicate with the teacher." Furthermore, she states that parents need to consistently do their part, such as "find out what their children are doing, how their work is progressing, and you know, helping out also with the home and seeing if there's anything that needs to be done. I think they should be involved in their child's school life." These steps can help a parent understand and be supportive of her or his children.

According to Reba, teachers have their roles as well in helping children's schooling. "I think, also, that the teacher should be involved with the student. I think they should be about 100%." The teacher needs to communicate with the parent on a regular basis. "They should be able to let the parent know of any problems students are having—if they are not doing their work, if things are not up to par, and sometimes have meetings with parents and the students together to see how to make things get better."

In addition, Reba believes that, ideally, education warrants cooperation between the parent and the teacher; they should both work together in helping the child's schooling. She even claims that teachers should not only call when things are bad for the child, but also when things are good and when it is time to consider how the situation can be even better. "Even if things are going good, let the parents know, you know, so that you know, so you can work for a better life for the child, and they could be better in school."

In the past, Reba believes her life as a student in school was a good experience; however, it is different to her child's in the present. "I think being a student back in my

time is different than being a student now.” As a student, Reba was interested in school work and achieving success. In her words, “I worked hard. I loved school.” She had an enjoyable time with peers in school, but she wanted to do her school work, too. “I find that we worked more. I mean, we did a lot of playing and stuff, but our work was done. We got our work done. For me, I always was on time with my work.” Overall, Reba had a good experience as a student with little adversity.

In contrast, Reba sees that times are different for her child. “I was more into school than my son as of today, and I think the reason is the environment.” She feels there are other factors that she did not face growing up as a child that her child must now deal with in school, “Like there are more things to catch the kids’ eyes, more games, playing. There are computers, iPods, you know, they are always outside with their friends. Everything is catching their eyes.” Thus Reba considers her son’s experiences as a student as having more challenges than she faced in the past.

Reba takes it one step further by predicting that the next generation will be facing something else with which her own child does not have to contend as a student:

So I think that what changes is different now, as you know. It’s going to be happening on a year by year basis. As soon as every child comes out, things are going to be different. The new child is going to get adapted to the newer things that come out, and it just keeps going year and year.

In her statement, Reba thus alludes to her belief that all children need to be able to adapt to any challenges facing them, particularly, in their goals to be successful in education.

Reba feels that there are several biases facing her culture because she is Jamaican. Although Reba was born in Jamaica, her child was born in Canada. “Taye [a pseudonym] doesn’t have anything to do with Jamaica. Like, you know, he’s just Canadian; he acts Canadian.” Despite her son’s detachment from his

ethnic background, Reba fears for him because she feels that Jamaicans “get a bad rap in our society... On the street you may hear about, you know, a Jamaican did this, and a Jamaican did that, so I tell him (Reba’s son) to be careful.” She believes her son may be stereotyped according to his culture because society is automatically predisposed to holding a negative attitude towards people who do not share the same cultural background. “I tell Taye to call me and let me know if anything is going on with him outside of school.” Reba finds it necessary to keep in close contact with her only child to help him and prevent him from getting into trouble at school as well as outside of school grounds.

Practices

Reba’s beliefs about her child’s education clearly influence her parenting practices. First, just as she describes co-operation as crucial to children’s educational success, Reba and her child’s teachers work as a team to help him with his education. Second, just as she indicates how important education was to her and should be to her son, she serves as a role model for the value of education by studying diligently in high school and college. Finally, she recognizes the challenges her son faces as someone with a Jamaican background. Reba tries extra hard to find time to be with him and help him cope with these challenges.

Reba stresses the role her child’s teachers play in supporting his schooling. “I think his teachers, they all help because for instance, they notified me of Taye’s behaviour and his school work.” The importance Reba places on communication with her child’s teachers allows her to have a close relationship with all of his teachers. Reba then explains, “Well the teachers work hard with him. Some work hard with him after school

hours, within school hours. Some teachers have spoken with me. Some teachers work together. If there's anything Taye didn't do, they will let me know."

Certainly, it helps that teachers demonstrate a desire to help Reba's child both during and after school. Reba also states that she does her part in this partnership. "They work with him. I always work with Taye at home if there's any homework. When he comes home, I always ask him about his homework. If there is anything to be done, I work with him." Reba finds this partnership among teachers, child, and parent useful in helping her child's education.

Reba's experiences as a student were good. She enjoyed learning and was motivated to do well. In fact, she liked school and never skipped classes. "Like lack of going to school, but I never did that stuff. I always went to school." Reba wanted more from school and knew if she wanted a good job she needed to attend post-secondary school. She decided that she needed to attend college. "Ok, I went to college right after school. I went straight to college, right, you know. I kept going to college, keep going to school; I never stopped. I never stopped school. I never stopped school because of somebody." Reba had decided early on that she was not going to let anything, including lack of money, prevent her from graduating and receiving a degree. "I did it all on my own. I worked on my own. I borrowed student loans. My parents didn't help me out with that."

Reba even became married and raised a child during her college years, but these factors were not going to keep her from continuing with her education and getting a job. "Married, having a child in college, that's crazy, you know. That's crazy come out of college halfway. I did one year...that in college, in school. No, it wasn't going to stop

me. I went to school; I had to.” Even though she took some time off, it did not deter Reba from returning and attaining that degree. “I did go back to school after I had my child. After I had my son, I still went back to school. It was the only downside.” In working diligently, Reba did complete college and graduated with a diploma in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Her experiences give Taye a strong indication of what is necessary for someone to succeed in school.

Finally, Reba plans and makes time for her child. One thing Reba does is communicate constantly with her child. “I make sure I call (phone) Taye 24/7. He doesn’t like it.” By speaking with her child, she knows and understands what is going on in his life. “I make sure I check Taye’s workbook all the time. I make sure everything is up to par, like if I don’t know about it, it has to be. If not, it’s not in his book or a teacher didn’t notify me.”

On the one hand, Reba is particular about how her son spends his time doing school work. She finds time to help her son and takes away free time he may have. “I come home every day, ‘What do you have for homework?’ I help him out too. I help him with his work. I don’t give Taye free time, like I don’t give him once I know it is not right.” On the other hand, Reba’s child plays basketball, and she tries to be there for him. “I try to be home for Taye. School’s over at 3:05; then basketball practices. I try to bring Taye to practice, or I get someone else to bring him.” Between school work and sports, Reba understands the importance of planning, making time, getting involved, and supporting her child to help him achieve success in education.

Barriers

Reba confronts and contends with different barriers as a single mother in helping her child's schooling. She describes these challenges in two sections: first, the influences of friends when she was a student and now for her child as a student; and second, the lack of time and money.

Reba believes that friends can influence and drive students to make poor decisions about school. As a student herself, she was quite positive about school and did not allow anyone to influence her schooling. "I don't think nobody prevented me from not being successful. I mean, I didn't have any blockages or no reasons from becoming successful. I just think that if any one prevent me it would be your friend." She had teachers to help her, but she does admit that friends can influence you in different ways. "Well, your friends influence you sometimes, you know but not to that, to that much of an extent." While friends can influence someone to make poor choices up to a certain degree, the onus is on the person to make the right choices about her or his schooling.

Reba claims that the influences of friends on her child are somewhat different from the influences her own friends had on her. Reba's child has too many friends who have a bad influence on him. "I think the friends and company, too much friends and bad company." Reba sees her child associate with friends who may not be positive about school. "You know, he has too much friends, so maybe they, I think sometimes you get caught up with your friends, so you are just lacking. Follow what your friends do, and you don't do your homework." Reba has had to deal with situations involving her child's schooling and his friends. Because of their influence, her child had made poor decisions

and choices which affected his grades. “Taye had a hard time last year, and the difference was four or five of his friends.”

Like many single parents, Reba must overcome two related challenges: the lack of time and money. Reba states that she lacks time for her child due to work commitments. “My barriers are like work, like you know, maybe I can’t make it to some of...the parent interviews. I try my best. I try, but if I am at a job, I can’t make it.” She wants to be there for her child, but her job does not allow her to make concessions for her child’s parent/teacher interviews. At other times, she does not have the energy to help her child with his homework. “Sometimes when I come home from work...I am tired and stuff and may want to help, but I think sometimes he is lazy, and he can do the work.” Reba knows her child is capable of doing the work. While she needs to be on top of his school work, there are some days when she feels she needs to relax and assign her child responsibility for his education.

In terms of financial resources, when Reba was a student, her parents provided financial support for her in high school. “They help you stay in school when you were younger. They help you buy your books. Helping you out with this, helping you when you...come home from school, teaching you to do your homework and stuff like that.” However, Reba’s parents stopped helping her with her schooling when she went to college. “Well, my parents weren’t there. I had to pay for my own college, right, so it was hard. Like you know, you have to pay for your own college.” Her parents discussed the possibilities of college but never really supported her. “But to push you to go to college, they would talk about it, but to help out, no. I did it all on my own. I worked on my own. I borrowed student loans. My parents didn’t help me out with that.”

Reba expounds on the difficulties of her financial situation, as well as its physical effects on her, especially after having a child. Life for Reba became extremely hectic. “Sometimes, like for even going back to school, I thought that I was going to collapse. I was not ready because like funds were not there and sometimes you don’t have the funds, it kind of backs you down.” Despite the lack of funding and support from her parents, Reba still overcame these barriers and was able to graduate from college, although she still feels there is a money shortage to this day.

