

## Parents' Beliefs and Goals in Early Childhood

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*There is growing awareness about the home environment's contribution to educational inequalities, even from the earliest ages. However, very little research has been conducted on parental beliefs about involvement in their children's early learning. This study asks: (1) How do parents from different American socioeconomic backgrounds describe their role in their child's early education? (2) What messages do parents report receiving about their role in their young child's education? By gaining a better understanding of these beliefs it may be possible to better prepare tomorrow's early childhood caregivers and to design more effective interventions, especially for children from disadvantaged communities.*

### INTRODUCTION

Recent evidence has shown that achievement gaps by race and socioeconomic status are perceptible at very early ages (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Barnett, Hustedt, Robin, & Schulman, 2004). In fact, studies have detected a Black/White achievement gap among low-income children from as early as three years of age (Burchinal et al., 2011), and a seminal study on vocabulary development showed that children from professional versus welfare-supported families had heard, on average, 30 million more words by age three (Hart & Risley, 2003). The effects of these achievement gaps are pernicious, and despite various efforts to bridge the gap, differences in achievement are more likely to remain or grow as children progress through school (Heckman & Carneiro, 2003).

Not only because the gaps are evident at such early ages, but also because of the promising long- and short-term return on investment afforded, early childhood programs may provide the best opportunity to improve educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged children (Barnett, 1995; Barnett, 2013; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Many of these interventions offer institutional solutions—preschools and such as programs like Head Start—where educational institutions are created or adapted to attempt to improve the achievement of particular group. Other programs aim to change parent behaviors (or promote certain behaviors, like parental involvement), such as Harlem Children's Zone's Baby College (Tough, 2004) and Triple P (Sanders, 1999). However, the study of the relationship between parents' beliefs and how those beliefs impact their parenting activities – particularly in the early years – has been limited (Schaefer, 1991). This is especially troubling since the primacy of parents in influencing child development is well established (Missall, Hojnoski, Caskie, & Repasky, 2015; Rowe & Casillas, 2010). Without understanding the parenting beliefs that lead to parenting behaviors, including the decision to be involved in a child's learning, these programs may not be as successful as they could be in preventing the early achievement gap.

This study contributes to what is known about parental beliefs by addressing three questions: (1) How do parents describe their role in their young child's (ages 3-5) education and development? (2) What messages do parents report receiving about their role in their young child's education, and who is sending these messages? (3) How do parents' from different social addresses differ in the way they describe their role and the messages they receive about their role? In exploring these questions, this research aims to improve our understanding of parents' motivational beliefs and their perceived life context (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Through semi-structured interviews with fourteen parents from two different social addresses (Bronfenbrenner, 1986)—seven middle-class parents whose child attends a private preschool and seven low-income parents whose child attends Head Start—this study contributes to what is known about how parents of young children may be socialized to hold certain beliefs about their role in their child's early learning. By gaining a better understanding of these beliefs and the factors that contribute to them, it may be possible to design more effective interventions to promote school readiness and parental involvement, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study relies on two theoretical frameworks to organize its findings. First, parental beliefs about the impact and role they play in their child's education are understood to be shaped by the cultural, social, and educational context they and their child inhabit. In other words, the messages sent by public discourse, child care programs, and parents' peers about how children learn in early childhood shape the role parents see for themselves in their child's educational life. Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory situates the family in the microsystem—the system whose institutions and entities have meaningful daily interactions with the child, and which have the most direct impact on the child's development. Furthermore, the family is part of a system-within-a-system, whereas the within-family (or intrafamilial) interactions and perceptions are shaped by systems and conditions outside the family (or extrafamilial) (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), including the media, the social services they access, and their preschools. While the study participants are frequently organized by their "social address," this study considers the data from each participant as representing the *individual's* perspective within the context of her social address, and attempts to not generalize about the beliefs and experiences of *all* people within that social address. Moreover, the ecological systems approach follows a person-process-context model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), where the context (including the participant's socioeconomic status) is not only situated with the ecosystem, but also within the particulars of the individual's identity and family processes. In other words, rather than reducing all findings to generalizations about "private preschool parents" and "Head Start parents," in this study I try to describe the data not only in relation to the participant's social address, but also their individual characteristics, including race/immigration status, family structure, and background. By considering these additional factors, I am able to avoid, to some extent, overgeneralization, and am able to share this study's findings in a way that is, I hope, more true to the participants' experiences and perspectives.

In addition, in this study I draw on the work of Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard Sandler (2005) and their (revised) model of the parent involvement process. This model "hypothes[izes] about the causes and consequences of parental involvement in children's education" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 7). While student achievement is at the top of this model (Level 5), the present study concerns itself with the lowest, Level 1, constructs: *parents' motivational beliefs*, *parents' perceptions of invitation for involvement from others*, and *parents' perceived life context*—these are the motivators of parental engagement in their child's education and include not only parents' beliefs, but also their interactions with institutions and systems that impact their child rearing choices, and the time, resources, and skills they have to offer their children. To date, the Hoover-Dempsey model for parent involvement has not been applied to a preschool context, which presents an opportunity for this study to contribute new understanding of the utility of this model for improving children's learning outcomes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review of the extant literature, I will first provide a short overview of the ideas contributed by some of the most influential “experts” on parenting in the United States. While the history of the narratives contributed by these scholars, pediatricians, and other parenting “gurus” may seem peripheral to a study on parents’ beliefs about their role, these figures are integral to understanding the American discourses around parenting. These narratives exist, after all, to shape parental beliefs, the topic of my study. Second, I summarize previous research on parental beliefs, parental role construction, and the impact of parental beliefs on children’s learning.

### Sources of Information and Parenting “Experts”

The existence of the concept of “childhood” as a distinct developmental phase – rather than believing children to be small adults without their own unique set of needs, characteristics, and rights – is relatively new, gaining traction only in the last four hundred years (Holden, 2010; Hulbert, 2003). Without the concept of “childhood,” as a distinct stage in the development of people, a study of “parents” and “parenting” would not exist. The role of parenting becomes more important as children and their healthy development are recognized as having distinct needs, which parents may address to different extents of adequacy. Thus, it is only fairly recently, as child-centered theories of development have gained prominence, that interest in “parents” and “parenting” has begun to accumulate, both in research communities and in popular discourse (Holden, 2010; Hulbert, 2003). Even as recently as the 1920s, John Broadus Watson, the founder of behaviorism, asserted that children should be treated as young adults, and should not be coddled, cuddle, or kissed in his popular book, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (1928).

