



The Pedagogy of African American Parents: Learning from Educational Excellence in the African American community

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This qualitative study of how parents teach their children to excel academically in the African American community seeks to establish the validity of the pedagogical practices of working class African American families by investigating the educational leadership of two families on Chicago's south side. The study acknowledges the significance of non school factors (Schubert, 1986) that contribute to academic success. Parent pedagogical strategies are consistent with research findings on the sponsored independence parent involvement style reported by Clark, (1983). Findings demonstrate the significance of intergenerational educational practices, expectations, experiential motivation, parent advocacy, rituals and other factors.

“The reason I wanted her and my son to go to an Ivy League school was because I felt that they would be able to have contact to do whatever they wanted to do. So what I’ve found is that if you don’t put boundaries on the children that you’re having a close relationship with they can go far, far, far” (Billye Jo).

"We have to deprive our kids of things in order to spark ambition. If they have everything, what is there left for them to want? Achievement usually comes out of a desire for something. I believe even if we have to do it artificially, we have to create deprivation in our children’s lives in order to inspire them to want something more" (Constance).

- Despite acknowledgement and growing recognition of the importance of home and out-of-school factors (Schubert, 1986) that contribute to academic success and

educating the whole person, little attention is still being given to parents’ views of their roles in their children’s schooling and education. This study of the pedagogy of African American parents seeks to make visible the educational leadership of parents who design and implement curriculum at home to enable their children to attain educational excellence.

- My admiration for Billye Jo Ford’s successful work as a family educator led me to this area of research. Billye Jo has worked to successfully enable the outstanding scholastic achievement of her children and grandchildren. She is also a community teacher in that she is frequently solicited to teach adults to read and to prepare children to attain standardized test scores that qualify them to enter elite, prestigious schools. Billye Jo’s success is particularly intriguing since a high school diploma is the extent of her schooling.

This level of formal education was not unusual for teachers in the African American community immediately after slavery. However, contemporary conceptions of educational experts and elite constructions of knowledge production obstruct and obscure the educational contributions of those without formal teaching credentials. In addition, the diverse dynamics of family and community education in the African American community must be documented, and our knowledge of teaching and learning is incomplete if the theory and practice of those considered noncredentialed are ignored. Power and justice in a democratic society are linked to educational excellence and equity for disenfranchised groups such as African Americans, whose continuing struggles for equal and quality education are multifaceted, shape American society, and serve to define the collective hopes, dreams, and strivings of a people for justice, dignity, and equality.

The case studies presented here explore how two working class African American families on Chicago's south side--one single-parent, and the other a two-parent family--strategized to prepare their children for academic excellence and scholastic success. These parents whom I refer to as Billye Jo and Constance began educating their children at home with the goals of academic achievement beyond mere school completion. Billye Jo's husband, Matthew, was also involved in their children's education. The parents aimed for excellent grades and prestigious institutions as their children's means of social capital and social mobility. These families attained these goals in that their children won scholarships to, are attending, or have graduated from educational institutions such as Harvard, Dartmouth, Stanford, Northwestern, and Iowa State University. Billye Jo continues to instruct her grandchildren and others to achieve academic excellence.

In the context of this study, I define educational excellence as superior acquisition, mastery, and demonstrated accomplishment in and of the cultural knowledge, skills and competencies highly valued by and required for mobility and success in America's macroculture as well as demonstration of that knowledge, competence, learning and achievement in outstanding standardized test scores. Clearly parent pedagogies in African American communities are diverse, and this qualitative study is illustrative only of two families. This work is significant, however, because it has the important goal of documenting and establishing these parents' educational leadership as well as establishing the validity of the pedagogical practice of working class African American families. Through semi-structured conversational life history interviews with both mothers, an audio taped homework/tutoring

session with Billye Jo and two of her grandchildren, and an interview with one of Constance's children when she was a college sophomore, I examine the mothers' roles in their children's education, particularly their explicit teaching in the home which include the strategies and rituals parents used to fulfill their educational goals and related contextual factors that affect education and schooling.

History and Context

In America, upward mobility is linked to education, specifically to a college education (Hale, 2001, p. 25; Jackson, 2001, p. 259; Tidwell, 1988, p. 153; Winter, 1993), and graduating from an Ivy League school generally means access to privileged social status. As Brunious (1998, p. 24-25) explains, however, this view is contested, particularly by Social Reproductionists who "argue that education does not level the playing field; rather it is a means of reproducing the social order, the dominant ideology and the work force. The school maintains class structure and takes an active role perpetuating and maintaining the existing social strata." For many African Americans and others in oppressed groups academic achievement does not necessarily result in economic success and upward mobility (Price, 2000, p. 6; Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Spring, 1993). The construction of education as the great equalizer is a prominent idea which accompanies the view of gradualism (Watkins, 2001). This ideology nurtures the hope/belief that African Americans' status will improve little by little by means of schooling over successive generations and neglects the more immediate struggles for justice and equality. Gradualism and similar beliefs ensure that Blacks, as a group, remain at the bottom of society because for many of America's poor and minority children education perpetuates the status quo.

As a group, African Americans have always desired and striven for schooling. From the inception of public education for Blacks, however, schooling offered to African Americans has been largely separate and unequal. Obtaining education and schooling for America's former slaves has been a struggle of epic proportions which still impacts our society socially, politically, economically, as well as morally and spiritually. During slavery, even learning to read was a criminal act in some areas for many slaves, and in 1810 most southern Blacks were illiterate (Jones, 1986; Spring 2001). Amott and Matthaei (1991) report that: "History is clear that denying African Americans access to education, and then arguing that their illiteracy proved their inferiority, was a central tool in White's subordination of Blacks; proving Whites wrong in theory and practice was a main concern of the free Black community" (p. 154).

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After slavery, former slaves' compelling desire for schooling was firmly opposed by most Whites, and burning schools and lynching teachers were some of the tactics used to keep Blacks uneducated. In 1915, twenty-three southern cities with populations of over 20,000 including Tampa, New Orleans, Charleston, and Charlotte had no public high school for Blacks. Yet, these twenty-three cities had 36 high schools for Whites (Hine et al., 2003, p. 337). Even with the establishment of public schooling, "one of the most important barriers African Americans faced was the extremely poor conditions of Black schools, especially those in the rural south. At the beginning of the 20th century, nearly all Black parents had low education levels and most Black schools were in poor condition" (Bauman, pp. 502, 504, 1998).

Once public education was established in America, there was much resistance to funding schools for Blacks with public monies. The latter was the case, even in the North (Hine et al., 2003, p. 161). After the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954 overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* by declaring separate but equal education illegal, American mainstream society became even more creative in confining Blacks to inferior education. Tracking, ability grouping, special education designations (Hale, 2001; Jackson, 2001, p. 61; Reglin, 1995, p. 73; Roscigno, 1998) unequal funding, different curriculums, under-prepared teachers, outdated books and other means such as inferior resources and facilities are still being used to deny Blacks educational equity. Because of the latter, it is unconscionable to place the blame for the achievement gap and other educational problems solely on the Black family while winking at the aforementioned inequities (Franklin, p. 11, 2000).

Today's dropout rates and standardized test scores are constant reminders of America's history and the need for equity and excellence in the education of all Americans (Jackson, 2001; Steele, 1992). Statistics illustrating the closing of the education gap must be scrutinized. "In 1940, 26 percent of Whites, but only 7 percent of African Americans over age 25 were high school graduates. Currently, the figures are close for both races. However, the increasing number of Black high school graduates does not mean Blacks are being better educated (Malveaux, 1998, p. 64). Malveaux wonders about the quality of their [Blacks'] high school education as well as the resources allocated for their education. Jeremy Price (2000, p. 6) continues this line of reasoning by observing that "although there has been a steady decline over the past 30 years in the number of African American

youth dropping out of school, more than one out of five Black youth in the 18 to 21 age group do not have the necessary skills for entry level jobs, apprenticeship programs, or post secondary education (Gibbs, 1988)." Corroborating evidence exists to support Price's contention (Yan, 1999).

Ideas of Black inferiority seem to be perennially nourished around the standardized test score table; however, Berry (1989, p. 288) believes that "the old labels of the past that have inferred cognitive, motivational, self-esteem, and learning deficits of Black children, youth and college age young adults should be looked at with a jaundiced eye...Cultural attributes found in the family, community and peer groups do not by themselves explain the lower levels of academic and social achievement experienced by some Black people." On the other hand, Berry (1989) and Tucker (1999) do link the educational attainment of African Americans to the need for school and community programs that emphasize solid parenting skills which are important to the future achievement of the child, his or her self-esteem, and the survival of Black people" (Berry, p. 291; Cooper and Datnow, 2000; Sanders, 2000, p. 365).

Notwithstanding the historical and contemporary challenges, African American parents still strive for quality education to inoculate their children against unemployment and minimum wage jobs and as a means of social uplift. Berry (1988, p. 288) echoes this claim that "Contrary to much of the conventional wisdom, Black families, even of the so-called underclass, believe in education and schooling as a pathway to a better life. Frequently, however, the socioeconomic circumstances and experiences of the parents do not adequately provide the early educational orientation that prepares the child to be successful in a classroom that does not value the strengths of his or her life-style." Bauman (1998) reports that sociological surveys indicate, "African American students from disadvantaged backgrounds have higher educational and occupational aspirations than comparable Whites (Rosenberg and Simmons 1972; Hout and Morgan 1975; Hauser and Anderson 1991)... One cannot read much of the literature on Black education without seeing many assertions of the desire, respect and even reverence for education held in the Black community" (p. 504).

Despite this critical, compelling need for quality education, schooling and education, in the context of our society, are neither solutions nor panaceas for discrimination, inequality, injustice and oppression. However, the very existence of a Black middle class indicates that some African Americans

are able to use schooling and education to move out of poverty. The focus of this study is not the relationship between schooling and social mobility. Rather, the goal of this research is to investigate the pedagogy of working class African American parents who help their children achieve educational excellence. Features of the context and content of the pedagogical strategies and tactics of these parents should prove instructive to other parents and the educational community as well.