Support

Reba has developed different methods in supporting her child’s education. She has divided these methods into three different parts: first, support she received and continues to receive from family and friends when she was a student and as a single mother; second, support from her child’s teachers; and third, her own ability to plan the allocation of her time and financial resources wisely to support herself and her child.

Growing up, Reba received support from her family. Early in her schooling her parents were supportive of her education. Reba’s parents provided help when she was in elementary school. “My parents would help me when I was younger, you know, your ABC and this and that math.” As time progressed, and the older Reba became, the less her parents helped in her academic work; however, they still supported her. “When I was in Grade 9, they would help with the homework. They make sure every day I come home from school, we do my homework.” Reba’s parents did not have a lot of schooling. “I don’t think they finished school.” Reba’s parents provided moral support nonetheless. “Which is good, I am glad for what they made us like, even if they didn’t know how to do the math or whatever, science, they made sure that my sisters were there to help.”

Once Reba's education was above the level of schooling her parents received it was her sisters who stepped in to fill the void. "It was mostly my sisters who helped me." Reba's sisters were the ones who helped her with her high school homework. "My sisters and my parents were there, but because my parents weren't always home, they won't, well help with your work. They (sisters) still put up enough time in making sure the work was done." Her sisters were supportive of Reba's schooling and provided the help she needed to be successful.

Currently, Reba continues to rely on her sisters as well as her extended family for support. "Our family members, all us sisters have kids, and most of us, cousins and whatever, and we have meetings all the time. Other family members are going through the same thing, too." Reba's family not only provides support for her, but they also provide support for each other. Her family understands the challenges and difficulties that come with single parenthood. "As a single parent, sometimes you are always depressed. Sometimes a lot is on you. It's just you, you, you, you. It's nice if somebody put a word or two to encourage you or just put a smile on your face." Reba adds, "Sometimes I am down. Yes, sometimes I pick up the phone, and I talk to a friend or a sister, and they say a few words like 'Don't give up, move on.'" As she explains, Reba's sisters play an important role in her life and always help her and keep things positive.

In addition to her sisters, Reba's friends provide positive encouragement to her as a single parent. "I get a lot of support, for instance, like everyone always says, 'You are good.' Sometimes when I need help, you know, they say, 'You are a good parent, like you're alone.' I always get that compliment from people." The positive feedback and encouragement are reinforced by the advice and offers to help care for her child. "People

help out. They give me advice on what to do. People help by telling me, you know, taking care of Taye, picking him up for me, and doing stuff like.” Without helpful friends, Reba would have a difficult time supporting her child’s schooling.

Aside from family and friends, Taye’s teachers are supportive of Reba. They always speak with her about him. “I think his teachers, they all help because, for instance, they notified me of Taye’s behaviour and his school work.” She states that one teacher went beyond her duty as a teacher and was constantly contacting her. “One particular teacher phoned because she was the core teacher. I had her phone number; she had my phone number. I had her cell number, and she had my cell.” If anything extraordinary happened with her son at school, good or bad, Reba knew about it from the teacher.

Anything that Taye did, if he didn’t do his homework, I was called. If he did something wrong in French, anything, I was notified, so each teacher will report to her, and she will let me know all the things Taye will be doing in the classroom.

Evidently, Reba understands the importance of communicating with teachers on a regular basis in supporting her child’s schooling.

Besides the support from family, friends, and teachers, Reba describes the way she likes to support herself by planning ahead. She schedules and plans how and when she will do things to support her child. “I get up in the morning. If I have to go to work, I make sure the night before that Taye takes out his clothes, and I get Taye ready for school.” Reba also states, “Anything that has to be done, it is ready. I work ahead of time, so I don’t wait until the last minute. I am not a last-minute person.”

Reba also explains that, because money and time are tight, she budgets both carefully in her plans. “I work around things, and I always budget and always have things

on paper, so I have everything done, and I am on schedule.” As well, Reba schedules and plans ahead for her child’s basketball.

So I have everything done. I schedule what I do, and everyone says, ‘Reba, take it easy. Take it easy; you don’t have to do it. Just take it easy,’ but I can’t. I have to make sure everything is done on schedule and in a proper way. If Taye has to go to basketball, I have to make sure before I leave for work. If I can’t make it, I have someone to bring him, or he can go by himself, and I have to come pick him up. I have it planned, like I plan ahead.

Reba provides support for herself and her child by planning ahead, setting a schedule, and abiding by it.

Summary

Reba encounters some difficulties in raising a child as a single mother. To further complicate her situation, she was faced with the task of child-rearing while attending college. Despite her challenges, one value that emerges from the four themes of this case study is her motivation. Reba was persistently focused on attending and graduating from college and trying to raise her son to the best of her ability.

At an early age, Reba loved school and was eager to learn. If she had any problems with her homework, her parents would help. If they could not, her sisters were always there to support her through elementary and secondary school. Because Reba wanted to control her future, she did not allow negative influences like peer pressure to impede her progress in her schooling. When it was time to attend college, she continued to take her studies seriously and was determined to go. At the time, she began to struggle with other challenges, such as lack of funds for school and having a child. However, these concerns did not stop her from completing her college degree in Early Childhood

Education (ECE). A major factor for her motivation is her earnest intention to make sure she could provide for her son as a single parent.

Reba has established and continues to establish methods to receive help from other people, not only for herself, but also for her child in terms of his schooling. These methods provide Reba control over the events in her child's life. She makes sure she is in constant contact with her child's teacher. In addition, she is always there for her child to support him with his homework or bring him to basketball practice. If she lacks the funds, she plans ahead and purchases one necessary item at a time. When she is exhausted, she makes sure someone else will take her child to basketball practices or games. Reba has never given up and continues to be motivated in ensuring that her child has the support he requires.

Kelly

Background Information

Kelly is 40 years old. She is about 5'2" with a firm, stocky build. She was born in Manchester, Jamaica and came to Toronto, Canada in the early 1980's. She says, "I see myself as Jamaican, and I'll always be a Jamaican," reaffirming her strong heritage and affiliation towards her country of birth. At the time of the interview, Kelly is unemployed. She has been laid off from her job for the past three months and is hoping to be rehired. Kelly is presently living with her three children, whose ages are 16, 15, and 9 years old. The two eldest are in high school, and the youngest is in elementary school. Kelly herself did not finish high school in Jamaica due to financial constraints, nor did

she attend college. She and her husband, who is the father of her children, are still legally married; however, they separated many years ago.

During our interview, Kelly never looks me in the eye. I can sense that she is uncomfortable with making eye contact when I speak with her, so I try not to engage in direct eye contact. I want her to relax and feel comfortable while she tells her story. Kelly displays strength and elegance through her actions and the way she speaks. She has a strong, firm voice with a slight Jamaican accent. During her interview, Kelly runs through a gamut of emotions. On one hand, she becomes upset and consequently raises her voice when she speaks about her ex-husband. On the other hand, she displays enthusiasm before, during, and after the interview when she relates stories about her life in Canada and the future of her three children. What really amazes me is the way she tells her stories; her tone makes them come alive. I am able to feel her pain when she speaks about the past relationship with her ex-husband and when she discusses the challenges she faces as a single mother raising three children.

We conduct the interview in the dining room of the condominium that Kelly is renting. The television is turned on in the living room, and noises of a soccer match can be heard in the background as we speak. We are alone during the interview while her children are at school.

Beliefs

Kelly shares her firm beliefs on the education that her children are receiving. Kelly's beliefs are encompassed under one idea: responsibility. First, the parents have a responsibility to help their children; second, schools and teachers have the responsibility to work with parents to ensure that all children learn; and third, children need to be

responsible if they want to be successful not only in their schooling but also in making life choices.

Kelly firmly believes that parents should be involved in their children's education, as she states, "To the highest of extents!" According to Kelly, all parents want their children to be successful. "I think every parent would want their kids to succeed, get a better education than they did, have a better life than they did, easier life, that's what I think." Thus it is her responsibility as a parent to teach her children the importance of education. She obviously wants her children to have a better life.

Also, Kelly indicates that the schools and teachers, in conjunction with the parents, have a responsibility in helping and keeping students interested in school. "I would say the school, the parent and the school. Schools show how and the schools show interest in kids having a good education, and the parents show interest in wanting them to have a good education. I think that's basically it." The school, the teachers, and the parents all have their parts in being responsible for her children's schooling.

Furthermore, Kelly wants her children to refrain from repeating the same mistakes she made when she was young. "I don't want my kids to go what I'm going through, you know, grow up, get into relationships that don't work, find themselves with dead beat fathers like I did." By becoming more responsible and getting a good education, Kelly's children would be putting themselves in a better position than she did. "I want them to get a good education, go to college, go to university, get a good job, find somebody who's respectful and know responsibility basically." She also suggests that it is important to find partners who share the same values in life as they do.

Kelly explains that an inability to develop a sense of responsibility would be the only reason her children would not be successful in school. “The only thing I would think that will prevent them from having success in school is if they don’t want to succeed, nothing else I can see that will prevent them from succeeding in school.” For Kelly, any other factors should not affect her children’s ability in school. If they are responsible, her children should have no excuse or reason for failure in their own schooling.

In addition, Kelly reaffirms from her own experience as a student in Jamaica that it is her children’s responsibility to want to do well in school. “Education is education, and wherever you are, wherever you go, it doesn’t matter which country you are, education is education if you want to learn.” As a child, Kelly understood the need to be responsible; now she expects her children to be responsible for their education.