Much of the research on parenting is through research on socialization, which occurs throughout the lifespan but which has special importance in the early years. Socialization research has focused on how societies – and how parents in particular – provide individuals with the tools and knowledge to behave acceptably and productively within their particular cultural context (Maccoby, 2007). Psychologists interested in socialization have investigated whether and how children respond different stimuli (based on Skinnerian behaviorism), how to instill good habits in children, how to regulate impulses and self-regulate; they also generated typologies of parenting styles (such as Baumrind’s authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting), and developed an understanding of parenting and socialization as a product of evolution (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby, 2007). For example, John Bowlby’s attachment theory, developed in the 1950s with Mary Ainsworth, suggests that there is a hierarchy of types of attachment relationships between children and their caregivers. Parents and children with “secure attachment,” where children are tightly bonded with their caregivers, is the most desirable form and which allows children to feel secure even in new and strange situations. Attachment theory has informed clinical practice as well as childcare policy, and “attachment parenting” still enjoys popularity today among many parents (Bretherton, 1992; Quinn & Mageo, 2013).

As psychological research childhood and parenting gained prominence, so did the rise of the parenting “expert.” Among the first was physician Luther Emmett Holt. In his *The Care and Feeding of Children* (first published in 1894, but which remained popular well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Holden, 2010)), he provided parents and caregivers with detailed instructions on the daily practices of infant and child care, including how and when a child should be given his or her first bath, and how often they should be bathed thereafter; how a child should be fed (at various ages); how the nursery should be heated; and much more (Holt, 1907/2005). Later, Dr. Benjamin Spock told parents to “Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do” in *Baby and Child Care* (Spock, 1967), and provided American parents with an updated set of detailed recommendations for how to be a “good parent” based on their own common sense, rather than the strict dictates of an expert pediatrician (Hulbert, 2003). Spock’s books sold millions of copies and were pivotal in shaping the raising of the baby boomer generation, even as his recommendations were accused of “permissiveness” and blamed for creating a culture of entitlement (Hulbert, 2003).

For generations of American parents, these experts shaped parents' understanding of what the role required. However, there is evidence that their influence was never as strong as it may have seemed. As Dr. Spock's influence declined toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, no one expert has taken his place (Holden, 2010; Hulbert, 2003). Instead, a proliferation of parenting gurus in every flavor has given parents a variety of philosophies to choose from: William and Martha Sears (attachment parenting), Harvey Karp (the "happiest" baby), Rebecca Eanes (positive parenting), Daniel J. Siegel (mindful parenting), to name a few. Moreover, parents today need not just choose among the "experts" that one who suits their needs and styles, but they can also choose from a vast array of lay "experts," including peers in online discussion forums (such as babycenter.com), popular "mommy" bloggers (such as dooce.com and scarymommy.com), and through extended networks on social media (Facebook mom groups, etc.). While this decentralization and de-professionalization of sources of information for parents may seem as though it could result in less accurate or scientific advice for parents, in reality, parenting advice has rarely been grounded in research. Even the famed Dr. Spock admitted that his recommendations were based on his own professional experience and intuition, and not on research. In fact, it was only towards the end of his career, in part to address the critiques of his lifetime of work (including from his longtime rival, Bruno Bettelheim), that he conducted a longitudinal study of twenty-two mother-child dyads in order to provide a research backing for the recommendations he had been making for decades. Not only was the experimental design of the study flawed (lack of a control group; no standardized measures or procedures; poor recordkeeping), but the limited evidence generated from the study seemed to show that parents frequently ignored expert advice (Hulbert, 2003).

### **Parental Beliefs and Belief Systems**

Experts are one source of information that informs parental belief systems, which are the mechanism through which beliefs are formed. Belief systems are "socially shared yet constructed in the minds of individual parents" (Harkness & Super, 1996, p. 6). As socially mediated constructs, these belief systems are influenced by the social, policy, and cultural contexts in which they reside (Durand, 2010; LeVine, Dixon, LeVine, Richman, Keefer, Leiderman, & Brazelton, 2008). Furthermore, according to McGillicuddy-De Lisi and Subramanian (1996), parental beliefs about children and child development are developed through three means: (1) beliefs come directly (and unquestioned) through the culture; (2) beliefs are formed through the holder's own childhood, family, and parenting experiences; and (3) beliefs are influenced by the exchange of ideas and assumptions of people from different cultures.

Much of the previous research on parental beliefs has used a rigid set of parenting style typologies (Schaefer, 1991), such as Baumrind's typology of parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and democratic) or surveys (Bloomstra, van Dijk, Jorna, & van Geert, 2013; Bubić, Tošić, 2016; Carmichael, 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Frewen, Chew, Carter, Chunn, & Jotanovic, 2015; Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000) rather than more open-ended interviews to understand parental beliefs. However, studies that did use parent interviews to understand parental beliefs surfaced issues similar to the findings in the present study, such as the importance of social networks for parental involvement in schools (Eng, Szmodis, & Muslow, 2014; Sime & Sheridan, 2014), the value parents place on the socio-emotional opportunities preschool can afford (Manigo & Allison, 2017), and the primacy of the parental role (Durand, 2011; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Subramanian, 1996; Sime & Sheridan, 2014).

Furthermore, a robust set of evidence shows that parental beliefs matter for children's school success and healthy development, in general (Durand, 2011; Grusec, Rudy, & Martini, 1997; Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000). Some studies have questioned the correlation between parental beliefs and actions (Bloomstra, van Dijk, Jorna, & van Geert, 2013; Holden & Edwards, 1989), and have doubted whether parental beliefs are a stable construct (Bloomstra, van Dijk, Jorna, & van Geert, 2013). Yet other research has demonstrated the ways in which parental beliefs can impact their behaviors as well as child outcomes (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006; Rowe & Casillas, 2010). Bubić and Tošić (2016), for example, found that parents' attitudes about education were a significant predictor of parents' modeling behaviors for children. Other studies have examined the relationship between parental beliefs and children's early reading skills (Bloomstra, van Dijk, Jorna, & van Geert, 2013; Jung, 2016) mathematical performance



(Carmichael, 2014; Missall, Hojnosi, Caskie, & Repasky, 2015), and school involvement (Eng, Szamodis, & Muslow, 2014). In addition, prior work has shown that parental role construction is among the most significant predictors of school engagement for parents of children in elementary and middle school (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005), but less is known about the relationship between beliefs and role (Murphey & Alexander, 1991), particularly in the preschool years. Furthermore, more research is needed on how parents from different social addresses understand their role, since there is evidence that low-income parents may respond differently to efforts to promote engagement in their child's education than wealthier parents (Anderson & Minke, 2007).

