PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG CHILDREN’S SOCIAL INTEREST EXPERIENCES: AN INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College
of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Erin M. West
August 2016
A dissertation written by

Erin M. West

B.A., Kent State University, 2010
M.Ed., Kent State University, 2012
Ph.D., Kent State University, 2016

Approved by

____________________________, Co-director, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Lynne Guillot Miller

____________________________, Co-director, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Jane A. Cox

____________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Alicia R. Crowe

Accepted by

____________________________, Director, School of Lifespan Development and Educational Sciences
Mary Dellmann-Jenkins

____________________________, Interim Dean, College of Education, Health, and Human Services
Mark A. Kretovics

iii
This study was designed to explore parents’ perceptions of their young children’s school-organized social interest experiences. Interpretive description was selected for the methodology in this study, which is used when researchers want to gain a subjective understanding about an experience in efforts to inform practice. For the current study I sought to better understand parents’ perceptions of their young children’s social interest experiences in efforts to inform clinical mental health and school counseling practice.

Fourteen parents from a university based early childhood education participated in this semi structured interview and a follow up focus group. During these interviews parents were asked questions regarding their thoughts about the social interest experiences in which their children were involved. Data analysis was completed using guidelines for interpretive description data analysis described by Thorne (2008) and Charmaz’s (2014) suggestions for grounded theory analysis. Three themes developed through this process; parents perceived their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences as influencing: (a) their children’s self-esteem, (b) their children’s empathy, and (c) the parents’ and their children’s worldview and sense of citizenship.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals provided me personal and professional support throughout this dissertation process without whom I would not have finished. I would first and foremost like to thank the parents involved with this study who were generous with their time and stories, and their children who provided me with the inspiration for this project. If not for them, this dissertation would not have been possible. I would also like to thank the early childhood education center where I collected data. It was at this school many years ago that I first began to realize my love for working with children and families. My experiences there changed my life for the better and I will be forever grateful for the amazing faculty and staff who dedicate their lives to providing meaningful experiences for young children.

In particular I would like to thank two special teachers at this center. I first began working with one of these teachers nine years ago. I learned more about how to work with families and children from watching her than any other experience throughout my master’s and doctoral degree programs. Through our work together she became my dear friend and a source of constant support. I will never be able to thank her enough for the numerous ways she has positively influenced my life. The second teacher at this center has helped me realize the limitless potential young children possess to change our world. I am grateful to her for challenging me on a daily basis to think about how to more fully involve children in the community. These two women have such a genuine love for working with young children, I admire them deeply, and I am a better counselor and person for knowing them.
I continue to be thankful for my wonderful dissertation committee. Dr. Alicia Crowe has truly made me fall in love with qualitative research and provided such wonderful guidance throughout my dissertation. Dr. Lynne Guillot Miller and Dr. Jane Cox have made ending this dissertation process and doctoral program a bittersweet experience. While I am excited to be completing my degree I will miss our conversations about teaching, research, professional development, and life. Since starting my Master’s program at Kent State they have been wonderful advisors, teachers, supervisors, and steadfast mentors. They make leaving Kent hard, and yet, I know that because of them I feel prepared for the next step of my professional journey. They have set the bar for the kind of meaningful mentorship I hope to provide my future students, and I could not be more grateful.

I want to thank some other special people in the Counselor Education and Supervision Program at Kent State. Dr. Cynthia Osborn has been an extraordinary mentor throughout my doctoral process involving me in teaching, research, and writing. She has been unbelievably generous with her time and always willing to provide me with genuine listening and care. I will never be able to thank her enough. Dr. Cassie Storlie became such an invaluable addition to Kent State’s counseling faculty during my second year as a doctoral student. I have appreciated her steadfast kindness and wonderful advice. As I leave Kent I will continue to reflect on words she shared with me from Louisa May Alcott, “I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning to sail my ship.” Janet Creamer is another remarkable woman at Kent State who provides myself and countless other doctoral students with continuous love and support. I am thankful for her
friendship, life advice, and love. I also want to thank Rob McKinney, who has provided me with such meaningful friendship during a time when I needed it most.

Finally, I want to thank my family. Randy is my best friend, calming presence, and steadfast partner in life. I continue to be in awe of his ability to provide me with such unconditional love and support. I want to thank him for giving me the freedom to become the professional I have dreamed of and the love to know I’ll never be alone in doing so. My sister Anne has a quick wit, sense of humor, and love for life that continues to inspire me. I am blessed to have her as my sister, and more importantly my friend. I am also fortunate to have the world’s two most wonderful, generous, and supportive parents. My amazing mom, who I love so much, has been a continual reminder that working hard is just as important as playing hard. Her constant suggestions to take breaks, spend time with family and friends, and find meaning from experiences outside of school and work have kept me well and grounded throughout graduate school. She has always been my steadfast cheerleader for all things in life; she is incredible. And last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my dad. It is impossible for me to put into words how much I love and truly admire such an amazing man. He has taught me some of life’s most important lessons including the importance of having integrity, working hard, helping others, being humble, and spending time with family. Being his daughter continues to be the greatest privilege.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</strong></td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIST OF TABLES</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Literature</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred Adler and Individual Psychology</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interest</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Introduction and Literature Review</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive Description</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Researcher</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Context, Sampling Procedures, and Participants</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful Sampling</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Sampling</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Protocol</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoing</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant Comparison</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview Analysis</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing Trustworthiness</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity and Researcher Journal</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thick Descriptions</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Saturation</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Feedback</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer and Faculty Reviewers</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Methodology</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESULTS</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Results</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Themes in Context</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Children’s Self-Esteem</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Children’s Empathy</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Worldview and Sense of Citizenship</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Results</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. DISCUSSION

Current Findings and Previous Literature .......................................................... 108
  Children’s Social Interest and Empathy ......................................................... 108
  Children’s Social Interest and Self-Esteem ................................................. 109
  Children’s Social Interest and Their Parents ............................................. 111
  Children’s Mental Health .................................................................................. 115

Implications ........................................................................................................... 119
  Implications for Clinical Mental Health Counseling ....................................... 120
  Implications for School Counseling ................................................................ 123

Methodological Considerations and Limitations .................................................. 125
  Focus Group Research ....................................................................................... 125
  Research Limitations ......................................................................................... 126
  Directions for Future Research ....................................................................... 128
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 129

APPENDICES ............................................................................................................ 131

APPENDIX A. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTER
  DIRECTOR’S LETTER OF APPROVAL .................................................................. 132

APPENDIX B. KENT STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN PARTICIPATION APPROVAL LETTER .......................................................... 134

APPENDIX C. SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AT PARENT MEETING .......................................................... 136

APPENDIX D. EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS .................................................................. 138

APPENDIX E. CONSENT FORMS ............................................................................. 140

APPENDIX F. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE ................................................... 145

APPENDIX G. EMAIL TO NOTIFY PARTICIPANTS THEY HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE SAMPLE POOL .......................................................... 147

APPENDIX H. EMAIL TO NOTIFY PARTICIPANTS REMAINING IN THE SAMPLE POOL THAT DATA COLLECTION HAS ENDED .......................................................... 149

APPENDIX I. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ................................................... 151

APPENDIX J. DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL INTEREST AND SCHOOL-ORGANIZED SERVICE EXPERIENCES .......................................................... 154

APPENDIX K. PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR DATA ANALYSIS ..................................... 157

APPENDIX L. LISTS OF CODES AND DEFINITIONS .................................................. 159

APPENDIX M. SYNTHESIZING CODES TO THEMES .................................................. 163

APPENDIX N. PRELIMINARY THEMATIC STRUCTURE .................................................. 165

APPENDIX O. FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL ................................................................. 171
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Data Collection and Analysis Flowchart</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thematic Structure</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Outline of Theme 1</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Outline of Theme 2</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Outline of Theme 3</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Alfred Adler, a German psychotherapist, introduced an approach to therapy known as Individual Psychology in the early 1900s. Often referred to as Adlerian Therapy, this approach asserts that individuals are most healthy and psychologically well when they experience a connection to the community and sense of caring for others (Ansbacher, 1991). Adler placed significant focus on areas of family, community, education, and relationships when studying and explaining human nature. One of Adler’s most notable and lasting constructs, social interest, involves many of these aspects such as community and relationships. Social interest has been defined as an “interest in the interests of others” (Ansbacher, 1977, p. 57). Adler asserted that individuals with high levels of social interest have prosocial relationships with people and society, care about the betterment of the community and others’ wellbeing, and take actions that mirror these values. Although social interest has been studied extensively with adults (Bass, Curlette, Kern, & McWilliams, 2002; Bubenzer, Zarski, & Walter, 1991; Forman & Crandall, 1986; Hettman & Jenkins, 1990; E. P. Johnson, 1997), research involving social interest in youth, and particularly young children is limited.

Counselors working with youth could place a more significant focus on fostering social interest in efforts to work towards positive mental health outcomes. This social interest focus could be used as a method of prevention or intervention when working with this population. The National Center for Juvenile Justice recorded that over 31 million youth in 2011 were involved with the juvenile court system, and 79% of these youth were
between 10 and 15 years of age (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2014). Furthermore, since 1985 juvenile cases of drug involvement have increased 65%. Adler would assert that these youth have low levels of social interest and, as such, have a greater sense of private logic, meaning they are more concerned about themselves rather than the interests of others and society (Adler, 1931; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). For instance, some of these youth may be more interested in the instant personal gratification that comes from stealing or drug use without a concern for how their actions impact others or others’ interests. Working from his theory, one would assert that an emphasis on helping these youth to develop social interest earlier in life could have positive implications.

As aforementioned, this dissertation focuses on social interest in early childhood and specifically parents’ perceptions surrounding their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences. There are several reasons for focusing on social interest in this manner. Adler noted that all individuals have the propensity for social interest, but that it must be actively fostered and developed throughout childhood (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). When thinking about developing social interest in early childhood, it is important to reflect on the role that parents and schools can play in this process. In this study, parents, and not the children themselves, are being interviewed because parents play an integral role in fostering social interest in their children. Throughout early childhood, parents (or guardians) have a large influence over their children’s environments, experiences, and peers with whom they interact. Understanding parents’ perceptions and thoughts about fostering their children’s social interest, in order
to know how to have conversations with parents about the importance of providing social interest enhancing experiences and environments, could be beneficial for counselors.

In his writings, Adler (1931) also described the importance of focusing not only on intervention but prevention efforts with youth in the community. Adler noted that an important part of these prevention initiatives could include fostering social interest in efforts to prevent future behavioral or mental health concerns. Again, in order to foster social interest as a means of preventing future problems, it is essential that counselors are able to gain parents’ commitment to spending time on social interest related endeavors. Learning more about how parents perceive and understand efforts that focus on their children’s social interest could provide helpful information for counselors working with parents and children in the future.

**Research Question**

As a result of some of the issues mentioned above and literature that I review in the next section of this dissertation, I developed the following research question: How do parents perceive and understand their young children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences? Social interest experiences refer to service experiences such as book drives, making food for individuals living homeless, and cleaning up litter from local parks. A qualitative approach, interpretive description, was used to explore this question through gaining parents’ subjective perceptions on the research topic and developing themes from patterns among participant data. Through this study, I aimed to better understand parents’ perceptions of their children’s school-organized social interest experiences to inform clinical mental health and school counseling practice.
Review of the Literature

In the sections which follow in this chapter I briefly review Alfred Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology including its major concepts such as life tasks, life style, superiority, courage, and of course, social interest. Following a review of the major concepts, I more thoroughly describe social interest and summarize relevant research and literature related to this construct. Through this literature review I develop a rationale for this current study, which aims to better understand parents’ perceptions of their young children’s school-organized social interest experiences.

Alfred Adler and Individual Psychology

Alfred Adler was born in 1870 outside of Vienna, Austria. A contemporary of Sigmund Freud, Adler worked as a psychologist, professor, and physician. Unlike Freud, Adler approached understanding human nature from a systemic viewpoint (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Maniacci, 2012). Though Adler initially began as a colleague of Freud’s, he eventually distanced himself from Freud after disagreements regarding Freud’s assertions about human behavior, the community, and pathology. Specifically, Adler asserted that individuals who are connected to society and experience comfort with themselves are able to exist cooperatively with others, and be well adjusted and psychologically healthy (Maniacci, 2012). Adler revised and synthesized his assertions to create his own theory of psychology, Individual Psychology. This name for Adlerian therapy appropriately reflects Adler’s continual focus on the individuals with whom he worked rather than their presenting diagnosis or pathology (Adler, 1964). Adler worked
to educate mental health workers, educators, and the general public through his writings and teachings on this theory.

Adler’s ideas are just as relevant today as when first written (Maniaci, 2012). He emphasized the importance of family relationships and birth order on children’s development along with the positive impacts education and social interactions can have on individuals’ well-being (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler focused on cooperation, community, and belongingness. His view of human behavior was holistic and Adler reflected on the interaction between individuals and their environments (Brigman & Molina, 1999). Adler, unlike Freud, focused on conscious rather than unconscious behaviors. His innovative ideas regarding mental health and individuals’ propensity for change were optimistic (particularly when compared with Freud’s) and included assumptions that all humans strive for success and wholeness.

Adler was an advocate for all, which was evident in his work with families, youth, and individuals who were incarcerated or deemed psychotic. Much of Adler’s view of human nature stemmed from individuals’ social interactions with others. Oberst (2009) asserted,

Individual Psychology is the psychological model that has most dealt with the relationship of the individual with others and linked mental health with moral behavior through its core concept of social interest, which claims a relationship between prosocial behavior and psychological health. (pp. 398-399).

Adler highlighted humans’ involvement with society and the community as essential aspects of survival and well-being. He incorporated strength-based approaches and
believed that all people have the propensity for change and to overcome negative life occurrences.

Adler outlined several constructs in his theory of Individual Psychology that further delineated his beliefs about mental health and well-being. Some of these constructs include life tasks, life style, superiority, courage, and what has been identified as the most lasting and influential aspect of Adler’s work, social interest (Ansbacher, 1977, 1991; Bass et al., 2002; Crandall, 1975; Greever, Tseng, & Friedland, 1973). Next I describe these constructs, including social interest, the construct on which I focus in the current study.

**Life tasks.** Adler (1931, 1964) believed that people view problems from their own unique outlooks or worldviews. These problems or issues that are experienced, Adler believed, fall into three different areas; challenges with others, challenges related to work, or challenges with love. These three areas became known as Adler’s life tasks of association (or friendship), work (occupation or schooling), and love (Adler, 1964; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler noted that individuals have experiences in the community and general world that involve each of these tasks.

People feel as if they are tied to the earth by these circumstances—which are unavoidable and which confront every person every day in some fashion . . . the response each person makes to this given situation—and the response of society as a whole constitutes the activity of human life itself. (Mansager & Gold, 2000, p. 156)
Elaborating on Mansager and Gold’s writings, these life tasks are encountered during the inevitable interactions people have with society and throughout life experiences during early childhood through adulthood. Adler believed that all problems encountered through these life tasks require social interest and cooperation for resolution. Adler discussed the importance of early life experiences, particularly in childhood, on peoples’ approaches to life tasks throughout development (Weber, 2003).

**Life style.** Life style is a concept that Adler (1964) stated develops in childhood, specifically around the age of five. At this age, Adler believed that children, in somewhat of an unconscious manner, choose a life style, or way of being and interacting, that is helpful when working to reach goals. Life style also includes how people understand themselves and how they interact with society. Adler stated, “The style of life is the more general concept comprising, in addition to the goal, the individual’s opinion of himself and the world and his unique way of striving for the goal in his particular situation” (in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 172). Theorists following Adler have compared life style with personality and have described it as a constant way through which an individual faces and copes with life events (Eckstein, Baruth, & Mahrer, 1978).

Children’s life styles are largely influenced by their family constellation (McKay, 2012). McKay described how family constellations surpass theorist assumptions of birth order, and instead involve how individuals make sense of their position within the family (or birth order) and how this in turn is represented in their behavior. Adler believed that one’s lifestyle could be most observed during times of transition or when entering new
and challenging experiences. Furthermore, during these times individuals use skills and efforts congruent with their lifestyle to reach their goals (Eckstein et al., 1978).

Superiority. The discussion of life goals and Adler’s (1931, 1964) belief in individuals’ inherent momentum to reach their goals involves another of Adler’s concepts, superiority. Specifically, Adler discussed individuals’ strivings for superiority or perfection. Adler believed all individuals have the innate drive to work towards perfection and that human functioning and social relations are based on goal-directed behavior. Adler did note, however, that peoples’ perceptions of superiority and perfection vary (Schottky, Ehlers, & Linden, 1987). For example, some individuals may have goals that are not considered prosocial or a reflection of social interest. People with such goals may experience feelings of inferiority and as such they compensate by striving for power or superiority in ways that are not beneficial for others. Adler stated, “All these attempts to strive for elevation, to want power, must according to nature be considered as a form of striving for superiority or dominance” (Adler, 1912/2002, p. 35). Adler believed, however, that individuals could work toward “ideal perfection” through developing social interest (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1979, p. 34).

Adler asserted that through developing social interest individuals are able to distinguish between striving to create quality work and an unhealthy or neurotic obsession with perfection or superiority. Furthermore enhancing social interest reduces individuals’ anxiety or obsession with perfectionism (Lazarsfeld, 1991). Through enhancing social interest, people view themselves as part of a greater society and reflect on how they can be of service to others. “Adler viewed perfection as an ideal which can
never be really reached, but can serve as a sign post for going in the right direction of improvement, by going from big mistakes to even smaller ones, trying to perfect all one’s capacities but avoiding the pitfalls of perfectionism (Lazarsfeld, 1991, p. 94). To be imperfect involves a willingness to take chances and make mistakes without an unhealthy preoccupation with the need to be perfect. In other words, the courage to be imperfect requires that individuals experience comfort with their best effort. Having courage is yet another important construct Adler discussed within his theory.

**Courage.** Adler (in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1979) discussed courage and ways that courage influences individuals’ mental health, ability to meet life tasks, and functioning in society. He believed that courage involves a willingness to participate in life without necessarily knowing the outcome prior to participation. When people lack courage, they believe they need to have guarantees about the outcomes of situations before they are willing to participate (West & Bubenzer, 2012). Adler thought that when individuals are lacking courage or social interest they struggle with their life tasks. For example, in a working environment a co-worker may appear to not be completing his or her fair share of project responsibilities. This individual may be experiencing fear (lack of courage) of taking on responsibility for a large portion of a work project. As a result, this individual would be overly dependent on others in the workplace to complete the project. From an Adlerian perspective, this individual would be lacking courage and social interest stemming from fear surrounding his or her ability to competently complete a project and disregard for how his or her absence of effort is impacting colleagues.
All of the constructs reviewed (life tasks, life style, superiority, and courage) are essential elements of Individual Psychology; however, none have been as lasting or influential as social interest. Social interest has been described as the Adler’s criterion for mental health (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Bass et al., 2002; LaFountain, 1996). It was important though to first review his other constructs because they all have ties to social interest. In the remainder of this chapter I define and describe social interest and review relevant research and writings involving this construct.

**Social Interest**

Social interest is the key aspect of Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology. Adler first mentioned *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* (translated from German to English as social interest) in 1918. He described social interest as a sense of social feeling and an “interest in the interests of others” (Ansbacher, 1977, p. 57). The construct has been Adler’s most lasting legacy and the most well known component of his theory of Individual Psychology. Social interest has been described as including a feeling of belongingness, and a relationship with one’s community and greater society as a whole (Ansbacher, 1991). Individuals with high levels of social interest are not only concerned with society as it functions currently, but also have concern surrounding society’s potential for the future. Adler (1964) believed that all people have an inherent ability for social interest, but that it must be actively fostered throughout one’s life in order for individuals to reach their greatest social interest potential.

Following Adler, many theorists have put forth efforts to further define social interest. Crandall (1977) stated that social interest “involves interest and concern for the
interest and welfare of others” (p. 140). More recently, Watts (2012) asserted that when translating Adler’s words from German to English, the construct cannot be considered without the ideas of both social interest and community feeling, and furthermore that social interest is often the product of those who have a genuine sense of community.

Followers of Adler tend to agree that social interest involves characteristics of empathy, sympathy, caring for others, and actions taken to benefit others (Crandall, 1975). Individuals with high levels of social interest tend to have strong feelings of belongingness or identification with a social group and characteristics such as selflessness, egalitarianism, cooperation, and supportiveness (Ansbacher, 1991). Overall though, there is unanimous agreement from proponents of individual psychology that social interest is a fundamental aspect of mental health (Bass et al., 2002). It is important to note that social interest does not just involve feelings and thoughts (such as empathy) but also includes behaviors and actions one takes to provide service to and work with others towards their interests or the general interests of society (Ansbacher, 1991). Social interest involves an aspect of equality in that people demonstrating social interest work alongside rather than above others, cooperating to aid individuals and the community. Furthermore, it involves working with individuals who one may identify as similar to or different from oneself.

Adler believed that humans are born as social beings (Ansbacher, 1977). As such, interactions between individuals, communities, and society are key to healthy development and functioning. In efforts to better explain social interest, Kaplan (1991) outlined behaviors, thoughts, and feelings frequently associated with social interest.
Some examples Kaplan provided include sharing, helping, experiencing empathy, encouraging and supporting others, advocating for equal rights, thinking about the betterment of the community, and reflecting on others’ well-being. Individuals with heightened social interest tend to be more mentally healthy and well adjusted. Furthermore, similarities between individuals with elevated levels of social interest and those who have reached self-actualization have been noted (Ansbacher, 1991). Additionally, individuals lacking a sense of social interest frequently experience challenges in their relationships, self-esteem, work endeavors, and psychological well-being (Ansbacher, 1991; Crandall, 1975; Ostrovsky, Parr, & Gradel, 1992). Adler reminded us that social interest and willingness to work with one another are two of the strongest ways to prevent and alleviate violence, mental health problems, and maladjustment (Maniaci, 2012).

Researchers since Adler have focused on the relationship between social interest, mental health, and psychological well-being. Many of their results suggest correlational relationships between social interest and constructs related to well-being and health. For example, Crandall has conducted extensive research on social interest and results of his studies have suggested that individuals with high levels of social interest also have more cooperative behavior (Crandall & Harris, 1976), feel less hostility and a more positive outlook towards others (Crandall, 1977), experience more meaning in life (Crandall, 1975), and also have better overall well-being (Crandall & Putnam, 1980). Research has also demonstrated social interest as a significant predictor of health in adults represented
by heightened health, low somatic symptoms, and experiences of higher energy levels (Zarski, Bubenzer, & West, 1986).

