

# Parental Involvement in Education in Ghana: The Case of a Private Elementary School.

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The author of the study reported here set out to understand and then explain the degree to which predominantly low-income, illiterate parents of children at a Ghanaian community school value education. Information gained from this exploratory study will contribute to the knowledge base on the nature of parental support — specifically, perceptions and the valuing of education in an economically developing nation in sub-Saharan Africa. The exploratory nature of this study, however, identified other factors associated with parental values and parental involvement in education that influence the nature and degree of educational support that they provide to their children, including culture, economic circumstances, priorities, self interest, parental level of education, family structure, and family size. This study raises fundamental questions about parental perceptions toward education in the Weija Community of Ghana that have relevance for other countries in Africa.

*Keywords:* Parental Involvement; School-Community Relations; Parental Values; Parental Perception; Student Achievement

## **Background of the Study.**

This exploratory qualitative research study was situated in Ghana, a country in the Sub-Saharan West Africa with its capital in Accra. Ghana is located along the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean, and it was the first nation in the Sub-Saharan West Africa to gain independence from British colonial rule, in 1957. Ghana has ten administrative regions. The northern sector of the country was influenced by Arabs, who were involved in the Trans-Saharan trade, and the southern sector was influenced by early Christian missionaries, who settled along the coastal belt of the country. The southern regions had early access to the Western style of education the missionaries introduced. On the other hand, the northern regions were not influenced by Western education and maintained an Islamic-oriented system of education reflecting the Arabic influence.

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, introduced the Accelerated Development Plan for Education to enable every child of school-going age have access to basic education in the country. His goal was to accumulate human capital in order to develop the nation. Subsequent governments introduced many educational reforms to provide quality and easy access to basic education for all. One such educational reform is the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), which is still in effect. This system provides access to free elementary education for all children of school age in the nation. Schooling after elementary school may be provided by either public or private schools, both of which require educational fees.

### *The Greater Accra Region.*

The capital of Ghana is located in the Greater Accra region, one of the four regions that sit along the coastal belt of the country. Accra, the capital city, is situated on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean and harbors the nation's few industries, which attract people from all over the country in search of work. Accra is full of commercial activity, and people from other parts of the country come there to buy and sell. Although the indigenous people of the region are the Ga-Adangbes, the city has

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changed demographically as many different groups became permanent residents. This great urban growth also affects a growth in the suburbs and the adjoining communities, including the Weija community, where this study took place.

#### *The Weija Community.*

The Weija community is about 10 miles from the city center of Accra, with a population of about 10,000. The original inhabitants were farmers, but in the 1960s, the government of Ghana built a dam to create a reservoir that could supply water to the city of Accra, and the reservoir turned into a lake, covering about two-thirds of the land on which the people of the community cultivated their crops. Thus, they were deprived of their traditional livelihood, source of income, and the other social comforts they enjoyed before the dam. After the dam, most local residents had to travel to Accra for menial jobs. They often left their homes in Weija in the early hours of the day and returned home late in the evenings. The only alternative source of income was to quarry stones using basic tools like pickaxes, shovels, cutlasses, head pans, and hammers to break the stones into chips, which they sold to estate developers for home building use in the city.

Although the Weija community has the advantage of its location in the Greater Accra region and has a Western style of education, the rate of illiteracy remains high and the level of education of the few who received it is low. The parents who worked either in Accra or quarrying stone often leave their children unattended in the community without proper care or education.

#### *Research Question*

The government of Ghana introduced a new educational reform program in 1995 entitled "Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education" (FCUBE). This initiative represented an effort to boost education, yet many Ghanaian children still do not have access to basic education. Based on the information gathered from forums and conferences of heads of schools in the country, one can conclude that the few children who attend receive inadequate parental support. This problem is particularly prevalent in the rural areas of the country. The Weija community is no exception to this phenomenon. Although education was brought to the community's doorsteps, few parents provide adequate support for their children in school.

#### *The Hope International School*

In 1999, the Donkor family used a bedroom of their two-bedroom, 700 square-foot house to

provide 14 children with education in the Weija community. Many parents in the community developed interest in this local initiative to provide a quality education for the children in the community. News spread like wild fire and by the first anniversary of the school, the student body had increased to about 50 children. The school is currently supported by the Donkor family, by contributions, and by tuition fees. The contributions enabled the Donkor family to start building a permanent school, still under construction. The school now has a student body of about 200 students. Its classes range from pre-school to junior high. At the moment, it employs 11 teachers, one staff member, and two administrators.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

This study was directed toward understanding parents' perception, values and attitudes toward education at the Hope International School. It was meant to contribute to theory and literature of parents' support for their children's education in developing countries. In addition, it was to set up the tone for further research in parental involvement in children's education in Africa.

### **Theoretical Frameworks.**

The literature on human capital and social capital theories provides a framework for understanding the relationship between education and society. Goldin (2003) observed that there is a general belief in the symbiotic relationship between the wealth of a nation and its people, which is human capital. In addition, he noted that social learning influences human capital and that it may be enhanced by creating environments in which people observe, listen, and interact with one another, gain knowledge, and use it to make choices. Social capital refers to social cohesion among members of society and their collective ability to act on behalf of the common good. Social capital may enhance schools by enhancing student success and by encouraging and facilitating parental empowerment and involvement in children's education. Scholars recognize human capital and social capital as critical elements in advancing social justice in society, and they agree that public and private schools that empower parents to participate in education discourse and support their children's pursuit of education contribute to social justice.