## **METHODS**

### **Sample and Recruitment**

My aim was to interview twenty parents (mother, father, or other primary caregiver) from two different American "social addresses" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986)—ten higher income parents and ten lower income parents.<sup>1</sup> I based the choice of including two addresses on the well-established fact that parenting varies by social background of the parents. I initially defined the "middle income" sample as those parents whose children attend a private preschool that charge approximately \$1,600 or more per month in tuition,<sup>2</sup> and the "lower income" as those who qualify for Head Start, a federally-funded "school readiness" program for low-income families.<sup>3</sup>

I enlisted a friend (Molly<sup>4</sup>) with a child in the target age range to serve as a gatekeeper (Seidman, 2006), and who was able to recruit several of her peer-parents (Susan, Grace, and Jane) to participate. In a similar way, one other participant (Rita) was recruited through a mutual friend. The final two higher-income participants were recruited through GardenMoms (Beth and Diana), an online community for Boston-area parents that primarily attracts families from the wealthier Boston-area neighborhoods, including Brookline, Newton, Wellesley, and Belmont. All of the higher-income mothers were white, although one mentioned that her child was mixed-race. All interviews were conducted with mothers, although in one case a father (George, husband of Jane) was present during the interview and offered some limited responses to my questions. In each case, the target child for this group was either an only child or the oldest child, and so the parents primarily based their reflections on their role in relation to that particular child (this was not always the case for the Head Start parents—see below). The parents from this social address are referred to throughout this study as "private preschool" (or PP) parents.

In addition, I was able to secure permission the Coordinator of Family Services, "Sue," of Quality Head Start to recruit lower income parents through their program. Sue shared my flyer with families that participated in the Head Start's Policy Council, a group of parents that discusses the center's programs and policies, as well as provided me with opportunities to attend parent events (such as the "Morning Mingle" on Fridays) to recruit participants. In all, four mothers (Sara, Anne, Mary, and Laura) were referred to me directly by Sue, and three mothers (Nicole, Frances, and Helen) were recruited from a Morning Mingle event. Four of the Head Start participants were African-American (one of whom identified herself as Cape Verdean, and another as Haitian), one was Indian, one was white, and one was Latina (Colombian). In addition, several of the parents in this group had older children (in some cases, much older children), and their reflections on their role as parents were not limited to their experiences and attitudes relating to the target (preschool-aged) child. The parents in the sample from this "social address" are referred to as "Head Start" (or QHS) parents. For more information about the sample, please see Appendix A.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, I conducted fourteen<sup>5</sup> semi-structured interviews lasting, on average, 39 minutes. Parent reports of behaviors have been shown to raise validity concerns (Bates & Pettit, 2007), but since this study concerns itself with parental *beliefs*, interviews are an appropriate method. While the mean length of interviews with higher-income versus lower-income interview partners was similar (38 minutes, 20 seconds and 39 minutes, 30 seconds, respectively), the range of duration of interviews varied, with a

much larger range among the lower-income sample (between 18 minutes, 48 seconds [Anne] and 76 minutes, 51 seconds [Laura]). I attribute this to the greater variability in availability and interest in speaking with me among the lower income mothers, compared with the middle-income mothers.

Interviews took place in various locations: the Boston Public Library, a Dunkin Donuts in a Wal-Mart, via phone, in participants' homes, an independent coffee shop, and in various rooms at Quality Head Start. Only private preschool mothers invited me to interview them in their homes, while almost all (six out of seven) lower income mothers preferred that I interview them at Quality Head Start. This difference may be due to the fact that I recruited from Quality Head Start, whereas the private preschool mothers were recruited through social networks, and not through a child care program or preschool.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the interview data using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory was useful for my analysis since it helped to identify themes within "participants' implicit meanings [and] experiential views" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10) of what parenting entails and how they describe messages that receive that inform their conception of parenting. Grounded theory's emphasis on how "people construct data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 16) as well as its utility in uncovering complexity helped me to understand participants' parental beliefs, which, frequently, implicit and unexamined by the subject. In addition to using grounded theory to code my data, I also used memoing "to raise focused codes and conceptual categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 91).

My initial coding was utterance-by-utterance (as opposed to line-by-line, as recommended by Charmaz), since many of my interview participants' utterances (in response to a question from me) were on the same theme. In my initial codes, I attempted to "see actions" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47) such as "justifying own beliefs," "describing goals for her child," and "assigning responsibility." In preparation for a secondary round of more "focused" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57) and "theoretical" coding (p. 63), I revised my initial codes and attempted to connect them with concepts from the research literature, particularly Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model of the parent involvement process, and used that model to organize a discussion of my findings.

### **Limitations and Threats to Validity**

I acknowledge two main limitations and threats to the validity of the findings of this study. First, this study's sample is small: fourteen participants. Furthermore, of the fourteen, half (seven) are intended to offer the perspective of one American "social address," where the other half is supposed to present another perspective. With samples this small, generalizability is difficult, and I have attempted to discuss the findings without overstating what they might mean for the larger populations the samples are intended to represent, particularly by trying to highlight the personal characteristics of each of the participants that might influence their perspective. In addition, the private preschool sample, by many observable characteristics, appears to be more homogenous compared with the Head Start sample, despite the fact that, unlike the Head Start group, the parents all sent their children to different preschools. All of the private preschool parents are native-born (American) white, living in two-parent households, and hold college degrees. There was greater variation in the race/ethnicity, family composition, and education level of the parents in the Head Start sample: four were immigrants, six were non-white, and at least three were single parents. In addition, some of the participants from the Head Start sample mentioned that they had college degrees or were pursuing higher education, while for others I was not able to glean their education level. As noted above, the two groups also differed in terms of the birth order of the target child: each of the target children of the private preschool parents was either the first-born or an only child; whereas for several of the Head Start parents, the target child had at least one older sibling. As a result, many of the Head Start parents had experience with formal schooling beyond preschool, and often described how they advocated for their older children's education and were involved in their learning in order to describe their role in the target child's learning. These factors, related to identity and background, are bound to play a significant role in these individuals' beliefs and attitudes, and therefore make generalizing about Head Start parents and private preschool parents challenging and, perhaps, inappropriate.

The second threat to validity involves my own identity as a white woman and researcher from a prestigious university. It is possible that some participants, particularly Head Start parents, may have been more inclined to emphasize their academic goals for their child since they knew that I am a student at a school of education. Since the majority of the teaching profession is white and female (Howard, 2016), like I am, it is also possible that some participants emphasized academic goals because they saw me as a representative of the educator/teacher that they are familiar with or as an education authority figure. Finally, while I took pains to preface each interview by positioning myself as a learner (“I’m just a student”) and positioning my participants as the experts (“Thank you so much for offering your valuable perspective and experience”), it is likely that some participants may have seen me as a person with power, particularly due to my affiliation with a prestigious research university. As a result, they may have told me what they thought I wanted to hear (focusing on academics), particularly in regards to their goals for their children.