Social interest has been negatively correlated with constructs such as depression (Crandall, 1975) and hopelessness (Miller, Denton & Tobacyk, 1986). Logan, Kern, Curlette, and Trad (1993) examined the relationship between social interest and adjustment in approximately 130 couples, the majority of whom were married. When comparing couples with high levels of social interest to couples with lower levels of social interest, those with high levels of social interest reported better adjustment or quality within their relationship as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). These are just some examples of important positive and negative correlations that heightened levels of social interest have with constructs that are essential aspects of mental well-being.

With the noted positive outcomes of increased social interest and negative factors frequently related to individuals lacking social interest, it makes sense that social interest has been a topic of study for those in helping professions. Qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to research social interest; however, the multidimensional and abstract nature of the construct has led to challenges in measuring and studying social interest quantitatively. Bass et al.’s (2002) meta analysis of social interest research reflected some of these challenges. Bass and colleagues examined various social interest measures including the Social Interest Index (SII; Greer et al., 1973), Sulliman’s Scale of Social Interest (SSSI; Sulliman, 1973), the Social Interest Scale (SIS; Crandall, 1981), the Life Style Personality Inventory (LSPI; Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1982), and the
Basic Adlerian Scale for Interpersonal Success – Adult Form (BASIS-A; Curlette, Wheeler, & Kern, 1993). This meta-analysis included 124 studies that used one or more of these instruments. When comparing the social interest measures with one another, however, correlations were low (.08 to .22) suggesting the various measures examine different areas of the construct. Because of the challenges in measuring social interest, some researchers have decided to focus on qualitative methods to explore the construct. Provided next is a review of social interest related research. Because the focus of the current study involves social interest related to young children, the studies outlined below begin with those involving young adults and end with studies involving youth.

**Research involving social interest.** Social interest has been explored with a multitude of constructs, populations, and contexts such as locus of control (Ashby, Kottman, & Draper, 2002), moral reasoning and development (Christopher, Manaster, Campbell, & Weinfeld, 2002; Ostrovsky et al., 1992), family characteristics (P. Johnson, Smith, & Nelson, 2003), adolescents with conduct disorder (Sweitzer, 2005), peer counseling programs (Barkley, Wilborn, & Towers, 1984), and other school related contexts (Brigman & Molina, 1999; Clark, 1995; Edwards, Gfroerer, Flowers, & Whitaker, 2004; Guzick, Dorman, Groff, Altermatt, & Forsyth, 2004; LaFountain, 1996; Lee, 2014; Oberst, 2009). In Bass and colleagues’ (2002) meta analysis of social interest, they noted the construct has been examined in the literature over 260 times since 1977. Described next are just some of the research studies that have been conducted regarding social interest.
Ashby and colleagues (2002) used a sample of 262 college students to examine social interest and locus of control with the Social Interest Scale (SIS; Crandall, 1981) and the Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (LOCS; Levenson, 1974). Having a strong internal locus of control, similar to social interest, has been noted as having a significant positive relationship with mental health. Furthermore, individuals with an internal locus of control tend to be more community service and action oriented. Ashby and colleagues’ findings suggested a statistically significant relationship between the two constructs (internal locus of control and social interest); additionally, external locus of control was a significant predictor of lower levels of social interest.

Christopher and colleagues (2002) also explored social interest using a sample of 124 undergraduate and graduate students. Their study, however, explored social interest along with Abraham Maslow’s idea of peak experiences (times of identity awareness) and Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. The authors provided reasoning for the inclusion of these constructs in the same study noting that Maslow’s concept of self-actualization is best represented by individuals who have high social interest. Although the study resulted in mixed findings due to using two separate instruments to measure social interest, peak experiences were positively correlated with social interest when measured by one scale (the Tavis Measure of Social Interest; TMSI, Tavis, 1990) suggesting a positive relationship between individuals with higher levels of social interest and identity awareness.

Continuing with young adult’s social interest, P. Johnson and colleagues (2003) explored a variety of demographic variables in a sample of 813 undergraduate students to
examine correlations between these variables and social interest using the Social Interest Scale (SIS; Crandall, 1981). Findings suggested that feelings of unity within the family and experiencing less family conflict correlated with higher levels of social interest in college students sampled. These findings mirrored Adler’s (1964) notions that supportive families with nurturing relationships tend to foster social interest in children whereas children developing in families that experience significant conflict and turmoil struggle to develop social interest to the same degree. The findings in these studies (Ashby et al., 2002; Christopher et al., 2002; P. Johnson et al., 2003) encourage one to wonder how the college students who demonstrated higher levels of social interest in these studies developed social interest, and if this was fostered in early childhood. Furthermore, if social interest is being actively fostered in childhood, what activities are contributing to these efforts, and how do children and parents perceive and understand these experiences. I explore these areas in the current study through interviewing parents about how they perceive and understand their children’s involvement in social interest experiences.

Social interest has also been explored in adolescent populations. Sweitzer (2005) examined the relationship between social interest and self-concept in adolescents diagnosed with conduct disorder. Sixty participants were involved in the study from ages 14 to 17; 30 participants were diagnosed with conduct disorder and 30 were used as a control group. Participants’ social interest and self-concept were explored using the SIS (Crandall, 1981) and the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale (Piers, 1984). Sweitzer also collected additional data through participant interviews. Results suggested that self-concept and social interest were significantly lower in adolescents with conduct
disorder when compared to adolescents in the control group; also, a more significant relationship was present between the two constructs in adolescents without conduct disorder sampled. Qualitative interviews involved gaining reflections from the adolescents with conduct disorder about social interest and situations depicting social interest. Analysis of this qualitative data resulted in themes suggesting that these adolescents frequently felt defensive, lacked self-awareness, and struggled to trust others. These themes reflect diagnostic criteria of individuals with conduct disorder, but also, from an Adlerian perspective, reflect characteristics of one with low courage and social interest.

When thinking about how to help youth, including those with conduct disorder, Guzick et al. (2004) asserted that instead of focusing efforts on intervention, professionals should be thinking about prevention and ways to foster youth’s prosocial behavior. Focusing on social interest is a natural way to encourage this prosocial behavior and extra curricular activities could be one such preventative method for fostering prosocial behaviors and attitudes, such as social interest, in youth. Gilman (2001) examined social interest, life satisfaction, and participation in extracurricular activities in a sample of 515 high school aged students. In adolescents sampled, higher levels of social interest were significantly related to overall life satisfaction and satisfaction in relationships with friends and family. Furthermore, adolescents who participated in structured school activities reported experiencing more of this life satisfaction.
Guzick and colleagues (2004) were interested in exploring youth experiences that may contribute to higher adult levels of social interest. They had 146 young adults reflect on their experiences during adolescence and complete a social interest measure in efforts to determine if adults with higher levels of social interest shared common experiences during adolescence. Overall, factors such as feeling connected to the community and having positive relationships with family and teachers during adolescence correlated with adult measures of social interest. This encourages one to think about how we can help our youth to experience a sense of connectedness to the community. Furthermore, findings from Guzick and colleagues provide rationale for further research investigating social interest in youth. In particular, their study suggests a relationship between social interest and positive relationships with family and teachers. This prompts one to think about how focusing on social interest at a young age could help to strengthen these relationships and the role schools could hold in this process.

**Social interest in schools.** Social interest has been examined in school contexts with students ranging from high school to older elementary school. While I included some research studies in this section (e.g., Barkley et al., 1984; Edwards et al., 2004; Lee, 2014), the majority of literature published on this topic involves proposed social interest school-wide programing (e.g., Brigman & Molina, 1999; Clark, 1995; Oberst, 2009; Ostrovsky et al., 1992) as opposed to research studies. Additionally, the school based programming that has been developed primarily focuses on older youth, such as those in middle or high school, not young children. Again, research investigating social interest in early childhood is limited.
Barkley and colleagues (1984) explored social interest in a high school setting to investigate whether peer counseling programs could be used to foster social interest in adolescent students. The researchers created an experimental (22 students) and control group (23 students) of high school students; the experimental group participated in preparation tasks to become peer counselors (e.g., classes and discussions about peer counseling) and then conducted peer counseling with younger students and nursing home residents. Pre and post test measures including the Social Interest Index (SII: Greever et al., 1973) were used to examine quantitative differences between the peer counseling group and control group. Furthermore, the researchers also collected qualitative data in the form of school counselor statements, observations of students, and student written assignments. Barkley and colleagues’ quantitative findings suggested females SII scores in the experimental group were significantly higher after participating in the peer counseling program. No statistical significance, however, was present when examining men in the experimental group’s pre and post test scores. Qualitative data suggested that, overall, male and female participants in the experimental group experienced heightened social interest after participating in peer counseling, though these findings were particularly evident with female participants as well. The authors noted that their findings support the notion that social interest can be fostered, particularly during adolescence, and that efforts should be taken to do so. Results from this study, like others, encourage one to think about how social interest can be fostered not only in adolescence, but early childhood as well.
Lee (2014) examined social interest, assertiveness, and peer acceptance through assessing a sample of 441 fifth and sixth grade South Korean students. Findings suggested that proactive assertiveness was positively correlated with peer acceptance despite students’ levels of social interest, whereas students with reactive assertiveness only experienced peer acceptance if they had a high level of social interest. Reactive assertiveness refers to a person’s behavior after experiencing assertive or aggressive behavior from others. For these students, social interest was an important factor in their ability to have social relationships with others. Furthermore, social interest, or a sense of caring for others and willingness to help others, seemed to buffer potential negative outcomes of reactive assertive communication.

Edwards and colleagues (2004) were also interested in the important role social interest plays in young persons’ well-being. They were particularly interested in how social interest relates to their ability to identify coping skills. Authors described that their interest in this topic resulted from their appreciation of prevention and resiliency fostering efforts. Furthermore, authors stated they believe these efforts are important in today’s society where children are exposed to more violence and bullying and experience higher levels of stress when compared with previous years.

As such, Edwards and colleagues (2004) conducted a study to examine the relationship between social interest and coping resources in 129 third grade students. This relationship was explored using the belonging scale of the Basic Adaptive Styles in Schools-Childhood measure (BASIS-C; Curlette, Wheeler, & Kern, 1997) and the Coping Resources Inventory Scale for Educational Enhancement (CRISEE; Curlette et
al., 1999) after children participated in a school counselor led lesson on social interest. Authors described that they used the belonging scale of the BASIS-C due to the essential role belongingness plays in social interest. Results suggested a significant positive relationship between social interest and coping resources in children, specifically that children’s sense of belonging has an effect on their identified coping resources. In other words, children who experienced a greater sense of belonging were more able to identify coping resources for stressful situations.

Brigman and Molina (1999) used The Living, Learning and Working Program to involve fourth and fifth grade students in service opportunities including teaching younger peers. Through this program they focused on five social skills including understanding self and others, empathy, communication, cooperation, and making a responsible contribution. These five areas were chosen in efforts to foster social interest. The students involved were educated on these five areas and then the students taught those same topics to younger children through reading stories, role play, and discussion. While no outcome research was conducted, authors noted the important role school counselors could play in implementing this program in their schools.

Oberst (2009) also focused on fostering social interest in schools through developing her own Adlerian approach to education in efforts to integrate a social interest program in the schools, which she called Education for Living Together. This program combines Adlerian elements with concepts outlined by Rudolf Dreikurs to help youth experiencing behavior related issues in schools. The program aims to help these youth by educating teachers about how to focus on Adlerian principles including social interest.
when interacting with youth who have behavior issues rather than focusing on their diagnosis or challenges. Oberst emphasized, “social interest is taught and learned by experiencing it” (2009, p. 407).

LaFountain (1996) believed Adlerian concepts hold important implications for youth as well, and as such incorporated such concepts (including social interest) into solution focused school counseling groups. He assessed goals formed by 177 students in these groups to determine whether the goal expressed social interest. Results suggested that students met social interest related goals more frequently than goals that did not reflect social interest. These findings could suggest that students with higher levels of social interest are more likely to achieve established goals or that including goals which reflect social interest into counseling plans could increase one’s likelihood of obtaining them.

Other authors have suggested ways to foster and focus on social interest in schools. For example, Ostrovsky and colleagues (1992) encouraged educators to use social stories with young children and service activities with high school aged youth to promote social interest and moral development. Clark (1995) also wrote about fostering social interest in youth and asserted that when thinking about promoting social interest in schools, it is important to identify activities that are meaningful and involve serving others. Clark discussed a program for enhancing social interest in a school district called the SHARON program. Through this program Clark identified social interest related activities which were already taking place at schools within a district and incorporated further activities such as school and community service, peer tutoring and mediation, and
collaborative projects. Clark discussed the implementation of this program and potential means for assessment using measures such as Crandall’s Social Interest Scale (SIS; 1981) though no outcome measures were presented in this article.

The literature reviewed above involved individuals ranging from young adulthood to older elementary school. These authors, through their research and writings, have conveyed the positive relationship social interest holds with several mental health related constructs such as internal locus of control (Ashby et al., 2002), identity development (Christopher et al., 2002), positive perceptions of familial relationships (P. Johnson et al., 2003), and youth’s coping skills (Edwards et al., 2004). Furthermore, several authors have emphasized social interest through school wide programming such as the SHARON program (Clark, 1995), peer counseling initiatives (Barkley et al., 1984), The Living, Learning, and Working Program (Brigman & Molina, 1999), and Education for Living Together (Oberst, 2009).

Research regarding social interest in early childhood is lacking in the literature. In efforts to better understand how social interest develops, and how it can be supported, it is important to focus on social interest in this population. Research supports social interest’s role in mental health. In efforts to bolster social interest, and the mental health of young children throughout development, more research must be conducted to better understand social interest in early childhood. One appropriate way of focusing on social interest in early childhood is through interviewing young children’s parents. Provided next is a rationale for why this research topic should be extended to focus on early childhood and implications for children’s mental health. This is particularly relevant in
regards to the current study where I explored parents’ perceptions and understandings of their children’s involvement in social interest activities.

**Social interest and early childhood.** Adler (1964) stated that social interest is not inborn in individuals, but rather that each person has the ability to develop social interest. He went on to say that in order for individuals to reach their full social interest potential, the construct must be fostered throughout a person’s life. As such, the experiences throughout one’s development, including during early childhood, can be crucial in developing social interest. Fostering and supporting social interest development in young children could have positive implications for their mental health and overall well-being. Brigman and Molina (1999) noted that children with low social interest and poor social skills struggle academically. Furthermore, social interest positively impacts various areas of mental health and adjustment throughout development including one’s ability to cope with stress and experience increased meaning in life (Adler 1931, 1964). Clark (1995) discussed the importance of focusing on children’s social interest within their school environment through programs such as peer mediation, service learning, and collaborative projects.

There is a lack of research related to young children’s social interest. When conducting the literature review for this study, I was only able to identify one published research piece that discussed social interest in childhood. The study involved elementary school aged children, specifically third grade students (Edwards et al., 2004). This is disconcerting because Adler (1931) himself believed it was important to focus more holistically on our youth and emphasize social interest development. He specifically
talked about this in regards to children’s educational experiences and the value in moving beyond academic content towards fostering development of the whole child. Additionally, Oberst (2009) discussed the responsibility that parents and educators have to go beyond helping youth develop intellectually and focus also on areas such as moral development and social interest in youth. In Walton’s (2012) words about the relevance of Adler’s work, he stated,

In this day when a great many young children commonly spend as much time in the early childhood education center as they do with parents, we have begun to recognize the tremendous opportunity that exists to teach preschool children to care about fellow human beings. (p. 13)

Oberst (1999) challenged individuals in education and other fields to think about the role of social interest in current society especially when reflecting on child development. Social interest is expressed in one’s environment; for young children this typically includes at home with their family and at school with peers. This environment then broadens to the greater community and society as children age. By and large though, the majority of children’s social interactions take place within the family and at school. Therefore, the school environment creates a natural space to explore and foster social interest and parents are appropriate individuals who could provide information about their children’s social interest development. Adler himself emphasized the importance of incorporating socially responsible methods when working with young children (Oberst, 1999). Though it has been about 100 years since Adler first began
discussing social interest, the role of this construct in healthy development and well-being of children continues to be significant (Lemberger & Krauss, 2013).

**Individual psychology and parenting.** Adler believed that parents have a large influence throughout development on the mental health of their children. Rudolf Dreikurs, a contemporary of Adler’s, agreed with this assertion (Dreikurs, 1946; Dreikurs & Grey, 1992). Ferguson (2001) asserted that, “By uniquely and innovatively integrating the importance of social values into a theory of personality and personal dynamics, Adler and Dreikurs dealt effectively with issues of the individual in therapy as well as in school, family, and the workplace” (p. 326). Dreikurs, similar to Adler, emphasized the overwhelming influence that parents and particularly parenting style can have on the mental health of children (Dreikurs & Grey, 1992; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1999; Ferguson, 2001). Furthermore, both Adler and Dreikurs believed that the personality and characteristics children develop result from their primary environments and relationships created within the family and at school.

Adler and Dreikurs supported a more authoritative style of parenting through which parents emphasize aspects such as limit-setting, respect for one another, egalitarianism, self-control, and problem-solving (Ferguson, 2001; Gfroerer, Kern, & Curlette, 2004). Authoritative parents have more democratic relationships with their children, which involve respect demonstrated through wellness promoting actions toward all individuals and society as a whole (Ferguson, 2001). Furthermore, parents who employ this parenting style solicit feedback from their children when making decisions while also ensuring that outcomes are appropriate for their children. When using an
authoritative approach to parenting, parents utilize natural and logical consequences with their children instead of punishment. This authoritative parenting style has proven to be successful; children raised by parents that use this parenting style tend to succeed more in school, have fewer issues with substance use, and experience better mental and emotional well-being (Gfroerer et al., 2004).

Many constructs fostered through a democratic parenting style (such as empathy, mutual respect, and responsibility) are congruent with areas on which parents could focus to encourage their children’s social interest development (Crandall, 1975; Gfroerer et al., 2004; Kaplan, 1991; Watts, 2012). Moore and McDowell’s (2014) assertions surrounding the important responsibility parents have to help children experience a sense of belongingness as part of the community also mirror some of these social interest related characteristics. Social interest involves a feeling of belongingness and connection to the community along with concern regarding the interests and needs of the community (Watts, 2012). Adler himself emphasized parents’ responsibility to help their children experience a sense of belongingness within the family and society, furthermore that this feeling is an essential aspect social interest and of mental health (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Parents who employ an authoritative style of parenting typically have cooperative relationships with their children. As such, this parenting style, one which emphasizes cooperative relationships, can aid in developing children’s social interest (Gfroerer et al., 2004).

As stated, parents can play an integral role in fostering their children’s social interest. Leak and Williams (1989) asked young adults to complete social interest and
family environment inventories to retroactively assess this role parents can play in fostering social interest. Results suggested that young adults with higher levels of social interest described their family environment throughout development as one that “places an emphasis on intellectual, social, and ethical activities and value orientations” (Leak & Williams, 1989, p. 366). Adler believed that children’s social interest initially develops in their relationship with their mother (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Today, however, one could broaden this to conclude that social interest develops through children’s relationships with their primary caregivers.

Kopp (2003) stated that parents help children to construct a sense of who they are with themselves and others, which then influences how they relate to others, and participate generally in life. Children’s experiences at home are an essential part of developing social interest. Despite the important role parents and other primary caregivers (i.e., teachers and schools) can take in helping their young children to develop social interest, research on this topic is limited. In order for counselors to better understand how to work with parents to develop their young children’s social interest, it would be helpful to understand parents’ perceptions of their children’s social interest experiences. Greater insight into this parent perspective could provide counselors with further knowledge of how to work alongside parents to enhance mental health outcomes for their children.

Summary of Introduction and Literature Review

In Chapter 1, I outlined several important concepts that are central to Adlerian therapy including social interest, and research and literature that provide relevant context
for the current study. Despite the number of years that have passed since Adler’s first writings about social interest, the construct continues to hold significant relevance today (Lemberger & Krauss, 2013). Children in schools today are facing significant challenges with bullying, increasing antisocial behavior, and violence (Guzick et al., 2004). Guzick and colleagues discussed the potential impact of taking proactive approaches to foster social interest in youth instead of waiting to focus on enhancing social interest and empathy after a negative event has occurred. With the continual pressures to achieve academically, improve testing scores, and be up to date with the newest gadgets in an ever growing technology driven world, it is important now more than ever that we continue to focus on promoting the development of social interest in our youth (Herman 2012; Stipek, 2006).

As outlined in Chapter 1, Adler asserted that social interest is the criterion for mental health (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Also, lower levels of social interest have been affiliated with more negative attributes such as poor social skills and academic struggles (Brigman & Molina, 1999). Parents can play an integral role in supporting their young children’s social interest development. It is important that counselors comprehend how parents perceive and understand focusing on social interest related endeavors with their children in efforts to know how to work alongside parents in schools or clinical mental health counseling settings to focus on the development of this construct in young children. Therefore, through this study, I aimed to better understand parents’ perceptions of their children’s school-organized social interest experiences to inform clinical mental health and school counseling practice.
The research question guiding this dissertation was: How do parents perceive and understand their young children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences? In Chapter 2, I reviewed why interpretive description, a qualitative approach, allowed me to appropriately explore this research question. Also, I outlined and described the procedures used to complete the current study. In Chapter 3, I provided results from the study including a thematic structure with superordinate and subthemes and participant quotes that provide context for the results. Finally, in Chapter 4, I reviewed the findings from this study in comparison with other literature. I also provided implications for clinical mental health and school counselors along with limitations of the study.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

In the first chapter of this dissertation I reviewed the importance of social interest and literature noting the application of Adler’s theory of individual psychology to work with young adults and youth. Many authors of this literature, along with Adler himself, purported that fostering social interest in individuals throughout their development is imperative to supporting their mental well-being and adjustment (Adler, 1931, 1964; Ashby et al., 2002; Bass et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2004; Hettman & Jenkins, 1990; E. P. Johnson, 1997). While research surrounding social interest in adulthood and adolescence has been documented, research surrounding social interest development in early childhood is limited. This is disconcerting because Adler asserted that a focus on social interest in early childhood is essential to helping one develop social interest (Ansbacher, 1991). An important aspect of fostering social interest in young children includes involving parents in this process. In efforts to better comprehend how parents understand and foster social interest in their young children, I posed the following research question to guide this study: How do parents perceive and understand their young children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences? I used a qualitative approach, interpretive description, to explore this question.