Practices

Kelly is extremely involved in her children’s schooling. She describes her parenting practices in two sections. First, she compares her experiences as a student in Jamaica to her children’s experiences as students here in Canada, and the preparations they make to be ready for school. She also relates specific practices that demonstrate care and support in helping her children.

Kelly explains that her experiences in her school were unlike those of her children. She had to prepare for and follow different methods in getting ready for school. “Well, my experience in school is a bit different from the kids’ experience in school here, since I went to school in Jamaica; they go to school here.” She states that in school life back home in Jamaica, there were rules that students had to follow that her children do not need to follow in Canada. “You have to wear a uniform. You have to wear certain

shoes and certain socks a certain colour. You have to be at school a certain time. You have to leave school a certain time. You have to participate in certain, different programs.” However, despite the differences in expectations and in practices, Kelly maintains that, if her children want to learn, she will help them. “If they want an education, so they show it. I want them to have an education, so I do the best I can.”

In addition, Kelly describes how sports played a role in her education as it presently does in her children’s. In Jamaica, Kelly felt that without her engagement in sports, her future would have been different. Hence, she played and practiced various sports. “Well, I would say if I had the advantages that my kids have now when I was going to school, my life would have turned out much differently, because simply, like my kids now, I was involved in sports.” In other words, playing sports allowed Kelly to do something positive in her life. “Basically all my teens, almost all my teenage years, and after high school, like I said, if I had the sponsorship or support like kids nowadays who are involved in sports have, I would have a different life basically.” Kelly is hoping that her children do well in sports, so they can receive athletic scholarships and go on to college or university—an opportunity she was unable to avail herself of in Jamaica. “When I left school, I got offers, but when you live in Jamaica, if you don’t have help, not a whole lot of success will come of that.” Kelly thus makes it one of her keystone practices to encourage her children’s sports involvement.

Aside from opportunities in school, Kelly counts making time for her children as another important practice. Kelly explains that “Time, it doesn’t matter the time. I always like to find a job during the day, no nights.” She feels it is important for her to be there for her children after school; she makes sure she does not work the afternoon or night

shifts. “Nights, I find that ... if I’m home at night, I cook the dinner. I make sure their uniform, whoever’s uniform, is ready, homework is done, they get enough sleep, so that’s my whole routine.” Kelly consistently instills through her efforts the importance for her children of being prepared and ready for school each and every day.

Kelly has had time to care for her children because she was laid off. However, she is going back to work soon. “Well, like I said, I’m not working now, so I have a lot of free time, but it won’t gonna be for long ’cause come January, I have to go back to work, but I have a lot of free time now.” She currently has more time during the day to do activities and help prepare her children. “I have to go to my son’s school because sometimes he have a little behaviour problem at school. Not like, nothing bad, just talking too much and basically house stuff, handling things here, and as far as balancing, that’s basically it.” This extra time Kelly has now allows her to become more involved in her children’s schooling.

Even though she is not working, Kelly tries to keep positive. She makes the most of her current unemployed status by helping and engaging in activities with her children. “I don’t stress too much over things I can’t help, and I look at the positive. I mean, things could have been worse, but I’m not going to complain.” She is making the best of her situation as an unemployed, single parent in supporting her children. “It’s okay now. I’m paying the bills, the kids go to school every day, they eat every day, they go to church on Sunday, so I’m comfortable with that.”

Barriers

Kelly emphasizes only one barrier she deals with as a single mother who helps her three children’s schooling: her lack of full-time employment. In addition, Kelly describes

other difficulties that she encounters: the absence of a father in her life when she was a child, as well as the absence of a father for her children, and the bad influences friends or other people can have over her children.

Kelly's major barrier in her life, as she sees it, is her current state of unemployment. Indeed, in Kelly's view, "the only barrier I can see right now in my current situation is job wise." Kelly actually enjoys working as she claims, "I like to work. I'm not working right now. I had the same job for five and a half years. I just lost it a few months ago, but that's my only barrier right now." It will inevitably begin to become more difficult for Kelly to support her children the longer she is unemployed. "Once I'm working everything, I make sure they have whatever they need, and even though I have to do it on my own that, I don't complain about that so the only thing I want, as long as I'm working." Kelly is currently receiving unemployment insurance to help pay the bills and take care of her children.

In addition to this one barrier, Kelly describes two factors that could limit her children's success in education, as these factors limited her own education. Kelly grew up in a situation that is considerably similar to her children's. There was no father figure in her life. "No father, haven't seen him, I saw him maybe two times when I was a teenager. I haven't seen him in almost 25 years, so I grew up basically from I know who I am, just grandmother." Similarly, Kelly describes her children's father's interest in their lives as non-existent. "I think their father should be, but he isn't, and I don't think there's much I can do about it. I tried to do something about it, but most time you try, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's gonna work." Kelly feels that she is trying to get her children's father involved, but it sounds like he chooses not be in their lives. Kelly seems to get by

with or without his help in supporting her children's education. Kelly's former partner has 11 children, three of whom are Kelly's; the rest are his children with two other females.

The other limiting factor arises from bad influences. Kelly explains that bad influences are not necessarily limited to friends. Other people besides friends can be a bad influence on her and her children. "I wouldn't say are friends, I would say a bad influence, and wherever you go, whichever school you're in, and it doesn't matter which country you're in, you're from, you always find bad influence, you just have to be smart." Kelly realizes that she and her children need to be careful, to try to stay away from these bad influences, and to make the right decisions when it comes to the children's education. As Kelly quotes, "Think smart and be smart,' that's what grandmother always says."

Support

Kelly's grandmother and her mother helped raise and support her and her siblings. Having learned and experienced the value of family support, Kelly has developed and uses two methods in helping her children with their schooling. First, her sisters and friends give her support, and second, Kelly and her children help one another by being supportive.

When Kelly was a child, her grandmother and mother helped her and her siblings in their schooling. Kelly's grandmother was a teacher; as such, Kelly had her grandmother's support at an early age. "My first day at school I was two and a half years old and that was, my grandmother was the teacher." Kelly's grandmother encouraged her to focus and be ready for school each and every day. "And she makes sure I go to school

Monday to Friday every day and never miss a day for the year, and I went to Kindergarten, grade school, high school, all through.”

Although it was mostly Kelly’s grandmother who led their household in Jamaica, Kelly’s mother was supportive as well. “My mother, like I said, my mother was here, she had seven of us so she did the best she could, and my grandmother she did, she was a Kindergarten teacher and she did the best she could.” Kelly and her siblings lived with her grandmother, and her mother helped in the household when she had the funds. “Yeah she basically does all the spending, the money issue she dealt with all of that.” Kelly’s mother was the one who made sure the money was spent on what the children needed. “My grandma was just the one who made sure we go, but my mother, she sent the money for the uniforms, the outfit for the track and field, and the money for the trips.” In addition, Kelly states, “Everything we need for the sports and activities that we were involved in, she (her mother) was responsible for that. My grandmother just made sure we went, we got there, got there on time basically.” Both her grandmother and her mother were single parents who worked together as a team to support Kelly and her siblings in their education.

Similarly, Kelly finds support as a single parent from her sisters and friends; they help to support her children in their schooling. Like her grandmother and mother, her sisters are also single parents. “My sisters, they have kids like me, and they’re single, single parents like me, and I have a couple of friends that I sometimes they talk to me and they call me to find out if everything’s okay.” When conversing with her sisters and friends, Kelly can receive or seek advice. Kelly also says, “If I get frustrated, I have a few friends that I can call, good friends, best friends, and I talk to the kids, and I talk to a

couple of my sisters, so that's basically it." Her sisters and friends understand what she is going through because sometimes they are in a similar situation and are willing to be supportive of Kelly and her family.

Another source of support Kelly and her children have is each other. "Well my kids, basically, that's my only support." Kelly continues. "Like I said I'm, I basically do everything on my own, raise them on my own, and if sometimes I get annoyed sometimes at certain things and they, I ask questions and I try to encourage." She always tries to encourage her children, and her children are supportive too. "They're basically who if I have something to talk about, they're basically who I have to talk to, so I'm there for them and they're there for me when I needed to, that's basically it."

Kelly tries to be supportive of her children in their homework. Her two daughters do not need as much help as her youngest child. "The two oldest ones, they don't necessarily always need my help, just maybe a few questions, but definitely the nine year old I always have to help him with his homework." If Kelly does not understand her youngest child's work, her two daughters are there to help him in his schooling. "There's some things I don't get because I haven't been to school in a long time, but if there's something that I don't understand, the two older ones will help him understand it and help him." In working cooperatively and tightly as a team, both Kelly and her children can support one another.

Summary

By developing different strategies, Kelly is experiencing success in raising three children on her own. She applies child-rearing methods that are similar to those that her grandmother used with her children (Kelly's mother, aunts, and uncles). Kelly's

grandmother was an important part of her life when she was growing up. Kelly believes that being a positive role model, like her grandmother was, will help Kelly's children achieve success in their schooling. While Kelly's mother was supportive of her, it was her grandmother who took the time to raise and teach her at an early age. Whereas their grandmother supported Kelly and her siblings when they were young, Kelly now turns to her sisters and friends to help support her own children. This network of support includes the support she and her children provide one another in their lives, and, specifically, in the area of the children's education.