## **FINDINGS**

In this study, I investigated the way that parents (in this sample, mostly mothers) from two different social addresses talked about their role in their child’s learning, their goals for their young child’s learning, and the factors that contribute to their understanding of their role. Interviews with the parents showed that regardless of their social address, parents viewed their role in similar ways and held similar, yet not precisely the same, goals. However, the parents did differ subtly in a few important ways: Head Start parents were more isolated, and were more concerned with their child’s academic success than their private preschool counterparts. Parents of children in the private preschool group were more likely to rely on other parents and social networks when they had questions about their child’s learning or behavior, while some Head Start parents reported primarily relying on their own judgment or ad hoc research when it came to questions about their child. Overall, there were more similarities than differences between the ways that parents discussed their role, but those differences that did emerge may reflect disparate messages about the parental role sent from society and institutions based on their social address, and may affect their long-term involvement in their child’s learning.

### **Defining the Parent’s Role, Especially Vis-à-Vis the Preschool’s Role**

Participants in this study were asked questions to attempt to uncover how they saw their role in their child’s early learning. Since all of the children attended preschool, it was possible to describe the bounds that parents saw for their role in part by comparing how they described the role of their child’s preschool. In addition, by analyzing how parents described their goals for their child (including their goals in sending their child to preschool) and the things they are most proud of having taught their child, I was able to gain some understanding of their beliefs about their role in their child’s learning.

#### ***Parents as Teachers***

Unsurprisingly, all of the parents used language that suggested that their role in their child’s life was paramount: “The parents are the most important for the kid and for the child’s life” (Frances – QHS); “I believe that, ultimately, I’m responsible for all of it” (Grace – PP); “I think they’re [parents] ultimately the most important educators in their lives” (Sara – QHS). This finding echoes what others have found: despite prevalent deficit-oriented discourses about parenting beliefs among low income or immigrant parents, many studies instead show that parents, regardless of social address, feel that their role is primary in their child’s life (Durand, 2011; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Subramanian, 1996; Sime & Sheridan, 2014). In fact, QHS mothers were more likely to use “teacher” or “educator” in their description of their role, perhaps reflecting messages sent to them by QHS. This finding may also indicate the influence of advocacy efforts to combat achievement gaps by socioeconomic status since low income parents have recently been the target of many campaigns to promote a “parents as first teacher” mindset (Taylor, n.d.).

In their understanding of their role in their children’s learning, all of the parents in sample made it clear that their child’s learning was ultimately their responsibility, and while they might outsource some

aspects of their child's education, their understanding of their role included multiple domains of learning. In other words, parents understood their role in fostering their child's learning not only meant their child's academic learning, but also their child's social and cultural education. For example, Anne, an African-American woman with five sons, the youngest of whom was attending QHS, prioritized teaching her children about race and about financial literacy: "[It is most important that I teach him] about how we [African Americans] came here. How race is being treated. What you need to do to be able to sustain out there in society. Education is the key. Financial literacy is the key. So, I teach them those type of things." In a similar way, Sara, another QHS parent and longtime parent advocate at QHS, described her role as a parent this way:

[F]rom the time I got pregnant with my first one, I made a promise to myself that I was going to do everything and anything I could to make sure that my children became good people and smart people, and I wanted them to have some degree of street smarts and some degree of book smarts. I said I'm going to teach them everything and anything I possibly can no matter how minimal or how big it is and hope and pray they take away good things from it all.

Sara's perspective is influenced by the fact that she is a "second time around" mother: she had two children while still a teenager, and her third—the target child—eighteen years later. That fact, along with her job as a parent advocate at QHS, might lead her to be more conscious of her goals as a mother. While many parents seemed to emphasize non-academic learning, Anne and Sara's inclusion of both academic and social learning was typical of most of the parents in the sample, regardless of social address.

#### *A Partner or a Service*

Parents' conception of their own role was often placed in contrast (or in complement) to the role they saw their child's preschool playing in their child's learning and development. Virtually all parents in the sample, when prompted, were likely to describe their relationship with their child's preschool teachers as a "partnership." As two private preschool parents put it: "Yes, I do [think they're a partner]. I really think they're there to help" (Beth, a medical doctor); "It's partner. She provides what she can and then we're going to provide the rest" (Diana, a teacher who is taking time off from the profession). However, this characterization of their relationship with the preschool provider as a partner may have been the result of the prompting they received from me. By asking "Tell me about your relationship with your preschool. Do you see it as a partnership? Or in some other way?," it is possible that I primed the participants to answer in a particular way by suggesting an answer to a question they had not yet considered.

Instead, in probing more deeply, it seemed to emerge that parents, especially the private preschool parents, saw their preschool in much more utilitarian way. For these parents, the preschool was one of the key resources for achieving the goals they had for their child and their child's early learning. One mother, Diana, the former teacher, was explicit about how she saw her daughter's preschool as providing a service, rather than as a partner in her child's learning: "I'd say service because we do pay her [the preschool provider]" and "My preference is for him to be in a place where he can get [...] all the social stuff that I can't give him at home. But if I can't find a place that's good enough, then I would just have him [at home]." While another private preschool mother, Grace, didn't use the "service" terminology, she was even more overt about her thinking about preschool as a tool for achieving her goal for her child: "I am delegating to an external party pieces that I either can't do or they can do in a better aspect—but if he wasn't getting it there, then I would want to do it elsewhere." According to Grace, her background as the child of Christian missionaries who attended a very liberal college has influenced her understanding of her role. However, whether they were explicit about it or not, other middle-class parents also appeared to be very intentional regarding what they hoped to get out of their child's preschool, whether it was a more flexible child (Diana), a child with better social skills or more friends (Beth, Jane, Diana, and Molly), or an environment that would cultivate her child's artistic side (Susan).

It was not evident that Head Start parents saw the role of their preschool in the utilitarian way that private preschool parents did. One QHS parent, Sara, the parent advocate at the center (a part-time paid position) brought up the idea of partnership between QHS and families in the context of her work, and not

in relation to her own feelings about the role of the center in her child's learning: "we do a family partnership with them [other parents at QHS]." In this case, the "partnership" language might reflect QHS and national Head Start policy, which calls for Head Start centers to "Collaborate with families in a family partnership process that identifies needs, interests, strengths, goals, and services and resources that support family well-being, including family safety, health, and economic stability" (Head Start standard 1302.50(b)(3): Family engagement; United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2016). Multiple QHS parents mentioned working together with their child's teacher to set goals for learning. This difference in attitudes about the role of the preschool may be due to the disparate ways that the middle class parents came to choose their child's private preschool (shopping around, word of mouth, internet research), versus the ways that the Head Start parents came to enroll their child at QHS (referral from early intervention or through accessing other social services based on need), or due to the particular characteristics of the Head Start program, which explicitly includes partnership with families.