Interpretive Description

Interpretive description is a form of qualitative research that stems from constructivist philosophical foundations. Initially, Sally Thorne (2008) termed this methodology for use in nursing research. In developing this methodology she hoped to
create a framework that would allow nursing researchers to appropriately investigate clinical issues that could inform practice (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997; Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O’Flynn-Magee, 2004). More recently, however, interpretive description has been growing in popularity with other disciplines including psychology (Hunt, 2009; Neely & Holt, 2014; Thorne, 2008). Researchers use interpretive description to explore participant experiences when a more traditional qualitative approach such as phenomenology, ethnography, or grounded theory is not appropriate (Hunt, 2009).

When using interpretive description, the researcher continually attempts to uncover participants’ subjective perspectives while simultaneously gaining an understanding of patterns and commonalities from the dataset as a whole (Hunt, 2009; Thorne, 2008; Thorne et al., 2004). Thorne and colleagues (2004) explained:

The foundation of interpretive description is the smaller scale qualitative investigation of a clinical phenomenon of interest to the discipline for the purpose of capturing themes and patterns within subjective perceptions and generating an interpretive description capable of informing clinical understanding. (p. 5)

Elaborating on this definition, researchers use interpretive description to gather subjective understanding about an experience or concept that can be used to inform practice.

In order to better understand interpretive description, it is important to distinguish the approach from some related and better-known qualitative methodologies such as phenomenology and grounded theory. Researchers using interpretive description are interested in a phenomenon or experience from the subjective view of participants.
However, unlike using phenomenology, the goal is not to learn the underlying structure or essence of an experience. Instead, interpretive description researchers are interested in learning about a phenomenon to inform practice (Oliver, 2012).

When reflecting on the relationship between grounded theory and interpretive description, both approaches use constant comparative methods for analysis. The goal of interpretive description, however, is not development of a theory, which would be the focus for someone completing a grounded theory study. Instead, when completing an interpretive description, the researcher develops themes from patterns that appear to be common across participants. Another distinction between grounded theory and interpretive description involves the coding process that takes place during data analysis. When using interpretive description, rather than performing specific line-by-line coding (which would be used in grounded theory analysis), the researcher asks “broad questions” of the data (Hunt, 2009, p. 1290). Furthermore, interpretive description provides a shorter time frame for data collection and analysis than traditional grounded theory methods (Oliver, 2012). The specific process of analysis that was followed for this study, including questions that were asked of the data, are outlined later in this chapter.

Interpretive description was developed to incorporate strengths from each of these methods into a new framework that included rigor and a variety of different methods. It was created through the intentional development of an approach to research that explores participant understandings of a phenomenon that can provide helpful understandings for practitioners (Hunt, 2009; Oliver, 2012). Researchers using this approach honor subjective individual accounts but also aim to bring to light what is common across
individuals. In honoring these subjective accounts, space is created for the multiple realities represented by different individuals’ perceptions of a phenomenon. Researchers place their focus beyond individual participant accounts and narratives to better comprehend how participants make meaning from and understand phenomena (Thorne et al., 2004).

Researchers using interpretive description are encouraged to position new questions within an existing theory and comprehensive knowledge of the topic. This understanding of the literature and theory provides a foundation for the research process and encourages the researcher to reflect on aspects of the theory that may mold methodological choices throughout data collection and analysis (Thorne et al., 1997). Interpretive description frequently involves purposeful and theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, and a continual process of researcher reflexivity. Thorne (2008) noted that data collection involves purposeful samples that can provide information and perceptions on the phenomena under investigation, but also involves theoretical sampling to gain information from varying perspectives about the phenomena. The researcher engages in constant comparative analysis that begins with data collection and continually analyzes and makes use of memos throughout data collection and analysis. These methods are described and elaborated on further in this chapter.

The research question that I developed for the current study is grounded in Adler’s theory of individual psychology and allowed me to explore a gap in the social interest literature and research. I interviewed parents from varying perspectives to better understand how they have made sense of their children’s involvement in social interest
experiences. From conducting this interpretive description, I developed themes based on parent perceptions and understandings of these experiences to inform clinical mental health and school counseling practice (Thorne, 2008). Specifically, results from this study can aid clinical mental health and school counselors when working with youth and parents from an Adlerian approach.

**Description of the Researcher**

Prior to conducting most forms of qualitative research, it is important for researchers to reflect on their own biases, past experiences, and worldviews to explore how these factors may impact the research process. Thorne (2008) asserted that in order to complete quality interpretive description research, it is imperative for researchers to reflect on these aspects as well. This is just one part of researcher reflexivity, which I discuss further in the trustworthiness section of this chapter. This process allows a researcher to acknowledge biases and mindfully reflect on them throughout the research process. In efforts to remain aware of my assumptions and biases and to be reflexive throughout the research process, I provided a description of myself as the researcher in this methods section. This description includes reflections on my work at the school in which data is being collected and assumptions regarding my work with young children, families, and social interest. Through this process, I worked to more mindfully reflect on my assumptions and preconceived notions (while also realizing it is impossible to completely forget these while conducting research).

As aforementioned, while designing this study it was important for me to reflect on my experiences at the school in which data were collected. I have worked at this early
childhood education center in some capacity for eight years. Throughout this time I have watched teachers and staff invest time and effort into the children to provide them with opportunities for forming relationships with one another, the school, and the greater community. Several of these opportunities have included experiences providing service to others. Watching children enjoy involvement in this service and communicate the importance of helping others has influenced my view on the role social interest can play in the development and well-being of young children.

I have worked in other environments where I actively tried to emphasize Adlerian principles with youth and families including schools and community mental health settings. As a counselor in these settings, I frequently incorporated aspects of Adlerian therapy, and specifically worked with parents to find means for increasing children’s ties to the family and community in efforts to enhance social interest. Many of the outcomes from counseling which I perceived as beneficial were those in which I was able to help parents increase children’s connections and sense of purpose within the family and community. As such, I believe I have observed the positive impacts of fostering social interest through this work with clients. Finally, prior to conducting this study, I completed a thorough review of the literature regarding social interest and Adlerian approaches to counseling, which influenced my understandings of social interest and its implications for mental well-being.

Listed below are my assumptions about the research topic and current study informed by my work with young children at schools and mental health agencies and knowledge from reading literature and research regarding social interest:
1. Young children are capable of enhancing their social interest through the support of adults.

2. Parents play an integral role in fostering social interest in their children.

3. Social interest is an essential aspect of mental well-being.

**Research Context, Sampling Procedures, and Participants**

Participants for this study included parents of children enrolled at an early childhood education center in Ohio. The school currently serves approximately 150 children between the ages of 18 months and 6 years. Based on social constructivism, the school employs an inquiry-based curriculum that widely supports inquiry in the outdoors, encourages children to view themselves as part of a global society, and places an ongoing emphasis on social action and service initiatives. This service is then communicated to parents at the school via email and printed handouts including daily reflections, newsletters, and school-wide documentation. Because teachers and staff at this school emphasize service and cooperative relationships and children viewing themselves as part of a larger global society, I decided this would be an appropriate location to collect data related to social interest.

Jootun, McGhee, and Marland (2009) stated that while at times outsiders look negatively upon conducting research in a familiar setting, it can also offer unique insights to individuals’ stories and aid in forming relationships with participants to gather rich data. I too believe that collecting data at this school offers unique insights into a practice of engaging in service-oriented behaviors and fostering a sense of community caring which is a norm at this school. Furthermore, interviewing this specific group of parents
offered insights to various aspects of social interest development in early childhood. The work of individuals in this school provides a prime opportunity to capture a greater understanding of social interest in early childhood.

I chose to interview parents for the current study because they are in a natural position to foster social interest in their children. Furthermore, learning more about how parents perceive and understand their children’s involvement in social interest related experiences holds implications for ways that school counselors and clinical mental health counselors work with children and families from an Adlerian approach (Ansbacher, 1991). With a greater understanding of these areas, school counselors could learn more about effective ways to implement social interest programming in schools and how to encourage parents to follow up on these experiences at home. Additionally, clinical mental health counselors could develop greater insight into how to work alongside parents to support their children’s social interest development. Finally, findings from this study could be used to begin to develop a questionnaire for parents of young children to assess their children’s level of social interest as no such measure has been created to assess the construct in young children.

For this study, a purposeful sample of parents with children enrolled at the university school described above was selected. Based on the research question and purpose of the study, participant inclusion criteria for the current study consisted of the following: (a) being a parent of a child enrolled in preschool or kindergarten at the early childhood education center during the 2014–2015 academic year, and (b) being able and willing to participate in an individual interview and focus group in English. A
combination of purposeful and theoretical sampling was used to recruit participants for the study.

Thorne (2008) stated that interpretive description studies tend to involve smaller samples consisting of 5 to 30 participants. The current study involved 14 parents; 10 individual parents and two spousal couples. I continued with data collection until it appeared saturation was approached, a concept which I describe comprehensively later in this chapter.

**Purposeful Sampling**

Purposeful sampling is typically used for data collection in traditional qualitative studies to learn more about a specific group of individuals’ experiences or points of view (Creswell, 2007). I used purposeful sampling by identifying the early childhood education center where participants were recruited prior to collecting data. I then incorporated theoretical sampling to identify further participants within the school as the study progressed. Thorne and colleagues (1997) suggested that when conducting an interpretive description it is helpful to purposefully select “participants whose accounts reveal elements that are to some degree shared by others” (p. 174). As I explained in the research context section of this chapter, the children of parents at this school have all had similar service experiences and parents have been provided information about these experiences from the school. Therefore, the purposeful sample of parents used for this study has had a similar experience.
Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling involves targeting individuals who can provide the most likely variations within the phenomenon under investigation (Thorne et al., 1997). As I began developing codes and themes through data analysis, theoretical sampling helped me to further develop these categories by targeting certain individuals who were able to speak more to various topics that appeared to be underdeveloped. For example, one topic that emerged through individual interviews was the concept of privilege. I continued to have questions about this topic and not fully understand how parents perceived privilege as playing a role in their understandings of their children’s service work. As such, I began asking parents about this topic of privilege as interviews continued. Additionally, I sought to interview parents from varying races and family structures in efforts to better understand this developing concept of privilege.

Charmaz (2014) described theoretical sampling as “seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories” (p. 192). I engaged in theoretical sampling to help with developing categories and identifying a saturation point. Therefore, my goal in theoretical sampling was not to uncover what was unusual or unexpected, but rather what I would expect from varying interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation, parents’ perceptions of young children’s social interest experiences. If participants in interviews discussed something that appeared to be bizarre or unexpected, I placed this to the side and revisited the topic after further interviews to see if it appeared to be supported by others’ experiences and statements. During this process, no topics discussed were so far out of the ordinary that other parents did not
mention them. These topics through coding and developing emerging themes were then accounted for within the final thematic structure (Thorne et al., 2004).

Participants

The purposeful and theoretical sampling outlined above resulted in 14 participants (10 individuals, and 2 couples) who I interviewed regarding their perceptions and understandings of their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences. All participants involved in the current study met the inclusion criteria of being: (a) a parent of a child enrolled in preschool or kindergarten at the early childhood education center during the 2014–2015 academic year, and (b) able and willing to participate in an individual interview and focus group in English. Parents were assigned pseudonyms in efforts to protect their confidentiality.

Of the parents involved in the current study, 12 identified as Caucasian and 2 identified as African American. Parents’ ages ranged from 31 to 47 and the majority of parents I interviewed were mothers; however, three participants were fathers. Parents involved with this study reported having between one and four children with ages ranging from four months to 12 years. Nine of the parents were married (including the two couples involved with the study), four parents reported being single, and one parent identified as being partnered and not married. The parents involved with the study represented a rather educated group of adults; five reported having their PhD, seven held a master’s degree, one a bachelor’s degree, and one parent had his GED. This reflects the educational make-up of the university-based early childhood education center where data
were collected. In efforts to uphold participant confidentiality, I am not including a more detailed table of participant demographics.

**Data Collection**

Data collection for this study primarily consisted of individual interviews with parents. However, I also conducted a focus group following the interviews to engage parents in a feedback process to review preliminary topics, themes, and patterns. After I obtained approval from the early childhood education center’s director (Appendix A) and the university’s Internal Review Board (Appendix B) I began contacting participants. I attended parent meetings at the beginning of the school year to inform parents about the study and solicit participation (see script in Appendix C). Following the parent meetings, I contacted all parents with children enrolled in preschool and kindergarten during the 2014–2015 school year via email with a formal letter of invitation to participate in the study (Appendix D). This email was sent a total of three times in order to gain an adequate number of participants for the study. In this letter of invitation, I included a brief description of the study along with a definition/description of social interest to help parents better understand the purpose of the research. Attached to this email were consent forms (Appendix E) and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix F), which parents were instructed to complete and return to express interest in participation. In this demographic questionnaire participants noted their age, gender, race, highest level of education, partnership status, the number of children they have, ages of their children, and the number of years their children have attended the school in this study. I collected
this demographic information to gain a better understanding of the general characteristics of participants involved with the study.

After parents responded to the email with a completed demographic questionnaire expressing interest in participation, I informed them via email that they had been added to a pool of potential participants and that, if selected, their interview would take place between August and November of 2015 at a time that would be convenient for them (see Appendix G). Parents were also notified in this response email that they would be kept up to date on the research process including the conclusion of data collection (see Appendix H). Anytime a parent responded with a completed demographic questionnaire they were added to the pool of potential participants. I initially contacted the first two parents with completed demographic questionnaires to begin the interview process. Parents were informed that if they wanted to bring their partner or their children’s other parent/guardian to the interview they were welcome to do so (consent documents were collected for the two parents who chose to bring their partners to the interview).

Because I used theoretical sampling for this study, further participants were identified based on varying perspectives I was trying to gain about the phenomenon under investigation. Thorne and colleagues (1997) noted that it is not always possible to know these variations until data collection has begun. This process was directed by my data analysis and identifying codes and themes that required more explanation to be fully developed. Examples of other ways that I sought out varying perspectives included sampling to target participants with different family structures (single parent and two parent families), parents of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, and male and female
parents. This became particularly important when parents started discussing the theme of privilege during their interviews. I intentionally sought to include parents from varying demographic backgrounds to provide further clarification to this topic and was able to base some of these decisions on the demographic information provided by the parents.

**Interview Protocol**

After agreeing to participate in the study I worked with participants to establish a date and time for the individual interview (see individual protocol in Appendix I). I conducted all interviews face to face in a conference room at the school because it is a quiet and confidential space that was convenient for parents. Also, I audio-recorded all interviews for the purposes of transcription and data analysis. All data remained on a password locked computer, and/or in locked filing cabinets at the school. I transcribed all interviews and, in attempts to uphold confidentiality, all participants were assigned a pseudonym so their actual names were not listed with any transcriptions or research-related documents with the exception of consent forms, which were not linked in any way to the data. When participants arrived for the interview at a mutually agreed upon time, I discussed the information in the consent forms, and asked if they had any questions about the study. Though parents were provided with consent forms via email, many did not have them printed and signed so I brought extra copies to the interview, reviewed all of the documents, and made sure to obtain signatures at that time.

Because it is essential that participants understand what social interest entails in order to participate in conversation about the construct, I again provided participants with a description of social interest. I also provided a list of the service experiences in which
their children were engaged at the school during the 2014–2015 school year (Appendix J). I reviewed this information with the participants and encouraged them to ask any questions remaining about the study or information provided. Every participant received the same definition of social interest and list of service experiences in an effort to enhance continuity across interviews and methodological procedures.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature; through this format I was able to ask participants specific questions while also creating space for conversation with participants surrounding their children’s social interest experiences (Creswell, 2007). Semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to openly discuss their experiences without adhering to answering specific scripted questions. At the same time, however, this format of interviewing encouraged me to think ahead of time about topics that should be covered during the interview and offered questions to redirect the interview if conversation strayed significantly from the research topic. I developed questions to help participants reflect on and explore their perceptions surrounding their children’s involvement in service experiences. I also used follow up questions when appropriate for clarification and to gain thick and rich descriptions from the participants.

As discussed, I developed an individual interview protocol prior to starting the study including interview questions. Some questions were not asked directly if the topic was covered as a result of naturally occurring conversation during the interview. The questions I included in the interview protocol were designed to encourage parents’ reflection on topics related to the research question: How do parents perceive and
understand their young children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences?

Data Analysis

Researchers using interpretive description support the notion that knowledge is co-constructed with participants (Hunt, 2009). This co-construction along with the researcher’s use of an interpretive lens forms the foundation of interpretive description analysis. Researchers use this interpretive lens to discern what data are worthy of inclusion in analysis and results (Thorne et al., 2004). In other words, I used my interpretive lens to decide which data represented what one would categorize as normal variation within the phenomenon under investigation. Thorne and colleagues (2010) discussed that when using interpretive description, data collection and analysis are processes that occur simultaneously and continuously. As a result, data collection is constantly informing analysis and vice versa.

Prior to conducting this study I created a tentative calendar for data collection and analysis that I included in the appendix of this dissertation (Appendix K). I also provided a flowchart depicting the actual timeline of data collection and analysis (see Table 1). When considering specific procedural steps for data analysis, Thorne (2008) suggested that drawing from more formal forms of analysis, such as grounded theory approaches, could be helpful for interpretive description. Even though, as asserted earlier, the goal of interpretive description is not to develop a theory, grounded theory analysis is frequently used in interpretive description studies with modifications to account for the goals of a researcher using interpretive description.
Table 1

*Data Collection and Analysis Flowchart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1 <em>Began August 31, 2015</em></th>
<th>Weeks 2–3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB approval</td>
<td>Received 5 completed demographic forms from potential participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended parent meetings</td>
<td>Conducted individual interviews with the first three participants who responded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emailed parents with participation invitation</td>
<td>Transcribed 3 individual interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coded 3 individual interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 4–5</th>
<th>Weeks 6–7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sent out a second request for participants email</td>
<td>Sent out a third request for participants email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received 5 completed demographic forms from potential participants</td>
<td>Received 4 completed demographic forms from potential participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted interviews with 2 individual participants and one couple</td>
<td>Conducted individual interviews with 3 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribed 3 interviews</td>
<td>Transcribed 3 individual interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coded 3 interviews</td>
<td>Coded 3 individual interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met with dissertation co-directors to review data collection/analysis process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 8–9</th>
<th>Weeks 10–12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received 2 completed demographic forms from potential participants</td>
<td>Reviewed, grouped, synthesized, and defined codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted interviews with 2 individual participants and 1 couple</td>
<td>Developed emerging themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribed 3 interviews</td>
<td>Identified saturation point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coded 3 interviews</td>
<td>Met with methodologist to review data collection/analysis process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 13–14</th>
<th>Weeks 15–18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Met with peer reviewer to review data analysis process and emerging themes</td>
<td>Held focus group December 11th, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed handout for focus group reflecting preliminary themes</td>
<td>Transcribed focus group audio-recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzed focus group data and compared with preliminary themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finalized thematic structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For this study, I used a modification of grounded theory analysis as described by Charmaz (2014). Prior to outlining the specific steps I used for data analysis I review two processes in which I engaged throughout data collection and analysis: (a) memoing and (b) constant comparison. Along with engaging in these two processes throughout analysis, I used the following steps to analyze individual interview data for the current study: (a) transcribe individual interviews and read transcriptions, (b) open coding, (c) review codes to determine appropriate future participants, (d) repeat steps one through three for all further interviews, (e) develop themes from codes as patterns arise across participants, (f) identify saturation point, and (g) develop preliminary thematic structure. Following this individual interview analysis I scheduled the participant focus and presented the thematic structure including transcript anecdotes that I developed following analysis. After the focus group I revised and finalized the thematic structure representing the resulting conceptual description. The following further describes how I implemented each analysis step in the current study.

**Memoing**

I engaged in active and frequent memoing throughout this study through writing reflections, questions, or notes during data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Memoing helped me to remember ideas and thoughts I had during interviews that helped to inform analysis, track my reflections and interpretations, and remain actively engaged with the data. As Charmaz (2014) explained, “Memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you
to pursue” (p. 162). This process benefitted me throughout analysis as I began to construct codes and themes and compared data and codes with one another.

I included all memos in my researcher journal and reflected on them regularly, which helped me think critically about my interpretive process throughout the study. Wording I included in my memoing also helped me reflect on the data, develop codes, determine directions for future interviews, and recognize patterns, categories, and themes that developed within the data (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, memoing helped me make decisions regarding theoretical sampling as I made note of areas I wanted to explore further and areas where I noticed gaps in the data or codes. Additionally, through memoing I questioned and reflected on areas I wanted to know more about. The memoing process encouraged me to be reflective and intentional about my research practice and analysis.

**Constant Comparison**

The second process that was a common thread throughout analysis was constant comparison. Simply stated, constant comparison involves continually comparing data with other data. Engaging in constant comparison in the current study involved continual reflection on previous interviews, developing codes and patterns in efforts to identify commonalities within the data, and rendering decisions regarding future directions for data collection. More specifically, I compared incidents within the same individual transcript along with incidents depicted across participants’ transcripts (Charmaz, 2014). Memoing helped me to engage in this constant comparative process through noting and reflecting on participant interviews and emerging patterns. I used constant comparison to
drive my theoretical sampling, and assist me with engaging in an iterative process of focusing on how and from whom I collected data. I engaged in constant comparison and memoing throughout the individual interview analysis steps outlined in the next portion of this data analysis section.

**Individual Interview Analysis**

Individual interview analysis consisted of the following steps: (a) transcribe individual interviews and read transcriptions, (b) open coding, (c) review codes to determine appropriate future participants, (d) repeat steps one through three for all further interviews, (e) develop themes from codes as patterns arise across participants, (f) identify saturation point, and (g) develop preliminary thematic structure.

**Step 1: Transcribe and read transcripts.** I transcribed every audio-recorded interview verbatim within one week of the interview date. I then read the verbatim transcript twice thoroughly before proceeding with further data analysis steps. Transcribing and reading participant transcript allowed me to thoroughly familiarize myself with the data prior to proceeding with data analysis.

**Step 2: Coding.** After reading the transcript, I proceeded with coding. Charmaz (2014) suggested two phases of coding for grounded theory analysis; an initial word-by-word and line-by-line coding process, and a second stage of more focused coding. For the current study, I engaged in one phase of coding in an effort to develop themes and identify patterns from the data, consistent with interpretive description research. Thorne (2008) noted that coding processes that examine small aspects of the data make it difficult for the researcher to construct these themes and patterns for an
interpretive description. Keeping this in mind, I coded by examining larger chunks of the data such as statements, phrases, explanations, and passages provided by participants, rather than individual lines and words. This approach allowed me to stay close to the data, while not becoming preoccupied with scrutinizing individual words or clusters of words. During coding I examined the transcripts more holistically with broad questions such as “What is happening here? What am I learning about this?” (Thorne et al., 1997, p. 147) and “Why is this here? Why not something else? What does this mean?” (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 13). I also reflected on questions more specific to the study such as, What am I seeing here that relates to social interest? What are parents telling me about their children’s social interest? How are parents understanding/interpreting their child’s involvement in these service experiences?