Laitishia

Background Information

Laitishia is 35 years old, a stay-at-home mother, and a part-time hairdresser. She is about 5'5" in height with long, dyed blond hair. She is physically in great shape. Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Laitishia came to Toronto, Canada as a young girl in the 1970's. She sees herself as a "young, Black, Canadian Jamaican, because that's what I am." Laitishia has five children whose ages are 17, 15, 13, 5, and 3 years old: two in high school, two in elementary school, and the youngest still at home. Laitishia's two eldest children's father passed away many years ago. Neither is Laitishia living with the fathers of her three youngest children (the 13-year-old from one relationship and the two youngest from another relationship). Laitishia did not finish high school, completing Grade 11. She dropped out of high school when she became pregnant with her eldest child.

Laitishia has a relaxed, calm appearance and demonstrates the qualities of a strong person who possesses a great deal of confidence. She impresses me as being intelligent and knowledgeable. She speaks in a soft tone and never raises her voice with me nor with her children at any point before, during, or after the interview. Laitishia is very passionate when describing her life stories about her struggles in raising five children by herself. Laitishia only wants the best for her children. By just listening to her speak, I feel how difficult her past was and how dedicated she is to her children having a better life than she had growing up.

We conduct the interview at her female friend's townhouse where Laitishia is presently staying with her children. She is moving into her own townhouse sometime before the end of the year. While we are doing the interview, Laitishia is styling and braiding her youngest child's hair.

Beliefs

Laitishia describes her beliefs about the educational system around three main ideas. First, Laitishia states that parents and teachers should be involved in a child's education. Second, Laitishia strongly stresses that children today lack the sense of self-control or responsibility for their own education. Third, Laitishia expresses that peer pressure and race also could affect children's education.

Laitishia first explains that all parents need to become entirely involved in their children's education, "Involved in everything!" As a single mother of five children, she believes it is her duty to take charge and provide for her children. "I think once the seed has been planted, and you become a parent, and you have to deal with responsibility, naturally you prepare yourself. You have to deal with it, and I think this comes from

within.” In addition, for Laitishia, teachers play a critical role in children’s education.

“Teachers, by being there for them, basically beyond just teaching, being there to explain and make sure that the kids understand what they’re learning.” However, Laitishia feels that the schools could still do more for the children: “Yeah, teachers are an important part of their success, but I think there could be more, like more after school things that help, where the kids go, you know, the things that they didn’t understand throughout the day.”

Although Laitishia emphasizes the important roles of parents and teachers, she also feels that children today lack self-discipline and interest in learning. Children need to be more responsible with regard to their own education: “There’s no, um, I don’t know, no interest, no drive, no motivation to learn nothing educational, once it’s education it’s like, you know, when we were young we were even reading the cereal boxes. These kids don’t; they’re not really interested.” She also states that “kids nowadays, they’re afraid to ask; they’re afraid of making mistakes. We weren’t really afraid; we were always asking questions. Kids do not want to take risk or be responsible if they make a mistake.”

Peer pressure and race are two major obstacles for these children. Laitishia explains that, “peer pressure is a big factor, you know, like I said because there’s nothing for the children to do, and that’s where you find a lot of distracting peers.” However, she disputes the idea that friends and peer pressure are acceptable reasons for failure:

Like I said, friends will be there to distract you, but you can’t blame them for you, you know, if they’re unsuccessful you can’t blame it on anyone except them, you know, and if there’s avenues that they could have went to, then you have to blame it on whoever should have provided those doors for them to you.

Laitishia also suggests that race plays a role that may hinder her children’s education. “Stereotype, that’s the only thing because there is a lot of successful black American, African American Jamaican, you know.” Laitishia feels that, in the

community, especially in the school community where children need to feel safe, the existence of stereotype is incredibly detrimental to Black children's learning experiences.

Practices

Laitishia describes her parenting practices in supporting her children's education in terms of one area: communication. According to her, three clear and positive lines of communication have to exist: parent-teacher, teacher-child, and child-parent. All parties involved need to be able to address and/or solve issues or problems concerning school.

First, Laitishia adamantly states that it is essential for parents to "get to know the teachers." She feels that fostering the relationship with the teacher is the parents' first step in helping their children in school. As a child, she saw the importance of the parent-teacher relationships when her own parents regularly met and conferred with teachers. "I remember my parents being involved in parent-teacher night. They were always communicating with the teachers; that's one thing I remember that stood out as far as them helping."

Second, Laitishia highlights the importance of open communication between teacher and student. She explains, retrospectively, that some of her teachers took the time to help her in school. "Who helped me? There was the teachers, the teachers were more. I feel more caring, more patient, and they were probably like, looking back then, less stressed. They were, you know, more involved with us as children." She suggests that it was easier for teachers to communicate with students when she was attending school.

Conversely, Laitishia strongly feels that sometimes her teachers failed to communicate with her when she did not understand her schoolwork. She observes that, unfortunately, this situation may be happening to her own children at their current

schools. “The things that they didn’t understand throughout the day, and I think there’s not a lot of that. . . . You just sit through class and at the end of the day just; they’re just counting the hours down to leave.” Thus, while Laitishia values her experience of having had the support of teachers, she worries that teachers may not be reaching out adequately so as to support children in schools at the current time.

Third, Laitishia describes how important it is for parents to constantly communicate with their children. She feels that there are certain topics that parents need to discuss with their children with regard to education, such as their future and the values of organization and the sense of responsibility. “Talk to the kids about where they want to go in life, and work with them to get there.” Laitishia goes one step further by making sure her children are organized. “I make sure after school I check on homework, make sure their work is organized, try and get them organized and prepared; I explain to them the importance of being prepared.” It is through these practices that Laitishia’s children are taught the consequences of being responsible in school.

Barriers

As a single mother, Laitishia faces many barriers in raising five children on her own. She describes and divides the barriers she encounters in supporting her children’s education into four areas. First, as a single parent, she lacks the time and financial resources to satisfactorily support her family; second, she lacks the educational background necessary to help her children with their school work; third, the classes are too large for all students to receive help; and, four, she has no control over the negative influences presented by her children’s friends.

First of all, most single parents lack the time and financial resources in comparison to two-parent families (Bumpass & Raley, 1995). Laitishia experiences a challenge that numerous single parents face, which is the lack of time. “And another barrier is the fact that I have five children. It’s hard to pay each of them, you know, a fair amount of time so, you know, having five children to deal with and one person.” Although she tries very hard, Laitishia continually struggles with finding time for all her children.

Financial issues are another problem that Laitishia views as a barrier in helping her children. “I’ve always wanted to get tutoring for them and, you know, other ... to get them involved in other activities, but nowadays everything is expensive.” She believes that after-school programs used to be affordable, but they no longer are. “Five years ago, things were, there was programs for kids, and even if we had to pay, it was always, you know, a little bit less, but now there’s nothing, you know. You’re paying full price for everything.” She even wants to send her children to a better school but lacks the necessary funds. “Sometimes I wish I could send my kids to a better school, but, you know, it’s the money, and that’s where, that’s the way, you know, that’s the way I prevent them from being more successful; it’s financially.” Undoubtedly, Laitishia wishes she had more resources and could do more to help support her children’s education.

Second, Laitishia explains that, when she was a young child, her mother wanted to help and did help her. However, there was a limit to the help that Laitishia received from her mother because of her mother’s lack of formal education. “You know, where we come from, she didn’t have a chance to go too far with her education, so she wasn’t able

to help as much as she would probably if she could.” At present, Laitishia is experiencing a similar dilemma in trying to help her children as much as she can, given her educational background.

Third, Laitishia stresses the reality that classroom sizes are too large as an additional barrier. Teachers are overwhelmed, and, as a result, they do not have the time required to provide help to all children, especially to the ones who need it the most. “The only barriers I feel, um, are since they’ve been putting more children in the classrooms, it’s... not concentrate on the children individually because they have more to deal with.” In other words, due to the larger size of classes, teachers are spending less time helping individual children.

The last barrier that Laitishia describes is the influence of students’ peers. Having been a student herself, Laitishia is aware of the distractions that keep children from staying focused in school. As a young student, Laitishia began to feel that friends played a role that could negatively affect her education. “Looking back now, probably there were friends that distracted you.” This distraction, she explains, then results in a lack of concentration in school and leads students to make questionable, if not poor, choices. “If you lose focus, then, you know, this is what happens, but there are friends to distract you; there was distractions along the way.” As a student, Laitishia felt these distractions from her friends, and they did affect her own education.

Support

The discussion regarding the methods of support that Laitishia utilizes to help her children become successful in school revolves around two main ideas: first, the support she received as a student from after-school programs and how they helped her achieve

some success in school, and, second, the supports she currently receives, as a mother, from her family and friends. This network of support from family and friends has a positive impact on her children's education.

As a young child, Laitishia was able to access after-school programs. "I think a lot of things that helped was there was always lots of after-school programs, and there was always something to do or somewhere to go or someone to go to." According to Laitishia, the after-school programs allowed for a relaxing setting where she felt she could just talk with someone and acquire the understanding that she did not get at school. "I think that was a, that was important back in our days, having someone to, you know, just someone to talk to and, you know, that was, that was good." Furthermore, after-school programs were instrumental in Laitishia's achievement of success as a student because they offered support for a variety of subjects and situations. "A lot of my success ... because it opened up a lot of doors of where you could go and who you could talk to." Unfortunately, Laitishia considers these after-school programs expensive. She can no longer afford to enroll her children in similar programs as she has done in the past.