*Social Capital Theories and Education*

Social capital refers to connections within and between social networks and has become a core concept in business, economics, organizational behavior, political science, public health and sociology (Bourdieu, 1993; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The underlying premise of this concept is that social networks have value. The World Bank (1999) adopted social capital as an organizational idea and noted that increasing evidence shows social cohesion to be critical for societies seeking to prosper economically and for sustainable development. In addition, Bourdieu (1983) and Coleman (1994) concluded that social capital in the abstract sense is a neutral resource; however, Bourdieu's work explained how people may use their access to powerful individuals or positions through the direct and indirect social connections and thereby contribute to inequality. By contrast, Coleman (1994) and Putnam (1993) examined how association and civic community may enhance equality, and they argued persuasively that social capital, connections among individuals, networks, norms of reciprocity, and the trustworthiness that arises from them, contribute to the civic virtue that uplifts individuals within society. Scholars now recognize social capital as a relational attribute of social collectives, helping commit people to one another and contributing to the social fabric of communities - all actions that benefit the commonwealth and key components of democracy (Field, 2003; Foley & Edwards, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

The notion of social capital now enjoys so much prominence that discussions often center on how it may be intentionally developed with a social group, community, or society. For example, social capital may contribute to enhancing the ability of children in society through trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity within a child's family, school, peer group and larger community. These linkages and commitments to common action may "have far reaching effects on their children's future opportunities and choices, educational achievement, and hence on their behavior and development" (Putnam, 2000 p. 296). Putnam underscored the importance of creating opportunities for people to join groups, participate in the development of associations, and contribute to community building activities. This perspective emphasizes the important role of school in society as well as the importance of parent engagement in school affairs and providing support for the education of their children. Leithwood (1994)

found children's educational achievement influenced by the parental belief in the efficacy of education to contribute to the future well being of these children, which in turn encouraged their participation in extracurricular activities in groups and teams, academic learning, and improved classroom behavior. These findings (Putnam 2000; Smylie & Hart, 1999; Coleman, 1987) support the contention that creating environments conducive to informal interaction among educators and parents contributes to building social capital. In addition, they observed social capital to be enhanced through the education of parents whose knowledge, skills, and dispositions increase their presence, support, and involvement with their families. Social capital also positively affects occupational status and consequently influences the academic success, educational attainment, occupational aspirations, and life chances of their children (Hagan, MacMillan, & Wheaton, 1996, Marjoribanks, 1991; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994, as cited in Smylie & Hart, 1999).

In addition, social capital is enhanced by the creation of healthy relations between parents and school personnel as well as external networks, including other schools, community-based agencies, and not-for-profit and private sector organizations. All these activities help schools build social capital within communities and generate support for education. Smylie and Hart (1999) concluded that although community engagement requires a commitment of time and effort on the part of principals and teachers, it remains a potentially powerful approach to school improvement and improving students' academic learning, and it demonstrates a commitment to civic responsibility and positive, long-term community and nation-building strategies.

*Social Justice and Education*

Social justice incorporates principles of fair treatment, shared benefits, and justice uniformly applied throughout society. Social justice derives its authority from the codes of morality prevailing in each culture and embraces a commitment to the realization of these principles among all members of society. In this regard, Greenberg (1996) asserted that social justice is a universally accepted value that promotes the well-being of all individuals and institutions in society.

Social justice conveys the idea that every individual is entitled to basic human rights regardless of such differences as economic disparity, class, gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, age, sexual orientation,

disability or health. It also implies the idea that to achieve these ends, society has a compelling obligation to eradicate poverty and illiteracy, pursue equality of opportunity, and ensure that all citizens are included in the economic, social, and political life of the community and nation. Social justice denigrates the pursuit of unbridled self interest (Starratt, 1996). Individuals enter into a social contract that surrenders some of their freedom in return for ensuring the well-being of the commonwealth.

#### *Organizational Justice in Schools*

The concept of organizational justice extends the principles of social justice to a specific organizational context and focuses on incorporating its tenets into day-to-day school practices. According to Folger and Cropanzano (1998), scholars viewed as experts on organizational behavior concur with the precept that fairness and justice matter in all organizational settings. Rawls (1971) observed that it is "the first virtue of social institutions" (p. 3). Greenberg (2001) noted that the idea of justice as applied in school settings is concerned with how students, teachers, parents, and the community citizens are treated by administrators. He suggested that violating the expectations of fairness in organizations and condoning unfair treatment may demoralize employees and consequently diminish their productivity.

#### *Human Capital Theories and Education*

Human capital refers to the stock of productive skills, technical and intellectual knowledge, and psychological and judgmental abilities embodied in members of the society, and these assets cannot be separated from them like other capital assets (Becker, 1964; Gilmore, 1999). The acquisition of these skills and knowledge is often enhanced through education, study, or apprenticeship programs, which is considered a real expense and regarded as an asset or type of capital fixed in the individual. According to Becker (1964), one's outputs depend partly on the rate of return on the human capital one can offer. These outputs include those capabilities a person acquires through either self-investment or the investment of others, as when parents read to their children or when employers support additional training. Schultz (1961) considered both knowledge and skill to be forms of capital and this capital as a product of deliberate investment.