Review and Rationale

This examination of African American mothers' family pedagogies and parenting practices in the achievement of educational excellence addresses multiple areas such as informal education, parent involvement, and parent pedagogical practices. Hoover-Dempsey and O'Connor's (2002) study of factors responsible for how parents construct their roles for involvement in their children's education derived findings which suggest, "it is the implementation of values and goals--parents' cognitions and actions related to those cognitions--that are most closely associated with student achievement"(p. 19). It is therefore important to examine various areas of these families' lives in order to reveal the values and goals reflected in their practice.

Clark's (1983) concept of sponsored and unsponsored independence forms part of the conceptual framework used in this study. His ethnographic case studies of ten Black families compare and contrast child development strategies used by parents of five high achieving students with the strategies of parents of five students who are not high achievers. Clark concluded that, "Psychological processes and social communication patterns of family life come closest to capturing the essence of human learning experiences in homes" (p.3). He maintains that parents use either "sponsored independence" or an "unsponsored independence" style of parenting to prepare their children for major life roles.

High achieving families use the "sponsored independence" style of communication in which parents use their influence in an authoritative manner, maintain high involvement and interest in their children's activity in the home, and consistently monitor their children's use of time and space. These parents also engage in frequent, almost ritualistic, parent and child activity which involves studying, reading, writing, conversing, and creating, regular parental explanation, advisement, and demonstration of everyday life skills. Praising and acknowledging the child's talents and abilities; consistent parental expectations and standards for responsible and restricted child behavior are factors as well as

generally disciplined parental role behavior modeled to the child, and regular use of special parent-child role etiquettes to get the child's compliance.

In low achieving children's homes the "unsponsored independence" parenting style is generally characterized by permissive or authoritarian parental behavior patterns as well as the opposite of the sponsored independence style described above. For example, there are infrequent parent child activities involving literacy tasks such as studying, reading, writing, information sharing and creating; limited parental teaching, advising and demonstrating of concepts and ideas to the child; inconsistent or non-existent parental expectations and standards for "responsible" child behavior in home, classroom, and neighborhood settings; inconsistent discipline or irresponsible role behavior modeled before the child. Other studies have supported these findings see Yan (1999).

Clark concludes his investigation by calling for more studies which trace and analyze family educational practices over three generations of a family and the discovery of patterns of family pedagogy used by diverse strata, including never employed parents. He (1983, p. 213) observes that: "Although several important research projects on family learning processes are now being done, there is not enough carefully done research on the role of parents' home teaching practices." This study of the pedagogy of these African American families in the inner cities is an addition to this literature.

Research by Bempechat (1992) concurs with the data above:

The literature on home influences in African American families suggests that the importance of parental educational socialization practices--both cognitive and academic--cannot be overstated. Thus, it would be fruitful for parenting programs to focus in part on parental teaching strategies. Parents who learn how to organize their homes around learning, and, in particular, how to engage their children to better meet the demands of the school, will better prepare their children to meet the demands of the school (p. 46).

Most of the strategies and tactics devised by the parents in this study can be considered forms of parent involvement, but there are myriad ways of conceptualizing parent involvement. Yan's (1999, p. 1) analysis follows:

In the search for strategies that foster academic success among African American students, attention has been focused on increasing parental involvement in these students' schooling. However, parental

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involvement has multiple meanings (Cassanova, 1996), and it has been operationalized in studies in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, parental involvement is widely recognized as an important contributor to the academic success of African American students (Coleman, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Cooper & Datnow, in press; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 1989).

Winters (1993, p. viii) conceives of parent participation as referring "to parents who become an integral part of their children's education." While this conception is necessary to defining Constance's and Billye Jo's roles in their children's educational achievement, I conceive their involvement as going beyond common meanings of "involvement" and see them, in addition, as being educational leaders who organize and use schooling as one of the many strands designed to produce specific characters and lifestyles for their children.

Much of the literature on parent involvement, parents as teachers, informal education, and parent participation construct or describe parents as clients who need motivation to assist their children with homework and other duties. Some of these approaches define parent involvement in ways that exclude parent leadership and representations of parents as sources of transforming knowledge and pedagogy that can contribute to scholarship and to the field of education. The focus is generally for teachers and other school personnel to urge or direct parents to become involved in the school and/or with their children. Recently, more emphasis has been placed on school family partnerships to improve educational outcomes (Lewis, 1992). According to Lewis, "no discussion of school reform and school or education policy issues these days seems complete without references to 'parent involvement.' Most educators would agree this term goes far beyond the traditional view of parents as field trip chaperones and cookie bakers from preparing children for education choice, to new forms of school governance. Nevertheless, much of the literature still defines parent involvement as those activities supporting what the schools define as involvement, and continues to address what parents should do" (Lewis, 1992, p. 1).

While efforts to enhance parent participation are commendable and clearly necessary, we must also examine what teachers, administrators, and the wider educational community can learn from the theory and practice of parents who have successfully mastered the art and science of teaching their children to succeed academically. In his study of the

role of parental involvement in successful African American students, Yan (1999, p. 1) decries how "studies examining the effect of parental involvement on African American students often focus on the factors that place these students at risk and ignore the ways in which African American families promote successful school achievement and experiences." Louque (1999) agrees that insufficient studies have focused on successful Black students. She critiques discussions of the educational achievement of Blacks that blame Black pathology for educational failure, but completely overlook Black students who succeed despite overwhelmingly negative caricatures of their culture and home environments. Louque further asserts that: "The effectiveness of education can be improved by what we learn from the ones who experience academic success. Since most studies have focused on Black underachievers, little is known about the influences that stimulate academic achievement by Blacks, particularly females" (p. 2).

Jenkins (1989, p. 140) observes that: "Successful academic achievement appears to be greatly influenced by good parenting skills and positive parental involvement." He cites research, which indicates that parents' educational level, reading activities and behaviors on the part of family and child enhance reading proficiency. The absence of these activities was found to be important in explaining lower achievement of Black and Hispanic children. Jenkins (p. 141) discusses another study, which found that lavish praise, teaching responsibility, and buying trade books were critical to parents' pedagogy.

A National Institute of Education document (June 1985) explains that "programs fostering parent involvement in at-home teaching improve achievement, particularly for low-income elementary school children, but more elaborate parental programs and parent education are needed. The pedagogies of the two mothers who participated in this study exemplify the parenting practices discussed above. Harris et al (1999, p. 490-491) write that:

...Contemporary investigations examining the teaching practices of African American mothers (with the exception of low-income mothers) and the influence of education or schooling on the teaching practices of African American mothers are virtually nonexistent (Brody & Flor, 1997; Heath and Thomas, 1984; Scott Jones, 1987). This seems puzzling given that for the past few years, social scientists have argued for race-homogenous studies that explore the cultural aspects of child rearing, parenting style, and

behavior (Peters, 1988). Conversely, research on the teaching behaviors of Caucasian mothers has expanded rapidly during the past two decades. The diversity in parenting and methodology of in home education among African Americans demands examinations of a range of family types and settings.

The literature discussed reveals the usefulness of this examination of various aspects of participants' pedagogy from the early years of parenting until the children leave for college. In the case of Billye Jo, her family pedagogy continues with her grandchildren's schooling. A significant benefit of this research is this intergenerational educational experience. Scott-Jones, (1987) establishes the need for information about both contextual and intentional teaching by parents in the following:

The current popular educational practice of encouraging parental help with children's schoolwork needs to be carefully implemented and needs to be informed by more extensive research. Conceptualizations of the mother's role in her children's school achievement must be developmentally based. Research with older children as well as with preschoolers is needed to establish effective roles for parents to assume as children progress through school. The indirect ways in which parents influence their children, in addition to directly teaching skills, must be assessed....Greater knowledge in these areas may lead to both families and schools being more successful in the socialization and education of children" (p.34).

Bempechat (1992, p.1) also stresses the research needs in this area: "While much research has underscored the importance of parental educational socializational practices in children's academic achievement, little is known about the ways in which high achieving Black families differ from one another. The educational value orientations of families can be quite complex.... more research on within group differences will deepen an understanding of the home factors that mediate high achievement in African American families"

Multiple aspects of parents as teachers need to be investigated to illuminate and facilitate teaching and learning. Laura Desimone (1999, p. 15) advocates developing "a better understanding of the mechanisms through which parent involvement affects children's school success." Billye Jo and Constance are not simply models of excellence from the African American community, but their educational experiences can contribute to an

examination of how/whether or not the system of education held up as ideal works for diverse constituencies in a democracy. This study could also help to inform further exploration and assessment of the relationship between school and home in our society.

Finally, this study has implications for the educative process in general and for curriculum and methodology in formal and informal learning communities and can serve to enlighten classroom teachers and parents who need to be informed, encouraged, and connected as to the efficacy of their efforts towards the educational success of children. Using parents' narratives gained from conversational interviews I explored:

- Parents' beliefs about schooling and education
- The role and source of parents' motivation and action/agency for schooling and education
- The role of literacy and parent self-education and research in their children's achievements
- Parents' practice--strategy and tactics used to educate their children/home/ methodologies parents' formal and informal teaching/learning in the home

Introducing Billye Jo

Billye Jo and Matthew married after their high school graduation in 1955; she was 17, he was 20 years old. Their daughter, Sybil, was born the following year. Matthew completed junior college during this period, but Billye Jo's schooling ended with her high school graduation. Intelligence and a desire to work did not unlock job opportunities closed to Blacks in Memphis, and the frustratingly futile efforts to get a job as a postal clerk in Memphis led Matthew and the family to leave the Jim Crow South and join the "Great Migration" to Chicago.

Unlike in Memphis, passing the postal service test in Chicago allowed Matthew to begin a 32-year career as a postal clerk. He welcomed the chance to work and soon he was a full-time bus driver and a part-time postal worker. When he became a Chicago police officer two years later, Matthew continued working two jobs so that Billye Jo could remain at home and teach their children. Billye Jo's self educational efforts, talents, hard work, and educational strategizing led her to not only provide educational leadership for her family, but also to her being asked to serve as the teaching assistant in the first open classroom in Chicago's public school system. In addition, parents of students at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools recommended her as a tutor for children who needed

academic help. When Billye Jo told parents who requested her services that she did not have a college degree, they simply responded, "What's your fee?"