Charmaz (2014) described coding as providing labels to portions of data that allow you to classify and synthesize data while, at the same time, accounting for all parts of the data. Thorne (2008) described coding as

Creating a mechanism by which you can bring together a group of data bits that might be thematically related (or might not) so that you can interrogate that collection, as well as the evolving data construction process, as to what those relationships might look like. (p. 146)

Elaborating on these descriptions, I constructed interpretations of the data to gain understanding and meaning from participant statements. Charmaz’s (2014) explanation of coding (while written for the purposes of grounded theory analysis) meshes well with philosophical underpinnings of interpretive description. Similar to Thorne (2008),
Charmaz also suggested moving beyond the descriptions and statements provided by participants to engage in an interpretive process during analysis. Charmaz discussed the importance of remaining open to developing categories and codes during analysis. While I put forth efforts to do so, I also entered this research with a theoretical framework about social interest. This is congruent with Thorne’s (2008) suggestions to researchers conducting interpretive descriptions in that using a theoretical framework allows research findings to hold potential implications for practice.

I coded each interview individually and then compared the interviews and codes with prior interviews in efforts to engage in constant comparison. Through immediate transcription and preliminary analysis of individual interviews, I was able to learn from beginning interviews to inform later interviews. This process also guided my theoretical sampling by informing me of participants I should seek out to help provide more information regarding under developed codes or areas I continued to have questions about. Through this iterative process I continually constructed and revised codes that informed my choices regarding future participants and guided my topics and questions for the interviews. While developing these codes, I explored them more through interviews with further participants where, if appropriate, I could ask open-ended questions about the codes. In these interviews I also covered topics included in the interview protocol and remained open to new codes as they developed. As I constructed the codes, I was able to edit, reword, and refine codes by engaging in the process of emergent data analysis.
Step 3: Construct initial themes. After completing these first two steps of data analysis, and further interviews did not appear to be leading to the development of or addition to codes, I began constructing initial themes. While this is similar to saturation, I waited until after I developed initial themes to explore saturation more fully because developing initial themes may have led me to believe that I needed to interview more participants to better understand themes I was constructing.

I reviewed and assessed codes for patterns and frequency in order to develop initial themes. This involved more methods of comparison because I examined within and across participant accounts to compare codes and render which codes I believed were more significant or representative of themes and patterns in the data. To aid with this process I used questions posed by Charmaz (2014) including, “In what ways might your initial codes reveal patterns? Which of these codes best account for the data? What do your comparisons between codes indicate?” (pp. 140-141). I also continually reflected on previous memos in efforts to interpret the data and focus on participants’ meaning and understandings of how they perceived and understood their children’s involvement in social interest related experiences.

I used an interpretive lens throughout data analysis, but particularly when developing preliminary themes. When approaching the data with an interpretive lens I critically reflected on the questions posed to help me develop and revise codes and themes. Through this process I was able to define codes (See Appendix L) and then group codes that were related with one another and eliminate codes that were better accounted for by other codes (See Appendix M). For example, codes such as
self-esteem, empowering, leadership, capable, independent, self-concept, and belongingness all seemed to be representative of a larger theme (and the first code listed in this group), self-esteem. Parents discussed all of these codes, however, following analysis it became evident that all of these topics were better explained by children’s self-esteem. As such, self-esteem developed as a theme.

From approaching the data with an interpretive stance I was able to decide if and when codes did not represent what I considered typical variation of an experience as informed by other participants. It is important to note that Thorne and colleagues (2004) asserted that when using interpretive description the researcher decides through analysis and participant data what is relevant for inclusion in findings; Thorne (1997) described this as interpretive authority. For the current study parent statements were rarely not supported by statements from other parents. As such, the perspectives shared by parents in this study were rarely outside of what I considered a typical variation of their understandings of their children’s social interest experiences.

**Step 4: Data saturation.** Data saturation tends to be an abstract concept, and while it is impossible to meet an absolute data saturation as asserted by Thorne (2008), it is possible to continue collecting and analyzing data until similar patterns appear to develop repeatedly. Researchers tend to conceptualize saturation as collecting data until no new information or insights are acquired (Charmaz, 2014; Morse, 1995; Thorne, 2008). Morse (1995) stated that “signals of saturation seem to be determined by investigator proclamation and by evaluating the adequacy and comprehensiveness of the results” (p. 147). While I attended to patterns throughout analysis, as suggested by
Morse, frequency or quantity of data in a theme or area was not considered more important than the richness that developed from comprehensive accounts provided by participants. I considered these areas concurrently when assessing saturation, that is, I examined both repetition of patterns within the data and richness of descriptions provided.

For the purposes of this study, I decided that saturation had been approached when no new codes and themes appeared to be developing from the individual interviews. After the 10th interview I began to notice that developing codes were repetitions of previous codes and were adding to themes that were already constructed, without providing new perspectives or further depth. I then decided to conduct two further interviews to ensure that I had approached saturation as closely as possible. Again, these last two interviews did not add new codes or different perspectives to themes that I was developing through analysis. At this point I decided saturation had been approached. This manner of assessing for saturation allowed for a diversity of examples, perceptions, and information to be included, while maintaining perspective on the overarching picture of the emerging themes. I discuss data saturation further as an element of trustworthiness later in this chapter.

**Step 5: Develop preliminary thematic structure.** I developed a preliminary thematic structure once analysis suggested saturation had been approached and provided this structure to participants during the focus group (see Appendix N). In this preliminary thematic structure, I included themes and hierarchical relationships that developed. For example, I represented superordinate and subthemes in the structure.
While developing this structure I reflected on what these themes suggested about parents’ perceptions and understandings regarding their child’s participation in social interest related experiences. I also thought about how themes were related to and fit with one another. Furthermore, I provided anecdotes (with pseudonyms) from the transcripts in efforts to provide context to the themes.

As stated, I provided this preliminary thematic structure including anecdotes to participants during the focus group. This structure offered participants a visual representation of the developed themes and the anecdotes provided participants with an understanding regarding how various themes were developed through the interpretive process of analysis. During the focus group I facilitated conversation surrounding participants’ reflections on these themes and solicited participant feedback.

**Focus Group**

Following the completion of all individual interviews and preliminary data analysis, I invited participants to a focus group to discuss preliminary themes and patterns that developed through analysis. Prior to conducting the focus group, I asked all participants to provide me with convenient days and times for the group. The focus group was scheduled for a time that was convenient for as many participants as possible. Eight participants representing eight of the 12 conducted interviews were able to attend the focus group. This focus group was held at the school in a larger conference room to accommodate the number of participants in attendance. The focus group was audio-recorded for the purposes of later review. However, I only transcribed portions of the focus group that provided further clarification of developed codes and themes or
revealed topics that were not discussed during interviews. The purpose of this group was to solicit feedback from participants rather than as a form of further data collection.

Furthermore, the purpose of this focus group was not for participant transcript validation. Thorne and colleagues (2004) noted that involving participants in a transcript validation process is not appropriate for interpretive description. Interpretive description emphasizes the interpretive and subjective nature of experiences and perceptions, and as such, a checking of verbatim transcripts would not be congruent with this approach. Instead, as discussed, focus group participants were provided with emerging themes and patterns developed from all interviews for discussion. In particular I asked them about their impressions and reflections of the thematic structure, and how the preliminary analysis results represented their own experiences with their children and their perceptions and understandings of their children’s involvement in social interest experiences (Hunt, 2009). This feedback was then considered when finalizing the thematic structure.

The format of this focus group relied heavily on topics and themes from the individual interviews; however, prior to conducting the focus group I developed a focus group protocol including possible questions (Appendix O). An example of a specific topic that developed during the individual interviews that I sought clarification on in the focus group was the topic privilege. Several parents mentioned the word privilege during their interviews and it was unclear to me how parents were thinking about privilege specifically in relation to their children’s involvement in social interest experiences. As such, I asked parents about this topic during the focus group to gain clarification on their
perceptions of privilege as it related to the research topic. Results of this focus group discussion are included in the results section of this dissertation.

**Focus group analysis.** Following the focus group, I transcribed relevant data that helped with further developing themes to finalize the thematic structure. In particular, I transcribed portions of the focus group in which parents discussed privilege and their definition and understanding of how privilege relates to their children’s social interest experiences. I also transcribed portions of the focus group in which parents further elaborated on developed themes. Parents did not express disagreement with any developed themes in the thematic structure provided during the focus group.

After the focus group I reflected further on the thematic structure which focus group members were presented and relationships between subthemes included. During this process I re-organized the preliminary thematic structure into a thematic structure that more appropriately reflected the findings from this study. The subthemes and topics included in the preliminary thematic structure (presented to the focus group) were all retained in the final thematic structure depicted in the results section (see Appendix P). The thematic structure in the results section, though, presents a more cohesive picture of findings from the study.

The final thematic structure depicted in the results chapter represents a conceptual description of parents’ perceptions and understandings of their children’s involvement in social interest experiences. Thorne (2008) described that a conceptual description provides “latent patterns that have been discovered within the data through the application of the interpretive analytic process” (p. 164). This structure represents
patterns and shared experiences while also accounting for individual variations within the data. Furthermore, when developing and finalizing this structure, I reflected on what the developed themes imply and suggest as described by Thorne and colleagues (2004). I also reflected back to the social interest literature with which I have become familiar in efforts to think about how findings from this study relate to counseling practice.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

Thorne and colleagues (2004) discussed that the trustworthiness or credibility of an interpretive description will result from choices made throughout the analysis process and furthermore, how this process is explained to the reader or consumer of results. Thorne (2008) later described this as epistemological integrity meaning that the line of research and methods chosen are sensible. Furthermore, Thorne stated that epistemological integrity involves the researcher’s ability to clearly state why certain methodological choices were made over others. I worked to uphold epistemological integrity throughout the study by clearly outlining reasoning for methodological choices throughout this chapter. Additionally, I engaged in further activities to enhance trustworthiness of the study; in particular, I employed the following five procedures: (a) engaging in continual reflexivity through memoing in a researcher journal, (b) obtaining thick and rich descriptions from research participants, (c) approaching data saturation, (d) soliciting feedback on themes and interpretations from the research sample through a participant focus group, and (e) using a peer reviewer.
Reflexivity and Researcher Journal

Interpretive description reflects several philosophical underpinnings of social constructivism including the notion that multiple realities exist and people interact with others and view situations from their own reality. This is sometimes viewed in the researching world as researcher bias. I believe, similar to Thorne (2008), that eliminating biases from myself as the researcher is not possible. Instead, I reflected on my assumptions (listed earlier in this chapter) throughout the research process in efforts to continually reflect on ways these beliefs and thoughts could impact the research process (Thorne et al., 1997). This process is often referred to as researcher reflexivity and involves researchers’ continual efforts to think about how their own worldview, perspectives, experiences, and hypotheses can shade the analysis process and interpretation of results. Engaging in reflexivity adds rigor to a research study and trustworthiness to findings (Jootun et al., 2009). Jootun and colleagues asserted that reflexivity should be an ongoing process in all qualitative research and that this process “brings to consciousness and reveals what is believed about a topic” (p. 43).

One way I worked to be reflexive in the current study was through keeping a researcher journal. I began writing in this researcher journal when I started conceptualizing the study and continued tracking my thoughts, decision making processes, and reflections until I completed data collection and analysis. In this journal I recorded my ongoing thoughts, questions, interpretations, and opinions about the study as they arose (Jootun et al., 2009). Memoing, which I discussed at the beginning of this analysis section, was a large portion of what I included in my researcher journal. This
researcher journal assisted me with remaining aware of the impact that I, with my preconceived notions and assumptions, had on participants, the data, analysis process, and results. During participant selection and data collection I reflected on my decisions to include certain participants or follow up on certain questions during interviews.

In regard to data analysis, I used the journal to engage in memoing. I more thoroughly reviewed memoing earlier in this chapter; the process involved documenting my thoughts about interviews while transcribing and analyzing data including my beginning interpretations (Hunt, 2009). I continually reflected on my assumptions in efforts to keep them from being visible during data analysis and while developing the thematic structure. I worked to remain aware of my assumptions but not jump to them immediately, rather, keep them to the side. This process assisted me with respecting individual participant accounts and honoring their stories while also attending to what developed as common across multiple participants (Thorne et al., 1997).

**Thick Descriptions**

Creswell (2007) discussed that another way to enhance the trustworthiness of a study is by providing “thick and rich descriptions” when communicating results to the reader (p. 196). A thick and rich description is usually present if, when reading the description, a reader is able to thoroughly understand what it would be like to have had that experience without having it himself or herself. Providing thick and rich descriptions when communicating results of the study also helps to add to what Thorne (2008) described as the study’s analytic logic because these descriptions provide some merit for the themes developed. Thick and rich descriptions, however, do not only apply to writing
research findings, but also to the interview process itself. In the current study, I designed questions as part of the semi-structured interview in efforts to gain thick and rich descriptions of participant experiences, perceptions, and the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, in the current study thick and rich descriptions were a goal throughout data collection and while writing the results of the study in the next chapter of this dissertation.

Thick and rich descriptions also pertain to another aspect of the research process, the manner in which procedural and methodological choices are communicated in a research study. In this dissertation I worked to clearly communicate the steps of data collection and analysis through thick and rich descriptions of the research process. This also adds to the trustworthiness of the study.

**Data Saturation**

Data saturation is a common goal of qualitative studies as it supports whether an appropriate amount of data have been collected and helps the researcher to render an endpoint for data collection. I examined saturation in two ways for the current study: (a) within individual participant interviews and (b) across participant interviews. Individual saturation was addressed through obtaining rich descriptions of accounts and experiences from participants. Morse (1995), when discussing data saturation, asserted that “richness of data” is an essential aspect of saturation (p. 148). I examined saturation across participants through data analysis and theoretical sampling. Through these processes I was able to further explore specific categories and gain more information until I interpreted the category to be fully developed (or saturated). I knew when this point was
reached by conducting interviews during which participants were providing no new information, or further depth to topics they had already covered. As aforementioned, I began to notice this saturation point after the 10th participant interview, but conducted two more participant interviews for a total of 12 interviews to insure saturation had been approached.

**Focus Group Feedback**

Another method I used to build credibility in the current study involved soliciting feedback through a participant focus group. This process was used as a means of member checking which, in general, involves efforts to ask for participant feedback on transcription, analysis, or data findings (Creswell, 2007). As Thorne and colleagues (2004) explained,

> Because an interpretive description is intended to extend beyond what any individual might “see” in his or her own situation and allow us to understand commonalities within a range of instances of a phenomenon, techniques such as having research participants “validate” findings can also be quite misleading. (p. 17)

Considering Thorne’s assertions, and the philosophical underpinnings of interpretive description, instead of bringing verbatim transcripts for participants to check during the focus group, I provided them with a thematic structure and supporting transcript anecdotes (Thorne et al., 1997). I then encouraged participant reflection and conversation surrounding these materials. This focus group also addressed a credibility factor Thorne (2008) called interpretive authority. By talking with the focus group about
what represented common findings and themes I was able to assess my interpretation with the participants as a whole.

**Peer and Faculty Reviewers**

Peer and faculty reviewers were the final methods I utilized to bolster trustworthiness in this study. Throughout data collection and analysis I met with my dissertation committee members twice. One meeting occurred midway through data collection, after I interviewed seven participants. The other meeting took place prior to conducting the focus group. At these meetings I reviewed data collected, my analysis process, and developing codes and themes with my committee. I asked for feedback regarding whether my process appeared to be sound and emerging codes and themes seemed plausible for the data provided.

I also used a peer reviewer to add trustworthiness to the current study. When meeting with this peer reviewer I discussed my data collection and analysis process including sampling procedures, developed codes, and my process for synthesizing and categorizing codes to develop themes. I also provided this peer reviewer with a draft of my preliminary thematic structure that included transcript anecdotes. I met with my peer reviewer prior to conducting the focus group so he could provide me with feedback regarding his impressions of my analysis. I was then able to reflect on these areas prior to creating the document with emerging themes and anecdotes that I provided to the focus group.
Summary of Methodology

Using interpretive description for this dissertation allowed me to research how parents perceive and understand their young children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences. This approach also enabled me to take an interpretive stance as the researcher moving beyond structural analysis of participants’ accounts, towards interpretations of meaning and understanding related to the topic. This approach, in many ways, mirrors goals and values of counseling when working with clients to interpret and help them make meaning from their experiences. Furthermore, through conducting this study, I hoped to gain insights into parents’ perceptions and understandings of their children’s social interest experiences in efforts to inform school and clinical mental health counseling practice.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

This chapter includes the results of the current study, parents’ perceptions of their young children’s social interest experiences. In this chapter I provide a description of the participants involved in the study and the thematic structure developed following data analysis. The question that guided the current study was: How do parents perceive and understand their young children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences? Results suggest that parents perceived their children’s involvement in social interest experiences influenced: (a) their children’s self-esteem, (b) their children’s empathy, and (c) parents’ and their children’s worldview and sense of citizenship. I begin by describing the parents involved in the current study, and then discuss results including themes and subthemes.

Overview of Results

In this section I provide and describe the results of the current interpretive description study. As discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, during the current study I used constant comparative methods throughout data collection and analysis. This process resulted in 44 codes that represented my conversations with the parents involved in the study (Appendix L). While reviewing these codes and beginning to finalize the thematic structure it became evident that the codes centered around three themes: children’s self-esteem, children’s empathy, and topics which reflected parents’ and their children’s worldview and sense of citizenship (Appendix M). In this chapter I
provide many participant quotes to add context to the thematic structure. All parents involved with the current study are represented through their quotes in this chapter.

Prior to the parent focus group, I developed a preliminary thematic structure representing three overarching areas (child factors, parent factors, and parent-child relational factors, see Appendix N). I provided this preliminary thematic structure including subthemes to parents during the participant focus group. While reflecting on the focus group, I realized that the preliminary thematic structure I provided focus group participants did not reflect the true themes resulting from this study. Instead, this preliminary thematic structure I provided them reflected three categories (child factors, parent factors, and parent-child relational factors) under which the true themes were listed. As such, I revised the final thematic structure to more appropriately represent themes from the parent interviews and focus group. While I modified structural elements of the themes and subthemes, topics did not change between the structure presented to focus group parents and the structure in this results chapter (Appendix P).

Following the completion of data analysis, it seemed clear that parents perceived their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences as influencing: (a) their children’s self-esteem, (b) their children’s empathy, and (c) the parents’ and their children’s worldview and sense of citizenship. In this chapter I further explain these overarching themes and their corresponding subthemes. Additionally, I provide further information regarding how I developed the thematic structure that resulted from the current study (see Table 2).
Table 2

Thematic Structure

Results

Theme 1: Social Interest Experiences Influence Children’s Self-Esteem
   Parents’ Perceptions of Children as Capable
   Parent Pride

Theme 2: Social Interest Experiences Influence Children’s Empathy
   Parents experience their children’s empathy through personal interactions
   Parents’ observations of their children’s empathy

Theme 3: Social Interest Experiences Influence Parents’ and Children’s Worldview and Sense of Citizenship
   Children’s Intrinsic Motivation
   Family Service Work
   Parents’ Hopes for the Future
   Parents’ Reflections on Academic Privilege

The Themes in Context

The themes and subthemes developed from participant interviews do not exist in isolation; they are interwoven and exist as a whole, providing an overall understanding of how parents perceived their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences. As such, prior to describing the developed themes, subthemes, and transcript anecdotes, I next provide an example of how these themes work together from an experience one parent shared during her individual interview.

While describing her perceptions of her son’s social interest experiences, Lindsey (without knowing it) provided an example of how the three overarching themes (children’s self-esteem, children’s empathy, and parents’ and children’s worldview and sense of citizenship) were interrelated in her experience. Lindsey described a
combination of moments with her son following some of the social interest experiences with which he was involved at school. Specifically, she discussed the conversations her son initiated following the book drive at school. These conversations centered on her son’s continued concern about children who did not have books at their home (empathy). Lindsey described how her son would make statements such as, “They’re sad because they don’t have books” and “I would want books if I didn’t have them.” She talked further about her conversations with her son regarding his concern about other children not having books; “He could have the conversation, he could intellectually understand what was happening, engage with it emotionally, but his impulse was to do something.” Lindsey believed that her son’s prolonged reflection and concern about other children’s access to books developed from his perception that children’s inability to have books is unjust and empathy he experienced for these children (worldview and sense of citizenship). Lindsey then explained that as a result of her son’s concern surrounding other children’s lack of access to books and his sense of responsibility to help them, they decided as a family to donate some of their books to children who did not have books at their home. While sharing this experience, Lindsey expressed pride in her son’s care, concern, and efforts to help others. Additionally, she seemed surprised in his ability to view himself as capable of making a difference in these children’s lives (self-esteem).

This vignette provides one example of how a parent understood her son’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences and an example of how the developed themes (children’s self-esteem, children’s empathy, and parents’ and children’s worldview and sense of citizenship) are interwoven within her perception of
her child’s involvement in these experiences. This particular vignette depicts how a parent perceived her child as able to have empathy for another’s situation and experienced his ability to communicate this empathy through conversations with her. Furthermore, this mother believed that her child experienced a sense of responsibility that stemmed from his perception of an unjust situation, children not having books. Lindsey believed her son viewed himself as capable of making a difference in this situation because he had been offered formal opportunities to help and care for others through social interest experiences at school.

This vignette provides one example of how the three themes that resulted from this study are interwoven and exist with one another in the lived experiences of the children and their parents. These themes and subthemes cannot be understood in isolation, as parents’ perceptions and experiences are more than a sum of their parts. The thematic structure representing parents’ understandings of their children’s social interest experiences exists as a whole entity. As discussed in the literature review, social interest as a construct is also difficult to define and measure because of its complexity. The same is true of parents’ perceptions of their young children’s social interest experiences; their perceptions cannot be broken down into isolated pieces. Next, I describe each of the three themes (children’s empathy, children’s self-esteem, and parents’ and children’s worldview and sense of citizenship) along with their corresponding subthemes. I also include examples of how the themes and subthemes relate to and are interwoven with one another. Portions of participant transcripts are included to provide context to the themes and subthemes described.
Theme 1: Children’s Self-Esteem

Parents spoke at length during their individual interviews and the focus group about the valuable experiences school-organized social interest work has provided their children. For the parents, this value seemed to stem from the positive influences they perceived these experiences to have on their children. In particular, through data analysis it became evident that parents believed their children’s social interest experiences influenced their children’s self-esteem.