### **Parental Goals: Academic Versus Socio-Emotional**

The way that parents in the sample explained their goals for their children, in many ways, illuminated more detail on their conception of their role in their child's learning. When asked what parents thought were the most important things that their child learn before they started kindergarten, parents in the two samples tended to have different answers. All parents from the middle-class sample emphasized non-academic skills and attitudes that they believed were most important for their child to cultivate prior to the start of formal schooling. In contrast, parents from the Head Start sample were more likely to mention their child's mastery of early literacy or numeracy skills, such as letter or number recognition.

#### *Private Preschool Parents' Goals*

When asked what they felt were the most important things their child needed to know before school, private preschool parents answered with skills and knowledge such as: "manners," "respect for others," "caring," "sharing," and "kindness." In particular, they emphasized social skills and citizenship skills. As Diana, a former elementary school teacher with a son in a private preschool said, "I think that being social is a really important part of being human." Similarly, Beth reported, "Honestly my biggest [goal] would be her ability to navigate the world socially." When asked her goal in choosing a preschool, Molly, whose identity as a working mother was very important to her, said: "The big things are that they are cared for, that they are safe, that they are loved, all the emotional stuff that hopefully creates strong, secure young women." Rita, who is raising a mixed-race child, also wanted a caring environment, but, more importantly, wanted a diverse one as well: "it is kind of a homey atmosphere but the teachers are really talented. My daughter is Ghanaian-American, so one of the things we were kind of hoping for was more obvious racial diversity." These parents' goals for their children's early education reflect their desire to help their children grow into successful, caring adult, and echoes prior research that shows that preschool is effective at promoting socio-emotional development among children (Manigo & Allison, 2017).

#### *Taking Academic Success for Granted*

In fact, among the private preschool mothers, there was the sentiment that they could take their child's future academic success for granted. For example, as Susan put it:

I feel like letters, numbers, those sort of things, she knows some—I don't worry about that sort of thing. The things that I worry about and I think are really important are more of the humanitarian ways of thinking and being and caring about other human beings and being very considerate of other people and other people's space and their beliefs and being just kind and generous and thoughtful and being respectful, being responsible for yourself, cleaning up after yourself.

Rita also cared most about her daughter developing citizenship skills in preschool, and even went so far as to say that she wouldn't be disappointed if her daughter didn't learn to read by the end of preschool:

What I cared about the most—I didn't really care if she came out learning how to read. I mean it is exciting and she likes math, but even when they talk about the kindergarten milestones I felt like the base that I was really excited about at the preschool was the community and I don't know if citizenship is the right word, but just the caring and the kindness and the treat others as you would like to be treated and that is a philosophy in our family too.

Thus, private preschool parents' main goals for their children's early learning were not focused on their academic development, but instead their social development, and they selected preschools to fulfill those goals.

### *Being Prepared for Kindergarten*

In contrast, while some parents from QHS also mentioned socio-emotional goals for their child's early learning (e.g. Laura: "To give back. I think the most important thing is to be human. Be human. Be kind to people.), they were much more likely to list academic and specific school readiness skills when asked what their child needs to know before school. "I believe she needs to know [how to] write down her full name so I'm practicing her name" (Frances). It is clear that Mary, another QHS mother, had been told what the expectations for her child would be upon entry to kindergarten, and was focused on ensuring that her daughter met those expectations: "So I know that she's going to be starting kindergarten and the requirements are at least to have her name recognized and written as well as some other activities such as going up and down the stairs alone for example . . . So I'm trying to get her to that level so she doesn't stay behind." Not only does Mary focus on academic and gross motor skills, but she also has the sense that her child is already behind, perhaps because of the messages she's received about the early achievement gap. Laura also expressed awareness that there were different expectations for children from different income levels, and that this impacted why she prioritized some things over others: ". In her case, it led her to have more limited expectations for her child, in part because she felt that wealthier parents might have unrealistic expectations that result in their child being "stressed out." This is not to say that QHS parents didn't hope for their children to have good social skills and to be good citizens, but rather that they were much more preoccupied than private preschool parents with their child's academic skills.

### **Sources of Information**

A third way in which parents from the two social addresses tended to differ was in the sources of information and types of parenting support they received. In order to understand some of the influences on their conception of their role as parents, participants were asked about how they learned about their child's development, including what they should know or learn at various ages, as well as who they turned to when they had questions about their child. Many of the participants mentioned the influence of their own parents and childhoods on their parenting styles—sometimes expressing a desire to emulate the way their parents inhabited the role, but more often noting that they pick and choose what they want to replicate from their childhoods. As Mary put it, "Usually I go by what I was taught as a child because my whole family had educators in it . . . and we never settle for less education." Surprisingly, very few parents, from their group felt that their pediatrician was an important source of information. Overall, middle class parents seemed to rely much more heavily on peer parents for advice and information about parenting, compared with the Head Start parents. This finding is similar to what others have found about both the importance of social networks for parental involvement and the lack of these networks for low-income parents (Eng, Szmodis, & Muslow, 2014; Sime & Sheridan, 2014).

### *The Importance of Social Networks*

Parents whose children attended private preschool reported relying primarily on social networks, both in person and virtual, for information about parenting, child development, and their child's learning. "The bulk of the information I have is from other parents and I feel that my friends are relatively well-informed, and I trust them," said Beth. This feeling of "trust" among likeminded parents was echoed by other private preschool parents. As Grace put it, "I think social circles play a big part. I have numbers of

friends, three or four friends probably—close friends, who parent in a very similar style, and so it's like a conglomeration of approaches that I've taken and then shared with other people, approaches they've taken or heard of or seen or whatever and liked and adopted and shared with me.” These mothers reported belonging to moms’ Facebook groups and online communities like GardenMoms<sup>6</sup> and had regularly scheduled playdates with moms and their children in person. In addition, their relationships with other parents were not haphazard: parents sought out other parents who held similar childrearing philosophies. Jane, in particular, explained how she navigated different approaches to childrearing: “It's so easy with the internet to be exposed to so many different philosophies of parenting, and just like landing on something that feels comfortable...I'm in a couple of Facebook mom groups, and you can just see there's the attachment parenting people over here, and then the totally opposite of that on the other spectrum. It's about observing and finding your place.” This sentiment echoes what the review of expert parenting literature has shown—the proliferation of parenting advice is associated with parents no longer relying on all-knowing experts (such as Dr. Spock) in the way that earlier generations did. Instead, they are able to choose from a menu of different parenting styles, and these middle class parents sought out fellow parents who subscribed to the same philosophies.