According to Gilmore (1999) a close correlation exists between the educational level of workers and their productive capacity. In the same vein, individuals with higher levels of education or training traditionally can expect higher wages, lower unemployment, better mobility, and more demand for their labor over the course of their working lives. Schultz (1961) stated that the concept of human capital implies an investment in people, and he argued that education, training and investments in health open opportunities and choices that might otherwise be unavailable. He believed that educational institutions play a central role in the development of human capital.

Furthermore, Schultz affirmed that education prepares a workforce for productive participation in the economy as well as providing other national benefits. He considered an educated citizenry more capable of participating in local, regional, and national government. Becker (1964), Gilmore (1999), and Schultz (1961) concurred that an investment to enhance these capabilities enables an individual to perform tasks effectively and leads to an increase in human productivity, which in turn contributes to a positive rate of return for the individual as well as for nation states. Miller (1999) viewed education as central to preparing future workers and developing human capital. Thus, communities, regions, and nation states eager to participate in the new knowledge-based, global economy should provide the educational infrastructure needed to launch and sustain its human capital. Miller (1999) took the lesson for local, regional, and national development to be clear: human capital exists throughout communities and if it can be developed at higher levels, it can provide the impetus for community development.

Becker (1964) recognized that formal education is hardly the only way to invest in human capital. Workers also receive training and learn outside schools, especially on the job. Even college graduates find themselves less than fully prepared for the labor market when they leave school, and they tend to fit into their jobs through formal and informal training programs. Becker asserted that no discussion of human capital can omit the influence of families on the knowledge, skills, values, and habits of their children. He believed that parents affect educational attainment as well as other dimensions of their children. Finally, most of us generally believe that education offers the opportunity for upward mobility among the poor.

*Cultural Capital Theories and Education*

In the analysis of the processes of social and cultural reproduction, which is how the various forms of capital tend to transfer from one generation to the next, Bourdieu (1993) claimed that education represents the key example of this process. According to Bourdieu, educational success entails a whole range of cultural behavior. He described culture as including competencies, skills or qualifications, and symbolic capital as prestige, honor, and the right to be heard, as a crucial source of power. Furthermore, he asserted that the difference between the culture of humans and the behaviors exhibited by other organisms is that humans cannot survive without culture. He claimed that everything humans see, touch, interact with, and think about, is cultural, but that culture does not mean civilization. It is not necessary to have cities in order to have a culture. Every society does the best it can with its circumstances. Any given social group, and therefore the culture that reflects it, is therefore neither more advanced nor more backward than any other; it is simply the way it is because it is the way it works. If the circumstances should change because of environmental change, population pressure or historical events, the culture changes.

Some use the term 'culture' to refer to a wide array of human activities. It exhibits the way that humans interpret their biology and their environment. According to this viewpoint, culture becomes such an integral part of human existence that it is literally the human environment, and most cultural change can be attributed to human adaptation to historical events.

Researchers have reiterated the importance and benefits of social and cultural capital as catalysts for creating a level playing field in a society. Blasko (2003) drew on the work of DiMaggio (1982) with the model of cultural mobility, the idea being that cultural capital does indeed play an important role in shaping social inequalities, but it does so by improving the opportunities of those from lower classes rather than by promoting upper classes to inherit advantageous positions. Applying Merton's theory to the idea of cultural mobility, families that invest more in their children than families of otherwise similar social standing do, are in fact promoting the socialization of their offspring. Consciously or unconsciously, these parents select a reference group at a higher social position than their own and adjust their cultural activities to them. For the children, such a preliminary adjustment can both

make it easier to enter the selected status group and might help integrate them into the new group and stabilize their position in it. By the time of the entry, the newcomer has assimilated to the group in at least one important dimension in this way (Merton, 1980, as cited in Blasko, 2003).

**Review of Literature.***Relationship Between Schools and Society*

According to a study by Wilson, Cordry, Notar and Friery (2004), teachers concur that they cannot do it alone, and for effective educational processes to occur in classrooms, parental help in partnership with educators is needed. Epstein and Salinas (2004) stated that a school learning community includes educators, students, parents and community partners who work together to improve the school and enhance students' learning opportunities. Home, school, and community connections make school subjects more meaningful for students. In addition, to learn at high levels, all students need the guidance and support of their teachers, families and other community members.

*The Relationship Between Parental Support and Academic Success of Students*

When creating a high quality instructional environment is a shared goal, parents transform from passive supporters to active members of the educational community. When children see the support, excitement about learning, and teamwork between home and school, they too become excited. They sense the value in learning, and their intrinsic motivation for learning grows (McLoughlin et al., 2003). Research findings indicate that when parents are involved in the education of their children, student achievement, attendance, health, and discipline show marked improvement (Boal, 2004). In addition, inviting parents, members of the business community, and service organizations to identify academic goals and standards and quantify measures of progress sends the message that what students learn and how well they learn it is not an issue just for teachers and administrators but is a real priority for the community as well (Wright and Saks, 2000, as cited in Cunningham, 2004). Trotman (2001) concluded that whether it is a routine task or a task that seems to be insurmountable, collaboration among parents, teachers, and other school personnel promises positive outcomes. In addition, where empowerment exists, there is

positive student and parent response as well as improvement in motivation and self-confidence. Fullan (1997) recognized the value of these efforts and noted that "nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families/community working together in partnership. These forms of (parent) involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation, but they happen by explicit strategic intervention" (pp. 42-43).