Billye Jo's Family Socialization

Despite their economic locations on the other side of the American dream, Billye Jo's parents created an atmosphere of confident hope. She and her siblings sat on orange crates because the only chairs were for the family's adults. Billye Jo recalls however that: "the table always had a tablecloth on it." The table was always set and floral arrangements from their garden mediated the starkness of poverty. Despite the family's circumstances, Billye Jo's mother and grandmother provided informal education, which laid a foundation for the children's adult lives. In addition to a flower and a vegetable garden, there was an herb garden, and everything was used to instruct: "My grandmother would walk with us and tell us the names of the flowers and the plants. She would pick off some leaves and say, 'here's peppermint, smell this, taste this sweet gum.'"

An important piece of Billye Jo's family's education was the love of reading that her mother and grandmother inculcated into the children. Billye Jo says her mother and grandmother always read: "I think my mother probably had a fifth or sixth grade education and probably my grandmother even less, but the thing that impressed me the most was that we always had this big box and it was full of books, and my mother and grandmother read, you know, all the time. And when we got through with our homework we would sit and they would tell us folktales or riddles and read to us." The behaviors these women modeled, impacted the children's lives. Billye Jo spent most of her free time reading. She particularly liked reading fairy tales.

In addition to reading, the curriculum of the home included arts and crafts projects, which ranged from sewing, quilt making, drawing, and painting to woodworking. Arts and crafts are on Billye Jo's home curriculum, just as it was when she herself was a child. One of her brothers earned his college tuition by tailoring. The result of this home training is obvious in Billye Jo's life. Tiffany's of New York purchased some of her dolls for their "Dolls and Diamonds" exhibit. Billye Jo has conducted quilting and origami workshops in schools, and she has been commissioned to make quilts for schools and organizations such as Jack and Jill of America. She strives to learn and produce any art or craft that intrigues her.

Introducing Constance

The second participant, Constance, was a housewife during her three children's infancy. Her

husband was a financial aid administrator at a university, and she says she held middle class status during her marriage. The couple divorced, and Constance and her three children slipped into the underclass, coping with the pervasive poverty, which accompanied single parent status. "In a social climate in which only 23 percent of American children are growing up in two parent families and 85 percent of African American children are in single parent families" (Hale, 2001, p. 6), Constance and her children were surrounded by others in similar circumstances. Yet, she raised her three high achieving children while dealing with abuse from her former husband and earning a bachelor's degree in communications. The degree helped her work her way up to becoming a public housing manager. While in this position, Constance developed a training program to teach public housing residents who were supervisory trainees skills ranging from business etiquette to using a calculator and writing reports.

Constance's Family Socialization

I have more information on Billye Jo than I do on Constance because I have been investigating Billye Jo's practice for a longer time. Constance had a difficult relationship with her mother. Her mother believed in African derived religious practices and Constance wanted no part of it. She remembers:

Because I resisted my Mother's attempts to include me in a religious practice called "roots", we were never close. She was an interesting dichotomy; she sent us to church every Sunday, but she wanted me to be a "root worker" as well. Because I was steadfast in my refusal to participate in any of the rituals she practiced, I became the family goat. My mother was a terrifying woman. She drank, she smoked, she fought men and women all her life. I didn't drink, I didn't smoke. I was an "A" student and as straight as I could figure out how to be. She would look at me and get mad. When she got mad, she would beat me. She was a funny, fearless, intelligent woman who lived a life completely out of control. Maintaining control over her children was of paramount importance to her. When I left her house, it was to marry yet another controlling personality.

Despite the above, Constance credits her mother "for teaching me how to persevere in the face of extreme adversity." She remembers that her father motivated her to excel. She credits him:

for giving us a sense of self. My daddy insisted that all of his children were exceptional. He taught us that we were all blessed with high intelligence, which increased our responsibility to our race, our community, and our family name. We were taught to always be aware that other people are watching what we do. My father loved the church. He did not always live an exemplary life, but he loved God all of his life. In the church, they say that if you're a Christian, you're supposed to be a stand up example, and I've used that most of my life. I have always wanted to create a positive environment where people are encouraged, where people are convinced that the dream they have is attainable.

Clark (1983, p. 112) explains that, "The case studies of high achieving students indicate the existence of an intergenerational transmission of behavior patterns." The lives of Billye Jo and Constance illustrate this transmission in multiple areas. Both women are successful in their personal and professional endeavors. Billye Jo discovered an extraordinary talent when a friend took a sample doll Billye Jo had made to the American Bar Association and received 400 orders that first day. Connie excels as housing manager in the public and private sectors and is currently assistant housing manager of a city in the eastern United States.

Method

Billye Jo's enthusiasm for excellence in educational achievement fuels her desire to see parents infected with hope and equipped with strategies to help their children succeed and excel. Constance is also gratified with her own and her children's educational successes and agreed to participate in this study. A third parent, Billye Jo's neighbor, whose son recently was graduated from Harvard University with a double major, declined to participate. Clark (1983, p. 9) observes that the "Most promising new research on the topic of 'families' as educators is taking a more holistic view of family units as producers of knowledge." My goal is to look holistically at these lives so as not to, a priori, exclude information that may inform our understanding of their family education.

I use background information from a previous study of Billye Jo's practice which I conducted in 1994 for doctoral coursework because this knowledge is inextricably part of the data I use to conceptualize her pedagogy. I also use information from an audio taped tutoring session with the two grandchildren she worked closely with, Simon and Jill. I recorded an interview with Constance's oldest daughter, Pauline, in 1999 about her perceptions of

her family's educational journey during her tenure at Dartmouth. I recorded and transcribed life history conversational interviews with both mothers in 2000, and I conducted follow up interviews by telephone and in person in 2003.

Semi-structured conversational life history interviews enabled the excavation of embedded information about participants' lives and teaching. Both mothers' philosophies and practices are interspersed/suffused/located in several areas of their experiences. Not wanting to disembodify them from their individuality, which is critical to examining and understanding their pedagogy, I look at them individually and jointly. The diversity and similarity in their approaches should be valuable to our understanding in many areas. I use narrative methodology (Riessman, 1993) because it gives agency to participants and allows them to discuss how their life experiences shaped their decisions, strategies and tactics as successful family educators. Interviews are similar to informal conversational ones used in Etter-Lewis' (1993) study of older professional Black women. Themes (Eisner, 1988, p. 64) and patterns (Polkinghorne, 1988) are identified and analyzed.

Both in- and out-of school factors influence education and academic achievement, and this study acknowledges the conceptual framework derived from Schubert's (1986) theorizing on the significance of the relationship between the in-school and non-school curriculum. Schubert suggests that answers to questions such as "What messages do students get about the value of schooling; What do they see it as being good for; Do students come into contact with persons who are actively trying to become educated in their homes and families; Is such an education of a formal or informal variety; Do family members take an interest in or discuss ideas or projects dealt with in school; And what does the family environment teach," must inform the practice of educational stakeholders and therefore should be investigated. The answers to these questions will not only inform us as about the various influences on education but will also illuminate the pedagogy of the parents in this research. Narrative data from this study address questions similar to Schubert's that explore family education. The significance of the out-of-school curriculum and pedagogy of these parents in their children's academic success will be demonstrated.

Academic Achievement of Participant's Children/Grandchildren

Her children's elementary school teachers often told Constance that her children set the curves on examinations. Two of her three children majored in mathematics. However, her son Mark was notable in that:

The teachers recognized that he needed challenging, so from seventh grade on every summer he went to a different college for high-level mathematics. And so they kept trying to engage him, and by his junior year he was taking his math at the University of Chicago, because there wasn't anything else for him to take. By third and fourth grade he figured out that school was easy, work was dumb. And so that was the struggle I had with him. Mark did not learn until after he entered the master's program how to study because he never needed to.

Mark earned a master's degree in electrical and computer engineering and is thriving in his profession.

Billye Jo's daughter, Sybil, was in kindergarten for only three weeks when the teacher requested a conference; "I was like what could Sybil have done, why is she calling me? So I go up and she said, 'you know your daughter is very, very bright.' I was like, she is? And she said, 'Yes, we want to move her from kindergarten to second grade.' And so I said okay she could go, you know, and Sybil felt all right with it. And so then I started paying attention to what Sybil was really doing." Sybil scored in the 99 percentile on her high school entrance examination and won scholarships to prestigious high schools such as the Latin School and Frances Parker. Billye Jo and Matthew, unaware of the reputation of these schools, sent Sybil to a catholic girls' school close to home, however, because they believed she would be safer. Under her mother's tutelage, Sybil became valedictorian of her class and won academic scholarships to institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth. She became a lawyer and married a doctor. When Sybil and her husband were expecting their first child, Billye Jo challenged herself to see if she could make her first grandchild a genius.

Billye Jo's grandchildren, Sybil's two children, represent the maturation of Billye Jo's pedagogy. Billye Jo began teaching Jill soon after she was born, and at four years old, Billye Jo applied to have Jill admitted to a program for the gifted at Northwestern University. Jill's comprehension impressed the program's instructors when they noticed that she knew the difference between "rain," "reign," and "rein." Jill enrolled in all honors classes at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, won the Brown University Award for Literature, and earned perfect SAT verbal scores. She is now completing her freshman year at an Ivy League University. Her brother, Simon, is just as accomplished, although not as disciplined, according

to Billye Jo's standard. He has been admitted to the high school rated by *Chicago* magazine and the *Chicago Sun Times* as one of the top five high schools in Chicago where he has been invited to enroll in honors mathematics and science.