Several parents’ statements and interviews reflected ways they perceived the school wide social interest experiences have influenced their children’s self-esteem. Some parents spoke directly about how they believed their children’s self-esteem was enhanced after these activities whereas other parents talked about their children’s behavior and affect following opportunities to help others. Parents described their children’s cheerful moods and energetic behaviors, both of which they believed represented their children’s positive sense of self. All 14 parents interviewed spoke about their children’s self-concept, perceptions of themselves as independent, sense of accomplishment, and feelings of empowerment. All of these areas represented ways parents perceived the social interest experiences had influenced their children’s self-esteem.

Dana, Emma, Rich, Ryan, and Tammy discussed behavior and affect they observed in their children following school-organized social interest experiences. Dana recalled times when she spoke with her sons after school about the social interest work they had been involved with during the day. “They smile when they talk about it and
they talk about sometimes how it was hard work but they did it anyways.” Tammy remembered her daughter’s excitement when she came home and discussed these experiences as well. “When she was able to help others, I saw it in her face, she feels good about herself when she can do something like that, helping. I can only imagine what that does for her self-esteem.” Tammy believed her daughter’s mood and behavior following these activities had a direct impact on her self-esteem. Ryan also recalled an interaction with his son prior to a specific school-organized social interest activity, the book drive. Ryan described his son’s process of choosing books for other children, thinking about books that he enjoyed and believed children without books in their home might enjoy. Ryan recalled,

He [son] was proud, I could tell, he walked around the house with the books he wanted to donate in a bag. He said over and over, this is for other kids, they’re gunna love it, I’m a big boy and I can help people.

Ryan observed what he perceived as his son’s pride in his own work, something that likely influenced his son’s self-esteem.

Parents also discussed the sense of accomplishment they believed their children experienced after being provided opportunities to do what Caitlyn described as “big and important work” that benefitted others. Jade and Abby talked about how their daughters viewed the social interest experiences as an important responsibility. Furthermore, they discussed that their daughters’ perception of their work as important helped them (their daughters) to feel special because they had been entrusted with an important responsibility to help others. During her interview Abby said,
I think she feels like her work is important, and well really that she’s important. But I want her to feel like she is important because you know it makes her feel like she has a purpose and is part of something larger, and kids need that . . . I think it helps ’em to become successful people.

Jade’s daughter is currently in kindergarten at another school, but Jade reflected on how she believed the social interest experiences in which her daughter was involved last year have influenced her daughter’s self-esteem and confidence at her new school. “I think that this service work helped her to build leadership, it has helped her to build her confidence and I see her becoming a leader in different areas.” Jade and Abby perceived the social interest experiences helped their daughters to develop confidence and view themselves as capable.

Many parents discussed that they believed the social interest experiences at school were particularly meaningful because their children were able to be involved in all aspects of the activity. This full emersion in an experience benefitting others aided their children with experiencing a sense of accomplishment and viewing themselves as capable. Michelle recalled a specific activity at school where the children made clay pots, sold them at a local farmers market, and then used the funds gained to buy blankets that they donated to a local shelter for women and children. She stated,

What I loved about the clay pots was that the kids were actually able to make something, get money from it, and then able to buy something with that, that then could contribute. So it was sort of like they were completely involved in every process . . . showing that they are independent and able, well not just able but
capable of doing this all on their own almost. They are capable beings, able to do something that really makes a difference all by themselves.

Michelle believed that the school’s efforts to involve children in all aspects of an activity helped her daughter to feel capable, independent, and valued.

Angie and Chris discussed that these school-organized opportunities to serve and help others were especially important for their daughter because she is the youngest of their four children:

In our family structure she’s the youngest so often she can’t do what everyone else is doing and I think in general that’s frustrating for her. So I think any opportunity she has to help and be the leader in helping is very empowering for her.

During their interview, Angie’s husband Chris went on to say,

She sees herself as able to help others and someone who can care and help. I think that’s really powerful for a child who is four, to see themselves as able to have such a big impact on the world.

Angie and Chris valued the opportunities their daughter has been provided through these experiences and perceived them as having an influential role on their daughter’s self-esteem.

Within this theme, children’s self-esteem, I developed two subthemes to reflect statements from parent interviews regarding (a) parents’ perceptions of children as capable and (b) parent pride (see Table 3). These subthemes were included within Theme 1 because parents’ ability to view their children as capable and their sense of
pride in their children’s social interest work are related to their children’s self-esteem. For example, children’s self-esteem may have been boosted after feeling their parents were proud of the work in which they were engaged or that their parents viewed them as capable of accomplishing larger tasks. On the other hand, parents may have experienced pride in their children after becoming aware of the work in which their children engaged to help others. Furthermore, parents may have viewed their children as being more capable after they noticed their children’s greater sense of confidence in themselves and their own abilities. As such, although Table 3 depicts Theme 1 and its subthemes as linear in nature, it is important to keep in mind that no experience, or understanding of another’s experience is linear in nature and rather must be considered in its entirety.

Table 3

Outline of Theme 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Social Interest Experiences Influence Children’s Self-Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Parents’ Perceptions of Children as Capable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Parent Pride</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents’ perceptions of children as capable. Parents discussed that their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences encouraged them to reflect on how they viewed their children and their children’s capabilities. Seven parents throughout the course of their interviews used the word “capable” to describe their children. Furthermore, several parents related viewing their children as capable to their children’s involvement in these social interest experiences. As discussed, it is likely
that parents’ perception of their children as capable is related to their observations of a change in their children’s self-esteem and therefore has been included as a subtheme under Theme 1: Children’s Self-Esteem.

Jade shared an interaction she had with her daughter which encouraged her to think about how she views her daughter’s capabilities. After some of the school-organized social interest experiences, Jade and her daughter decided to donate canned items from their home to a local food pantry. Jade talked about a specific conversation she had with her daughter during this experience.

I tried to unload the boxes and what not myself, but she told me to stop and reminded me, you know, she said, “Stop mom! Kids can help people too, I can do it!” And she’s right you know we don’t give them enough credit. She amazes me sometimes.

Jade’s daughter’s insistence helped Jade to think about her child’s capabilities differently and Jade perceived this experience as being related to the social interest work she had been involved with at school.

Lindsey also discussed how her son’s involvement in these activities has encouraged her to think differently about how her son and other young children can be involved in systems larger than themselves. “I feel like young children are capable of more understanding of the world around them, more authentic understanding, if they can then feel like they can do something to help.” Lindsey stated that she now tries to provide her son with opportunities to help others because she sees him as capable of doing so. Ryan discussed his surprise in realizing his son’s capabilities and potential
through learning about the social interest experiences he was involved with at school as well,

This has laid a foundation for us of ideas and things we can try at home . . . I hadn’t really thought that he could do some of these things until learning what was done here so that’s good cause it gives us different ideas.

Michelle discussed the social interest experiences with which her daughter and classmates have been involved over the year. She reflected on how these experiences have helped her to view her daughter and daughter’s classmates as “capable independent beings able to do things on their own.” Furthermore, she appreciates the school’s emphasis on helping parents to realize this through activities where her daughter is able to help others asserting, “that is absolutely why I send her to school here.” Dana spoke about how she believes these experiences encourage adults to think differently about children’s potential as well.

Children can do service in lots of different ways, and I think this work encourages them to think about different ways they can help others and challenges adults to think about how children are able to help and contribute to and care for society.

For Dana, it is important to her that other adults, outside of her and her husband, view her young children as capable, and she believes that when adults become aware of these social interest experiences in which her children are involved they will begin to realize the “limitless potential” young children possess.

Parent pride. It was overwhelmingly evident from parent interviews and the follow-up focus group that parents experienced an immense amount of pride when
thinking about the social interest experiences in which their children have been involved at school. This pride, and parents’ statements towards their children that reflected their pride, likely influenced their children’s self-esteem. Parents were proud, and glad, that their children have been provided opportunities and were involved with work that helps other individuals, and several parents became tearful when reflecting on the pride they experienced in their children. Emma stated, “It makes me feel super proud, but it also makes me feel like ok we’re doing the right thing.” This pride was also evident from other parent statements, such as Ryan’s who talked about the pride he experienced through his son engaging in these experiences, “My son, he amazes me sometimes how someone his age can be so aware of the people around them and care about what they need . . . this service work helps develop that in him.”

Angie talked about why she valued her daughter’s involvement in these social interest activities and the pride she experienced reflecting on her daughter’s work,

So this work is valuable for her, and valuable for people who see children helping, because I would hope it encouraged other people to think about how they can make a difference and be caring as well . . . think for me it’s just an element of pride that my kid is so involved with this.

Angie was proud in thinking that her daughter’s involvement in social interest experiences could positively influence bystanders and benefactors of her efforts. Caitlyn also expressed a sense of wonder and excitement that her son is involved in these experiences at a young age. “I just think it is such a phenomenal thing that he is learning this at an early age, what it means to care for others and think about other people.”
Caitlyn’s statements express a sense of gratitude and pride she experienced thinking about her son’s involvement in these experiences.

From these provided statements, it became clear that parents experienced pride, wonder, and amazement that their children were capable of this work. Parents also seemed proud of the school their children attended because it provided these opportunities for their children. For example Ryan said, “It makes me feel good as a parent and like we’re doing something right because he’s excited and talks about the [service] work they’re doing.” In some ways parents’ pride and happiness that their children were involved in this work reinforced their belief that they were choosing to surround their children in meaningful environments. Parents talked about why they value their children’s opportunities to be engaged in an environment that encourages them to help and care for others. Parents seemed to appreciate these opportunities because they viewed them as fostering values and characteristics that they hoped would remain with their children throughout their lives. These parental hopes have been included as a subtheme under the third theme that developed from this study, parents’ and children’s worldview and sense of citizenship.

Parents believed their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences influenced their children’s self-esteem. Furthermore, knowing and learning about their children’s involvement in these experiences encouraged parents to experience pride in their children and view their children as capable. Parents perceived other ways these experiences influenced their children, such as their ability to experience empathy, which is the next theme that emerged from this study.
**Theme 2: Children’s Empathy**

Parents also perceived their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences had an influence on their children’s ability to experience empathy for the environment, the parents, and others. Some parents viewed these school-organized activities as a purposeful teaching method for building empathy in their children. Other parents did not view these experiences as a structured method for building empathy, but rather perceived empathy development as a natural product of their children having opportunities to help others.

Ryan and Kirsten stated that their children’s favorite school-organized social interest activities were those that involved cleaning up the environment because their children love animals and spending time outdoors. While initially one may not perceive environmental initiatives as work that would influence empathy, these parents perceived that it did. They described that their children wanted the earth to be clean for the animals and for other individuals so people could enjoy spending time outside; the children were thinking about what kind of a world and environment others would enjoy. Also, they were able to reflect on how spending time in a clean environment outdoors makes them feel. These parents reflected that they believed their children wanted the environment to be clean so that “animals could be happy living in it and people could be happy playing in it.”

Ryan discussed the impact he viewed the environmental days as having on his son. “The Clean-Up the Meadow day in April, that doesn’t help a particular person but it helps mother earth and he [son] loved that and had so much compassion for the earth and
animals.” Ryan talked about his son’s insistence on doing a “good job” cleaning the Earth because, “the animals would want a clean place to live.” Ryan recalled that his son went on to say “they could die or get sick if they eat litter which would make them sad.” In this instance Ryan’s son was able to put himself in the animals’ metaphorical shoes and imagine the kind of home he would want to have if he were an animal, and how he would “feel sad” if he had to live in a place with litter. His empathy for the animals encouraged him to want to work hard to ensure they had a clean place to live.

Kirsten referenced the “empathy toward the natural environment” she has noticed develop in her daughter; “she sees the environment and thinks about it as a living thing and wants it to be happy.” Though adults do not perceive the environment as having feelings or emotions, Kristen’s daughter does and it is important to her daughter that the environment “feels good.” While this empathy Kristen’s daughter experienced is not being expressed or experienced in relation to another human being, that does not make it any less of an experience of empathy. For Kristen’s daughter, the earth has feelings as well, and she wants to ensure that these are positive feelings. Kristen perceived this care and concern for the environment as developing from the Earth Day at school and school conversations regarding the impacts children can have on the environment. Laine talked about her daughter’s experience as well. “I mean she always loves being outside, but that event [Clean-up the Meadow Day] now she thinks about what kind of an environment should be there for other people to enjoy when they are outside.” Laine believed her daughter was able to think about how much she enjoys being outdoors and hoped for others to experience that same enjoyment. Laine explained that her daughter knew that
she feels sad and gets upset when she spends time outside surrounded by litter and imagined that others would feel sad if they had to spend time outdoors with litter as well. Laine expressed, “my daughter is happy outside, the happiest really and I think on some level she is able to reflect on that and wants others to experience that same joy in the outdoors.” Laine believed that this and other social interest experiences, where her daughter is encouraged to think about others and their needs, wants, and feelings, helped to build empathy in her daughter.

Caitlyn reflected on the empathy that she believed the social interest experiences helped develop in her son. She discussed that it is important to her that her son develops empathy rather than sympathy for those who may be going through a challenging time. Caitlyn stated that she thinks the experiences with which he is involved at school were important in helping her son to develop this empathy without looking down on or differently towards others who may have a different level of access to resources.

Empathy, I just, I don’t want him to have an entitled view after helping someone, you know, “Oh those people, it’s sad and they need help.” Instead I see empathy here, empathy and um, non-judgment that’s what comes out of the work that’s being done here.

Rich also tied the school social interest experiences to empathy he has noticed develop in his daughter.

You can see she actually seems more conscious of what other people are feeling and thinking and I would imagine that these [service experiences] are the things that are helping her realize that there’s, you know that other people have feelings.
I discussed some of Lindsey’s experiences with her son at the beginning of this chapter. Lindsey reflected on ways she perceived this social interest work has influenced her son’s empathy as well.

Empathy is built within the classrooms but also in this kind of service work. The service work I think impacts the empathy they have for one another in the classroom but also empathy they have for just people in general . . . like my son can think about how he would feel if he didn’t have books to read, and he says, you know, “I’d be sad.”

Lindsey viewed these experiences as an essential part of helping her son to develop empathy, particularly at a young age. Caitlyn also talked further in her interview about the important role she believes these social interest experiences play in fostering empathy and other important characteristics in her son and all children at the school. She stated,

I think there’s so much this service work with children is fostering, it’s like these learning opportunities that focus on empathy and understanding and awareness of that broader definition of community and their part in the community. Even at 3, or 4, or 5 years old this work enforces that.

Caitlyn’s statements also reflect the important role that she viewed these experiences had on her son’s worldview and sense of citizenship, which is the final theme that developed from this study. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, it is difficult to tease apart and place parent perceptions and statements in distinct categories because they overlap to form a more whole entity.
While analyzing parent interviews, it became evident that parents believed their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences influenced their children’s empathy because they (a) personally experienced empathy from their children and (b) observed their children express empathy towards others (see Table 4). These two areas greatly influenced parents’ belief that the school-organized social interest experiences help encourage empathy in their children.

Table 4

*Outline of Theme 2*

Theme 2: Social Interest Experiences Influence Children’s Empathy

- (a) Parents’ Personal Experiences of Empathy from Their Children
- (b) Parents’ Observations of Their Children’s Empathy Towards Others

Parents’ personal experiences of empathy from their children. Parents discussed interactions they had with their children when they perceived their children as expressing genuine empathy. These moments seemed to take parents by surprise and also appeared to touch them deeply as some parents became tearful while sharing them. These empathic moments shared by parents seemed to influence parents and how they viewed and interacted with their children. These were moments parents perceived as spontaneous and authentic, times when their children expressed genuine empathy.

Caitlyn shared a moment when she experienced empathy from her son describing an interaction with him before bedtime.
When he’s [son] going to bed, he asks me about my day, like, “how was your day mom?” . . . And I know it is not exactly this, but it’s that idea that he asks . . . it really made me realize how intentional he is about listening. Like asking me questions and drawing me out that helps me realize that he is really in tune with me . . . he wants to know how my day was and he really cares how my day was. But it makes me think about this work, the service work that you’re doing at the school. And this is a way that he’s connected it to something. You know it’s not that we go and we serve and we do this, but he’s finding space within himself that he’s asking and he’s interested in how someone else’s day is going . . . and that’s powerful for me.

While sharing this story, Caitlyn appeared to be in awe recalling her son’s ability to be interested in and care about what was going on in her life. Her voice softened and she spoke slowly while smiling remembering this particular interaction. She experienced empathy from her son in this moment through his ability to stop and focus on her. While experiencing empathic listening is typically powerful for all individuals, it is likely even more touching when a parent is able to experience this from their own child since a parent’s life typically revolves around a child’s needs.

Other parents experienced empathy from their children as well. Tammy spoke about an interaction with her daughter that was particularly meaningful to her:

She is so sweet to me sometimes too like asking, “mom are you ok?” Or if she sees me needing help or sees that I look sad you know, “mom you’re sad.” And then she seems sad that I’m sad and tries to do things to cheer me up. Or if I need
help she offers help... it really touches me that she cares about me so much and can think about what I need.

Tammy believed that the social interest experiences with which her daughter was involved at school helped her to think about others and develop this sense of caring and empathy. She talked about her daughter’s sense of caring and referenced the social interest experiences at school as one way this caring and empathy is fostered.

**Parents’ observations of their children’s empathy towards others.** During their interviews, parents also described times when they observed empathic moments between their children and other individuals, such as same-aged peers. Parents perceived that these moments were encouraged because of opportunities their children were provided to care for others through social interest experiences at school. While describing these moments, parents seemed meaningfully impacted by their children’s display of genuine empathy and caring. Emma and Rich recalled one such time with their daughter.

She had some gummies, and you know she wants those gummies and that’s like not necessarily something that she would want to share with somebody, but she took some of the gummies in her hand and offered them to the other girl. It warms your heart, so she thought outside of herself.

Emma and Rich talked about the emotional reaction they had to watching this interaction between their daughter and a peer. They discussed how they were “so touched” and Emma said, “if it was possible I loved her more after watching that, which sounds silly but it is like I loved her in a different way because I saw a different side of her.”
Michelle, similar to Emma and Rich, talked about a time when she observed an interaction between her daughter and a classmate. She talked about watching her daughter help a peer after getting hurt.

She sat by him and helped to feel better and I asked her why she did that and she said, “because mom he needed me because I’m his best friend and I made him feel better, I can help people. I’m good at that.”

When talking with Michelle about this experience, Michelle became tearful and quiet reflecting on her daughter’s willingness and interest to care for someone else. She seemed to perceive this interaction between her daughter and daughter’s friend as one of authentic empathy. Additionally, observing this interaction and talking with her daughter about it seemed to influence the way Michelle viewed her daughter.

It is clear through these statements that parents experienced empathy from their children and observed their ability to express empathy towards others. Caitlyn, Lindsey, Rich, Laine, and Ryan specifically stated how they believe their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences influenced this empathy in their children. Children’s empathy is likely related to the third and final theme that developed from this study, parents’ and children’s worldview and sense of citizenship. Children’s ability to experience empathy for others may have influenced their worldview and sense of citizenship including family service work that followed the school-organized experiences, and parents’ hopes for the future. Inversely, these areas likely influenced children’s empathy as well.
Theme 3: Worldview and Sense of Citizenship

The children’s, and, by extension, their parents’ worldview and sense of citizenship were influenced by the children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences. Parents discussed changes they noticed in their children’s worldview, sense of community, and sense of responsibility following their involvement in school-organized social interest experiences. Prior to the focus group I represented this topic with two separate subthemes: (a) child’s worldview and sense of community, and (b) cognitive complexity. This structure was also reflected in the handout I provided participants during the focus group. During the focus group parents inquired as to what I meant by cognitive complexity, and I explained that from reading their interview transcripts and analyzing the data, it seemed they perceived their children’s involvement in these social interest experiences as influencing how their children think about the world, their place in the community, and their ability to consider varying perspectives. While explaining this to the parents during the focus group, I realized, with the help of the parents, that these areas are interrelated; parents believed their children think differently after these experiences and that this thinking impacts their children’s worldview and how they view themselves as part of a community. As such, following the focus group I changed the thematic structure to reflect one unified theme titled worldview and sense of citizenship.

With the term worldview I am referring to how children and families think about the world and other individuals. While this may seem similar to the second theme discussed, empathy, empathy involves more of a sharing of feelings or ability to imagine
other individuals’ thoughts and feelings about varying circumstances. Citizenship is also included in the title of this theme because through data analysis it was too difficult to discern parent statements reflecting worldview from those reflecting a sense of citizenship. By sense of citizenship I am referring to parents’ perceptions that these school-organized social interest experiences encouraged conversations about and efforts surrounding being a responsible member of the community. Additionally, this concept includes how children and families viewed themselves as part of the community following the school-organized experiences.

During their interviews, parents expressed that they were pleasantly surprised and glad that their children were not merely involved in these school-organized social interest experiences, but that their children also understood the purpose and impact of the various experiences. Laine stated that her daughter knew and was able to talk about the different social interest experiences, why each one was important, and how her work could help another person. She referenced one activity in particular,

It wasn’t just making the clay pots, I mean she did like that part a lot . . . but she knew why she was making them, and that they were being sold and the money was to buy blankets for kids that didn’t have blankets. She seems to think and speak more complexly about things with an awareness of others.

Laine and other parents seemed to think that their children’s understandings of why they were doing each activity helped their children to think about how the work impacted others. This, in turn, encouraged the children to reflect on roles they are capable of within their school and greater community.
Jade also reflected on conversations she has had with her daughter about the social interest experiences at school. “I don’t know how her brain works at five years old but she can explain to you why it is important for her to be doing this [service] work.”

Jade went on to discuss how her daughter’s involvement in these school-organized social interest experiences encourages her daughter to think about the world and others’ experiences.

From this work she understands that not everyone has the same things that she does at home or access to those things, and she’s not ok with that, that inequity piece, she thinks it is unfair. I think before some of these experiences she [daughter] was very much all about herself but I think after some of these experiences now she knows the importance of helping others.

Ryan stated that these school-organized activities have helped his son to reflect on others’ experiences and the role that he can have in helping others,

This work instills values and ideas that not all children are exposed to at this age. It helps him to think about helping others and having awareness that not all children have the same level of access and it is important for him to be aware of others in the world.