Researchers have examined the effects of parental behavior on academic achievement, particularly with regard to the effects of parental perceptions, aspirations, and expectations on their children's academic achievement (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese & Garnier, 2001). Recently, ethnographers have been concerned with children, who against the odds, manage to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Their evidence indicates that success in school among poor children of all family types is related to deliberate efforts on the part of parents to inculcate discipline and good study habits in their children (Clark, 1983). For example, Peng and Wright (1994) found that regardless of other variables, parents' high expectations were a powerful predictor of student achievement. Other research has shown that parental beliefs and expectations about their children's learning are strongly related to children's beliefs about their own competencies, as well as their achievement (Galper, Wigfield, & Seefeldt, 1997).

Without family support for their children's learning, it appears difficult for teachers to devise academic experiences to help students learn meaningful content. But research shows that an increase in parental involvement correlates with an increase in student achievement (Ballen & Moles, 1994; Benjet, 1995; Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, 1995a; Epstein, 1991). Trotman (2001) asserted that not only do children perform better academically and behaviorally when parents are involved, but also teachers' behaviors have been affected. Bever (1994) found that when parents become involved, teachers normally exhibit positive attitude changes and often improved their own work habits.

Parental involvement in school activities as well as direct communication with teachers and administrators is associated with greater achievement in mathematics and reading (Griffith, 1996; Reynold, 1992; Sui-Chu & Williams, 1996, as cited in Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry & Childs, 2004). Higher levels of parental involvement in

their children's educational experiences at home (e.g., supervision and monitoring daily conversations about school) have been associated with children's higher achievement scores in reading and writing, as well as higher report card grades (Epstein, 1991; Griffith, 1996; Sui-Chu & Williams, 1996; Keith et al., 1998, as cited in Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry & Childs, 2004). A report of research findings by Fantuzzo et al. (1999) indicated that for children participating in urban Head Start programs a home-based involvement dimension was regarded as superior to other dimensions in its relationship to pre-school competencies. These findings concur with those of Henderson (1987) and Henderson and Berla (1995), who found that the more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement. When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior, are more likely to graduate, and are more likely to attend post-secondary education. Several researchers have examined the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement among pre-school children in such vulnerable groups as children of low-income, illiterate parents. Research findings from students in these groups indicate that parental involvement programs focusing on improving the home learning environment (through for example, parent education and provision of materials) increases children's motivation and self-efficacy (Dickinson & DeTemple, 1998; Mantzicopoulos, 1997; Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple & Peay, 1999, as cited in Fantuzzo et al. 2004).

#### *Parent Empowerment*

The notion of a community as it relates to the alignment of common purposes among the school, teachers, parents, and children implies shared perceptions of the value of education as the basis of the partnership (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In addition, Covey's (1989) rule of communication, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood" (p. 237), suggests the need to understand the dynamics of shared values and perceptions of education to encourage more effectively the development of partnerships with parents as well as to sustain them over time. The United States Department of Education (1995a) concluded that "thirty years of research make it clear: parents and families are pivotal to children's learning" (p. 19). Scholars concur that ample empirical evidence affirms that parents' involvement in the education of their children relates directly to their academic success. Parents and educators,

however, continue to struggle in their efforts to define exactly what the role of each should be. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), the most useful perspective for the relationship between the school and parent are those in which each party is expected to bring knowledge and skills to the enterprise, to offer different perspectives on issues that contribute to achieving mutual goals.

### **Research Method.**

The case study method lends itself to developing a better understanding of the Hope International School during the bounded period from 2007 to 2008 during which parents enrolled their children in the Hope International School (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Focused on this case the author hoped to understand those broad-based factors that influence parental support for children in other communities.

The design of the study was qualitative because it provides an in depth study on why parents behave the way they do towards their children's education. Qualitative research is rooted in the belief that human actions are strongly influenced by the settings in which they occur. The researcher therefore describes and analyzes people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions at a site or collects information from individuals or a group without interfering with natural events. Qualitative studies are important for theory generation, policy development, improvement of educational practice, illumination of social issues, and action stimulus (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The author based his rationale for selecting the qualitative method for the study reported here on the move toward a historical revision and transformation, erosion of ignorance, and the empowerment of the people of the Weija community of Ghana with respect to education. He chose to focus his study on the lived experiences of a racial and ethnic group in a holistic social context. The research constituted an exploratory study, which examined a topic subject to little prior research. It was therefore designed to lead to further inquiry, to develop a model, or to suggest propositions. The concepts, models or hypotheses amounted to grounded theory because the author based them on observations rather than deduced them from prior theories. Qualitative research develops this sort of grounded theory, develops understanding, describes multiple realities, and captures naturally occurring behavior

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This research represented an effort to contribute to theory, create effective practice, enhance policy change, and provide emancipatory perception toward education in the Weija community of Ghana.