Contextualizing – Struggles and Dreams – Education as Motivation and Motivation for Education

Poverty was a ubiquitous, oppressing force in both families--a legacy they did not want their children to inherit. Their lives were influenced by their struggles to survive and escape poverty. Yet, they refused to allow poverty to define them and fix their destinies. Both families saw schooling and education as a means of empowerment and upward social mobility, and they shared these values with their children explicitly, both verbally and nonverbally. In addition to single parenthood and financial disaster, Constance coped with knowing that her husband was stalking her. Billye Jo and Constance are both characteristic of Clark's (1983, p. 116) description of the high achieving students' parents he describes as being:

Distinguished by their hopeful, forthright sensibilities about themselves and their children. Specifically, they possessed a belief in their own ability to see to it somehow that their children's needs would be provided for, a strong sense of goal direction and a hope and belief that things would get better, a penchant for managing their time and material resources prudently, a strong sense of self-reliance and independence, deep self-pride and personal integrity, a sense of the salience of the needs of their children....

They saw themselves and their own efforts as indispensable to attaining educational goals they willingly sacrificed to obtain. This willingness to sacrifice demonstrates their beliefs in and commitment to assuming responsibility for the education of their offspring. Throughout her struggles, Constance focused on her educational goals for the children as well as for herself. She explains:

I was paying all of the little money I was making out in babysitting, and tuition and we were eating raviolis and Ramen Pride--three for a dollar. We were struggling, but I knew that--I kept my eyes on the prize--I knew that the struggle was worth it, and I was able to convince the children that we could do anything in a short period of time...But all through our lives education

was the key to the change and the children saw it once I got my degree.

After earning her bachelor's degree, Constance's salary climbed from \$13,000 a year to \$25,000, "And that seemed like a fortune. We were middle class at 25 grand." The children noted that they no longer shopped in thrift stores once their mother became manager of a department at Sears.

Billye Jo and Matthew's strategy meant that he worked two jobs so that she could remain at home and educate their child. Despite his working two jobs, money was still scarce. "Here comes one-suit-Ford," Matthew's coworkers would say. "What if you make this sacrifice and your daughter gets pregnant," some of them would ask him. He was resolute, however, in his determination to see his daughter well educated.

Even before Sybil was born, Billye Jo dreamed of the life she wanted for her daughter. Andy Hardy movies exposed Billye Jo to the link between a diploma from an Ivy League school and upward mobility. "The girls attended Mt. Holyoke and others of the seven sisters. There'd be a big ball at Harvard or Dartmouth and the girls always looked fabulous." Billye Jo reminisces that the message she got from the media and society was that "Blacks had to excel; we had to have something special. When I watched the kids on the screen, I just thought, that looks like a much better life than I had, and I decided I wanted that for my child." By the time Sybil enrolled in high school, Billye Jo had researched "Ivy League schools, and I figured, why shouldn't she go? Never mind we didn't have any money. Never mind all of these other things, you know."

Epps reveals that his survey research indicates that parents and students who believe opportunities are not open to them have lower educational aspirations (Epps in Clark 1983). Mavis Sanders' (1998) investigation of students' beliefs also links beliefs about social mobility and achievement in schooling:

Students' achievement ideologies or beliefs about the relationship between schooling and future success and prosperity also have been found to influence academic performance.... If youth view education as an effective means of social and economic improvement, they are more likely to value educational attainment and academic achievement. On the other hand, if they are pessimistic about the role of education for socioeconomic mobility, they are less likely to value academic achievement. Indeed, in an analysis of fifth-grade attitudes, Brookover and Schneider (1975) found that students' sense of futility in the school system accounted for nearly 45% of the

remaining variance in academic achievement after controlling for student background variables.

Expectations and Boundaries

Kitano's (1998, p. 2) observation applies to how Billye Jo and Constance were raised and how they in turn trained their children:

In general African American families hold high expectations for schooling and are motivated to support children's academic achievement (Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990). Within African American families, achieving students are more likely than their unachieving peers to have nurturing but firm parents who are optimistic and who perceive themselves as having effective coping strategies, engage in activities that enhance their children's literacy, and are assertive in their interactions with the schools (Clark, 1983). Overall, there is a strong belief in education as means to a better life across economic groups (Clark; Prom-Jackson, Johnson, & Wallace, 1987; Willis, 1992).

Some of the factors critical to the children's success were that their parents set high standards of academic performance, explicitly communicated these goals/expectations/dreams, and supported their children's own goals and efforts by implementing strategies for their success. Billye Jo was not an outstanding student, but she was aware of her parents' expectations: "I could never catch on as fast. I could catch on, but it took time for me to catch on. I felt that I was dumb...but going through school I guess I was like ahm low average. I never brought home Ds, but Bs and some Cs because my parents did not do Ds. So that's what I grew up with, but my place was in the peach tree. I would sit up in the peach tree and just daydream all the time and "star light, star bright..." These dreams may well have been sites where young Billye Jo envisioned breaking boundaries.

Constance's parents were also quite explicit in conveying their academic expectations: "My daddy used to say that anybody could get a "C." The only thing he really expected you to bring home was an "A" or a "B," so I did tell the children that as well--so I passed that on. Anybody could get a "C"--you might as well be flunking. All you gotta do is show up; you get a "C," so they accepted it. It was easy for them to get "A"s. ...My children would get "A"s. They would set the curves on exams." When her children were three, five, and seven years of age, Constance communicated to them her vision of how they would survive and thrive:

After my divorce, I used to sit and talk to my children. After being a stay at home

mother, it was time for me to go to work. I sat down and talked to them. I said I've got to go to work and that's going to be my job...I told them that you've got a job too. Your job is to make good grades... Your mother's poor. We're poor now and I am not sure that I'll be able to send you to college. But you can go if you make good grades. You make good grades and they'll give you scholarships. You can go anywhere in the world you want to go. You can go to Paris, you can go to Austria, you can go anywhere. Your job is to make those grades and the world is yours. I had no intention of staying poor enough for my kids to get to school based on financial hardship, ...[but] I knew if they didn't make the cut financially, they needed to make it academically. As it turned out, all three of them went to school on academic scholarships.

Like Connie, Billye Jo was explicit with Sybil. "I'm telling her, oh Sybil, I want you to go to an Ivy League school, either Yale or Harvard or whatever. I said, you know, your grades have to be perfect, but her grades always were. She was always in the Junior Classical League, honors, everything." Billye Jo explained that students who excelled in Latin were invited to join the Junior Classical League. Both families exemplified persistent dedication by working daily towards their goals. Information such as the academic rankings of educational institutions was part of the social capital that helped them compete in a world where knowledge and information can mean the difference between success and failure.

The word 'boundaries' represents opposition to limits on their children's potential, which Billye Jo and Constance reject. Instead, they strove to harness all areas of life to holistically support educational achievement. Constance stresses: "I never told them there was a limit to anywhere they could go. I never told them there was a limit to their aspirations, because how would I know? I told my children they could be anything they wanted. I told them that with the understanding that they needed to know what they wanted. I never said that they would be the president of the United States, but I fully--I let them know they could be the president of something." Billye Jo expresses similar sentiments: "What I found is that if you don't put boundaries on the children that you are having close relationship with, they can go far, far, far."

Billye Jo adds that her daughter "Sybil wanted to be the best, and I would tell her, you are

the best. I told her my hopes and dreams for her." The latter conveys both positive expectations and boundary defying worldviews that bore fruit by inculcating positive self-concept. An adult Sybil informed Billye Jo that: "I wanted them (these goals) for myself, but for you, too."

These mothers' practices exemplify Bempechat's findings (1992, p. 1) in the following: "The messages parents communicate to their children about learning and schooling, while often subtle, can be very powerful in their children's developing notions about achievement. Caregivers who communicate the importance of effort and of taking responsibility for personal academic outcomes may foster in children greater persistence and diligence in the pursuit of achievement goals." Both families used explicit as well as subtle means of educational socialization.

Clearly these parents' beliefs in the viability of education as the way to upward mobility, and their focus support Clark's finding that parents of high achievers seem more optimistic and believe they can cope with life challenges, whereas parents of low achievers view things as hopeless (Clark 1983). Even in their interactions with the youth in their communities, Billye Jo and Constance share similar messages of setting high standards, personal achievement, and fulfilling potentials. Constance told the youth at the housing projects she managed not to limit themselves: "They have people in their lives that are telling them what they can't do. I don't want people to think in a provincial way. I don't want people to believe that where they are is the only place for them to be."

Parental Responsibility and Advocacy

Although their tactics differed, both mothers demonstrated persistent, informed advocacy as a form of parent involvement. This advocacy meant high visibility in school affairs. Connie taught her children how to negotiate with adults and to solve problems in the school environment, so they could learn to handle situations independently. However, she knew when to intervene:

Now if one of my children took my advice and did as I suggested, and I did not like the report they brought back to me, I appeared at the school. The favorite phrase at the school was, 'Now Ms. Clark, now Ms. Clark, (laugh) let me explain what happened...' But what it did, in matters where my children seemed to have been victimized or mistreated, P.S. 25 knew that I was going to show up. I think that too, affected my children's academic careers.

The children got to the point where they would rather take care of the problem than see me show up at the school. I was never ignorant, never abusive to the administrators, but I was very firm, and very determined to get the problem resolved. And that's how we went through their secondary school years. I would go to the school, I would make it very clear to whoever was involved in the matter, that whatever their problem was, they should visit it upon somebody else. My child was not the one. It's interesting in that once a teacher had met me, from that point on, my children would cease to have problems with that particular teacher. Whatever their personality problems were, they did not want those dialogues to happen again and they would leave my children alone.

Billye Jo and Matthew both visited a high school teacher they thought was being unfair to Sybil. The presence of both parents, united in their concern and support, undoubtedly left an indelible impact on the school. Their approach seems subtler than Constance's, though. Billye Jo's advocacy was frequently expressed in assertively researching information to help Sybil fulfill her dreams and goals. Like Constance, Billye Jo believes passionately that parents must assume responsibility for and take charge of their children's education. When Sybil wanted to be the valedictorian of her class, but worried that other classmates who were smarter than she might prevail, Billye Jo responded, "Oh well, you can be that if you want to be." Action followed those words: "I went to school to find out what it took to be valedictorian, and she ended up valedictorian; so that taught me a lot of times you can't wait for circumstances. If you want something you have to go after it." Now that Billye Jo's granddaughter Jill wants to win the service award for Jack and Jill of America, the same parental assertiveness is guiding her towards her goal.