Angie mirrored Ryan and Jade’s statements perceiving these experiences as influencing her daughter’s ability to think about others. “It teaches her to look outside of herself and think about other peoples’ needs and wants, and just to realize that other people have needs and wants.”
Many parents talked during their interviews about how their children’s involvement in these school-organized experiences helped their children to not only see themselves as part of a larger system, but also realize that they can play a role in improving the lives of others and community. Parents perceived this work as fostering a sense of citizenship within their children. Caitlyn stated, “This [service work] just reiterates that message about what it means to be a member of the community and that we all bear some responsibility for the health and well-being of all members of the community.” Tammy stated that she believes these experiences helped her daughter realize she can have a role in helping others and that helping others is similar to any other responsibility one would have.

She [Tammy’s daughter] thought this [service] work was what was supposed to be done, do you know what I mean? Like it wasn’t extraordinary to her because helping people is the right thing to do. So because of this work, doing service isn’t some outlandish thing, it’s part of being a person in the community. Parents, like Tammy, believed it was important for their children to have a sense of responsibility to contribute to the community and help others, and as such they valued these social interest experiences.

Several parents stated that the school-organized social interest experiences spurred conversations at home between them and their children reflecting themes of worldview and sense of citizenship. These conversations the parents discussed reflected topics such as open-mindedness, community, and citizenship. Parents described times when they started conversations with their children about these activities by posing
questions about their school day. Parents, such as Michelle, reported that the daily newsletters they received from classroom teachers were helpful in starting conversations with their children because they provided information about the happenings of their children’s day. Parents also stated that sometimes conversations about the social interest experiences emerged naturally from their children. They described times when their children would come home talking or asking questions about an activity in which they were engaged at school. For example, Lindsey reflected on conversations her son has started following social interest activities at school. She believes these conversations her son starts, spurred by social interest experiences, are invaluable opportunities to talk with him about important topics related to citizenship and world issues. Lindsey asserted, “It begins the conversation about privilege, and about responsibility and injustice, and all kinds of things that I feel like are important.”

During the interviews parents reflected on some of the conversations they have had with their children following their school-organized social interest experiences. Many parents referred to these conversations with their children as “challenging” or “difficult” because their children would pose questions which parents were unsure how to answer, particularly in a manner a young child could comprehend. Tammy recalled, “She [daughter] doesn’t really understand why some people have harder lives than others, and that’s hard to explain.” Despite these conversations being difficult or topics being challenging for parents to explain to children, parents expressed that they were glad for the opportunities to talk with their children about some complex ongoing social issues.
Lindsey stated, “My son will ask questions about well, ‘why don’t they have any books?’ . . . those questions start difficult but important conversations in our home.”

Parents valued the meaningful conversations they were able to have with their children following their involvement in social interest experiences. Furthermore, parents seemed to believe that they would not have been prompted to have these conversations with their children if it wasn’t for these activities. As such, parents viewed the experiences as encouraging valuable conversation between them and their children.

This theme was developed from four underlying subthemes: (a) children’s intrinsic motivation, (b) family service work, (c) parents’ hopes for the future, and (d) parents’ reflections on academic privilege. All of these subthemes are strongly related to worldview and sense of citizenship. For example, children’s sense of citizenship was fostered through the intrinsic motivation they experienced while participating in school-organized social interest experiences. Additionally, the social interest experiences encouraged family conversations and service work, which encouraged parents and their children to reflect on their worldview and engage in behaviors to help others (citizenship). Finally, while parents’ watched and reflected on their children’s social interest experiences their worldviews were challenged through reflecting on their perceptions of academic privilege. These various subthemes are described next.
Table 5
*Outline of Theme 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 3: Social Interest Experiences Influence Worldview and Sense of Citizenship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Children’s Intrinsic Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Family Service Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Parents’ Hopes for the Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Parents’ Reflections on Academic Privilege</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Children’s intrinsic motivation.** Throughout parent interviews and the focus group, parents continually discussed the extent to which their children enjoyed the social interest experiences at school. Parents talked about excitement their children experienced prior to and while engaging in these activities. Parents believed that their children’s perceptions of the social interest experiences as fun and important encouraged their children to want to continue engaging in these types of activities in the future. This subtheme shares some similarities with an earlier discussed theme of Children’s Self-Esteem; however, when reviewing codes and developing the thematic structure these two areas were distinct enough to merit different groups. The theme Children’s Self-Esteem refers to parents’ perceptions that the social interest related work influenced their children’s concept of themselves and their capabilities. I developed the subtheme intrinsic motivation to reflect parents’ statements regarding their children’s enjoyment of the activities and how parents perceived this enjoyment to act as a motivator for their children’s want to continue engaging in work that helps others.
Dana discussed how she perceives social interest experiences as helping to build her children’s intrinsic motivation, particularly in a world that is frequently built on praise or tangible rewards.

There’s some intrinsic value going on there . . . they don’t get an “oh I’m so proud of you” or “great job for helping someone else.” But they still feel good and are smiley and energetic and excited afterwards because they know they did something to help someone else. And that helps them feel good.

During her interview, Dana talked about how she appreciates that her children are not overly praised for their work and instead, conversations following social interest experiences are centered around encouraging the children to reflect on how they feel engaging in these kinds of activities. Kirsten spoke about this during her interview as well. “She’s [daughter] able to talk about how someone is going to benefit from her work and that knowing they are helping someone makes her happy, there’s not that praise.”

Michelle reflected on conversations she had with her daughter following school-organized social interest experiences and classroom conversations she read about through school wide documentation.

She [Michelle’s daughter] will make those kinds of statements after helping others or doing this that she feels good helping people and it is important to her to help other people feel better. That part of, “I like helping people feel better” and “It makes me happy” those are common statements at our house.
Several parents expressed that their children seem happy to engage in these activities and that this happiness and excitement seems to feed their want to do more work that helps others. Emma, for example, reflected on what she believes her daughter thinks about the activities in which she’s been involved. While discussing this topic Emma stated, “I think that if somebody says ‘that made me feel happy’ or ‘thank you’ and they have a big smile on their face that’s what the reward is for her.” Many parents stated that their children enjoy seeing people happy following their efforts and that they believe seeing others happy helps their children to “feel good,” which acts as a form of intrinsic motivation to continue engaging in this type of work.

**Family service work.** Along with these conversations, parents also talked about how their children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences encouraged them to engage in family service work outside of school. Parents’ decisions to organize service opportunities for their families could be due to many of the positive influences they perceived these experiences had on their children and themselves represented in the thematic structure (e.g., children’s self-esteem, children’s empathy, children’s intrinsic motivation). On the other hand, parents could have more generally been influenced by the work with which their children were involved at school. Whatever the reason, it was evident that children’s involvement in these social interest experiences encouraged their parents to engage in service work with them outside of school.

Emma talked about how she has worked to organize service opportunities for her daughter after learning about some of the service work that had been occurring at school.
She and her husband discussed that they have had the most success with this when thinking about ways they can help people in their everyday lives. For example, they worked as a family to build a garden for Rich’s mother. Emma talked about her daughter’s role in building this garden, “She [daughter] was instrumental . . . she was helping to make decisions about what was going to be planted, she was helping dig holes, how many, everything.” Emma and Rich also talked about their continued efforts to find more service work to engage in as a family. Emma stated, “Each time I see that they’ve [children] done some kind of new service thing I’m reminded, we need to be thinking of more of that do with her [daughter].” Emma and Rich discussed that they have begun to view service work as a means for spending quality family time together.

Other parents discussed ways they have tried to extend social interest activities from school into their daily lives at home. Michelle referred to the Earth Day at the school when children focused on caring for the environment and animals,

This clean up the meadow day is still everyday in our lives, because you know whenever we have any trash too she’ll tell me, “don’t put that on the ground, we have to find a garbage can, we need to throw it away!” So I’d say that is still every day in our lives and we try to keep encouraging it too.

Michelle talked further about how she has tried to be more purposeful about planning walks with her daughter so that she can continue to have opportunities to care for the environment. Michelle believed that this was a “passion” which her daughter has shared with her and she wants to continue to encourage. Kirsten also enjoys walking with her
children and encourages them to think about the earth and how they can help the earth during their walks. She talked about how her daughter,

Continues to point out litter, and she does it to this day, but of course she calls it glitter . . . and so she understands that it shouldn’t be there and it can be harmful to people and animals.

Michelle and Kirsten have found ways to continue encouraging values their children learned through the social interest experiences outside of school.

I discussed earlier in this chapter that Jade involved her children in donating non-perishable food items from their home to a local pantry. This was one service experience she created for her children following the social interest activities her daughter had been involved with at school. After the book drive, they thought as a family about other materials they could collect for people. They decided on canned foods after realizing the surplus they had in their own pantry at home. Jade also involved her children in helping her with the students she teaches at a local university. Through her role, Jade arranges a lunch for her students after working on a large day-long project. Jade decided to involve her children in preparing this meal. She explained to her children that they were helping her make food for tired and hungry students and discussed her daughter’s reaction to this work.

She [daughter] knew she was helping me cause she knew there were a lot of kids coming in so they [daughter and son] were up at five in the morning and they didn’t mind because they knew they had a purpose and a job to help feed the students.
Parents have found other ways to provide opportunities for their children to help and care for others following the school-organized social interest experiences. For example, Tammy referenced her busy schedule and that it is hard for her to get her children organized to leave the home on the weekends for larger service work projects, particularly as a single parent. As such, she works to provide them opportunities to contribute around the house and help the family. She recalled,

I was out mowing the grass one Sunday or Saturday, I was mowing and planting and stuff and she [daughter] had this big contraption that you push the leaves and the stuff comes out. She kept saying, “I’m helping” with a smile on her face. She was proud of herself and doing a fabulous job.

Whether through more formally organized efforts or daily work around the home, parents have been thinking about and engaging in service work with their children following these social interest experiences. They perceived these school-organized experiences as encouraging family service work.

**Parents’ hopes for the future.** During interviews, parents also discussed their hopes and wishes for their children, and reflected on ways that they believe the school-organized social interest experiences reflect these hopes for their children’s future. Parents’ hopes for their children’s future seemed influenced by the parents’ worldview and what they perceived as important to being part of a community. Parents discussed their hopes that lessons learned and values gained from these experiences would remain with their children as they age. Dana said, “If they learn at an early age that doing something for someone else, something simple can make a big difference, it just becomes
second nature for them.” Kirsten believed this as well saying, “that’s where it’s going to get printed into her [daughter’s] moral fiber is at a young age.” Abby talked about the hopes she has for her daughter’s future. “I want her to be real and grounded and have good values and care about things that matter to other people, like how they are doing and what they need.” Abby strongly believed that these social interest experiences were beginning to foster these values, which she hoped her child retains as she grows older.

Several of the hopes parents have for their children’s future mirror ways that they believe the school-organized social interest experiences have influenced their children (e.g., children’s self-esteem, children’s empathy). I developed Hopes for the Future as a separate subtheme though because the children’s social interest experiences encouraged parents to reflect on what they hope for their children’s future, not simply how they view the work as impacting their children at their current age. Michelle discussed characteristics that she wants her daughter to have now and into adulthood. “It’s very important to me that she grows up to be empathic and in tune to others.” Michelle believes the school-organized social interest experiences help to develop these qualities in her daughter. Michelle went on in her interview to say,

I think that it’s just so important to her [daughter] as a person and the person I want her to become, someone who is happy and healthy and cares about other people. You guys are building that foundation through this work and just, thank you. I think she’s learning how to care for others.
Ryan also viewed these experiences as capable of having a long-term impact on his son. “My hope is for this work to impact his self-esteem and confidence as he goes throughout his whole life.”

Tammy hopes that her daughter’s involvement in these experiences will stay with her as she grows older as well. “I think people who are able to think of others and not be self-absorbed end up being happier people, and I always want her to be happy.” Jade also hopes that her daughter’s involvement helps her to be, “kind, humble, and I want her to you know do for others as she wants done to her and treat others the way she wants to be treated.” Parents viewed these social interest experiences as laying the foundation for the kind of person they hoped their children could one day become.

During interviews, parents also reflected on their hopes for the kinds of roles their children may have in society as they age. These statements seemed to reflect a sense of citizenship parents hoped their children would have later in life. Laine spoke about this in her interview.

So I guess the bigger goal I see is because this is like the next generation so we need them to be prepared when they come out into the world on their own to address some major social injustices and inequalities throughout the world . . . problems with poverty, food insecurity, race, gender, the list goes on. So positioning them to be, I mean I think when you start young so they are in positions to actually address those issues later in life.

Laine, along with other parents, seemed to hope that their children’s involvement in these experiences establishes them with the potential to be positive agents of change later in
Caitlyn reflected on why she values her son’s involvement in helping others, particularly at his young age. “The values that this instills in terms of what does it mean to be part of a community and care, and our responsibility to one another, it’s so important to learn at an early age.” She hopes her son continues to view himself as part of a larger community and reflect on how he can have a role in that community as he gets older.

Dana believed that this is a critical time in her children’s lives to begin fostering values and encouraging them to think about what it means to be part of a community as well. She hoped that these experiences will influence her children well into adulthood.

You have to start young; it becomes second nature then. They learn to care about people now, and helping others, and what it means to be part of a community instead of starting in 8th grade with a required service project or something for a grade in class.

Kirsten, similar to Dana, hoped that her daughter’s experiences of being encouraged to think about and help others at a young age remain with her as she gets older.

The whole idea behind the service lesson is to be able to leave your own world and make that connection that you’re a part of something bigger. She’s just starting to kind of get this and I want her to think this way always.

During the focus group parents reflected on quotes I included in the handout depicting the preliminary thematic structure. Parents talked further about their hopes for their children’s future and how these social interest experiences, have influenced the kinds of hopes they have for their children’s future. In particular Lindsey reflected,
I want them [children] to be good people so that they’re good people, but I also feel a great sense of social responsibility. And that social responsibility is shared by many people here, feeling that they’re not going to be super smart and giving and wonderful people for their own benefit. I mean it is for them but it’s so that they impact the world. So I feel like we’re kind of nurturing social change here, in a way.

Lindsey and other parents appreciated these shared hopes for their children’s future. In other words, they enjoyed that their children were in a school where teachers and parents seem to share a similar goal for values and characteristics they hoped children would retain as they grew older.

**Parents’ reflections on academic privilege.** This final subtheme began to develop during parents’ individual interviews but was not fully explained until the parent focus group. During their interviews, several parents used the word privilege when discussing their children’s involvement in social interest experiences. I became even more aware of parents’ use of the word privilege when I started coding initial interviews. I was trying to better understand how parents understood privilege in relation to their children’s social interest experiences and particularly, if an understanding was shared across the group of diverse parents involved with the study.

Following the completion of data collection and analysis, it was still unclear to me what parents were referring to when using the word privilege; however, it was evident that this was a topic deserving of representation in the thematic structure. Instead of including privilege in the preliminary thematic structure provided to parents during the
focus group, I brought up this question to the parents. I asked them during the focus
group to reflect on and describe to me how they viewed privilege as having a role in their
children’s social interest experiences. The parents discussed this among themselves, and
through the conversation it became evident that when using the word privilege they were
referring to a sense of educational privilege that they associated with their children’s
involvement in these experiences. In other words, parents viewed the opportunities their
children were provided to be involved with social interest experiences as a privilege, an
opportunity many children are not offered at a young age. Parents viewed their
children’s opportunities to help others and have conversations about helping others as a
unique experience, one that they wished all children had and that they hope their children
will continue to have as they move throughout their education. Parents’ perceptions of
their children’s opportunities to help others as a privilege is directly related to parents’
worldview or how they interpret the world.

Parents’ perceptions of their children’s privilege to be involved in what they
described as a more “holistic style” of education was evident through several parents’
statements during the focus group. Lindsey, for example, said, “My kids are in a school
that values their social and emotional well-being along with their academics and they are
lucky to have that.” Jade expressed similar sentiments saying, “It’s a privilege to be able
to send my kids here, and I don’t mean like money privilege but it’s an educational
privilege.” Angie also reflected on the benefits she believes her daughter gains from
attending a school that offers social interest experiences.
My children are at a benefit because they are at a school that values holistic education . . . thinking about how to think about other people and the fact that her teachers are encouraging that from her, she’s lucky for that, not all children get that.

Parents also talked about how their children’s social interest experiences at the school are different from the experiences the parents were offered at school while growing up. Rich discussed this during the focus group saying,

I wasn’t taught this way when I was little, this is so different and I like how my daughter is being taught to think and look at people outside of her community. It is a gift that she is being taught and encouraged to do that, I wish I would have had that experience.

Following this statement several parents nodded their heads in agreement suggesting they also were thankful for the experiences their children were being offered at the school to focus on caring for and thinking about others.

It is evident through these parent statements that the parents believed involvement in school organized social interest experiences influenced them and their children’s worldview and sense of citizenship. Parents believed the experiences helped develop their children’s intrinsic motivation through providing them with experiences where they could enjoy completing difficult tasks where the reward was knowledge that they had helped another individual. Additionally, parents discussed the important role the social interest experiences had in conversations with their children and family service work in which they chose to engage outside of school. Parents also discussed how these
experiences encouraged them to reflect on their children’s future and their hopes for the type of citizen their children could someday become. Finally, parents discussed their perception of privileged the educational environment their children have been provided which values engaging in community oriented service work.

**Summary of Results**

In this chapter I reviewed a description of the participants, an overview of results including the thematic structure, and a detailed description of each theme and subtheme that developed from the current study. The themes developed help to answer the research question that guided this study, how do parents perceive and understand their young children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences? Results suggest parents perceived their young children’s involvement in social interest experiences influenced different aspects of their children’s (and the parents’) lives. Furthermore, the themes developed shed light on the value parents perceive these social interest experiences have for their children and themselves as parents.

As discussed, though the structural representation provided may at a glance lead the reader to infer that these themes and subthemes are separate entities, it is important to remember that they are interconnected. I provided a vignette at the beginning of this chapter reflecting this interwoven nature of the themes. In the next chapter I explore the findings from the current study compared with relevant research relating to social interest development. Additionally, I review implications for clinical mental health counseling, school counseling, and directions for future research.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to explore parents’ perceptions of their young children’s social interest experiences. While social interest has been explored in adult and adolescent populations, there has been limited work published regarding social interest in early childhood. Furthermore, no research has explored parents’ perceptions of their young children’s social interest. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, social interest has been linked to several important characteristics associated with mental well-being (Bass et al., 2002; Crandall, 1975; Crandall & Harris, 1976; Crandall & Putnam, 1980). Therefore, it is important that we begin to explore social interest not just in adulthood and adolescence, but early childhood as well. The majority of young children’s time is spent with primary caregivers and in school environments; as such, parents and schools are in the most natural role to help foster children’s social interest development. In the current study, I sought to gain a better understanding of parents’ perceptions of their young children’s school-organized social interest experiences.

The research question that guided this study was: How do parents perceive and understand their young children’s involvement in school-organized social interest experiences? Results from the study suggest that parents believed their children’s school-organized social interest experiences influenced (a) their children’s self-esteem, (b) their children’s empathy, and (c) parents’ and their children’s worldview and sense of citizenship. In this chapter, I interpret the findings from the current study and
conceptualize them in relation to findings and assertions from the scholarly literature. Based on the findings, I consider implications for clinical mental health counselors and school counselors. Finally, I discuss the current study’s limitations and propose directions for future research.

**Current Findings and Previous Literature**

Overall, the findings from the current study suggest that parents perceived their children’s school-organized social interest experiences influenced their children in meaningful ways. The current study, focused on young children, adds a new lens and provides further reasoning for the importance of focusing on social interest development at an early age. Findings from this study warrant further discussion surrounding social interest in early childhood. In this section I discuss how findings from the current study relate to young children’s development of empathy and self-esteem; parenting approaches and interactions between parents and children; and young children’s mental health.

**Children’s Social Interest and Empathy**

Parents believed their children’s school-organized social interest experiences influenced their children’s empathy. Previous researchers (e.g., Crandall, 1975; Kaplan, 1991) have also suggested a strong relationship between social interest and empathy, specifically that individuals with high levels of social interest are more empathic. This relationship between social interest and empathy, however, has not been explored with young children. While the current study was qualitative in nature and as such direct relationships cannot be derived, findings do suggest that parents perceived these social interest experiences as having an influence on their young children’s empathy.
Historically children have been viewed as egocentric in nature and unable to experience empathy or express care towards others. Research, though, has suggested that even during infancy babies exhibit empathic cries as a response to others’ distress (Roth-Hanania, Davidov, & Zahn-Waxler, 2011). As children age, their empathy development is influenced by their temperament, life experiences, and interactions (Tong et al., 2012; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Empathy, and the ability to be empathic has been associated with prosocial behavior time and again in the literature (Deschamps, Schutter, Kenemans, & Matthys, 2015; Williams, O’Driscoll, & Moore, 2014) and negatively associated with aggressive behaviors (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). Parents in the current study believed that social interest experiences had a meaningful influence on their young children’s empathy. It could be advantageous in the future to consider how to provide young children with more social interest experiences as a way of fostering not only children’s social interest development, but their empathy development as well. With benefits such as more prosocial behavior and less aggressive behavior, supporting young children’s social interest and empathy development could help to set them up for successful social interactions, professional interactions, and overall mental health later in life.

**Children’s Social Interest and Self-Esteem**

Parents in the current study also discussed their children’s affect and behavior, which they observed following the school-organized social interest experiences. Some parents, for example, reported observing their children’s excitement and happiness through behaviors such as jumping around and smiling. During data analysis I developed
three overarching themes to reflect meaningful topics that emerged from the parent interviews and focus group. One such finding suggested parents believed the school-organized social interest experiences influenced their young children’s self-esteem. Sweitzer (2005) explored self-concept (a concept related to self-esteem) with social interest in an adolescent population. Her results suggested adolescents with higher levels of social interest tend to have a greater sense of self-concept. While self-concept and self-esteem (a developed theme from the current study) are not interchangeable terms, both the current study and Sweitzer’s findings suggest a relationship between social interest and a positive sense of self.

Efforts that foster self-esteem in early childhood are worthy of further discussion. Self-esteem, and more specifically having positive self-esteem can hold meaningful ramifications for individuals’ mental health and overall well-being during childhood and into adulthood. Youth with higher self-esteem report less psychological distress (Dang, 2014) and have higher academic performance (Booth & Gerard, 2011; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995). Because youth with higher self-esteem tend to experience more mental well-being and academic achievement, a continued focus on developing self-esteem in early childhood could be beneficial. Results from the current study suggest that social interest experiences may be one such method for fostering positive self-esteem, which could act as a protective measure against developing mental health or academic challenges later in life.