The author adopted interpretive research methodology designed to clarify the culture of the people of Weija in terms of the actions of the participants. The rationale for selecting the qualitative study approach centered on its value for describing behaviors and then explaining them in terms of what the participants believe, perceive or value.

Individual interviews of community elders took place in their respective homes and focus group interviews of parents of children in the Hope International School, teachers, and school administrators took place in the school. Participant observation was exercised by the author in addition to document analysis: e.g., attendance registers, cash books, children's exercise books, PTA attendance registers, enrolment registers and so forth were reviewed.

The three main sources of data for this research study included observations, interviews, and document analyses. These sources provided large quantities of narrative data. The author selected a representative sample of 30 parents of children who attended the Hope International School who served as key informants and they formed 3 focus groups of 10 members each. Another focus group was composed of all of the 11 teachers. An additional focus group included two school administrators. The first parent focus group interview took place at the beginning of the research study to provide direction and refinement of interview questions. Subsequent focus group interviews were conducted throughout the study period. Individual interviews with community elders provided a different perspective on parental attitudes toward education. There were 7 individual interviews for community elders (i.e., opinion leaders). The analysis of pertinent documents proceeded concurrently with focus group and individual interviews and facilitated triangulation of data and added to confidence in its accuracy. In all 50 participants took part in the focus group and individual interviews.

#### *Descriptive Narrative*

Data collected were used to write a descriptive narrative of case study events associated with parental values and parental involvement in education of those whose children attended the Hope International School during the bounded

period from 2007 to 2008. Events reflected experiences and perceptions of parents, school administrators, teachers, and community elders and presented a holistic picture of parental values and parental involvement in education at the Hope International School (Creswell, 2003). The descriptive narrative was prepared using data systematically collected and organized to meet the objectives of the study (Yin, 2003).

#### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis identified the major categories and prominent themes that emerged from the data associated with parental values and parental involvement in education in the Weija community of Accra, Ghana. The descriptive narrative provided the essential basis for the author to develop a grounded theoretical explanation of the phenomena studied. Data analysis was both literal (i.e., involving an analysis of exact data), interpretative (i.e., the meaning the author ascribed to the data), and reflexive (i.e., the author's engagement with the data in the interpretive process) (Mason, 1996).

Four groups of individuals, including community elders, parents of children attending the Hope International School, teachers, and administrators were interviewed in the Weija community to more fully understand parental perceptions of the value of education in that community. Data collected were reported separately under these four headings.

To analyze data, the author coded data and collected instances from which meanings emerged. He drew patterns and concluded with a naturalistic generalization. Six categories emerged from the data including (1) perceptions of the value of education; (2) the influence of economic circumstances on parental support for their children's education; (3) the influence of parental conformity with cultural norms, values, and beliefs on the allocation of resources for education; (4) parenting practices that support children's education; (5) parent-school relations and support for children's education; and (6) Christian moral responsibility and support for children's education. These categories provide an organized framework for analyzing data. The author summarized relevant data under each category followed by synopses of the relevant literature. He discussed those findings and provided a set of naturalistic generalizations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Propositions were presented at the end of each analysis section that summarized findings (Zetterberg, 1965). He then synthesized these

propositions into a grounded theoretical explanation that concludes the study. Finally, the author reflected on his findings with regard to implications for future research.

The author used theories like human capital, social capital, cultural capital, social justice, organizational justice and concepts like empowerment of the study to explain events or factors above and propositions were developed for each factor that summarized findings. These propositions delineate what emerged from the study of parental value of education as it relates to their providing support for their children's schooling, and they contribute to a limited yet 'grounded' explanation of the phenomenon.

#### **Summary of Research Findings.**

The following statement summarizes the findings of this exploratory case study: positive parental value of education is influenced by the parents' awareness of the relationship between education and the future economic well-being of individuals, their level of participation in school activities, the degree to which they understand their role in supporting their children's schooling, a consciousness of their empowerment in making decisions, their belief in Christian moral principles that support acceptance of family responsibilities, and the diminishing influence of traditional cultural norms.

#### *Perception of the value of education*

All elders interviewed concurred that education is important, especially in contemporary society and the world economy. They based their views on personal experiences and observations in the community and beyond. For example, Rukaya an elder of the Zongo community in Weija, where a majority of the inhabitants are illiterate stated that,

*In the past, we did not have enough knowledge about education, but now we know the essence of education. So if your child is now in school, you need to help the child. The usual practice of buying ornaments and other things at the expense of our children's education should be discontinued so that the children will become prominent figures in the future. If we don't prioritize our choices in support of our children's education, our children may turn out to be like us mothers, who are now suffering*



for lack of education (fieldnote, May, 2008).

Many of the elders reflected on their own circumstances and observed that they had missed several opportunities in life because they remained uneducated. They could see that those who were educated were moving ahead of them in many ways. Although the elders are generally older than many other people in the community, they do not enjoy a quality of life enjoyed by better educated people in the community. Togbe J. J. an elder said, "I missed a job with the Ghana Water Company here in the Weija community simply because I was not educated. Therefore, I am forced to remain a fisherman for the rest of my life. So I see education as a very important tool in life" (fieldnote, May, 2008).