*“I go off of my own feelings.”*

In contrast, only one QHS parent, Helen, a Colombian immigrant, mentioned relying on peer parents for advice and information about parenting. Instead, QHS parents were more likely to describe either relying only on their own judgment or using an ad hoc mix of research methods that might include internet searches, films/TV, sites like Pinterest and YouTube, or other media. As Sara, the QHS parent who was also a longtime parent advocate said, “Mostly, I go off of my own feelings and what I feel is right or wrong.” Anne, the mother of five boys, said, “I research from here and there . . . I read a lot. I do a lot of youtube videos and whatever I want to know I just research. So if anything helps my mind, I research it.” Frances’s strategy was similar to Anne’s: “Yes, I do a lot of stuff, readings, books, news, letters, shows, TV shows on this stuff. Yeah. I try to gather as much as information because I'm a little bit concerned about her.” Like the private preschool parents, the QHS mothers were not followers of any parenting experts, and instead looked for varied sources of advice. It was not clear how they evaluated the quality of the information they gathered, nor did it seem as though they were as intentional about curating advice that adhered to their own personal parenting philosophy, compared with the private preschool parents. The lack of support social and familiar support networks that the QHS mothers reported is supported by research that shows that low-income parents tend to be more isolated (Sime & Sheridan, 2014).

#### *Messages and Support from the Preschool*

Virtually all of the middle-class parents expressed disappointment with the lack of information about how to support their child’s learning that they received from their preschool. For some parents, the absence of communication and guidance from the preschool was because there was a sense that the middle class parents were already meeting societal expectations for supporting their child’s early learning: “But we're on top of all the academic stuff, and so she [the preschool teacher] doesn't tell us stuff like, read to your kid or anything like that” (Diana – PP). Beth, a physician, had a different interpretation of the lack of communication. She believed that her preschool failed to give suggestions and advice precisely because of the characteristics of the parent demographic: “I think it's too much trouble [for them], because I think parents over-interpret it. I just think there's too much risk of being wrong and getting sued. I would not want to deal with us as parents.” This notion that the preschool teachers, who some might consider experts in child development, would refrain from offering guidance to parents might reflect the role that middle-class parents saw for their preschool—the school provided a service, not a partnership. Instead, several of the private preschool parents mentioned that they only learned about what the child was doing in preschool from the child him/herself.

On the other hand, many of the Head Start parents mentioned frequent communication from their child's teachers about how to support their child's learning, as well as their child's progress in mastering school readiness skills. According to Nicole, a Haitian-American single mother:

We do parent teacher conferences and that's when they give me a paper of showing me what he knows alphabet wise, what he knows in his numbers, his colors, his shapes. I get a report from the teacher and we talk, too, when I drop him off. If there are issues—how he's doing behavioral wise—and what we [should be] working on. There's a communication between me and the teachers, and I also get a report.

As noted above, Head Start specifically aims to promote preschool-parent relationships, and parent communication and education are parts of the program design. At the same time, QHS, in particular, also aimed to support the development of peer parent relationships through such events as the Morning Mingle, but this effort appeared much less successful.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study was designed to explore how parents of young, preschool-aged children from middle- and low-income households understood their role in their children's learning. By examining how parents from two social addresses described the part they played in fostering their children's learning, by analyzing the goals they had for their children, and by investigating the different resources that parents turned to that influenced their parenting, I hoped to build an understanding of the different ways that parents conceived of their role. Parents' beliefs about their role are important, in part, because of their relationship to children's academic achievement (Sime & Sheridan, 2013). Therefore, in order to better understand the processes by which parents' beliefs and attitudes might impact their child's academic success, I consider the findings in relation to a well-known model for parent involvement, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parent involvement process. This model has not previously been applied to the preschool context, which is typically parents' first introduction to interaction with their child's teachers and educational institutions. In this way, this study may offer a valuable contribution to understanding how and why parents become involved in their child's education at the outset of their exposure to formal educational organizations.

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) parent involvement process model (see Appendix B) has been widely used to investigate how and why parents from various backgrounds are involved in their children's schooling. This model describes the process by which parents decide to become involved in their children's education, with the ultimate goal of improving student achievement (Level 5 of the model). The present study examines the Level 1 components of the model: (1) parents' motivational beliefs, (2) parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others, and (3) parents' perceived life context. In particular, this study uses interview data to understand parents' motivational beliefs, which are defined as a combination of (1a) parental role construction and (1b) parental self-efficacy for helping the child succeed in school. Interview participants were also asked about the messages they received from their preschool about supporting their child's learning, which provides information about (2) parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement for others, and, specifically, (2a) perceptions of general (pre)school invitations, and (2c) perceptions of specific teacher invitations. Some parents also mentioned invitations to participate in their child's learning and preschool activities through invitations from their child (2b). Finally, by asking the parents about their backgrounds and the (familial, media, and other) influences on their knowledge of child development and parenting, I hoped to gain insight into (3) parents' perceived life context, which includes (3a) parents' self-perceived knowledge and skills and (3b) parents' perceived time and energy.

### **Parents' Motivational Beliefs**

The present study analyzed how parents described their role in their child's early learning. According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model, parents' construction of their role (and their self-efficacy in enacting that role) make up parents' motivational beliefs. As noted above, all of the parents expressed a



strong belief that their role was paramount—that they were the primary figures responsible for teaching their children myriad things in many domains, including cognitive/academic, social, and cultural. Prior research has also shown that parents, regardless of education level and social class, may hold similar beliefs about the importance of school readiness (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000), while other research suggests that families cultural beliefs and practices regarding schools and learning may differ by race or social class (Lareau, 2011). However, one of the somewhat surprising findings from this study is the difference in parents' perceptions of the role of the preschool—where private preschool parents tended to see the preschool as providing a service, while Head Start parents saw it as more of a partnership. According to the Parent Involvement model, parents who saw their role as being in partnership with the school (partner-focused role beliefs, versus parent- and school-focused role beliefs) tended to be more involved in their children's education in the elementary and middle school years (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Therefore, it is possible that the Head Start parents in this study may be being socialized to be more involved in their children's education. This interpretation could be seen to provide evidence that Head Start's efforts to promote family engagement and use of "partnership" language is successfully entering into parents' understandings of their role in relation to their child's school.

Another finding from this study involved the difference in parents' goals for their children. I understand these goals to be related to parents' sense of self-efficacy for helping their child succeed (in school, 2a, and in life), in that their goals were illuminated through questions about what they felt was most important that they teach their child and what they were most proud of having taught their child. Bandura (1982) also makes the connection between self-efficacy and goals, and previous research has parents' sense of efficacy is a factor in their engagement in their child's learning (Anderson & Minke, 2007). In the present study, private preschool parents' goals for their children were often more focused on socio-emotional and citizenship outcomes, compared with the Head Start parents, who tended to focus more on narrow academic skills. While at face value, this finding could be interpreted to mean that Head Start parents have a high sense of self-efficacy for helping their child succeed in school, the fact that private preschool parents tended to take their child's academic success for granted, and frequently only mentioned supporting their child's academic learning (through such activities as book reading and practicing letters/numbers) when probed, likely points towards higher self-efficacy. Furthermore, the emphasis QHS parents placed on their role in their child's academic learning is in contrast to previous research that indicates that immigrant parents tend to relegate academic learning to schools and see their own role as supporting moral and cultural development (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995).