Findings of Hoover-Dempsey's and Jones O'Connor's (2002) study of the role of parental role construction in parent involvement and children's education affirm the link between Billye Jo's and Constance's concept of responsibility for their children's educational success and their children's academic achievement. These researchers define parental role construction for involvement in education "as parental beliefs about what one is supposed to do, as a parent, in relation to the child's education. It functions as a motivator of parental involvement because it enables the parent to imagine, anticipate, plan, and behave in relation to a host of

activities potentially relevant to the child's educational success" (2002, p. 5).

Hoover-Dempsey and Jones O'Connor (2002, p. 15) found that: "Student achievement, the focal student outcome for much parental involvement research, was associated with components of parental role construction. Parents of lower achieving children tend to focus on the school's responsibility in both day to day and common crisis situations; parents of higher achieving students tended to focus on their own responsibilities in day-to-day education and on partnership-focused responsibilities in common crisis situations." Constance's response to my question if she believes the educational system works for African Americans since it has worked for her children follows:

I believe that it is the parents' responsibility to see to it that it works. I believe in public education. My children got an excellent education from the public school system, but I am somewhat concerned about the tendency of parents to abdicate total responsibility for their children's education to the school system. I do not believe it's possible for the school system to totally serve the needs of Black children, and I think that we are fooling ourselves when we try to structure a situation where that is. Because all it means to me is that we are abdicating responsibility. I believe that the primary basis for ensuring the education of our children remains in the home. I've always believed that. And I believe that we as parents have to take full responsibility for our children. If my children were mad at me because I wouldn't let em go somewhere, well that's just too bad. I'd just have to take that hit. They still couldn't go!

The economic and social stressors should not be minimized, but these families' lives demonstrate the faith as well as the works needed to overcome the barriers they faced.

Constance's position on the role of parents in the educational achievement of their children is informed partly by her observation of how "southern Blacks, maids, people with third grade educations sent five, six kids to college because they insisted that that's what was going to happen." The latter illustrates the power of parent leadership as well as the influence of community and the force of history to motivate educational achievement. The intergenerational transmission of values is evident here as well.

Clark (1983, p. 211) notes: "Parents who expect public schools and other public agencies to take the major responsibility for their children are

likely to see their children leave school sooner than they should and with inadequate preparation for social responsibilities.” Clark advocates practical training and information to help Black parents improve the quality of their children's academic experience. For this training to be most effective, I believe it is critical to investigate parents' perceptions of the role of the school and their own roles in the educational process.

Family Pedagogical Strategies

Educational Rigor/Commitment/Discipline

That these parents accepted the responsibility for the academic goals they chose for their children as discussed above is reflected in the level of educational rigor they sustained. They sought the educational experiences and rewards of elite institutions, and therefore accepted the accompanying challenges. The following remarks by Billye Jo about her grandchildren's schools are self-explanatory: "But another thing that I like about Lab and Lenard, is that no matter what the parents think, you know, a lot of parents say I don't want my child under stress, I don't want my child this, I don't want my child that, but we live in a real world. You have to either do it or not do it. If you're gonna be successful there are things you've gotta do. And if you're not, you're not. So this has taught Jill and Simon I'm gonna budget my time and I'm going to do this, this, and this. And then the stress is not stressful."

Billye Jo acknowledges the parents' challenges in the following: "...But if you go to the meetings there are parents there who complain that there's too much homework, you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that, and you shouldn't do the other. And I feel the same way; I feel there is an awful lot of homework at both schools, awful lot, plus they have an awful lot of after school things that are going on too that they want to participate in, so you have to find a way to do all of it.... If you're gonna do it, you might as well do it well." in addition to school work, Billye Jo's grandchildren have elected to be involved in extra curricular activities such as foreign study, music, tennis, children's choir, soccer, and theatre. Each child also has to plan and cook dinner one night per week at home.

Clark (1983, p. 5) asserts: "There are at least three types of home activity that prepare children for the competent performance of school responsibilities." The first of these is "home educational-instructional activities, such as deliberate teaching in the three Rs, home recreational activities, and health maintenance activities." The first two factors are particularly relevant in this study. Both mothers conscientiously implemented early literacy.

During Sybil's infancy, the family's weekly shopping trip always ended with the purchase of a Golden Book. By the time Sybil was six years old, she owned about 100 of these books. Sybil took a book instead of a toy on family outings, her father read to her nightly, and books were always part of her life.

Billye Jo remembers, "I talked to Sybil a lot and because of my love for reading, every time I saw a book I'd bring it to Sybil. And ahm, we'd talk and we'd read stories together and she--I wanted her to have the love of reading because when I discovered reading from that box my mother had, it was like a whole world opened up. You could dream about traveling and dream about this and that. So when Sybil was born I had all these dreams for Sybil." The multidimensional connections between education and dreams are repeatedly apparent in their dialogue.

The period after Sybil was skipped from kindergarten to second grade was decisive. Billye Jo noted:

I really started paying attention to what Sybil was doing. So when she came home and talked about phonics--I had never really heard about phonics because I grew up in the 50s, so I went to school and I sat in the back of class and told the teacher you need to teach me phonics because I've never heard of this. So the teacher was gracious and she taught me phonics, then I could help Sybil. I attended school with her at least two times a week to learn what she was learning, then I'd improve on the lesson and teach it to her.

Billye Jo diligently used the school or any other resource that she could learn from, so that she could teach the information to her cooperative daughter: "People often think that I overpowered Sybil, but I always asked her opinion and agreement before we did things. Even when Sybil was only in the fifth grade I'd get her opinion on what I planned to cover with her. I'd say, Sybil, I think this is what we should do, what do you think?"

Both mothers pursued early literacy for their children. On observing a first grade classroom where many children were not being taught to read at grade level, Hale's (2001, p. 137) remarks address the critical nature of early literacy: "They want to learn. However, many of these children are not being taught to read at grade level. Teaching reading is hard work. Many children who are not taught to read by their parents before entering school fall through the cracks."

Constance shared some teaching techniques she used with Mark when he was a preschooler:

When I taught him it was big A, it might have been like a song, I had a book. It said big A--little a. what begins with A, A-apple, something else, it all began that way. It was a poem. But I also found when I was teaching him, and this is helpful to young parents who try, you have to teach him both cases. You have to teach him the big "A" the little "a," Big "B", the little "b" at the same time because the children take what you say as law. So if you teach them the upper case and then you try to introduce the lower cases, they're going to think you're crazy. No, no you told me this other thing was the "A." what do you mean this is an "a" too? So I found that out in the course of me working with them, you have to teach them both cases of the letters going in, and you have to pick a book that reflects the fonts that are most regularly used in books.

Of her after school sessions with grandchildren Simon and Jill, Billye Jo remarked: "I make learning a game, it's not just a matter of do this or do that." She also mentioned arts and crafts: "there's a big box of papers, origami things, scissors, I have crafts, it's so much fun, they cry when they have to go home."

Even though single parenting meant she had to enter the workforce, Connie says she developed an abbreviated method of instruction, which included a minimum of 15 minutes per day with each child, and like Billye Jo, she stresses the importance of making learning fun:

What I did was I combined it with love, you know. If they got it right I'd kiss em all up and tickle em all, and they just loved it. And so then they'd want to do the next one. And then I'd say "what's this?" and he'd say big "A," and I'd say what's that and he'd say little "a." and I'd tickle, tickle, tickle and then we'd go. And so I would introduce maybe three letters at a time, you know. Maybe A, B, C then D, E, F and then we'd go back and check those other ones just to make sure he retained it. And it was nothing. They picked it up like that.

Both parents bought educational toys with alphabets or numbers, blocks or puzzles of the United States. Constance limited her purchases to "anything ...that taught them how to do something." She bought a few non-educational toys such as He Man and She Ra for Christmas, though.

Teaching and learning were neither relegated to a particular time nor space. Billye Jo kept a map on the wall, and whenever she took one of her many trips to places such as Japan, Israel, or

China, for example, Jill charted the countries on the map and studied them. *The World Almanac*, *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, Greek and Indian myths, the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," *Great Artists for Children*, *Shakespeare for Children*, a question and answer book (the latter is reminiscent of general knowledge textbooks I used in Jamaica under the British system of education) were some of the texts in Billye Jo's home curriculum. "I've got this great new book, it's gonna teach you how to remember the capitals," was Billye Jo's introduction to a memory system to help Jill, who was now in the fourth grade, remember the state capitals and the American presidents. Jill now says that her grandmother's enthusiasm motivated her to love learning. One of Billye Jo's goals was for Jill to be equally interested in all subjects. This plan was eminently successful because as a high school student Jill was enrolled in honors physics, chemistry, English, literature, and writing.

In preparing to teach her grandchildren, Billye Jo took her neighbor's advice and purchased the book *How to give your child a higher I.Q.* One of the book's techniques that she used was teaching her granddaughter colors even before she could speak. "This is a red rattle," Billye Jo would say. "People would wonder why mention the color when she didn't understand, but I'd always mention it. By the time Jill was one and a half years old, she knew all her colors." Every day Billye Jo picked up her two grandchildren from school, supervised their schoolwork, helped them with homework, and instructed them. As mentioned above, arts and crafts were integral to the curriculum in the home. Ritualized learning practices began so early that the children knew no alternatives.

Early in their family education efforts, Matthew, Billye Jo's husband, came home in between his two jobs to teach Sybil mathematics. Unlike Billye Jo, Constance received no help from her husband with the children, but she was undeterred from her daily teaching ritual. She says her son received more teaching time because she did not work outside the home during his infancy. Billye Jo's neighbor who declined to be part of this study shared many successful techniques with her such as how to use alphabet blocks and flash cards to instruct the children.

Billye Jo threw flash cards on the floor and used them to compose words for Jill. She would then have Jill compose her own words. Next, Billye Jo moved the words around to make sentences. Soon she would assign the five-year-old Jill to make a sentence, and competition heightened the challenge. "My sentence is the best, Billye Jo would say; I bet you \$100 you can't make a better sentence than mine." Jill might fail and become concerned that she

owed her grandmother money, but Billye Jo would graciously give Jill opportunities to clear her debts by earning double the money if she could produce more than the agreed on number of sentences. Progress came quickly, and soon Jill would be composing "asking sentences," "statement sentences," and so on.