All of the parents interviewed considered education very important with only a few mentioning training in moral values. Many of the parents claimed that they want to educate their children so that they could receive their assistance during their old age. For example, Mr. Jajano a parent said, "I couldn't attain a higher level of education, but I have resolved to send my children to school so that they can assist me in my old age. In my youthful age, I wish to work very hard to support my children's education for a better future" (fieldnote, May, 2008).

In addition, Ms. Laame a parent said,

*I was born here, but my mother did not send me to school. I was sent to the northern region and I suffered a lot there before coming back to Accra. When I got married, I had two children and I decided to send them to school. I can neither read nor write, so I do not even know what the messages on billboards mean and I always become a victim of warning signs wherever I go. That is very embarrassing. I sent my children to school so that they will not also fall victim to such embarrassing situations in the future (fieldnote, May, 2008).*

On the other hand, school administrators reflected that in many instances parents give their jobs top priority at the expense of their children's education. They claim that many parents send their children to school with worn-out uniforms, unkempt hair, and on empty stomachs. Mr. Michael a school administrator said, "You can imagine how a child who comes to school without

eating anything can cope with his or her studies" (fieldnote, May, 2008).

Many teachers complained that few parents had visited the school after the first day when they brought their children to the school. Most agreed that parental value of education is still in a transitional stage and that their lack of involvement reflected it. Mr. Abed, a teacher, said, "Weija is a place where education is now gaining ground" (fieldnote, May, 2008). The teachers generally expressed concern about a wide gap between what parents said about the importance of education and what they did to support their children in school.

The propositions that pertain to this factor are: the higher the awareness of economic change occurring in society, the higher the value placed on education by community citizens; the more direct the relationship between education and economic well being, the more likely citizens will value education; and the greater the value placed on education by parents, the greater the likelihood they will support their children in school.

*The influence of the value of education in mitigating the effect of economic circumstance on parental support for their children's education*

Baba Issifu, an elder of the Zongo community claimed that many parents in the community have demonstrated that they value education by sending their children to school:

*When I sit in front of my house every morning, I see how women are so anxious in taking their small children to the Kindergarten school. They are very anxious about education because they know the importance of education. As some of them could not attain higher levels of education and are now suffering, I think they don't want their children to go through the same experience, but they want their children to do better in the future. So they are trying their best. As for this community they are doing well by sending their children to school (fieldnote, May, 2008).*

Parents were unanimous in their belief that the greatest and most worthwhile legacy they can give their children is an education. Ms. Serwa a parent emphasized this point: "You cannot see anyone working in an office here that is not educated" (fieldnote, May, 2008).

The propositions that pertain to this factor are: the greater the degree of parental value for education, the greater the likelihood that they will send their children to school; the greater the likelihood that parents send their children to school, the greater the belief in the efficacy of education; the greater the belief in the efficacy of education, the more likely they will provide non-monetary support to their children, including encouragement, parental supervision, and participation in school activities; and the greater the level of non-monetary parental support, the greater the level of their children's academic achievement.

*Parental conformity with cultural norms, values, and beliefs and the allocation of resources for education*

The elders noted that an attitude that inhibits parents from supporting their children's education emanates from their belief that one should honor the dead rather than cherish life. They noted how many people in the community ignore daily needs of people, including the young old, and sick, but then go to extreme lengths to honor the dead. They claimed that such practices inhibit the support that parents provide for their children's education because parents may deny their children school fees, but buy dresses to attend funerals.

School administrators observed that getting parents to remit school fees can be a Herculean task. They noted that even though the fees are small, most parents are in arrears, which makes it difficult to pay teachers' salaries on time.

The propositions that pertain to this factor are: the greater the value parents place on educating their children, the more likely they are to pay required school fees and purchase textbooks and school materials; the more willing parents are to support their children's education, the more likely the hegemony of the dominant culture will be weakened; the greater the level of parents' participation in school affairs, the greater the likelihood that they will develop a more positive attitude toward educating their children; the greater the level of parent empowerment in making decisions about their children's education, the more likely they will value the social and economic upward mobility of their children; the greater the influence of culture, the more likely parents will conform to traditional social practices; and the greater the desire to conform to cultural norms and social practices, the greater the

likelihood that individuals will reproduce traditional culture and affirm traditional social practices.

*Parenting practices that support children's education*

Parents held many different views with regard to the academic performance of their children. For the most part, they felt their children were doing well at school and said that they were pleased with their performances. Parents of students who were doing poorly in school identified probable causes of this poor performance. In most instances, they admitted that the lack of proper supervision of homework was the primary reason their children were not doing well academically. For example, Mr. Mensah a parent said,

*I realized that normally my children perform poorly if I am not able to provide all of their school requirements, like books. Also, if supervision at home is lacking, the children take it for granted and they give much attention to the watching of the television, but once I provide them with the needed school materials and step up with supervision at home, they pick up in their performance (fieldnote, May, 2008).*

Furthermore, Mr. Edem a parent said,

*I am now a single parent and what is affecting the performance of my children could be attributed to the lack of a mother at home. I believe that mothers do have a great influence on their children's education. The mother's presence provides them with some sort of peace to study, and because there is no mother, they are lacking in some aspect. So that is affecting their studies. I am praying to secure a lady who could help the children at home (fieldnote, May, 2008).*

Most parents agreed that home supervision helps to improve academic performance. Some parents, however, admitted that the falling standard of their children's academic performances may be attributable to their own absence from home. They said that they spend long hours on their jobs and much less time with their children at home.