According to the findings of this study, some aspects of parents' motivational beliefs differed by social address. While private preschool and Head Start parents' construction of their roles were fairly similar in that they all saw themselves as playing the most important role in their children's learning, the parents from the two groups appeared to differ in their self-efficacy in enacting that role. This is evident both through the difference in the parents' goals, but also in their different orientations to the preschool's role. Thus, an understanding of the differences in parents from different social addresses' motivational beliefs is important for supporting student achievement, the ultimate aim of efforts to involve parents in their child's schooling.

### **Parents' Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Others**

In this study, parents reported who they received information from regarding what their child should be learning at what ages. As noted in the findings, when probed, virtually all of the private preschool parents reported being disappointed in the quality and quantity of information sent home from their child's preschool. On the other hand, the majority of the Head Start parents described frequent reports from their child's teachers, as well as on-going communication from the Head Start overall. Parents from both social addresses noted that their pediatrician (historically an important source of information on child development) was not a key source of information, but for private preschool parents, friends (whom I refer to as peer parents) were.

These findings are very interesting in the context of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model, since invitations for involvement from the child—which many of the private preschool parents mentioned—

predicted parents' home-based involvement, and invitations for involvement from the school—which many of the QHS parents mentioned—was one of the predictors of parents' school-based involvement. Home-based involvement includes learning activities that take place in the home (outside of school) between the parents and the child, and school-based involvement includes participation in such things as parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, or chaperoning a field trip. Prior research has shown that home-based involvement tends to have a greater impact on student achievement than school-based involvement (Hong, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Thus, while it is not necessarily optimal that private preschool parents perceive that their preschools are not issuing many invitations for involvement in their child's schooling, it is possible that one of the ways they receive information—through their child—is helping to promote the most important form of parental involvement.

### **Parents' Perceived Life Context**

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model defines parents' perceived life context as encompassing parents' self-perceived knowledge and skills, and their self-perceived time and energy. The present study did not specifically ask parents about how much time or energy they felt that were able to devote to their child's learning, but many parents did bring up logistical constraints, particularly work schedules and the pressures of being a parent or single parent. When asked about one resource that they wish they had more access to, QHS parents reported: music therapy, time, money, full-time preschool, her child's father. However, as noted in the findings, all of the parents believed that they were ultimately responsible for their child's learning, and they conveyed a sense of primacy towards that role, even while hoping for more resources and support. In other words, all of the parents, even those who mentioned the challenge of working and being a parent, or of parenting without a partner, made it clear that supporting their child's learning and development was a key component of their construction of their role as a parent, and neither a lack of time or energy would inhibit their performance of that role.

According to the model, the second component of parents' perceived life context is parents' perception of their knowledge and skills. As noted above, in general, parents appeared to have a strong sense of responsibility in terms of promoting their child's learning, and overall, appeared to feel efficacious in promoting their child's learning. This may be due to the rather limited set of knowledge and skills that parents believe children need to master in the preschool years, and may suggest that this component of the parent involvement process model is less important for a preschool context compared with a K-12 context. Interestingly, it was frequently the private preschool parents who, in general, had higher educational attainment than the QHS parents, and who talked about areas in which they felt they were lacking in knowledge and skills. Several private preschool parents mentioned not being able to provide their child with certain things (social opportunities, creative activities, etc.) as a motivation for sending their child to preschool. Thus, in this case, a lower perception of skills and knowledge seemed to promote preschool enrollment—if not exactly parental involvement in preschool.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study surfaced several interesting findings that provide insight into how parents of young children are involved in their children's learning, and what factors might be contributing their understanding of their role, and then applied those findings to an existing model that theorizes how and why parents are involved in their child's education. In doing so, this paper accomplishes two things: it provides insight into parents' beliefs for those attempting to influence the behaviors of parents of young children, and analyzes the ways in which the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parent involvement process might be applicable to families with preschool-aged children.

First, does the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model fit the preschool context? More research is needed to fully answer that question. However, evidence from the present study indicates that parent involvement behaviors are similar for preschool parents compared with parents of children in elementary and middle school. In particular, the constructs related to parents' motivational beliefs and perceptions of invitations for involvement from others seemed particularly relevant. In addition, Quality Head Start

seems to be doing many of the things that the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model would suggest in order to promote parent involvement, compared with the private preschools, especially in terms of invitations for parents. One important finding from the present study that did not appear to fit in the model is the importance of peer parent networks. It may be that fellow parents are a greater resource to parents of preschoolers than for parents of older children, or it may be that while peer parents are an important source of information, they are not necessarily an important factor in a parent's decision to become involved in his or her child's education.

Second, what are the implications of the differences in the findings by social address? It is my hope that this study helps to combat a deficit view of working-class parents (Ball, 2008) by illuminating the ways in which low-income parents' beliefs were similar to those of their wealthier counterparts. That is not to say that the findings suggest that the middle-class parents beliefs are superior, and, in fact, in many ways it appeared that the QHS parents were thinking and behaving in ways that would suggest long-term involvement in their child's education. Moreover, there is evidence from the several QHS parents who had older children and who described their role in their children's schooling throughout K-12 that the QHS parents are indeed engaged long-term.

Finally, this work is important since there has been substantial interest reducing or eliminating early achievement gaps, and a better understanding of how parents—the most important people in young children's lives—conceive of and inhabit their role in their child's early learning is very useful. Some of the ways that policymakers and other stakeholders have attempted to address the achievement gap, such as the proliferation of no-excuses charter schools that focus on a narrow set of academic skills, might be having further alienating effects on the populations that they are intended to benefit. As seen in this study, already by the preschool years are low-income parents conceiving of their child's learning in more limited ways (focusing more heavily discrete academic skills) compared with middle class parents (who take academic success for granted and instead focus on cultivating soft-skills in their child). In an era where 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and many “soft” skills are increasingly valued by employers and by society, it is perhaps troubling that the goals for lower income children are limited to the “three Rs.”