Research has also suggested that parenting can have an influence on youth’s self-esteem (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2008). As discussed in the third chapter of this
dissertation, results from the current study likely suggest a relationship between parents’ pride and perceptions of their children as capable and their children’s enhanced self-esteem. Involving young children in social interest experiences influences children and appears to have a domino effect on other aspects of them and their parents’ lives.

**Children’s Social Interest and Their Parents**

An important finding that developed from the current study was the influence parents believed their children’s social interest experiences had on themselves as parents. This is an important area for reflection, because parents suggested that their children’s involvement in social interest experiences influenced not only their children, but themselves as parents as well. This finding is interesting because it could suggest that taking time to foster young children’s social interest may have positive implications for other individuals in the child’s life as well. In the current study, the young children’s social interest experiences seemed to influence how parents viewed their children and particularly that parents experienced pride in their children and viewed their children as more capable after learning of their involvement in the activities. Additionally, parents perceived that their children’s social interest experiences encouraged meaningful interactions between them and their children through conversations and family service work that followed the school-organized activities.

Previous research and literature has not explored possible ways that parents may be influenced by their young children’s social interest or service work. A continued focus on fostering social interest in early childhood could bring to light more ways that not only children, but also other members of their family may inadvertently benefit.
Findings from the current study encourage further reflection on two particular areas, parenting style and parents’ desire for more holistic approaches to education.

**Parenting style.** In the first chapter of this dissertation I referenced a follower of Adler, Rudolf Dreikurs’ work regarding parenting styles. As discussed, both Dreikurs and Adler supported an authoritative approach to parenting which emphasizes aspects such as mutual respect, responsibility, and egalitarianism (Ferguson, 2001; Gfroerer et al., 2004). Findings from the current study (e.g., children’s intrinsic motivation, parents’ view of children as capable, children’s empathy, worldview and sense of citizenship, and parent pride) reflect some of these characteristics exemplified in authoritative parenting. For example, children with intrinsic motivation and parents who view them as capable may develop a greater sense of responsibility being internally motivated to complete tasks and experiencing parent support in doing so. Characteristics exemplified in authoritative parenting (e.g., mutual respect, responsibility, egalitarianism) were also reflected in conversations between parents and children included under Theme 2: Worldview and Sense of Citizenship. Though not identical, many of the concepts represented in authoritative parenting are related to findings from the current study.

As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, an authoritative parenting style has demonstrated success; children raised by parents who use this parenting style tend to succeed more in school, have fewer issues with substance use, and experience better mental and emotional well-being (Gfroerer et al., 2004). Social interest fostering outcomes and authoritative parenting outcomes overlap, particularly when considering efforts that bolster mental well-being. Parents, regardless of their parenting style, may
benefit from engaging in social interest experiences with their children. These experiences, for parents who do not use an authoritative parenting style, could encourage parents to think about different approaches to interacting with their children. Additionally, for parents who already employ an authoritative approach to parenting, social interest experiences may further support their parenting efforts and goals with their children.

Parents in the current study also expressed appreciation that their children were not overly praised for the school-organized social interest work. This lack of praise and presence of encouragement, parents believed, helped their children develop intrinsic motivation. Suissa (2013) discussed this as well, and stated that adults’ tendency to rely on praise when talking with children can develop “praise junkies” where children are overly concerned about external evaluations and opinions instead of self-evaluation and intrinsic motivation. Parents in the current study believed that this specific encouragement based approach the school used for the social interest experiences fostered their children’s sense of responsibility and the idea that “pitching in” is a normal part of being a member of a community; it’s what is “supposed to be done.” Adler emphasized encouragement as well and discussed how using encouragement bolsters individual’s self-esteem, sense of worth, and a genuine sense of acceptance (Carns & Carns, 1998). Authoritative parenting also outlines the importance of using encouragement with children in efforts to help them foster a sense of responsibility.

Parents’ desire for children’s holistic education. While discussing findings from the current study related to parents, it is also important to further consider the value
they placed on what they perceived as the school’s “holistic approach” to their children’s education. This was expressed particularly during the focus group when parents talked about their perception that their children’s opportunity to engage in school-organized social interest experiences was an academic or educational privilege that is not experienced by most children. As a researcher, counselor, and educator, I was somewhat disheartened by this particular finding: parents’ perception that service experiences are not offered to most children. I believe that teaching young children how to help and care for others should be a central element of early childhood education. While parents’ appreciation for their children’s opportunity to be involved in these experiences was evident, they viewed these social interest experiences as unique and not provided to most young children. Parents were appreciative for the holistic approach to early childhood education their children had received, an approach that focused not only on academic skill based learning, but fostered the overall development of their children, encouraging them to view themselves as part of a larger global society.

I was surprised by this subtheme that developed reflecting parents’ perception of these school-organized social interest experiences as an academic privilege, particularly because the experiences in which these children were engaged did not require access to monetary or external resources. Instead, they only needed a commitment of time from the teachers and children. It was evident that parents desired for these social interest experiences to be accessible for all children; however they perceived it as being a rare and unique experience in a skill and assessment driven education system. This finding, and parent statements, encouraged me to reflect further on our current system of
education and the heavy emphasis on testing and academics. It seems, in some ways, we have forgotten the opportunity schools have to develop the whole person who is the child.

In the United States our system of public education continues to be centered around standardized testing requirements and more recently preparing our youth to remain up to date with the latest trends in technology and other STEM concepts (Lehman, Kim, & Harris, 2014; Thompson & Allen, 2012). Not often does one hear of school initiatives focused around helping children to develop skills related to empathy, caring, or citizenship to balance out these new STEM-related skills that remain such a focus. Results from the current study suggest that young children could be benefitting from opportunities to engage in simple efforts to help other individuals. While these helping experiences and opportunities do not require a significant level of access to resources, some may not consider them to be as important as other emphases such as testing and technology. As such, they have not been incorporated into the daily practices of our educational system. The parents involved in the current study shared some anxiety about how and if their children would still be offered service opportunities when they leave the educational center they now attend. I too share this concern and hope that more schools will work to create opportunities for children to help and care for others.

**Children’s Mental Health**

Finally, it is important to reflect on findings from the current study in relationship to children’s mental health. As outlined in the first chapter of this dissertation, Adler identified social interest as his criterion for mental health (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Bass et al., 2002; LaFountain, 1996). More recently, The World Health
Organization (WHO) defined mental health as, “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO, 2014). It is worth noting that WHO seems to agree with Adler’s assertions that contributions to and connections with the community (aspects of social interest) are central elements of mental health and well-being.

Researchers have outlined other factors that have become commonly accepted as contributing to overall mental well-being such as empathy (Deschamps et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2014), positive self-esteem (Lecompte, Moss, Cyr, & Pascuzzo, 2014), resiliency (Brennan, 2008), healthy coping skills (Mishara & Ystgaard, 2006), and positive relationships (McGrath & Noble, 2010). Some of these concepts were mirrored in findings from the current study such as self-esteem and empathy while others, such as resiliency and positive relationships, could likely be an outcome of engaging in service work or helping behaviors. Findings from the current study further support the important role social interest experiences may play in fostering mental health and well-being, particularly in early childhood. Emphasizing social interest development in early childhood could help young children to develop positive self-esteem, empathy, resiliency, and encourage positive relationships, all factors which aid in bolstering mental health. Focusing on these areas in early childhood, instead of waiting until adulthood, could act as a powerful means of prevention against mental health concerns for individuals. Additionally, social interest efforts could be used with youth experiencing mental health concerns as a means of intervention as well.
Developing social interest-based prevention efforts to foster mental health and well-being in childhood could help children to be more successful as they age. When reflecting on some of the findings from the current study (e.g., enhanced self-esteem, empathy, intrinsic motivation, parent pride, meaningful parent-child interactions) one can begin to understand how developing these areas or having these experiences could bolster youth and build resiliency for later life. For example, fostering young children’s social interest may help them develop a positive sense of self early on in life which could aid them as they age, particularly through more tumultuous times such as adolescence. Adolescence is a time filled with peer pressure and temptations to engage in risky behavior, and research has suggested that higher self-esteem can act as a protective factor against engaging in such risky behaviors (Peterson, Buser, & Westburg, 2010). Social interest activities in early childhood could help to bolster self-esteem at an early age, which if continually fostered, could aid youth during adolescence.

In today’s day and age it seems that much is done for children or on the behalf of children. Young children are not always viewed as capable of taking care of their own needs, helping others, or making a difference in their community. Results from this study conflict with some of these societal trends in that this work helped parents to realize that their young children are capable, and capable of work parents were not expecting. A tendency to do children’s work for them or shield them from responsibility and involvement in larger tasks can create a sense of learned helplessness. Mueller (2005) discussed this and the important role that service work could play in helping to empower and protect youth against a sense of learned helplessness. While Mueller wrote
specifically about using service work with “at-risk” youth to protect against learned helplessness, all youth could benefit from such efforts. Mueller’s article was published in the service learning literature and there have been a limited number of other pieces (e.g., Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Paris, 2015; Swick, 2001) within the service learning literature pertaining to engaging young children in service. These articles all discuss similar themes in using service work as a means for teaching empathy and caring behaviors along with civic engagement. When reflecting on results from the current study along with previous literature one can begin to wonder how social interest experiences could help children through fostering resiliency, building self-esteem and intrinsic motivation, encouraging empathy, and protecting against learned helplessness, all of which could help children to face life’s challenges as they age.

Additionally, it is important to remember that parents have the potential to play a large role in youth mental health. Findings from the current study suggest that young children’s social interest experiences influence how parents view their children, and particularly that social interest experiences may aid parents in viewing their children in a more positive light (e.g., experiencing pride in their children, viewing their children as capable, reflecting on positive hopes for their children’s future). Parents, and particularly the relationship that parents co-create with their children, can have a large influence on mental health in childhood through adulthood (Morgan, Brugha, Fryers, & Stewart-Brown, 2012). Furthermore, it seems that interactions between parents and children (which can in turn shape the parent-child relationship) can be influenced by children’s social interest experiences. As such, children’s social interest and related activities may be a new avenue
through which counselors could explore possibilities for enhancing the parent-child relationship.

Results from the current study suggest social interest can be fostered in early childhood and that parents believed their children benefitted in meaningful ways from involvement in the school-organized social interest experiences. Themes that resulted from data analysis reflected important characteristics, which have been identified by earlier researchers as central aspects of mental well-being. As such, it may be advantageous for future researchers to reflect on how to engage young children in social interest experiences in efforts to further explore how young children can benefit from this work. Based on findings from the current study, I propose implications for counselors working with children and families in clinical mental health and school settings.

**Implications**

Adler (1964) believed all people have the inherent potential for social interest but that it must be actively fostered throughout life. While previously conducted research has focused on social interest in adulthood and adolescence, findings from the current study encourage one to think about how social interest can be fostered during early childhood. Findings from the current study contribute to the existing literature regarding social interest and hold implications for counseling practice. In this section I discuss implications from the current study for clinical mental health counselors and school counselors.
Implications for Clinical Mental Health Counseling

From the current study, it was apparent that parents perceived that they and their children benefitted from and were influenced in positive ways by their children’s social interest experiences. These findings encourage me to reflect on what role social interest experiences, or service work, could have when counseling children and families in clinical mental health settings. I believe social interest experiences have the potential to play a meaningful role in counseling with young children and parents. In particular, these experiences may be helpful when working with parents of young children whose presenting concern is their young children’s problem behavior. Oftentimes it is difficult for parents of children with behavioral concerns to view their child in a more positive light because of frequent stressors that accompany the behavioral concerns. As such, these parents can get stuck in a cycle of negative interactions with their children and problem-saturated language, making it challenging to have positive parent child interactions. For parents who enter counseling with children experiencing behavioral issues, such social interest experiences through counseling could be significant and provide enough of a change from daily behavioral challenges or frustrations to spur further changes through counseling. Several parents involved in the current study became tearful when discussing the meaningful influences they believed these experiences had on their children, which makes me wonder what kind of a meaningful influence it could have for other parents as well.

Even when parents and children enter counseling for reasons other than child behavioral concerns, social interest experiences could be incorporated to encourage other
positive outcomes. For example, some parents enter counseling not knowing how to appropriately engage with their children or even how to talk with or have meaningful interactions with their children. Service experiences offer a forum through which parents and children could spend meaningful time together without interruptions such as technology. Social interest experiences could allow parents and children to think about and observe one another’s strengths. This type of work could be beneficial for encouraging positive interactions between parents and their young children.

One such way that counselors could introduce a social interest experience during a counseling session with parents and children is through working with them to decide on an enjoyable service experience in which they could engage outside of the counseling session. Counselors could facilitate discussion between parents and children, using play when appropriate, to talk about their hopes for this service experience. Also, counselors could work with parents to discuss differences between praise and encouragement language and the benefits of using encouragement. Counselors could suggest that parents use this encouragement language while engaging in the service experience with their children, and try to focus on positive aspects of their children and the work they are engaging in together. In a counseling session following the service work, counselors could help parents and children process this experience. While doing so, counselors could encourage parents to reflect strengths they noticed about their child during the experience and joys they had with one another. Furthermore, counselors could encourage children to talk about what they enjoyed about the experience and spending time with their parents. Art and play could be used to help children communicate this as well.
Service work could be infused in a multitude of clinical mental health counseling settings. As seen from the previous example, it would be fairly easy to incorporate service work as part of outpatient counseling particularly if it is encouraged as an activity to be done in between counseling sessions as a means of homework. Service work could also be considered as part of the curriculum for youth in intensive outpatient and residential treatment programs as well. Though children are usually not encouraged to enter such programs until around the age of 11, more recently programs have been developed to accommodate children as young as five (Hussey, 2007). These experiences, though, could be beneficial for youth from a variety of ages in such more intensive mental health settings.

In these more intensive mental health contexts counselors could work to provide children with opportunities to contribute to the greater community through service work. Based on the results of the current study, I wonder if such experiences would help these youth to experience greater self-esteem, empathy, and intrinsic motivation. Additionally, perhaps these experiences could help youth to have a greater sense of purpose and belongingness working collectively or individually toward meaningful goals. Children could be provided with a sense of ownership over this work by encouraging their input in designing the service experiences. These conversations regarding developing service experiences could be done in a group counseling setting while encouraging the development of various social skills such as listening, negotiation, turn-taking, and respectful communication. Youth could also be encouraged to share their service work with parents or guardians during parent visitation days or family therapy sessions. The
counselor could play a vital role in this process focusing on strength-based communication and encouragement instead of problem-saturated language. Processing the children’s service work may help parents, and other family members, to view their children in a more positive light (e.g., experience pride and view their children as more capable).

These are just some ideas of how social interest experiences could be incorporated as part of clinical mental health counseling practice. Counselors, though, could be creative in their ideas for incorporating social interest experiences within counseling in efforts to best meet the needs of their client. Additionally, this type of approach could be helpful for children and families presenting with a myriad of issues (e.g., behavioral concerns, academic concerns, autism spectrum disorders, anxiety, depression). Research on incorporating social interest experiences in counseling would be helpful to assess the possible benefits of this type of approach.

**Implications for School Counseling**

As discussed, parents involved in the current study perceived their children benefitted from their school-organized social interest experiences. Based on these conversations with parents, it could be beneficial to think about infusing social interest experiences into comprehensive school counseling programs. The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) encourages school counselors to meet the needs of all students through developing a comprehensive school-counseling program. Furthermore, through this program school counselors are encouraged to develop student competencies across academic, personal-social, and career domains (ASCA, 2012).
A social interest comprehensive school counseling program could allow school counselors to focus on student development across these three domains through various service experiences. For example, students could develop their own service work with the help of teachers, parents, and/or school counselors that centers on a career area of interest for them (e.g., students interested in becoming a veterinarian could engage in ongoing service at a local animal shelter). Following these service experiences school counselors could visit classrooms and facilitate student discussions to process their experiences (emphasizing personal-social development). Additionally, school counselors could collect data to explore how this type of program impacts students’ academic achievement. Themes that resulted from the current study (e.g., enhanced self-esteem, intrinsic motivation) have been associated with increased academic performance (Rosenberg et al., 1995). Furthermore, individuals with higher social interest tend to experience a greater sense of belongingness, and sense of belongingness has been identified as a key part of youth motivation to succeed academically (Gillen-O’Neel & Fuligni, 2013) and academic success, particularly for students of diversity (Booker, 2004). As such, it could be beneficial for school counselors to think about how social interest experiences could be integrated into a comprehensive school counseling program in efforts to encourage more positive academic and mental health outcomes for children.

A program such as this would take a significant amount of school counselor planning and would require support from teachers, staff, and administration. If school counselors could gain this support from key stakeholders though, this type of social interest school counseling program could have benefits for students. School wide social
interest programs have been proposed in the literature (e.g., Brigman & Molina, 1999; Clark, 1995; Oberst, 2009); however outcome data from these programs have not been collected or assessed. It would be helpful to better understand the effectiveness of these programs in efforts to develop a meaningful school based social interest program.

**Methodological Considerations and Limitations**

With any research study, it is important to consider the strengths and limitations of methodological decisions made throughout the research process. Though limitations exist in this current study, I made several methodological decisions that strengthened the rigor and trustworthiness of this research. In the second chapter I reviewed efforts I engaged in to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. In this section I further discuss how the use of a focus group strengthened the results of this study and also review limitations of this research.

**Focus Group Research**

While not all parents participated in the focus group, including a focus group as a means of participant feedback resulted in an invaluable part of this research study. This format offered a unique opportunity for parents to share experiences and build community. It also offered valuable clarification on parent statements and the developing thematic structure. Kress and Shoffner (2007) noted that focus groups “elicit a synergistic effect that cannot be attained through individual interviews” (p. 192). I was able to observe this in the current study’s focus group. It proved to be a wonderful accompaniment to the individual interviews and was a beneficial aspect of data collection and analysis.
Research Limitations

When considering limitations of the current study, it is important to first recognize that results from this study indicate shared and significant opinions among the parents interviewed at this particular time. Also, it is important to reflect on the element of social desirability that can be present anytime a researcher is talking with parents about their children. In other words, parents may have been speaking favorably about their children in efforts to be perceived as good parents. Throughout their interviews though, parents also shared times of concern or challenges with their children, and as such, I did not perceive that parents were trying to be viewed in an overly desirable manner. Additionally, results from this study do not take into account the children’s perceptions about their involvement in their social interest experiences. They may have had different ideas about the activities at school and how they understood their work.

A limitation of the current study was the parent sample. Parents involved in the current study were overwhelmingly a group of individuals with a great deal of formal education, though representative of the parent population at the university lab school where data were collected. If this study were to be replicated at another school where parents have fewer educational experiences, results may be different. Another limitation of the study was the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity represented in participants. Two parents identified as African American whereas the remaining 12 parents (consisting of 10 interviews because 2 interviews were conducted with couples) identified as Caucasian. The parents did represent some diversity in family structure with four reporting as single, one identifying as partnered and not married, and the remaining parents being married.
Participants involved were the parents of sons and daughters, and as such there was diversity in genders of children discussed. The majority of parents, however, involved in interviews were mothers, as only three fathers participated. Learning more about how different groups of parents from varying backgrounds perceive and understand their children’s social interest experiences could provide greater information surrounding how to work with a multitude of parents to enhance young children’s social interest.

Finally, some could consider me as the researcher a limitation to the current study because of my role as the Family Services Coordinator at the early childhood education center where data were collected. Similar to Jootun and colleagues (2009) though, I believe that collecting data at a setting where I was a familiar individual was a strength in this study. This role at the school allowed me to gain access to participants and, I believe, helped participants feel comfortable during interviews and the focus group. Furthermore, because I was a familiar individual I believe I was able to gain thick and rich descriptions of experiences from participants. Despite the strengths that I perceived, limitations may have been present. Parents may have perceived me as an individual of authority at the school and as such could have answered in a socially desirable manner. Though I worked to form non hierarchical relationships with participants through establishing interviews at a convenient time and in a confidential space, and continually reminding them that responses would in no way influence their child’s educational experiences, parents may have still perceived a power differential.

Despite these limitations, I continue to be confident in the trustworthiness of the current study. I used several methods outlined in the second chapter of this dissertation
in efforts to ensure a sound research study including memoing in a research journal, a peer reviewer, soliciting participant feedback, obtaining thick and rich descriptions for research participants, and data saturation. Additionally, I have been intentional in my transparent descriptions of the data collection and analysis process.

**Directions for Future Research**

The current study adds a new perspective to the existing literature surrounding social interest; however, there are areas on which future research could focus. Some of this future research could focus on outcome studies related to the implications for clinical mental health and school counselors discussed in this chapter. For example, researchers could explore client outcomes after using social interest experiences in counseling when working with children and parents, conducting in home family therapy, or in intensive outpatient and residential treatment facilities for youth. Such research could be helpful in learning more about specific benefits, or drawbacks, of including social interest experiences as part of counseling. Furthermore, findings from these studies could help counselors to incorporate social interest experiences more effectively with varying populations or presenting concerns in efforts to learn approaches that work best and tailor social interest approaches to clients based on their specific needs.

It could be helpful to explore outcomes of infusing social interest in a comprehensive school-counseling program. For example, researchers could compare students’ attitudes towards school, self-esteem, and academic success prior to and following involvement in a social interest comprehensive school-counseling program. It would also be helpful to understand how social interest experiences influence youth in
various settings, for example in urban and rural school districts. Longitudinal approaches could be particularly helpful when exploring the benefits of social interest comprehensive school counseling programs. This type of approach could allow us to learn more about potential long term benefits of being engaged in social interest work throughout a child and/or adolescent’s development. If benefits are found, and significant, there could be implications for systemic educational change and perhaps maybe even a switch in focus towards supporting a more holistic educational approach.

Developing a scale for measuring social interest in early childhood could be an important aspect of these proposed research ideas. Such a scale has not been developed and would provide quantitative means for measuring children’s social interest and exploring the effectiveness of efforts to foster social interest. While qualitative research is beneficial, typically when individuals are trying to make larger systemic changes, educational and clinical administrators prefer to see more large scale quantitative studies prior to making larger changes. A scale that measures social interest in young children would be an important step in this process.