Teachers, on the other hand, uniformly agreed that parental support should not be limited to financial support. They asserted that some parents remained unaware how family structures can

influence support for their children's education. For instance, a number of teachers observed that marital problems, like divorced mothers marrying new husbands and fathers having several wives living in separate homes, contributed to a lack of parental interest, involvement and support. They noted that some children do not have specific homes to go to after school and are frequently shuttled from grandmother to grandfather or from aunt to uncle. Most teachers considered this to be a peculiar problem in the Weija community. For example, many children may go to their grandmothers for an after-school snack, then visit their grandfather before staying with an aunt for the evening. The next day, children take their bags and go back to school. The lack of direct parental support in situations like this has a negative effect on the children's learning. As Mr. Andy a teacher said,

*I think there should be one mother and one father all staying in the same home to ensure the child's proper supervision or proper care of the child. Here lies the case whereby the child is living between two to three homes. Sometimes he goes home and does not see his mother or he goes home and does not see his father. I do not think even when they are asked to buy books he will be able to get the appropriate person to buy the books, so the child will not even say it at all. I think that is the very picture that we have in this community (fieldnote, May, 2008).*

The propositions set forth for this factor are: the greater the level of parents' support for their children's education, the greater the likelihood that they will achieve at higher academic levels; and the higher the level of academic achievement of children, the greater the likelihood that their children will receive social justice and break the cycle of poverty.

#### *Parent-School relations and support for education*

The school tries to involve parents in school activities, and almost all of the parents mentioned that they attended Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. They credited the PTA meetings as being their main source of interaction with the school. They maintained that the meetings were the place where they frequently exchanged ideas about their children's education with teachers and school administrators. Some parents also talked about the individual invitations they received from

teachers and school administrators, asking them to discuss issues pertaining to their children's academic performance, behavior, and other matters.

The teachers' perspectives on the relationship between the school and the community varied. They noted that while some parents showered praises on their performance, others were disrespectful. In most instances, teachers reported that parents who showed disrespect were parents who believed the teachers were too young to educate their children or that they were untrained and, therefore unqualified to teach their children. In addition, some parents occasionally criticized them on trivial matters. In this regard, some teachers felt as though they did not have a free hand to work with the children. These teachers, however, affirmed that the PTA meetings had brought about some improvement in the relationship between teachers and parents as they provide a forum in which parents and teachers may openly exchange ideas about the well being of students, as well as on other matters that affect the school and the community as a whole. The teachers indicated that they played a dual role in their jobs, which involved educating both parents and their children. They said that they worked to educate parents both through interactions at school and at home regarding the importance of education in the future lives of their children. Many also said that they frequently went into the community to talk with parents about many school-related issues, including the need for their children to do their homework, to buy books, to pay school fees, and so forth.

The school administrators said that the relationship between the school and the community can be complex. For example, Ms. Rose Mary a school administrator said, "If you offend one person, you offend the whole village. When one person withdraws their child from the school, the whole people in the community will also withdraw their children from the school. So if one person gives a bad report about the school, the whole community does the same" (fieldnote, May, 2008).

The propositions that pertain to this factor are: the greater the level of parent involvement in their children's education, the higher their academic performance; the greater the level of parent involvement in their children's education, the more positive their classroom behavior; the greater the level of involvement of parents in their children's education, the greater the understanding of parents with regard to their

responsibilities to support their children in school; and the greater the level of involvement of parents in their children's education, the higher the morale of their children's teachers.

*Christian moral responsibility and support for education*

Some of the parents see the responsibility for educating their children as a moral obligation. They said that they sent their children to school because God had given them the children as gifts. Referring to the Holy Bible, they maintained that if they fail to take good care of their children, God would curse them. Therefore, they had resolved to do whatever it takes to help their children become educated and good citizens. They declared that it was their responsibility to support their children's education so they would become independent and later help support them in their old age. Their goal is to be obedient to God's commandments so that God will love them and bless them.

The propositions that pertain to this factor are: the stronger parental belief in Christian moral principles, the more likely they will support their children's education; and the greater the level of support for their children's education, the more likely that they will contribute to a socially just society.

### **Discussions and Implications.**

This exploratory case study contributes to the literature base on parental values of education in sub-Saharan Africa. Research findings suggest that further inquiry may be pursued in developing a more thorough understanding of patterns of influence on parental values toward education in developing nations. Although a number of scholars (Blasko, 2003; Hoy and Miskel, 1996; Schein, 1985) have acknowledged the influence of traditional cultural norms on individual behavior in Western societies, few scholars have examined the process of how low income, illiterate parents in developing nations in sub-Saharan Africa may adopt norms that alter their valuing of education and influence behavior that supports their children attaining a higher level of education than their own. Filling this gap in the international literature with regard to adoption of new cultural norms, beliefs and values in developing nations may contribute to the extant literature on cultural change as well as offer insight into how education leaders and policy makers may more effectively work with low-income, poorly educated parents.