The support Laitishia received as a student from the after-school programs was enhanced by her family and friends. Laitishia came from a close family and received support from her mother and siblings. Laitishia speaks of how much her mother supported both her and her siblings to the best of her ability. Subsequently, her brothers and sisters would assist one another when her mother could no longer do so. "We had a lot of sibling support, too. Even if Mother couldn't help us, there was always a sibling or a friend that was always there to help." Clearly, her family had a support system in place so that they could help one another.

Similar to her own experiences as a student, Laitishia describes her children's experiences of support from family. Laitishia has developed a network of support that consists of friends and family. Her older brother, for one, is a source of support for her children. "Well I have, I have my brother. My older brother, he's a big help with the kids." As a student, Laitishia was able to depend on her brother for support in school. Now, her children are able to rely on him for support with their schooling, and Laitishia is able to count on his support of her parenting.

Laitishia's experiences as a student included learning how to work independently because her mother was not always able to help her. Consequently, she and her siblings would try to do their work on their own or turn to friends who were able to help them with their school work. "We helped ourselves, and what we didn't know, we weren't afraid to ask." She uses this strategy in seeking support for not only her, but also her children. "I have friends that always, you know, look out for them, talk to them, you know, always there to give them advice, take them sometimes on the weekends and, you know, I have some support, I have to confess." Her children thus have the opportunity to hear and receive advice from others besides their mother. In addition, the support Laitishia receives grants her additional time with individual children.

Summary

As a single parent of five children, Laitishia has her hands full. With children ranging in age from an infant to a teenager, she handles her situation to the best of her ability. Two concepts cross the four themes: the role of friends and the comparison of present with past.

Laitishia believes that friends play an important role in her life and her children's lives. She has a network of friends who support her and her children. These friends help by giving advice and taking care of her children. Laitishia knows she needs friends to help her. However, in other instances, friends could be viewed as barriers, more specifically, her children's friends. For example, peer pressure could lead her children to lose focus and become distracted in school.

Laitishia usually refers to her past as a student and compares her experiences to her own children's educational experiences. She reflects, compares, and contrasts her mother's help when she was a student and the help she provides her children now. Laitishia felt that, in the past, with regard to such factors as after-school programs, teachers, and peer pressure, she had received more support and less problems than her children face in their schooling.

Laitishia relies on her friends and her own past experiences to create strategies to help her children's schooling. As a single parent of five children, whose age ranges and education levels vary with great disparity, she needs all the help she can obtain. These two strategies of support allow her to help all her children in their education.

Summary

This chapter describes an in-depth look into how four single Canadian parents of Jamaican heritage share experiences about their children's schooling. The next chapter synthesizes the results of this chapter with the literature on single parents of African heritage, using the four themes that guided this study: beliefs, practices, barriers, and support.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this thesis, I used qualitative interviews with four single parents of Jamaican heritage to examine my four research questions: What are the beliefs of these four single parents of Jamaican heritage with regard to the education system for their children? What practices do these four single parents of Jamaican heritage use in helping their children in school? What barriers do these four single parents of Jamaican heritage face with respect to their children's education? What methods of support do these four single parents of Jamaican heritage use to help their children become successful in school? In this chapter, I take data from the interviews and connect them with the literature to examine the four research questions. I then describe the limitations of my study and implications for practice. I conclude this chapter with my final thoughts on this study.

Beliefs

The four participants in this study discussed their beliefs in regards to the education system for their children. Regardless of background, SES, and/or marital status, parents articulated that they are responsible for ensuring a good education for their children (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). All four single parents shared the same beliefs that it is the responsibility of both the parent and the teacher in helping all children be successful in their education.

Carvel viewed the relationship between parents and teachers who were working together in supporting her child's education as a partnership. She saw the value and the need to be involved with her children's homework to help keep their relationships

positive. Carvel also felt it was important to keep an open line of communication with her children's teachers. Both parent and teachers were on the same page because there was a consistent flow of communication on the child's progress during school and after school. Carvel's beliefs are related to literature from the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) study. These researchers stated that there needed to be a partnership between teachers and parents. This partnership made the parent feel not only welcome at the child's school, but it also gave the parent a sense of efficacy for taking an active role in helping the child learn (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Similar to Carvel, Reba shared the strong belief that it was the responsibility for the parents and the teachers to create a positive environment for children to learn. For Reba, both the parent and the teacher should be communicating with each other on a regular basis. Second, she believed that parents needed to do their part by helping their child with homework seeing if they could do anything more to help their child learn. In addition, teachers could do their part by calling home when the children were doing well or poorly in school. This proactive approach created a positive relationship for the parent and the child both at home and at school. Reba's ideas on responsibility can be found in the Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) literature review, as these authors indicated that joint responsibility would help children develop and feel supported by parents and their teacher.

Likewise, Kelly believed that it was the responsibility of the parent and the teacher to be involved in the child's learning. For her, all parents wanted their children to be successful and to have a better life in terms of SES. Both the parents and teachers should show a high degree of interest in their children's education. However, Kelly took

it one step further in making clear that it was also the child's responsibility. When she was a child, she believed that if she wanted to do well she had to work hard in school by doing her homework and studying for tests. Kelly's own children took responsibility for their learning and asked for help when they found it necessary. Murry et al.'s (2001) study suggested if African American single mothers had frequent parent-child communication and served as positive parental role models, the child would benefit from this communication and do better in school. It would seem that Kelly was providing a similar situation for her three children.

Similar to the other participants, Laitishia believed that it was the parents' duty to take responsibility in their children's education. Parents must play an active role in doing whatever it took for their children to be successful. Also, Laitishia felt teachers must go above and beyond their role as teachers to ensure all children learn. Some children were bored with school so it was the teachers' responsibility to keep children motivated with school through using different teaching methods. In contrast with Kelly's views, Laitishia felt that not all children took on the responsibility of learning. They lacked the sense of control and felt that school was not important. In this situation, it was important for the communication lines among the child, teacher, and the parent to work together in support of this child. Laitishia's opinions on responsibility are related to the McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) study. In their study, which used focus group interviews of parents in low-income settings, parents stated that teachers should do more to help parents and their children in school. It would seem Laitishia needed this extra help because her children were at risk for school failure.

Another belief that three of the four participants shared is the suggestion that race and stereotyping could hamper their children's education. This belief is similar to that found in the literature about stereotype threat. Aronson's (2004) research on stereotyping described it as a threat that could affect achievement levels at school for African Americans. As early as six years old, children are aware of the different cultural stereotypes. African American students understand the negative views that some individuals or groups hold of their race. At school, if African American students are called out in class or have to write a test, they have the additional pressure of the stereotypes that they are trouble makers and not as intelligent as the non-stereotyped students. This additional pressure sometimes results in them believing and accepting these biases, which will cause them to misbehave or do poorly on the test (Aronson, 2004). Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff's (2003) study had similar findings. African Americans who were being discriminated against by their teachers could increase their chances of having academic and behaviour issues in schools when their parents helped them develop a bond to their ethnic group and taught them about the discrimination they might face in school. Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003) also found a high connection for African American students between their ethnic group and a positive orientation towards school despite the discrimination that they may well encounter at school.

Laitisihia suggested that stereotyping played a role that could affect her children's growth as students. She acknowledged that there were many successful people of Jamaican heritage. Schools should be a place for positive reinforcement of these role models for her children, not a place to hinder their education. Reba discussed how there were many biases facing her culture because she was Jamaican. Reba worried about her

son because on the streets you heard many stories about Jamaicans that put them in a bad light. Although she saw her son as Canadian, she felt society would perceive him as Jamaican and treat him accordingly. She tried to keep constant contact with her son and protect him from these possible problems because of his race. Similarly, Carvel felt her children did not receive fair treatment in life due to their race. She discussed the negative bias with which some members of society viewed her culture. In contrast, Kelly was the only participant who did not discuss stereotyping or race as a belief. It is possible she strongly believed that regardless of her children's ethnic background, they needed to work hard to be successful in school.

All four participants shared similar beliefs that it was the responsibility of all parents to be involved in their children's schooling. This responsibility gave parents a sense of control as parents. Parents also needed teachers to work with them as partners, with the two parties supporting and communicating with each other for the children to achieve success in school. Carvel and Reba believed it was equally the responsibility of the parent and teachers, a two-way partnership. In contrast, Kelly believed it was a three-way partnership among the parent, teacher, and child, while Laitishia felt that teachers needed to do more to help these children (less of an equal partnership). Her beliefs could be the result of taking care of five children by herself. In addition, three of the four participants felt that their children's education could be compromised by the negative stereotyping related to their national origin or their race.

Practices

The literature on parenting practices can be divided into three sections: at-home involvement (Epstein, 2001; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Mapp, 2003), at-school involvement (Epstein, 2001; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Mapp, 2003), and strict discipline (Kelley, Power, & Wimbush 1992; Nix et al., 1999). I summarize each of these practices and relate how the four participants of this study used these approaches with their children's schooling.

There are many ways that parents can support their children's education at home. Mapp (2003) indicated the importance of parents helping with homework and supporting children's future educational goals. In a similar vein, Greenwood and Hickman (1991) included at-home approaches, such as parent as teacher of own child and parent as decision maker. In addition to these two kinds of at-home practices, Epstein (2001) cited collaborating with the community, where parents make connections with community agencies in ensuring student success.