One day, Billye Jo announced to four-year old Jill, "I'm giving you a test; I'm putting you on the clock." Jill looked puzzled, but began the process of becoming familiar with taking timed tests. Billye Jo had been afraid of tests in her youth and the realization that her children would be competing in a stratified society mandated this approach. One of the teachers interviewed in Cynthia Jackson's reference handbook on African American Education believes if African American students are taught test taking skills, "they could probably do equally as well as other children" (2001, p. 81).

A synonym finder and the study of critical thinking were soon added to the home curriculum. Billye Jo's husband's belief that if one knows the rules for a particular procedure, one can do anything, guided the family's focus on the rules for grammar, math, Latin, and other subjects. Jill's teachers at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools did not believe in such a focus on rules, but Billye Jo and Matthew insisted on it anyway. They wanted their children and grandchildren to study Latin to help them with root derivatives, for example, and they are pleased with the results.

Although Billye Jo never studied Geometry in high school, she read books and taught Jill Geometry before Jill learned it in school. The goal was to keep Jill ahead of her class. Jill was the only student of color and the only female at a prestigious national engineering summer camp for honor students, and it is obvious that the fruit of these labors of love is evident. These parents conceived of these strategies as giving their children "a little leg up." Teachers recognized the achievement, preparedness for learning, and the superior performance of these students.

Billye Jo believes that success comes in "having and working a plan," and her pedagogy is illustrative of this. The educational strategies she currently uses with her grandchildren reflect her ingenuity and initiative to research and develop ways to achieve her educational goals. She consulted with upper class Asians at her grandchildren's schools to learn how they helped their children excel academically. She discovered that these parents acquired required readings for the coming school year and prepared their children over the summer. They examined papers and other schoolwork to

anticipate what their children would need and provided the appropriate resources in advance. Billye Jo began to apply these same principles, and her grandchildren were always ahead of their classes.

She explains, "I keep em ahead. That's the key; you have to keep them ahead of what the teacher's asking. When Jill was in third grade if I knew the teacher's gonna give a test on whatever, I would teach it to her. She already knew it because I would teach it to her. When I had her with me, I'm teaching her." Hale's (2001, p. 134) discussion of affluent White parents is descriptive of what Constance and Billye Jo sought to do by means of their pedagogy: "These parents left nothing to chance. They did not depend upon the schools to teach their children to read and calculate. The children came to school reading, having being taught by their mothers."

I tape recorded an after school session during which Billye Jo worked with Simon on rhyming words while Jill did her mathematics homework. In one segment Billye Jo tells four-year-old Simon, "Ok now, this might be a little hard" and receives the expected reply:

Simon: *Not hard for me, hard for you!*

Billye Jo responds: *Oh, is that what it's going to be? Let's see! And the challenge is on.*

Billye Jo: *Okay, what's the next word?*

Simon: *Spoon.*

Billye Jo: *and what rhymes with it?*

Simon: *Poon?*

Billye Jo: *Spoon, what?*

Simon: *Moon? Billye Jo sounds delighted and a bit surprised. Oh, that's great, okay!*

Jill, who has been working independently asks,

Jill: *Grandma,*

Billye Jo: *Yes, Jill?*

Jill: *What does it mean when it says tell how many hundreds tens and ones?*

I did not sense anything spectacular except devotion, diligence, patience and a disciplined, yet fun approach to the work. Billye Jo tells Simon, "Look at the word so when you see it again you'll know it." Undoubtedly, the day-by-day consistency counts. While working on rhyming words, Simon sees the word 'money' and begins singing "more money, more money, more money, more!" Billye Jo firmly guides him back to the rhyming sentences. When Billye Jo invested in learning aids such as the Evelyn Woods reading course. The speed-reading and comprehension helps Sybil in her work as a lawyer. Constance stressed the importance of going beyond commitment to being informed: "...It's a time, it's a time commitment, for sure. And then you

educate yourself. I mean, I went to the teachers' stores...."

I asked these parents repeatedly if these were bright children who would do well academically under any circumstances. Rather than claiming their children are geniuses, both mothers believe their early and consistent home education efforts were instrumental in their children's academic excellence. Connie responds:

I believe my children are bright. I don't know that they are necessarily brighter than other people's children. I've had this conversation with other people. My children represent the third generation of college educated people on both sides of their family; both my ex-husband's family and my own. We are intelligent people. But I have become convinced that if you take the time out when they are very small, then almost any child can achieve similar results. I didn't expect people to consider my children geniuses when they went to school. I just wanted them to be adequately prepared. Everybody went nuts every time one of my children came through the first grade because they knew how to read. I believe just doing that isolates the children. In our educational system, the category they assign you to going in oftentimes determines how the system will respond to you. My children were given opportunities and advantages that other children were not given. That is unfortunate.

As a parent of a student in the high school Constance's children attended, my observations of the teachers with whom I interacted led me to conclude that some of them were more enthusiastic, responsive, protective of, and helpful to these students who already had the strong foundation of the "little leg up" and were outstanding scholastically. My perception was that the "ordinary" students were not 'feathers in teachers' caps,' and therefore resources and opportunities were different. This is probably what Billye Jo referred to when she said Blacks need "something special to succeed."

In addition, Constance's daughter Pauline who graduated from Dartmouth noticed that her friends who attended all Black high schools were pushed to graduate from high school, but not to attend college. These students did not get the referrals and college information her integrated high school offered. Pauline claims guidance counselors made a difference because at her high school, "There were three really good counselors. I kept close to them. A friend of mine was telling me how guidance counselors didn't tell them anything. They had to go

to the counselors. I understand having to go to them, but you have to pry information; and, like, if you don't ask the right questions you don't get info. No information is volunteered as far as like college or higher education. The higher education information is like Chicago State or Robert Morris, Columbia. So I mean, I found that very interesting."

Discipline

This study's parents were not engrossed with academic achievement to the exclusion of discipline, the effect of peer influences, and such. Their holistic plans included discipline as a critical component of the various methods they used to shape their children's consciousness and steer them towards their educational goals. I asked Constance if the children rebelled; she replied, "Well now, I didn't do a lot of that;" she continued with a laugh: "I know that parents today worry about that, but my children never--I never gave them that latitude. This is how they lived, you know, this was it! 'Can you go?' 'No, mother's not goin' let me go,' (whiney voice) you know. It wasn't like they had witnessed another option, so this was normal life." Constance adds that while she separated the children from negative forces, she also made home life fun.

Constance's behavior echoes that of the high achieving parents Clark (1983, p. 114) describes: "A significant amount of television watching was monitored at home and was supplemented by parental discussions and explanations. Parents believed that television programs influenced the way a person thinks." Constance agrees, and explains:

Throughout my children's lives I only had one TV in this house, so whatever was watched, everybody watched it--from Sesame Street to whatever. We weren't sitting in the house in four different bedrooms all doing our own thing. I constantly interacted with the kids. We laughed. We joked. I refused to get cable. I didn't get cable until my last child went away to college because I believe that there was too much sexual material, you know, too many incendiary things on cable for young children. We would watch the TV program and then I would ask them questions about the program. That's what we did, we would pick out stuff. I would say, "What do you think about what that girl just did, do you see that? And we would talk about it. We are a very chatty family.

The foregoing supports research by Yan (1999, p. 8), and others that "the finding of higher levels of home discussion in successful African American students' families is consistent with

previous literature (Clark, 1983; Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, & Dornbusch, 1993)."

Like Billye Jo's family in Memphis, one of Constance's family's favorite entertainments was nature walks, which were also used to instruct: "We would just all go outta the house and we'd just walk, and we'd examine flowers, people's houses, people who passed us...." They would return home and discuss their adventures. In his case studies of high achieving Black children Clark (1983, p. 114) found that parents encouraged and maintained "cohesion building family rituals that involved group singing, conversation, and reading aloud within an affect-authority relationship characterized by firm but warm supervision and support."

In addition to nature walks, the family skipped and sang together. I remember being incredulous at seeing an adult female singing and skipping down the street with her daughters. At the time it seemed odd and maybe slightly offensive to my sensibilities. I did not realize the role this and similar activities played in their family cohesiveness. The impact of these rituals is apparently life long. Connie explains:

They loved the singing, even Bruce, he'd be embarrassed, but even he would do the 'Off to see the Wizard' song. We had a favorite song; it was the 'Greatest American Hero' song--it went 'Believe it or not, I'm walking on Air, I never thought I could feel so Free'! We would skip down the sidewalk and sing these songs. It's so funny, Mabel and I were riding back from Maine the other day, it started thunder storming and she started singing one of our songs. We had power songs and we had happy songs. Our power song was 'If it had not been for the Lord on my Side, Tell me where would I be?' We would sing that song at the top of our lungs. This thunderstorm was coming down and she just broke into that song and we both sang it. If we were happy, we would sing 'Look at what's happened to me, I can't believe it myself', Suddenly I'm on top of the world, It could have been somebody else.' And if we were angry, it was 'Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge.' We've sung together since my divorce from their father. It's been a part of our family life for many years.

Billye Jo and her family sang and performed oldies, particularly on Saturdays, as they hurried through housework so they could do fun things later on. Particularly in Constance's family's case, it seems

as if the songs were modes of communication that were also used as coping mechanisms used to communicate various states of being. The family could solicit/ elicit various modes such as support, comfort, or communicate anger, frustration or other emotions or simply see the song as a call to rejoice in the moment with hope.

Motivation and Social Control

In addition to telling their children that education could enable them to travel to exotic destinations, the parents vividly illustrated to their children what their destinations in life could be if they made other choices. Modern day object lessons were features of this experiential learning. Connie took her middle school daughters to a Chicago Housing Authority building:

When my girls were 10 and 11, I made them walk a 16-story building with me. And I said, 'you know your mother has been struggling for many years. It's been hard, taking care of all of you by myself. I need you to understand that I'm not going to take care of you and a baby, too. If you look around, do you see my mother? No? Well when you have a child, you're going to be the mother. You're going to have to take care of them like I take care of you. Look around, if you don't finish your education, this is where you'll stay. I can get you a place here, and I can get it cheap. If you decide you want to get pregnant for some boy, be sure to have a plan. If you want, you can plan to live here. But you're not going to live with me.' And they believed me. Standing in a urine- stained hallway in Robert Taylor Homes, they believed me...