Another promising line of future inquiry may focus on an examination of the effects of low socio-economic status (SES) parent participation in school activities with regard to their understanding of their responsibilities to support their children's education including providing fees, books, materials, and the supervision of after-school activities and homework. Western scholars (e.g., Clark, 1983; Fantazzo et al., 1999; Henderson, 1987; Henderson and Berla, 1995) concur that providing parental involvement and support for their children's education are both critical to improving student motivation, learning, and behavior. But a gap appears in the international literature emerging from sub-Saharan Africa with regard to this dynamic relationship. Additional research may contribute to the knowledge base in the field generally, and also provide educational leaders and community development experts with insights that will enhance their capacity to build social and human capital in local communities.

The elders of the Weija community related that cultural expectations may contribute to parents' unwillingness to support their children's education, because parents have the belief that one should honor the dead rather than cherish life. Community elders, parents, and school administrators further discussed how many people in the community frequently ignore the daily needs of the young, old, and sick, yet go to extreme lengths to honor the dead. School administrators said that some parents would prefer to buy expensive clothes for parties, weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies rather than spending their money on school fees, books, lunch money, or even food for their children at home. The school administrators recognized that these practices used much of the family's discretionary resources and diminished parents' ability to pay for their children's education. A probable antidote for this social canker that deprives children in the Weija community from having adequate parental support for their education should be the social education of parents on how to use their scarce resources to support their children's education rather than spend their money on funerals, naming ceremonies and other social practices.

It is obvious that every society does the best it can with its circumstances, but unfortunately, some practices impede the progress of other societies and therefore the need to desist from such practices. For instance, the Western societies believe that families that invest more in their

children than families of otherwise similar social standing do are in fact helping anticipatory socialization of their offspring (Blasko, 2003). In addition, families often select a reference group of higher social position than their own and adjust their cultural activities to them. The people in Ghana should learn to adopt the above practices of the Western societies because it is worth investing in the living than in the dead. They should rather seek the welfare of their children's education and not to accumulate or channel their resources toward elegant funeral rites and other social events. There is the need to change their perceptions toward their children's education because the community elders interviewed for this study even understood the relationship between education and future economic well-being of the individual and the society as a whole. In this regard, the elders recognized the link between education and human capital. In addition, they reported a widely held perception of people in the community about the value of education and the need to equip their children with the knowledge and skills to help them improve their well-being and that of their parents. For example, Mr. Jajano a parent said, "I couldn't attain a higher level of education, but I have resolved to send my children to school so that they can assist me in my old age. In my youthful age, I wish to work very hard to support my children's education for a better future" (fieldnote, May, 2008). In addition, Ms. Ode, a parent, narrated her experience of being illiterate:

*A very good example is what has just happened to me here at this meeting. I cannot even append my signature on this participant consent form. I can neither read nor write. At a very young age, my parents sent me to the Brong Ahafo region in Ghana to cultivate the jungle for cash crops, like cocoa. I am very good in making farms in the forest, but I do not know how to read and write. I have therefore resolved to send my children to school to avoid this embarrassing situation in life (fieldnote, May, 2008).*

According to Blasko (2003) cultural assets have both helped the upper classes to maintain their existing positions and they have provided a possible source for those occupying lower positions in the social hierarchy to support their children going forward. It seems obvious that cultural capital can play a role in both cultural mobility and reproduction. The author is of the

view that people in Ghana have to do what Western societies do because he believes that cultural capital plays a more important role in the mobility of lower status children than it does in the status reproduction of the upper classes. In other words, cultural capital can have a bigger impact on the status-attainment process of those from the lower classes. Furthermore, promoting social mobility through cultural resources can be especially efficient since it can be a way to reduce the symbolic distance between the family, where the parents have low education levels and therefore find the values and expectations of school strange. By providing their children with the necessary cultural resources, parents can make the language, the way of thinking, and the relation to books (which the school expects and rewards), more familiar for them.

Coleman (1988) identified the ways in which parental involvement can build social capital (see also Dika & Singh, 2002). Coleman suggested that social capital derives from two types of relationships: the relationship between a student and his or her parents; and the relationship between a student's parents and other adults, particularly adults who are connected to the school the student attends (Perna & Titus, 2005). A primary function of social capital is to enable a student to gain access to human, cultural and other forms of capital, as well as to institutional resources and support. Without social relations, no possibility arises for the exchange of information or the enforcement of norms that facilitate collective goals. Social capital is conceived of as a public good and measured as a school attribute. According to Goddard (2003), it is a collective resource that encourages such productive outcomes as academic success for all students in a school or community and economic prosperity for a society (Putnam, 1993). Therefore, it seems advantageous to employ the resources of social capital to compensate for any possible deficiencies in the work of cultural activities.

With reference to the above literature and the many benefits it suggest, the concepts of social capital and cultural capital figure to be important tools that can help close the gap between the educated and the uneducated in Ghanaian society. They could serve as means to encourage parental and community involvement in children's education and school activities. Better still, they could also help break the wall that inhibits successful school-community relations in Ghana, especially between the Hope International School and the Weija community. Furthermore, with

proper planning and implementation, these concepts could make the students' learning more meaningful. The concepts promise to enhance the children's academic achievements, as well. Finally, it is the hope that by sharing information through

social networks, parents and members of the community could be empowered and their standards of living might improve.

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