All the mothers of this study used at-home practices to help with their children's schooling. When Carvel was a child, her mother supported her by helping with homework. Presently, Carvel used the same hands-on approach as her mother did in helping her own two children with their homework. She made sure her children's homework was done. Carvel regularly communicated with her children to make sure they were fine. Likewise, Reba usually helped out her child at home. She was constantly asking her child about homework or how school went on any given day. If her child did not understand the homework, Reba would take the time to help him. Kelly had the freedom to be involved at home because she was not working. She wanted her children to

be involved in sports and encouraged their involvement. Kelly made sure her children were ready for school; they had clean uniforms and got enough sleep at night. Finally, Laitishia made a point of communicating with her children. She checked on her children's homework and made sure their school work was well organized. She spoke with them about their future goals in life and tried to help teach them about responsibility.

At-school involvement is another way parents engage in their children's education. Mapp (2003) and Epstein (2001) described at-school involvement such as attending school events, communicating with teachers, volunteering, and participating on school committees. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) used similar ideas but applied different terms: parent as audience, parent as volunteer, parent as paraprofessional, and parent as learner.

Carvel usually spoke with her children's teachers on a regular basis, and she attended parent/teacher meetings. She also supported her children by watching them play on their school basketball team. Like Carvel, Reba attended parent/teacher meetings, communicated with her child's teacher consistently, and watched her son play basketball. Laitishia's parenting practices were similar to those of Carvel and Reba. As a child she saw her parents coming to parents' interview and recognized the importance of communicating with the teacher. As a single parent with five children, Laitishia, like her parents, took the time to get to know the child's teacher and attend parent/teacher interviews. Although Kelly had more time than Carvel, Reba, and Laitishia to communicate and be involved with her children's teacher at school and her availability was very flexible, she did not state that she went to parent/teacher interviews. However,

Kelly gave an example of going to her youngest child's school when there was a behaviour problem.

The Kelly et al. (1992) and Nix et al. (1999) studies examined single mothers' strict disciplinary practices. Strict discipline parenting requires that children must yield obedience to parental authority. Single African American mothers used this approach when their children's behaviour was unacceptable at school. In using this approach of strict discipline on their children, single African American mothers gained a sense of control of their children's lives (Nix et al., 1999).

Parents using strict disciplinary practices with their children did not emerge from the data of the interviews with these four single mothers of Jamaican heritage. Perhaps, unlike the participants in the earlier studies, these participants did not use strict disciplinary practices on their children. Kelly et al.'s (1992) and Nix et al.'s (1999) studies were done in the United States in low SES neighbourhoods with high crime, high murder rates of young African American males, and high illicit drug use. These neighbourhoods were seen as forcing parents to use strict disciplinary practices. The neighbourhood for the present study may not "require" such highly structured routines as result from strict discipline.

Still, these mothers might have used strict disciplinary practices and not discussed them. In that case, my line of questions during our interviews might not have probed sufficiently for that type of practice. Alternatively, parents might have practised strict discipline on their children but, for whatever reason, chose not to speak about this approach in helping their children's schooling

At -school and at-home involvement thus emerged as the important practices parents undertook to support their children's schooling. At-home, each parent found it important to help with their children's homework. The mothers also made it a point to communicate with their children to make sure their children were ready for school. In terms of at-school practices, all four single mothers communicated with their children's teachers. Carvel and Reba would come to their children's school for a variety of reasons, including supporting the children playing sports (basketball). Conversely, Kelly and Laitishia only discussed coming to their children's school for parent/teacher interviews or if there were problems with their children. All four participants failed to mention using strict disciplinary practices on their children. Perhaps this omission could be result of the type of neighbourhood in which the four participants lived in contrast to those neighbourhoods where the researchers identified strict disciplinary practices of single African American mothers.

Barriers

There are a variety of reasons why single parents feel it is a challenge to help their children's schooling. From the literature and the data from the interviews of this study, two themes emerged as barriers for parents' involvement in supporting their children's education: lack of time and lack of resources (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). All four participants discussed that lack of time and/or lack of money were factors that limited their involvement in their children's schooling.

Carvel stressed lack of time as a major barrier for her involvement in her children's schooling. It was a test for her to juggle her time at work, going to her

children's school before or after school to meet with teachers, and attending the children's basketball games. A few times she was not able to make it to her sons' basketball games, and she felt awful for missing them. Carvel believed that her children might feel that their mother did not care about them, and that she was not being very supportive of them. She stated that they were still young and did not understand that she needed to work so she could build her children a better future. Similar to the results in Roy et al.'s (2004) study, some jobs make it problematic for parents like Carvel to make time for their children's school. Carvel's job did not allow her the freedom to miss or leave work early while getting paid so it was difficult for her to miss work. In addition, her job was a fair distance from her children's school, and she used public transit to and from work, which made it harder to make time for her children.

Reba saw both time and money as hurdles she needed to overcome in helping her child's schooling. Like Carvel, Reba's job sometimes was not flexible, which made things harder when it came to school-related issues like parent/teacher interviews. Reba felt being a single parent was tiring. Sometimes, Reba did not have the energy to help her child with homework, or she wanted to come home and just relax. Yet Reba knew her son could be lazy, and she needed to follow up on his schoolwork every day. Reba's work schedule could be draining. Kemple et al.'s (2005) study stated that the demands created by their work schedule could make it extremely hard for parents to be involved in school activities. Her general lack of time and the fact she was a single mother, combined with Reba's work schedule, created barriers for supporting her child's schooling.

Reba also felt she lacked money for her child. She wished she could do more things for her son. She was very supportive of her son's basketball and found the funds

for him to play on a rep team in their area. However, similar to the findings in the Roy et al. (2004) study, where single mothers were constantly dejected by their lack of resources, Reba found herself in that kind of situation. Reba was hoping that she could obtain more funds so she could do more things such as move out of her area and into a better neighbourhood.

At the time of the interview, Kelly was concerned about neither time nor money. Although she had been laid off from her last job and was receiving government assistance (unemployment insurance), she was able to stay within her budget and pay all her bills on time. She also specifically stated she did have time for her children's schooling because she was unemployed. Kelly's concerns were for the future, especially with respect to time. Kelly worried whether she was going to get her job back again or whether she would be successful in finding another. Given her unsure future, Kelly realized that her schedule might well change when she started working again. This change would put limits on her involvement in her children's education. In the Roy et al. (2004) study, parents found it difficult dealing with the typical 9-5 schedule to be involved. Kelly saw this same barrier in the future in her support of her children and wanted to have a job that allowed her to be home when her children needed her.

Compared to the other participants, Laitishia had the largest family, five children. With a big family to manage by herself, she discussed the lack of time and resources to support her children's education. She tried to give equal amounts of attention to each of her children, but it was hard. Indeed, Laitishia realized she was spending more time with her younger children. The lack of time for the other children caused grief or discomfort for them, and they turned to friends or other family members for support. Bumpass and

Lu's (2000) study showed that parents tended to spend less time with their children the older they were because the older children were seen as being old enough to take care of themselves. Like those parents, Laitishia compensated for her lack of time by spending less time with her older children and helping them less with their schoolwork.

Lack of resources was another challenge that Laitishia attempted to handle with her children's schooling. She wanted to help her children's education by paying for a private tutor to help them get more academic support. Some of her children found their schoolwork complicated and could use the extra help. However, as a single mother, it was hard for Laitishia to pay for these extra resources to help her children's education. Comparable to the parents studied in Mannan and Blackwell (1992), Laitishia found lack of resources to support her children a concern. The lack of resources and the addition of five children made this situation even more complex for Laitishia.

The four participants of this study did their best as parents to raise and support their children by themselves. For all four mothers, time was an issue. Because of their work schedules, Carvel, Reba, and Laitishia were unable to spend as much time with their children as they would have liked. Kelly, who was unemployed, had the time to spend but worried how her future job would lessen this time. Laitishia's problem with time was especially pressing as she tried to balance her time across five children but ended up spending more time with her youngest children.

Reba and Laitishia, in contrast to Carvel and Kelly, also were concerned about resources. Although they had sufficient resources for their children's basic needs, they wanted to do more for their children. Reba wanted to move into a better neighbourhood, and Laitishia wanted to pay for a tutor for her children.

Support

There are two ways in which single parents receive help in supporting their children's schooling: domestic kin networks (Goodman & Silverstein, 2006; Hunter, 1997; Jackson 1998; Jarrett, 1994; Lamborn & Nguyen, 2003; McCabe, 1998; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005; Murry et al., 2001; Steven, 1988) and support from professionals, such as schools and community agencies (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Kemple et al., 2005; Mapp, 2003). In this section, I review the two types of parents' support and compare how the four participants of this study used these approaches with their children's education.

One type of support that single mothers use to help them as parents is a domestic kin network. Domestic kin networks consist of help from family members, like sisters, brothers, uncles, or aunts. Grandmothers tend to provide the most support for single parents, by giving them an opportunity to spend more time with their children and assisting both financially and emotionally. Creating a domestic kin network of support allows single African American parents a chance to provide more care and support for their children (Hunter, 1997).

The four participants of this study used domestic kin networking with their mother, grandmother, and/or sibling. Carvel relied on her mother and sister for support, both as a student and later as a single mother of two children. Her mother, with whom she had a positive relationship, helped her with her own education when she was a child. When Carvel dropped out of school, because of a teenage pregnancy, her mother was still very supportive. Carvel's sister took on much the same role as Carvel's mother. Thus Carvel was using her family to support her emotionally and financially, while she looked

after her boys and attempted to secure a better life for her children. Laitishia also talked about the support she received from her mother as a child. Like Carvel, when her mother could not help, Laitishia's siblings stepped in to fill the void. Her two teenage boys, who could benefit with some support from a male figure, received help from her older brother. Because of her brother, Laitishia could handle the time restrictions of being a single parent and spend more quality time with each of her children. However, in contrast to Carvel and Laitishia, Kelly discussed how, when growing up, it was her grandmother who was the head of the household and took care of her and her siblings. While her mother helped taking care of them, with seven brothers and sisters, it was her grandmother who kept the family together.