Billye Jo used similar techniques to instruct and motivate her grandchildren. When Simon and Jill were even younger than Constance's children were, Billye Jo drove them by the same housing projects and asked, "Do you want to live this way?" Next, she drove by upscale Hyde Park residences and asked the same questions. "If you want to live this way, then education is the key. You have to decide. What do you want your life to be like? It's up to you." She sometimes watched the "Jerry Springer" show with Jill to teach her what to avoid. Billye Jo states that at times she would ask Jill, "Here is a young man who is not a Christian, has no job, he doesn't respect his parents, why are these girls fighting over him?"

Connie walked with her children to the neighborhood hangout and discussed the behaviors they observed. "I'd say look at that one, they're up to no good. My favorite quote was 'Look to your

friends, there goes your future. I would say that child's future is not going to be yours. You cannot be with this person." Constance pointed out that her separating her children from others had nothing to do with economic status, because some of her children's friends were as poor as her family was. "I wasn't going to have them running with kids whose parents didn't want anything for em, who were ill-supervised, you know. If there was a kid who could run around and do whatever they wanted to do then that wasn't the kid for them to hang out with because that meant their parents were not on the case. So I couldn't trust my children to that parent." Billye Jo conveyed the same message to her children and grandchildren by using the exhortation: "You have to decide who is your kind. You deal with people that are your kind."

The grammar of the macroculture was the foundation of the curriculum, and, so speech, and language and other aspects of mainstream American culture had to be mastered. Billye Jo's parents told her and the other children to speak like the words they read in the books. Constance's older daughter observed:

My mother and father were, you know, very correct speaking people. They spoke Standard English. They expected us to speak Standard English, especially my father. If we said something in slang, he'd say, 'what?' And at my school everybody spoke the same way that being the type of school it was, even though it was a public school. And when I moved around here...everybody called me little White girl, called me and my sister, you know the two little White girls or whatever.

When Sybil was invited to a cotillion, given by a parent who was a member of the Links, Billye Jo and her sister, Capri, researched the proper etiquette so that Sybil would fit in. Billye Jo even instituted her own manners week as a part of Sybil's social grooming. Some of this information on "proper etiquette" Billye Jo learned from wealthy Whites her mother worked for in Memphis.

I conceptualize the parental roles of these mothers as life coaches in that they addressed every area of their children's lives and pursued their educational goals continuously and relentlessly. Every component of the family culture: peers, recreation and entertainment were vehicles for the desired outcome. Billye Jo wanted Sybil to not only excel in school, but to be well rounded in the social graces also. Sybil enjoyed being popular, and the family subscribed to *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines to keep her informed and to ensure that she knew enough about current events to converse effectively with people at all levels.

Connie's daughter Pauline remembers the catch in her voice as she responded "stamps" when the proprietor of the Arab store across the street from our building asked 'cash or stamps?' She also remembers vividly the embarrassment of wearing thrift store and hand me down clothing while students in her middle class school wore the latest fashions. According to Pauline, a strong desire to avoid this deprivation helped motivate her focus on education as a way out of poverty.

Work

Both families approached the discipline of work in the lives of their children differently. Constance explained:

I carried the ball with the eating and I would tell them, you know 'mama doesn't have it. - -But if they wanted extra stuff, they had to work (stated very emphatically)! All of them. The only one that didn't work every summer was Mark, and that was because he was always at a math camp. But he was working on his education. My children could not sit around the house during the summertime. That was the other thing. My mother used to say, 'When I get up, everybody has to get up.' And that was my philosophy. When I get up, everybody has to get up. And you have to have something to do. You just can't sit around this house. So they started, each one of them started working at 13... but, now, they got to keep all of their own money, and they got to spend it any way they wanted. I never saw their checks. I would encourage them to save it. I would give them suggestions.

Referring to her youngest daughter, Mabel, who spent her money on her friends rather than save for school clothing, Constance offers: "I never made up for the difference. I mean however your money turned out that's the way it turned out because I believe that experience is the best teacher. So she would treat everybody, and... she'd never have a dime." Constance fervently believes: "We have to deprive our kids of things in order to spark ambition. If they have everything, what is there left for them to want? And, and achievement usually comes out of a desire for something. I believe even if we have to do it artificially, we have to create deprivation in our children's lives in order to inspire them to want something more."

Billye Jo's family had the benefit of income from Matthew's full time and his part time job. Although her children did not have to seek employment, the discipline of work was still inculcated in them because they were responsible for keeping their rooms clean and performing household

chores. Matthew and Billye Jo did not deny Sybil anything the family could afford. Billye Jo believes that if children are taught the right values and they know them, that is sufficient. Matthew would leave twenty dollars on the dresser each week so that Sybil and Andy could get what they needed, whenever they needed it. They were accountable for the money, and they used it judiciously.

Constance told her children that she expected them to move out after high school. If they decided to attend college, however, they could remain in the home for four more years. They clearly acceded to the added motivation to pursue a college education. Billye Jo's grandchildren have been told that their parents' possessions belong to their parents. The expectation is that Jill and Simon will make their own ways in life. Clearly the seeds of family education are designed to direct and equip them to pursue formal education that will guarantee social mobility and a secure future. One of Constance's children who earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from an Ivy League school now earns over \$100,000 annually while she is still in her twenties. I doubt if she is being asked cash or stamps any longer when she shops in her new neighborhood.

Race

Sanders (1997) interviewed high-achieving African American students from urban areas and reported that Black parents' efforts to promote their children's positive racial/ethnic socialization helped promote academic success as a response to racism and discrimination In Yan (1999, p. 2). As a means of helping their children excel, these mothers were careful about how they taught about racism, or whether they mentioned racial discrimination at all. Although racism impacted their lives in diverse ways, neither family taught about the issue directly. This was a part of their strategy to help their children cope with a stratified society. Billye Jo says she did not present racism as a barrier. She taught her children that some people would dislike them for various reasons, but that was not their problem; rather, it was the problem of those who disliked them. Reasons for dislike could be jealousy, because Sybil had a car when some of her peers did not, for example.

According to Constance:

Even now, my children believe that it's going to be all right, and that's the sense that I wanted to give. I didn't want them to go into any experience anticipating that it's going to go wrong. I want them to approach every situation as a human being. So I never said that this happened to you because you're Black, or that happened because

you're Black. I think I only started to make comments like that since they started working. And even then, it's a rare occurrence. I didn't want my children to start thinking along those lines...I taught my children that most things can be negotiated, and either they're going to negotiate it for themselves, or I'm going to negotiate it for them.

Constance's approach seems empowering, particularly in view of Comer's research, in Hale (2001, p. 146), which indicates that a "key element of academic achievement in schoolchildren is the ability to elicit a positive response from school personnel and peers. This requires a high level of social skill. Often the parents of inner-city children were unsuccessful in negotiating the school themselves and therefore are unable to impart those skills to the children." Constance gave her children advice in the form of suggestions such as: "why don't you go talk to them, and this is what you say, or make appointment with so and so and do this and this."

The children learned well and began to coach one another, and Connie only went to school when they failed to resolve the problem themselves. Connie found the results of her approach rewarding: "And it empowered them, it taught them that even in their interactions with adults, that they had the capacity to affect the outcome. I didn't tell them that they were limited in any way because of racism. If something happened that I thought smacked of racism, that's when I became involved. I would show up, we'd have a meeting, and we would reach a resolution. I didn't say that White lady was trying to do this or that to you."

Connie says she expected her children to learn about racism through her experiences.

I talked about my own experiences growing up in the South. Because those experiences created some negative attitudes, my children considered me racist most of my life. I may be a racist. I may be a little bigoted, but I have never attempted to visit my personal perspectives upon my children. I discussed politics with them. They did know the concepts. But they all attended a very diverse high school, and they thought that racial problems were a part of the past. When they went to college, it hit them. Their first years, their freshman years, were traumatic. They came back to me and said, Mom, you should have told us, (she laughs). I said, "well I did talk about these things."

I have found African American students who believe racial problems to be a part of the past quite a challenge in my African American classes. This discussion helps my understanding of why some of them believe as they do. The following from Webster (1974, p. 119) illuminates Constance's rationale: the "works of Rotter, Seeman, and Liverant (1962) and Coleman (1966) have clearly documented the fact that achievement and motivation are significantly related to feelings of personal worth, competency, or power. In the case of Black Americans, second-class citizenship is held to be the cause of feelings of stigmatization and unworthiness, which inhibit levels of motivation and aspiration." I believe the parents' approach to racism may have played a significant role in developing confidence, and this confidence stimulated the self-esteem needed to achieve excellence. Research which investigates the children's conception of race and racism and the relationship to academic achievement would be most informative.

Without resources such as financial aid all of these dreams and hard work would be invisible epitaphs on the graves of stillborn visions. Billye Jo describes her family's financial miracle which helped them fulfill their dream and demonstrates their faith in God:

When she got in high school, I started dreaming about Sybil going to an Ivy League School, and so when it was time, God stepped in and a man called me. His name is ahm, Silas Parnell, and he usually, he helped the Black children get into college, and it's all public school, so I have no idea how he got Sybil's records; and he called me the summer of her going--you know when she got out of junior year, and he said, 'have you ever thought of your daughter going to an ivy league school?' I said all the time. I said, but I can't, we can't pay for her to go to an Ivy League school. how would you like Harvard, Yale? Yes, I want em all, you know. He arranged for Sybil to go visit the schools, and she got an academic scholarship to Yale, to Harvard to Dartmouth. We chose Dartmouth because I could not see Sybil at Yale because it's urban. She'd been sheltered and I could not turn her loose... Harvard was the same but Dartmouth is wonderful. The whole town is Dartmouth, if you've ever been on that campus, it's phenomenal! So we were glad that she went along with us and wanted to go to Dartmouth. She was in the first class of women that went to Dartmouth and had no problems. None whatsoever. She made

the transition. We had talked to her about you know these were very rich people. The Kennedys and the Rockefellers were there....