## ENDNOTES

1. Bronfenbrenner (1986) describes “social addresses” as “contrasting environments as defined by geography (rural vs. urban, the United States vs. Japan), or by social background (socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, etc.)” (p. 724).
2. This figure reflects the approximate cost of highly-rated preschools in the Cambridge, MA area.
3. In 2016, the poverty guidelines according to the Department for Health and Human Services stipulate that a family of four is eligible for services like Head Start if the combined income is less than \$24,300. For example, the eligibility criteria for Quality Head Start,<sup>1</sup> a Head Start program in the greater Boston area, included families of young children with combined income up to \$28,665 in 2009, the last year for which information was available on their website (Quality Head Start, 2016).
4. All research participants' names, and the names of their children and preschools, are pseudonyms.
5. I conducted a fifteenth interview over the phone, with a middle-class parent of a five-year-old and a nine-month old. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties the recording of the conversation was lost and the conversation was not transcribed. As a result, this interview was excluded from my analysis.
6. Two of the private preschool mothers were recruited for the study through GardenMoms, so their mention of the importance of that online community (and others) is not surprising. However, even several of those middle-class mothers who recruited through other means mentioned online social networks as an important resource. Furthermore, three of the QHS mothers were recruited through QHS's “Morning Mingle,” a casual monthly drop-in breakfast whose express purpose is to allow QHS parents to get to know one another.

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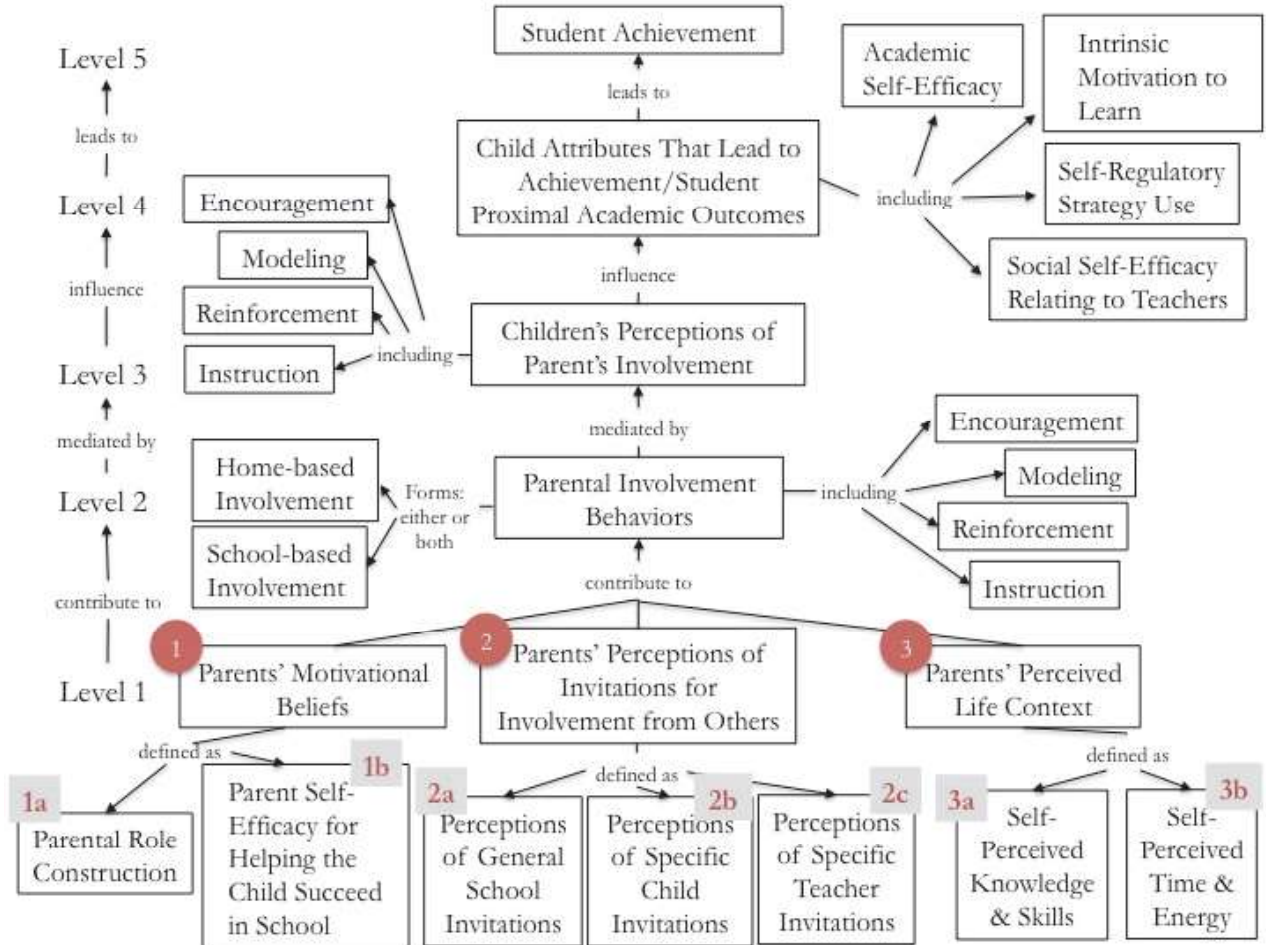
## APPENDIX A: SAMPLE

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Social Address</b>	<b>Recruitment Method</b>	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>
Anne	QHS	Referred by Sue	An African-American mother of five boys who is working to start her own business.
Beth	Private Preschool	GardenMoms	A white physician, whose husband is also a physician. Her child attends a hospital-affiliated preschool.
Diana	Private Preschool	GardenMoms	A white teacher who is taking some time off from teaching.
Frances	QHS	Morning Mingle	A woman born and raised in India with a troubled relationship with her child's father.
Grace	Private Preschool	Referred by Molly	A white woman, raised in several countries by Christian missionaries.
Helen	QHS	Morning Mingle	She is Colombian, and the only QHS parent who mentioned having a strong network of peer parents.
Jane & George	Private Preschool	Referred by Molly	The only couple I interviewed, they are both white and in graduate school. They recently relocated to the Boston area from the Midwest.
Laura	QHS	Referred by Sue	She is an African-American single mother with adult children as well as the target child. Her older daughter has significant learning disabilities due to exposure to carbon monoxide. She was formerly employed by the Department of Youth Services, and moved from an urban area to a rural/suburban town in her teenage years.
Mary	QHS	Referred by Sue	She is a Cape Verdian single mother, whose family includes many educators.
Molly	Private Preschool	She is a former classmate	A white woman whose child attends a faith-based preschool.
Nicole	QHS	Morning Mingle	A Haitian-American single parent with a child on the autism spectrum.
Rita	Private Preschool	Referred by a classmate	She is the white mother of a mixed race child.
Sara	QHS	Referred by Sue	She is a white woman who has two adult children and who has spent 12 years as a parent advocate at QHS.
Susan	Private Preschool	Referred by Molly	A white woman. Her child attends an "integrated" preschool, where children with and without disabilities are in the same classroom.

*Notes:* All names are pseudonyms. Personal characteristics are included to avoid reducing participants to their social address only.

## APPENDIX B: PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROCESS MODEL

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) revised model of the parent involvement process:



Note: Annotations in red/grey mine.