Reba had always had the support of her family, both her parents and sisters. As the youngest of her siblings, Reba would receive help from her parents when she was a student. When she became older, her parents started to spend less time helping her, but her sisters took her parents' place. As a single mother, Reba's sisters were still helping her out today. Some of Reba's sisters were single parents as well and were going through similar situations so they could help each other. Comparable to Reba, Kelly's sisters were also single parents. Kelly would call her sisters and ask for advice, thus receiving help from them. These types of domestic kin networking of the four participants provided stability for their family.

Similar to families, friends can offer support in helping these mothers (Murry et al., 2001). The social support from friends allows single parents some level of control of their lives. Friends can provide both financial and emotional support for the single parents, such as babysitting or giving extra cash to buy products for the children

(Jackson, 1998). When family members are not available, a friend can step in and be just as supportive, expanding the domestic kin network.

Three of the four participants used friends to support them as single mothers. Reba explained that, emotionally, being a single parent can be depressing. Not only did she receive help from her family but friends as well. Reba surrounded herself with friends who were a positive influence on her. Her friends encouraged her when she was down and helped her look after her son. Reba's friends offered advice, gave confidence, and ensured that when she needed help someone would be there for her. Like Reba, Laitishia had many friends who offered support for her children. Her friends gave her advice, took the time to speak with her children (and give them advice), and provided emotional support. Laitishia's friends also spent time looking after her children. They took them out or babysat her children when necessary. As a single mother, Kelly became frustrated at times and would call friends to get some support. Some of her friends understood what she was going through and could give advice because they too were single parents. In contrast, Carvel did not discuss using friends for support. Perhaps, the support she received from her mother and sister were enough, and she did not need any extra support from friends.

None of the participants of this study discussed the fathers of their children or other male non-relatives in their lives as a means of support (a possible barrier, although never discussed as such by the mothers). Perhaps the type of interview questions that I used for this study and the lack of probing as an interviewer failed to provide enough details about father figures in the children's lives. However, the four participants did provide limited knowledge of their former partners. Carvel stated the father had visitation

rights, but she gave the vague impression that he was not in the children's lives. Reba indicated the father of her child was involved in her son's life, but how much he was involved was not made clear. Kelly was separated from her former partner, and they were not on speaking terms at the time of the interview. Laitishia spoke very little about her former partners, but she noted that her first partner passed away.

Parents can also receive help from schools or community agencies. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) provided seven methods that schools can use to support parents with their children's education, such as: communicate clearly that all parents have an important role to play in the children's school, give parents specific information about what they can do to be involved, give parents specific information about the general effects of involvement on student learning, give parents specific information on how their involvement in activities influence learning, give parents specific information about curriculum and learning goals, offer parents positive feedback on the effects of their involvement, and create and support parent and parent-teacher networks in the school. Schools can also provide more support by creating a joining process: welcoming, honouring, and connecting all parents to their children's school (Mapp, 2003). Parents can take advantage of the support that is available from the school.

Not all participants in this study used schools or community agencies for support. Carvel took advantage of these opportunities and used the after-school, family, and youth outreach programs to help support her children. She saw these programs as giving her children a place to go after school. The after-school program, for example, kept her children busy, provided support in their homework, and gave them advice about peer pressure, sex, and drugs. Laitishia, as a young child, used similar programs to the ones

Carvel's children used presently. The after-school programs provided her a place to go after school where she could just talk with someone and get some help that she did not receive from school. She credited the after-school programs for a lot of her success in life. However, Laitishia stated that presently these after-school programs were expensive, and she could not enrol her children into similar programs. In contrast, Reba did not use after-school groups but received support from her child's teachers. According to Reba, teachers would contact her if there were any problems with her son in school. Reba understood the importance of receiving support from her child's teachers on a regular basis. Kelly did not mention any support from schools or community agencies. Perhaps her domestic kin network was able to support her enough so she chose not to use school or community agencies as a support.

Single parents do not have the same opportunities as two parents in supporting their children's schooling. They need to look for help to fill the missing void that another parent can provide and use domestic kin networks of friends and family to give them the extra support. All four participants of this study used domestic kin networks for support. However, none of the single mothers discussed the father of their children as a means of support. Carvel was the only participant to use after-school programs. While Laitishia wanted her children to use similar after-school programs, she could not afford to do so. Only Reba indicated that her child's teacher provided support for her. Collectively, these results mirror the literature with respect to domestic kin networks but indicate that, like the mothers of African heritage in Stevens (1988), the mothers tended to not employ professional support.

Limitations of this Study

There are four key limitations of the current thesis: (a) the similarity across participants, (b) the nature of the interviews, (c) the male/female dynamic in the interviewer/interviewee relationship, and (d) the lack of an initial theoretical framework to guide the four themes of this thesis. I explore each limitation in turn.

When I began this research, I was looking for single mothers of African heritage within one neighbourhood of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). However, at my thesis colloquium, it was strongly suggested that I limit myself to one ethnic group. As people of Jamaican heritage were the prominent ethnic group in the neighbourhood, those single mothers were easiest to recruit and became the focus of the study. Furthermore, I defined single parents in terms of four possible living arrangements, yet all of the single parents I interviewed had similar living arrangements. While this restriction in terms of ethnicity and living arrangement may have been helpful in providing commonalities across participants, it could have been limiting in not giving more diverse views. Future research should therefore target different ethnicities and different living arrangements.

As a researcher, I encountered some challenges in interviewing the four participants. My first problem was scheduling the interviews. It was a struggle to set up a time where I could meet participants. Only Kelly had free time to meet me because she was not working. The other single parents were harder. Carvel cancelled on me a few times before we finally did the interview. Both Laitishia and Reba were late and made me wait before we could do the interview (four hours for Laitishia; 90 minutes for Reba).

The second problem was where we had the interview. I wanted a quiet area, such as the library or the participant's home when the children were absent, to have the

interview. However, Carvel's grandmother was sick at the time, and Carvel was spending most of her free time at the hospital. Finally, we did the interview in her car, which is not an ideal place to conduct an interview. Laitishia had three of her children at home and was braiding one child's hair during our interview. Her children were speaking to her throughout the interview, although her eldest daughter did help out by taking one of her sisters to another room. Reba and Kelly were at home when we did the interview, and their children were at school. However, their telephones or cell phones went off and interrupted the interview.

Third, as a first-time interviewer; I had some technical difficulties with the tape recorder. Sometimes the tape recorder did not pick up parts of the interview so I lost valuable data, for example, in my first interview with Reba. I was able to ask her the same questions over again at the end of the interview, but she did not answer the same way she had the first time. Also the interviews tended to be short because I was not probing answers enough. I just wanted the participants to talk and tell their story without me interrupting. By not probing, I missed another chance to gain more data about the participants' lives. Next time, I would explore participants' responses with more probing so they would explain their answers with more reasons, facts, and examples.

Finally, after the interview, I spoke with the participants. They started to tell me more stories about their lives. I wrote some of what they said down but not everything. By not recording these conversations, I missed on another opportunity for additional information from each participant that my pre-selected questions or my probing failed to provide. Next time, I would ask each participant if we could speak after the formal interview and record this segment as well.

I also now question the nature of this topic as suitable for someone like myself to do. As a single male of Guyanese heritage with no children, who was raised by two middle SES parents, I shared little with the participants of this study. While it might have been an advantage to have had more similarities with the interviewees, the differences helped me by viewing the data provided with few preconceived notions. However, it is possible that these women would be able to share more if they had a women interview them rather than a man.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of a theoretical framework to initially scaffold the four themes of this thesis. As a researcher/writer, I did not always take a critical point of view in examining the previous research in relation to race, gender, and class. In doing so, the four themes of this study were not guided by one particular position. As I got to the end of the process of thesis writing, one of my committee members pointed out this deficiency. I subsequently studied the theoretical frameworks presented by different researchers (Dei, 1999; Ng, Staton, & Scane, 1995; Trifonas, 2003). I concluded that one would have been ideally suited for this study, had I become aware of it earlier. Researcher George Dei (1999) suggested one must take a critical position in understanding, identifying, and explaining how these individuals see themselves from their own eyes. Dei recommends that using an anti-racist discursive framework allows an understanding of how race, gender, and class can influence practices, such as, in my case, single mother's involvement in their children's schools. In using a discursive approach, it helps explain why, within areas of society, certain knowledge is accepted compared to other forms of knowledge. For example, some research (e.g., Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992; Nix et al., 1999) found that mothers

practice strict discipline in supporting their children, while other studies (e.g., Epstein, 2001; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Mapp, 2003) reported single mothers practice at-home involvement with their children's education. This discursive framework would help construct these differences in findings as being related to the mothers' culture or SES. An anti-racist discursive framework also helps identify how single mothers make sense of the knowledge in dealing with a power relationship between themselves and the Eurocentric education system in Canada. In the future, should I write a PhD dissertation in education on a subject related to race, gender, class, and sexuality, I will use this or a similar approach of anti-racist discursive framework and a critical pedagogy to guide my study to help the reader have a better understanding of my work.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have four implications for the practices of teachers with respect to (a) their responsibility; (b) at-school practices for single parents; (c) time and resources; and (d) after-school programs. Each of these implications arises from a different theme: beliefs, practices, barriers, and support, respectively. All four implications arise from the four mothers' perspectives.