Constance says she was "savvy enough about the financial aid situation--my ex husband had been a financial aid administrator for a university, but again that's the advantage that my children had over a lot of other children. Their parents went to college." Early information about the right courses to take early in high school and financial aid are important to students' decision to attend college (Jamilah, 1998). An example of Constance's resourcefulness is that she was one of the few parents in our community with the information and foresight to prepare her children in their precollege, even in their preteen years, to fulfill scholarship requirements. Working as a golf caddy, for example, helped Mabel to enter college on a golf scholarship.

Further investigation of the roles of Constance and Billye Jo's Christian beliefs should illuminate our understanding of their motivation to persevere. It is clear that their faith under girds the worldviews that helped them hurdle the barriers they faced, but this is a topic for another paper. To omit their source of faith that helped them succeed would be untruthful. In discussing some of her most challenging moments after her husband left, Constance recalls times such as when she had no money and a Commonwealth Edison employee came to disconnect the electricity. "I would get down on my knees and pray sometimes when I just, I couldn't figure out what was goin' happen next. I couldn't figure it out. The next day the sun would shine, I mean----Something would come to me and I know it wasn't me. I knew it wasn't me. An idea...."

Four years after the initial interview, Constance responded to reading her data with the following statement: "My hopes were not built on deprivation. I was making over \$60,000 a year by the time my last child went to college. I never doubted for a moment that I and my children would do well. I knew that faith in God and hard work would see us through. We were "education poor". At one time, I had all three of them in college at the same time. But I never, ever doubted the way our lives would turn out. It was not need, but faith and confidence in God, in each other, and in the future. We expected to excel."

Conclusion

Focusing solely on the role of the family in the education of African American students would be inaccurate, insufficient and thus, inappropriate. However, it is critical that we learn from parents' educational experiences. Thus, this study examined the educational leadership, inclusive of some of the specific teaching and learning strategies, of two

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African American mothers, Billye Jo and Constance. A goal of this work is to address the need for information that depicts Black parents as proactive successful teachers of their children.

These parents' pedagogies affirm the sponsored independence approach described by Clark (1983). In addition, their attitudes and approaches to education become acts of empowerment for their children. They engaged the system on its own terms and won. From positions of seeming weakness and powerlessness they 'flipped the script.' Since these models of teaching in African American families exist, there is a need to realign our epistemologies to see these parents as producers of useful/valid knowledge that can inform other parents and the educational community as well.

This research forms part of the mosaic that seeks to acknowledge and document the "great diversity found in the teaching practices of African American mothers and [demonstrates] that...African American mothers of all social status groups have been remarkably effective and resilient in preparing and helping their children cope with the schooling process" (Slaughter, 1987, pp. 7 & 11). These families' achievements are not simply due to the natural evolutionary processes of a kind and gentle society. Rather, these achievements are the results of dreams and deliberate decisions to strategize and to work to achieve these dreams. The word "dream" was used as a verb and as a noun, repeatedly in both women's narratives. Early in her account Billye Jo began with: "When I discovered reading from that box my mother had, it was like a whole world opened up. You could dream about traveling and dream about this and that. So when Sybil was born I had all these dreams for Sybil." Billye Jo's mother and grandmother had stressed: "Don't let your circumstances keep you from dreaming and wanting to be something." Part of Constance's goal is "to create a positive environment where people are encouraged, where people are convinced that the dream that they have is attainable." Clearly, this envisioning of a better life is inter generational, begins in the soul, and forms the very environment that sustains, invigorates, and energizes these families.

Billye Jo's explanation that she wanted her children to attend Ivy League schools because "they would be able to have contact to do whatever they wanted to do," illuminates another facet of these parents' goals of empowerment by means of a certain type of schooling. Connie's discussion with her children in which she linked education with the ability to travel to exotic places denotes a similar goal

to that of Billye Jo's. I observed substantive evidence of how organizations such as The Dartmouth Club served as mechanisms for these goals. Before attending law school, Sybil sought a career in international banking, and Dartmouth Club members helped open doors for her. Semesters in Spain and Brazil, Wall Street internships, backpacking across Europe, and particularly for Sybil, lifelong friendships with other women who are also at various levels of the legal profession are some of the social capital enjoyed by Dartmouth graduates.

These parents' open communication with their children bonded the family together in partnerships to achieve educational goals which were made explicit and which were strategically operationalized throughout the school years. Education was both formal and informal as well as didactic and experiential. Billye Jo's statement that "experience is the best teacher" is indicative and illustrative of these parents taking their children to the projects and neighborhood hangouts to demonstrate what deviation from their educational goals could mean for their futures. Children and parents agreed on the out of school curriculum and the rigor needed to implement it. Clearly, the early years were foundational and preparatory to these academic achievements. Non-school learning was valued as much as school learning, or maybe even more so, because the informal curriculum harnessed the totality of their lives to develop realities which ensured/supported school achievement.

That both mothers did not work outside the home in the early years of parenting meant that time was available for critical foundational training. On the other hand, it is quite clear that these parents' achievements cannot solely be attributed to their remaining at home during their children's infancy. For numerous reasons many parents with more resources, time, formal education as well as other forms of social and human capital fail to attain the results these parents have attained. Children's cooperativeness should also not be underrated, and in some cases, competitiveness was a factor, at least in Billye Jo's family.

Early literacy, diligently providing and pursuing an enriched curriculum, particularly as is demonstrated in the case of Billye Jo's granddaughter, Jill, also enhanced educational achievement for these children. Alluding to the benefits of an enriched curriculum Berry mentions: "Excellence for Black students will not become a reality unless and until they receive enriched curricular opportunities in elementary and secondary schools..." (Berry, 1989, p. 293). Connie and Billye

Jo referred to their pedagogy as giving their children a "little leg up," and clearly this allowed the children to make giant strides forward. The parents' discipline and love for learning, enthusiasm, and encouragement helped to build confidence and competence and shaped contexts in which these children fulfilled the goals they and their parents set. I interpret Billye Jo and Constance's definitions of parent involvement to include responsibility for exercising leadership in their families' education. They saw themselves as their children's first and most important teachers, and they were unintimidated by teachers and schools in their advocacy for their children. The approach to knowledge, particularly exemplified in Billye Jo's words, is that the answer to every question exists somewhere--in an individual, a book or in some other resource. This approach is liberating and frees the individual to be a seeker of information, a self-educator and a producer of knowledge. Clearly communicating goals and having open communication were indispensable. Faith that they could succeed was also important.

An interesting finding of this study is that in the process of educating their children the mothers themselves were transformed. Winters (1993, p. 99), observes that a basic thesis of her book--*African American Mothers and Urban Schools: The Power of Participation*--is that "participation and its educational benefits contribute to personal development." Accomplishments such as teaching her granddaughter, Jill, Geometry when Billye Jo herself had never studied the subject brought a sense of accomplishment that was transferable to other areas. Billye Jo says she began to think, "I made a doll's dress, maybe I can make a dress!" An Origami workshop in an alternative high school, a commissioned quilt for a graduating class, being consulted on decorating an apartment for visiting Soviet scientists, coordinating weddings, in addition to designing and making dolls and, of course, teaching a bus driver to read, are accomplishments which continuously spiral into other areas for Billye Jo. Recently two parents, both of whom hold doctorates in the sciences, sought Billye Jo's advice and tutoring services to prepare their eight-year old son to gain entrance into a school for the gifted. Validation of her expertise is apparent in that she has never advertised her services.

I have suggested to Billye Jo that attending college might have limited the development of her potential. By this I mean that her creativity and confidence in her ability might have been stifled through socialization to a field, profession, or a discipline in a traditional classroom. Billye Jo's life is an advertisement for the value of literacy. Under the auspices of a University of Illinois research team, she

conducted a workshop to help parents at a Chicago public school which serves a nearby housing project teach their children. A workshop for university teachers in a field master's program, one for undergraduate students, and another for students at an alternative high school are illustrative of the range of Billye Jo's contributions to both parents and educators. One of the teachers in the master's degree in education program commented:

The last class we just had allowed me the pleasure of meeting Billye Jo. What an experience! I couldn't wait to get home to tell everyone I know about her. She was so inspiring in so many ways. I tried to explain her to my family, but they did not quite get the same impression as I did. As I tried to describe her and talk of her accomplishments to my audience, they could not truly understand her prestige. They too wondered why she wasn't "college educated" as did I before I met her. When she first started speaking of her childhood and her family, I started making assumptions in my mind. The wrong assumptions at that. I was wondering what was so special about her that would have you ask her to come speak to us. But as time past, [sic] I became quickly absorbed in her life experiences and views. I was truly inspired. She spoke modestly as if she's an average person, but she is not.... I am very appreciative for having the opportunity to have listened to her life story. I wish everyone could also, too. I hope to remember her for the rest of my life and lead some of my decisions in a more productive way. She is a perfect example of self-determination...Thank you for bringing Billye Jo into my life. As life goes on, I am sure that I might forget some of her words, but I will always remember her spirit to strive to succeed.

While there are things any parent can do to improve her children's education, not all parents can overcome societal challenges to produce the results these two parents and others have achieved. As much as they want their children to excel in school, not many fathers can work or maybe even find two jobs as Matthew did. Not every parent possesses the information and ability to teach and supervise children while coping with external pressures, as Constance was able to do. We need to continue to find and implement solutions that will make quality education available to all students.

I am curious about these parents' definitions of worthwhile or useful knowledge. What type of

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curriculum do they see as being most worthwhile for various groups in American society? What type of curriculum would they advocate as ideal for public schools? Do they uncritically accept mainstream society's conception of education and the public school's definition of knowledge, as well as the curriculum being offered? How would they change the educational system to accommodate all children? Do the successful outcomes for their children mean that the educational system works for African Americans? Do their philosophies and practices indicate acceptance of the current educational system? Do they hold different ways of conceptualizing/defining knowledge that would be more liberating for society?

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