First, teachers have a responsibility to ensure all children learn. However, teachers can take on a greater responsibility by working together with parents as in a partnership. This partnership between parents and teachers will vary depending on how much the parent is involved with the children's schooling and how much parents and teachers are communicating with each other.

Second, teachers should publicize at-school practices available for parents. All of the participants in this study understood and did at-home practices, such as helping their children with their homework. In contrast, they did not take full opportunity of at-school practices. Teachers need to emphasize the diverse ways that parents can be involved at school, such as volunteering, being a tutor, attending sports events, and helping on school trips. These at-school practices can be flexible to suit the parents' available time.

Third, teachers must understand the issues of lack of time and resources for single parents. Teachers can help parents who are not available to meet for parent/teacher interviews during regularly scheduled hours by being flexible and working with the parents' limited time. Also teachers can support parents who lack resources by providing other means to support school activities, such as fundraisers, or by planning lower cost school trips.

Finally, schools should create affordable after-school programs. While all participants of this study used domestic kin networks as a means of support, only one used an after-school program. Schools can do more by developing after-school programs, such as drop-in centres or tutoring programs, which are free or low in price. The programs would give single parents extra support in helping their children's schooling.

Final Thoughts

Through the process of this thesis, I learned three important things: about the contribution of my research to the literature, about myself as a researcher, and about myself as a teacher.

My research brings a Canadian view to the current literature. Most of the previous research done in this area has been done in the United States, examining groups defined by race. This study in contrast focuses on one ethnicity, Jamaican (the largest group of Blacks in Canada and in the GTA; Milan & Tran, 2004), and considers the challenges four single mothers of Jamaican heritage face living in a lower SES neighbourhood in Canada. It provides an analysis of how these single parents think, develop, and prepare themselves and their children. The participants shared their successes and their failures in their quest to support their children at home and at school.

As a researcher, I did not realize how hard it was to obtain, analyze, and discuss the data of this study. I thought the process was going to be fairly easy: just call up some participants, do the interviews, and come up with some themes. Research is nowhere near that simple, and it requires a great deal of patience. The researcher needs to be patient in waiting for participants who are not ready when needed. A researcher also needs to be patient in reading the transcripts of the interviews over and over again until themes are clear. A researcher especially needs to be patient in relating the literature to the data of the interviews. It was easy for me to miss themes that came up in the interviews and not compare them to the literature. Sometimes, I learned in the end, a researcher needs to take a break and refocus so he or she can pick up on ideas that were overlooked.

As an educator, this research has given me a better understanding of being a single parent. While teaching in a school located in a lower SES neighbourhood, I have often seen, heard, and felt things about parents that are negative. I tended to believe these parents did not care about their children. Now I realize these stereotypes are not true of all parents. The parents with whom I spoke cared about their children, even though they

did not always participate in school-sponsored activities. I now understand that I must make all parents feel welcome in the classroom by involving them in different ways. I am communicating with parents more often than in the past because I realize as a teacher that these communications can be helpful. I have a few students who do not have a father figure in their lives and who seek me for guidance and support. I am now even more willing to give them help or listen to their problems. I thus make it a priority to support single parents in their work with their children. I am now their partner.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION

Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Ms. _____:

I am a Master of Education student in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. I am writing to request your participation in research which I am conducting, whose aim is to determine the beliefs and practices regarding their children's education of single Canadian parents of African heritage and what supports and barriers they experience in helping their children succeed in elementary school. The ultimate goal of my research is to help single parents of African heritage learn successful strategies in helping their children in their schooling. This research has been cleared by the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board.

The purpose of the study is to understand how single Canadian parents of African heritage work with the public elementary schools for their children's education. Single Canadian parents of African heritage have certain beliefs, practices, barriers, and supports in terms of how their children should be supported in education. The research is important because the findings will have important educational implications regarding what methods of support single Canadian parents of African heritage can use in helping their children with school.

To collect data for this research, I will be conducting individual interviews, which should take approximately 45- 60 minutes to complete. The interview will be audio taped. The taped interview will be transcribed, and then the tape will be destroyed. None of the data will contain your name. Data will be secured in a locked office, and your identity will be kept confidential.

I do not foresee risks in your research participation. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable, and you are assured that no information collected will be reported to anyone who is in authority over you. You are free to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of all or part of your data.

This research may result in publications of various types, including my master's thesis, journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, books, and instructional materials for schools. Your name will not be attached to any form of the data that you provide, neither will your name or the identity of your place of work be known to anyone tabulating or analyzing the data, nor will these appear in any publication created as a result of this research. A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed. Upon request, you can have full description of the results of the study after its completion.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, please feel free to contact me, Abraham Blair, at (416) 442 7185 (e-mail: blaircity2002@yahoo.com) or my supervisor, Dr. John Freeman, at (613) 533-6000 ext. 77298 (e-mail: freemanj@educ.queensu.ca). For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofré, at (613) 533-6210, or the Chair of the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at (613) 533-6081 (email stevensj@post.queensu.ca).

Sincerely,

Abraham Blair
M. Ed candidate
Faculty of Education
Queen's University

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Abraham Blair
 M. Ed. candidate,
 Faculty of Education
 Queen's University

Title: Single Canadian Parents of African Heritage Share Experiences about Their Children's Schooling

I have read and retained a copy of the letter of information concerning: Single Canadian Parents of African Heritage: Their Experiences with Their Children's Schooling, and all questions have been sufficiently answered. I am aware of the purpose and procedures of this study, and I have been informed that the interview will be recorded by audiotape.

I have been notified that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point during the study and I may request the removal of all or part of my data without any consequences to myself. I have also been told the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all information.

I am aware that if I have any questions about this research project or concerns, I can contact Mr. Abraham Blair at 416 442 7185 (email:blaircity2002@yahoo.com) or his supervisor, Dr. John Freeman, at (613) 533-6000 ext. 77298 (e-mail:freemanj@educ.queensu.ca.) I am also aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, I can contact the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofré, at (613) 533-6210, or the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at (613) 533-6081, (e-mail:stevensj@post.queensu.ca.)

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Note to participant: Please write your e-mail or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study.

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

Research Participants Requested

Single Black /African Canadian parents with Caribbean ancestry who have elementary-school aged children between the ages of 3 -14 are requested to participate in a research study.

My name is Abraham Blair; I am a Master of Education student in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. I am writing to request your participation in a research study, *Single Canadian Parents of African Heritage Share Experiences about with Their Children's Schooling*, which I am conducting. The aim of my research is to find out what beliefs parents hold, the practices they undertake, the barriers they encounter, and the supports they in helping their children achieve school success. The ultimate goal of my research is to help single parents learn successful strategies in helping their children in their schooling. Your identity will be kept confidential.

To collect data for this research, I will be conducting individual interviews. The individual interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. If you are willing to participate in this research project, please contact me, Abraham Blair, by phone at (416) 442 7185 or by e-mail at blaircity2002@yahoo.com.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background Questions

1. In terms of culture, race, and ethnicity, how would you identify yourself? Why do you identify with that particular cultural label?
2. Because I will be writing a brief paragraph about you in my study, I would need some background information about you.
 - a. Where were you born?
 - b. This next question is optional: How old are you?
 - c. How many children do you have?
 - d. How old are they?
 - e. What grade/s are they in?
 - f. What do you do for a living?
 - g. What type of education do you have?
 - h. What is your living arrangement at the moment?

Questions - Beliefs

1. To what extent do you feel parents should be involved in their children's education?
2. Who else is responsible for this education? Tell me how these people should be involved.
3. How do you think your own experience as a student compares to your own children's experiences as a student? What has caused this change?

Questions- Practice

I want to first understand your own experience of schooling.

1. Who helped you to succeed at school when you were a child? What did each of these people do to help you succeed?
2. Who prevented you from being successful at school? What did each of these people do to prevent your success? (Probe with questions: teachers, family, parents, peers, media, and culture)
3. What did your parents do that helped or prevented your success in school?
4. What other factors were there that helped or prevented you from achieving success at school? (e.g., living close to a library vs. a mall, peer pressure, going to church, TV/movie influences, etc.)

Now, I want to ask about your children's experience of school.

1. Who helps your children to succeed at school? What does each of these people do to help them succeed?
2. Who prevented your child to be successful at school? What did each of these people do to prevent your child's success? (Probe with questions: teachers, family, parents, peers)
3. What do you do that helps or prevents your children's success?
4. What other factors were there that helped or prevented you from achieving success at school? (e.g., living close to a library vs. a mall, peer pressure, going to church, TV/movie influences, etc.)

Questions- Barriers/Support

1. What are the major barriers to your involvement in your children's education? Can you talk more about each of these barriers? (Probe with questions: financial status, time, exhaustion/fatigue, lack of communication between you and your child, child's lack of interest in sharing with you, lack of knowledge/skill in certain subject areas)
2. How do you think your culture affects your child's education negatively?
3. To what extent do you feel your children's teachers represent a barrier to your children's education?
4. What supports do you have in your role as a parent?
5. How do these supports help you?
6. How do you balance your time between your job, home (laundry, cooking, cleaning), leisure, and helping your children succeed at school?