**Conclusion**

In summary, through the current study I explored parents’ perceptions of their young children’s social interest experiences. Themes developed suggest parents perceived their children’s school-organized social interest experience influence: (a) their children’s self-esteem, (b) their children’s empathy, and (c) parents’ and children’s worldview and sense of citizenship. Parents valued their children’s social interest experiences, and believed them to play an important role in helping their children to
develop characteristics such as empathy, positive self-esteem, a sense of intrinsic motivation, and a sense of citizenship. Parents experienced pride in their children following these school-organized social interest experiences and believed that watching their children’s involvement in these activities helped them to view their children as capable. Furthermore, parents believed that social interest experiences at school encouraged family service work and meaningful conversations with their children at home. Parents were appreciative of the experiences their children were provided at school to help and care for others and reflect on their ability to make a difference in their school and greater community.
APPENDIX A

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTER DIRECTOR’S LETTER OF APPROVAL
Appendix A

Early Childhood Education Center Director’s Letter of Approval

July 21, 2015

Dear IRR Committee,

Please accept this letter as a direct statement of support for [Redacted] to conduct our dissertation research at the [Redacted] during the 2015-2016 academic year.

If there are any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me by telephone at [Redacted] or through email at [Redacted].

Sincerely,

[Redacted]
APPENDIX B

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN PARTICIPATION APPROVAL LETTER
Appendix B

Kent State University Institutional Review Board for Human Participation

Approval Letter

RE: IRB # 15-424 entitled “Parents’ Perceptions of Young Children’s”

Hello,
I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as a Level II/Expedited, category 6 & 7 project. **Approval is effective for a twelve-month period:**

*August 31, 2015 through August 30, 2016*

*A copy of the IRB approved consent form is attached to this email if the study is recruiting in person. This “stamped” copy is the consent form that you must use for your research participants. It is important for you to also keep an unstamped text copy (i.e., Microsoft Word version) of your consent form for subsequent submissions.*

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB tries to send you annual review reminder notice by email as a courtesy. **However, please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials.** Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date. [*Visit our website*](#) for forms.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); [FWA Number 00001853](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at [Researchcompliance@kent.edu](mailto:Researchcompliance@kent.edu) or 330-672-2704 or 330-672-8058.

Kent State University Office of Research Compliance
224 Cartwright Hall | Fax 330.672.2658
**Victoria Holbrook** | Graduate Assistant [330.672.2384](tel:3306722384) | vholbroo@kent.edu
**Tricia Sloan** | Administrator [330.672.2181](tel:3306722181) | psloan1@kent.edu
**Kevin McCready** | Assistant Director [330.672.8058](tel:3306728058) | kmcrea1@kent.edu
**Paulette Washko** | Director [330.672.2704](tel:3306722704) | pwashko@kent.edu
Appendix C

Script for Participant Recruitment at Parent Meeting

Hello and thank you all so much for your time. I will be conducting a study for my dissertation research at the school this year, *Parents’ Perceptions of Young Children’s Social Interest Experiences: An Interpretive Description*. My research will focus on the service work which many of your children participated in last year at the school. I am interested in interviewing parents that had their children enrolled in preschool or kindergarten during the 2014–2015 school year. I anticipate that interviews will only last about an hour in length. Later in the school year I will also conduct a focus group with all of the parent participants to share emerging results from the study and ask for some feedback. If you think you might be interested in participating feel free to send me an e mail (ewest4@kent.edu) or stop by the office and talk with me about the study.
APPENDIX D

EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS
Appendix D

Email to Participants

Dear Parent,

I am conducting a research study, *Parents’ Perceptions of Young Children’s Social Interest Experiences: An Interpretive Description*, that centers on parents’ perceptions of their children’s social interest. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to better understand your perceptions of the service work in which your child was involved at the school last year.

This study will involve your participation in an audio-recorded interview and focus group, each of which will last approximately one hour in length. During the interview you will be asked questions regarding service experiences in which your child has engaged at the center along with broader questions about social interest and your child.

This study has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB# 15-424).

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study. If you are interested in participating please respond to this email (ewest4@kent.edu) and I will add you to the participant pool.

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me at ewest4@kent.edu or 330-672-2559 or my dissertation co-advisors Dr. Lynne Guillot Miller at lguillot@kent.edu and Dr. Jane Cox at jcox8@kent.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Erin West
APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORMS
Appendix E

Consent Forms

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Parents' Perceptions of Young Children's Social Interest Experiences: An Interpretive Description

Principal Investigator: Lynne Guillot Miller
Co-Investigators: Erin West and Jane Cox

You are being invited to participate in my (Erin West) dissertation research study. This consent form will provide you with information about the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to better understand how parents perceive and understand their young children's involvement in school organized social interest experiences. Also, I hope to gain further insight into how parents support their young children's social interest development at home.

Procedures:
I (Erin West) am conducting this study to fulfill requirements for my dissertation research, which is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lynne Guillot Miller and Dr. Jane Cox. If you chose to participate, I will conduct an audio-recorded interview with you. Interviews will consist of conversation surrounding service experiences that your children have been involved with at the and how you support your child’s social interest development. Interviews will be conducted in the conference room of the center to provide a private space allowing for confidentiality. It is estimated that interviews will last for approximately 60 minutes. After the interview is finished your audio-recorded interview will be transcribed and analyzed. Following this analysis, if I have questions about your responses, I may contact you for a brief follow up interview to provide clarification (this would last no longer than 20 minutes). Once interviews have been transcribed and analyzed, I will invite you back to participate in a focus group with the other participants. In this focus group (anticipated to last one hour) I will provide you with emerging themes and transcript anecdotes that have resulted from preliminary data analysis. Your name will not be attached to any transcript anecdotes provided in the focus group. You will be asked to provide your reflections of the analysis results and if interested, will be able to provide further clarification or information about the emerging results.
Audio and Video Recording and Photography
I will audio record individual interviews and video and audio record the focus group. These recordings are for the purposes of data transcription and analysis. The individual interviews will be transcribed for data analysis purposes, and portions of the focus group may be transcribed if they appear to provide further information regarding emerging themes. As a participant you will have the option of hearing/viewing your audio-recorded interviews and the video-recorded focus group prior to transcription. Audio-recorded interviews and the video-recorded focus group will only be used for the purposes of this study, and will be destroyed upon completion of transcription and data analysis.

Benefits
This research may not benefit you directly. However, your participation in this study will help us to better understand how parents perceive and understand their young children’s involvement in social interest experiences such as service. Better understanding of your experience could help school and clinical mental health counselors think about different ways of talking with parents regarding these experiences.

Risks and Discomforts
There are no anticipated risks in completing the study beyond those encountered in everyday life. However, participants may feel pressured to participate since I am affiliated with the center in the role of Family Services Coordinator. Teachers and Staff at the [redacted] will not be informed of individuals who participate in the study and will not be privy to any identifying information shared. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable answering a question or discussing a topic during the interview or focus group you can inform me that you would like to skip the question or move onto another topic. Your responses will in no way negatively impact services you or your child(ren) receive at the center or your child’s standing at the center.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Notes, interview/focus group recordings, and interview/focus group transcripts will remain confidential and secured in a locked file cabinet. Identifying information will not be made available in publications and/or presentations of the research data. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts and in all presentations and publications. After completion of the study, all audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed. Your responses will remain confidential within the limits of the law (for example, reports of child abuse and/or neglect) and will in no way negatively impact the services you and your child receive at the center or your child’s standing at the center. Information gathered during the focus group will also remain confidential within the limits of the law, however because of the focus group arrangement there is no guarantee of confidentiality by participants. With that in mind, participants are asked to keep information shared in discussions confidential. Teachers and other staff at the center will not be privy to information you provide.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you and your child are otherwise entitled. Participation or non participation will not affect your
child's standing at the [redacted]. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your willingness to continue your study participation.

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may call me at 330.672.2559, my dissertation co-advisor and principal investigator Lynne Guillot Miller at 330.672.2662, or my other dissertation co-advisor Jane Cox at 330.672.2662. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

**Consent Statement and Signature**
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AUDIOTAPE/VIDEO CONSENT FORM
For Interview and Focus Group

Parents' Perceptions of Young Children's Social Interest: An Interpretive Description
Lynne Guillot Miller/Erin West/Jane Cox

I agree to participate in an audiotaped interview, and audiotaped and videotaped focus group about parents' perceptions of young children's social interest as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Erin West may audio-tape/video tape this interview and focus group. The date, time and place of the interview and focus group will be mutually agreed upon.

Signature

Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview and focus group before it is used. I have decided that I:

_____want to listen to the recordings

_____do not want to listen to the recordings

Sign here below if you do not want to listen to the recordings. If you want to listen to the recordings, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Erin West may / may not (circle one) use the audio-tapes/video tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____this research project

_____publication

_____presentation at professional meetings

Signature

Date
APPENDIX F

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Appendix F

Demographic Questionnaire

Please circle the gender with which you most identify.

Male       Female       Other:__________________

Please circle the partnership description with which you most identify.

Single     Partnered, Not Married     Married     Other:__________________

Please circle the race/ethnicity with which you most identify.

African American     Hispanic     Asian     Arabic     Caucasian
Other: ___________

Please circle your highest level of completed education.

High School/GED     Associate’s Degree     Bachelor’s Degree
Master’s Degree     Doctoral Degree     Other: __________________

Please complete the following. List the age of each of your children and information for each child in the corresponding row for the questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Age</th>
<th>Did this child attend the school in the past academic year?</th>
<th>What is your child’s gender?</th>
<th>How many years has this child been attending the school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

146
APPENDIX G

EMAIL TO NOTIFY PARTICIPANTS THEY HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE SAMPLE POOL
Appendix G

Email to Notify Participants They have been Added to the Sample Pool

Hello,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation research! I am currently collecting a pool of potential participants and have added you to this list. When ready, I will contact you to set up an interview date and time that is convenient for you. I will keep you up to date as the study progresses and inform you when data collection has ended.

Thank you again and I’ll be in touch!

Erin West
APPENDIX H

EMAIL TO NOTIFY PARTICIPANTS REMAINING IN THE SAMPLE POOL THAT DATA COLLECTION HAS ENDED
Hello,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in my dissertation research. At this time data collection has ended. The number of parents who volunteered to participate exceeded the number needed for my research study. I appreciate your generosity of time, and interest in the service work that we have conducted at the school.

Thank you again,

Erin West
APPENDIX I

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Thank you so much for sharing your time with me today. Before we get started I just wanted to review the informed consent forms and provide you with a bit more information regarding the study. I also wanted to remind you that our interview will be audio-recorded and I anticipate it will last about 60 minutes. Our conversation will remain completely confidential within the limits of the law and anything we discuss will in no way impact services you receive at the school. (Give participant the informed consent documents and consent for recording to complete and review the information with them as they read along). I’ll give you a few minutes to look these over and I can answer any questions you may have.

Also, I have a brief demographic questionnaire for you to fill out that will provide me with some general information about all of the participants. (Give participant the demographic questionnaire).

All right, I’m going to start the audio-recorder now. As I had said, all information will remain confidential within the limits of the law and I will be attaching a pseudonym to everyone’s information, is there a pseudonym you would like me to use for you?

So as the informed consent states, I’m really interested in your perceptions surrounding the service experiences we did with your child last year. I printed up a brief review of these service experiences along with a definition of social interest which is the main idea I am investigating in this study, specifically your reflections surrounding the construct, your child, and service experiences at the school. (Give participant document with social interest definition and service experiences and discuss/review the document with the participant). Do you have any questions about the information provided on this sheet?

Ok, well I’m going to go ahead and start with some of the questions that I had then, I’m hoping for this interview to be more conversational in nature though so please feel free to elaborate on topics I ask about and add examples from your experiences at the school or at home with your child(ren).

What are some of your thoughts when looking over this list of service experiences that your child(ren) participated in throughout the year?

How do you think these experiences impacted your child, if at all? (prompts: their development, their interactions with others, their thoughts or conversations)

How have you noticed these effects?
What kinds of comments does your child make about the service they were involved with this year?
   Can you provide me with some examples?

When/How do you engage in social interest related conversations with your child?
   (Refer back to definition of social interest provided if necessary; community, empathy, service-orientedness)
   Can you give me an example of a time when you had a conversation like this?

Can you give me an example of a time when you engaged in a social interest related experience with your child?
   Why did you do this?
   What did you and your child talk about during and after this experience?
   How do you create time/space for these experiences?

I’m wondering what has influenced your decision to send your child to the school?
   What influenced this decision initially?
   Why do you continue to send your child (if child has been attending for more than one year)?

What else would you like to add based on what we have discussed today?

**These questions are meant to act as a guide, I will ask follow up questions based on participant statements and will likely ask other questions to clarify experiences and thoughts shared.

Well, thank you so much for coming in today and your willingness to share your time and thoughts with me. Like I said at the beginning, in late November or Early December, hopefully prior to the semester ending, I am planning on conducting a focus group with all of the parents who participated and provide you all with some of the preliminary analysis results. At the focus group I will be interested in your feedback and reflections on some of the preliminary findings. So, I will be in touch to schedule that focus group at a time that is convenient for as many parents as possible. Is email the best way to reach you regarding scheduling the focus group? (Confirm that I have the correct email address). Would you mind giving me a phone number that I can reach you at as a secondary way to reach you when scheduling the focus group (collect phone number if they agree)?

Well, thank you again and I’ll be in touch.
APPENDIX J

DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL INTEREST AND SCHOOL-ORGANIZED SERVICE EXPERIENCES
Appendix J

Description of Social Interest and School-Organized Service Experiences

Social Interest
Social Interest is a construct developed and defined by Alfred Adler, a psychologist and theorist. He defined social interest as, “an interest in the interests of others” (Ansbacher, 1977, p. 57). Social interest involves characteristics of caring for others, and actions taken to benefit others (Crandall, 1975). Social interest does not just involve feelings and thoughts but also includes behaviors and actions one takes to provide service to and work with others towards their interests or the general interests of society (Ansbacher, 1991).

Children’s Service Work
Over the past year at the school we have engaged in many service experiences both on campus and in the greater community.Outlined below are some descriptions of these experiences.

We participated in two drives during the fall: the Reach Out and Read Book Drive where the children donated books to pediatrician’s offices to be distributed during children’s wellness visits, and the Diaper Drive in collaboration with the University’s Women’s Center. Diapers were given to families in need.

In December the children made clay messages that read “good luck on final exams” and distributed them to college students in the student center. When interacting with the children, several college students made comments such as, “This made my day.”

In October the children made clay pots that were sold in January at the Farmers’ Market. They made about $100.00 from selling their pots. The children purchased warm blankets with this money and then delivered these blankets to a homeless shelter for women and children in the county.

In February the children created Valentines which were delivered to local nursing home residents in hopes of brightening their day.

The Kindergarteners went in April and made pizzas for individuals living homeless in a local city. Two school employees delivered these pizzas to the homeless and food insecure individuals.

In April we held a “Clean-up the Meadow Day” where our entire school went out onto the trail next to the school and cleaned up trash and other debris from the natural spaces. They also invited their families and people from campus and the greater community to join their efforts to keep the earth clean.
The children also created a collaborative fabric weaving which was auctioned off at the Scholarship Fundraiser on May 16th. Money gained from this weaving will be put in the scholarship fund for children in need which is used to support children who otherwise would not be able to attend the school.
APPENDIX K

PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR DATA ANALYSIS
Appendix K

Proposed Timeline for Data Analysis

August 3, 2015 – Obtain IRB Approval

Week of August 10th – Inform teachers of study and begin contacting participants

Participant Interviews, transcription, and data analysis will be a fluid process of constant comparison. As such, I anticipate that every 2 weeks I will be able to interview 2-3 parents, transcribe the interviews, and analyze them.

Weeks of August 17th and August 24th – Interview 2-3 participants, transcribe and analyze data

Weeks of August 31st and September 7th – Interview 2-3 participants, transcribe and analyze data

Weeks of September 14th and September 21st – Interview 2-3 participants, transcribe and analyze data

Weeks of September 28th and October 5th – Interview 2-3 Participants, transcribe and analyze data

Weeks of October 12th and October 19th – Interview 2-3 Participants, transcribe and analyze data

When it appears saturation has been met, I will construct a document with a preliminary analytic structure that represents emerging themes and includes transcript anecdotes. This document, along with theoretical sampling decisions, codes, and procedures followed throughout data collection and analysis will be given to my peer reviewer for review. After meeting with my peer reviewer, and discussing his impressions on analysis, if he agrees that saturation appears to be met and the research procedures and preliminary analysis results are sound and sensible, I will schedule the focus group. Focus group participants will be given the documents with the preliminary analytic structure and corresponding anecdotes.

Week of November 30th – Tentative date for focus group

After this focus group I will revise and finalize the thematic structure and develop the conceptual description.
APPENDIX L

LISTS OF CODES AND DEFINITIONS
### Appendix L

#### Lists of Codes and Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Privilege</th>
<th>Social interest experiences as an opportunity, something unique, provides an advantage, an experience that not all children have</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Social interest experiences help children put themselves in another’s shoes, consider things from another perspective, experience the feelings of another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>How children think about themselves, what they see themselves as capable of, their self-concept, how they view their purpose or worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering</td>
<td>Activities build confidence, help children to see themselves as capable. Noticed through energetic behavior, positive affect, or statements depicting excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping Behaviors</td>
<td>Parents see their children helping, they believe that the school service work encourages helping behaviors from their children such as contributing at home, at school, helping a friend, etc. They notice this happening more without prompting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Parents are proud of the work their children are doing and proud their children are at school that encourages service work and thinking about helping others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Service work gives children a sense of purpose, helps them feel like they are important, and have responsibility to complete a big job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader(ship)</td>
<td>Parents seemed to think that service work helps build leadership skills in children, willingness to lead other in helping, also comes from building confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capable</td>
<td>Parent see their children as capable and children see themselves as capable after completing some of this service work they at times did not realize they were capable of doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment (sense of)</td>
<td>Parents think children have a sense of accomplishment after completing service work. There is a notion that children view the work as big and important which enhances a sense of accomplishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute</td>
<td>Children feel like they are contributing through service work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Children experience a sense of independence because they are involved in all aspects of the service work and are entrusted to do many things without the help and support of adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grateful</td>
<td>Parents think service work helps their children to feel grateful for experiences and access to resources that they possess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Children think that helping others is fun, and having service work as a regular part of school normalizes experience and helps them continue to enjoy the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Concept</strong></td>
<td>Involvement in service work helps children form a self-concept that is positive and view themselves as important people in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excitement</strong></td>
<td>Children are excited by the service work and also experience excitement when they realize they have helped someone or made them happy from their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child talking about work</strong></td>
<td>Children talk about the service work they were engaged in at school and with their parents. Parents talked about that sometimes these conversations emerge naturally and at other times parents ask them about the activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>Service work helps children develop a sense of responsibility, responsibility towards others, themselves, the community, and the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversations between parents and children</strong></td>
<td>Parents value the conversations they have with their children about service work. Sometimes they think these conversations are challenging but they think they are important conversations to be having with their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early emphasis helps fosters life long values</strong></td>
<td>Parents are appreciative that their children are involved in these activities early in life because they believe they foster positive values and characteristics they hope will stay with their children throughout life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hopes for future</strong></td>
<td>Parents reflected on hopes that have for their children and society’s future and thought about how their children’s involvement in these activities can set their children up to be positive agents of change and community members throughout life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Development</strong></td>
<td>Parents reflected on early development of empathy, caring behaviors, and perspective taking they think these activities develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhancing Understanding</strong></td>
<td>Parents believe service work encourages their children to be more understanding of other peoples’ life circumstances, backgrounds and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunity</strong></td>
<td>Parents’ view school-organized service work for young children as an opportunity, something that is unique and not offered to all children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non Judgment</strong></td>
<td>Parents think that these experiences encourage their children not to judge others but instead consider their feelings. Empathy versus sympathy, not feeling bad for others but instead understanding their perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Normalizing Service</strong></td>
<td>Involvement in service work at a young age normalizes it for children, so they don’t have to learn how to contribute to the community later in life, it is something they are accustomed to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belongingness</strong></td>
<td>Completing service work with classmates and peers helps children have a sense of belongingness at school. Contributing to the betterment of the school and community helps children to feel like they belong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of thinking</td>
<td>Children thinking about others, thinking about differences and similarities between themselves and others, reflection on level of access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of impact on others</td>
<td>Children begin considering the potential they have to impact others, both positively and negatively from involvement in service work, they start to reflect on the interconnectedness we all share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic value/motivation</td>
<td>Children are rewarded by experience being fun, they don’t’ receive a treat or prize for doing service work but still enjoy it. Sometimes “reward” comes from feeling good, or seeing others happy after their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing others happy</td>
<td>Children enjoy seeing other people be happy after they have helped or cared for them, this builds intrinsic motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful work</td>
<td>Children view their service work as meaningful and important. Parents also see their children’s work as meaningful and value it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Behavior</td>
<td>Parents believe children’s service work impacts their behavior. Caring behaviors and also behaviors that lead parents to think their children are happier (jumping, excitement, quickened movement).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profound Impact</td>
<td>Parents were profoundly impacted by their seeing their children’s involvement in service work and meaningfully touched watching their children care for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic understanding</td>
<td>Parents perceived their children as authentically understanding and empathic towards others. They believe this is influenced by the service work they were involved in at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td>Parents think that involvement in service work helps their children to be more holistically well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family service work</td>
<td>Parents began engaging in service work as a family with their children after seeing their children’s enjoyment of service work at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued part of community</td>
<td>Parents feel like children view themselves as a valued part of the school community and greater community when they see themselves as able to contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic education</td>
<td>Parents think service work is an important part of holistic education, moving beyond academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical time</td>
<td>Parents view early childhood as a critical time to foster important values and characteristics built through service work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirroring of values</td>
<td>Parents think this service work mirrors values they are trying to foster in their children so they feel like school and home are trying to foster the same values which is important to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous moments</td>
<td>Parents described surprising moments where they observed empathy from their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>Children viewing themselves as having a role to better aspects of the community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX M

SYNTHEIZING CODES TO THEMES
## Appendix M

### Synthesizing Codes to Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Helping Behaviors</th>
<th>Child’s empathy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grateful</td>
<td>Parent experiences of spontaneous empathy from child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non Judgment</td>
<td>Child’s empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic Understanding</td>
<td>Observing and experiencing children’s empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spontaneous Moments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem</td>
<td>Empowering Leadership</td>
<td>Child’s self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capable</td>
<td>Parents’ perceptions of children as capable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Child’s Self Esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self Concept</td>
<td>Parents’ perceptions of child as capable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belongingness</td>
<td>Parent pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact on Behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Parent pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Sense of democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhancing Understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complexity of Thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaningful Work</td>
<td>Family service work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Profound Impact</td>
<td>Child’s worldview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valued Part of Community</td>
<td>Child’s sense of citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Service Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mirroring of Values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privilege</td>
<td>Opportunity Holistic Education</td>
<td>Privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child talking about work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversations between parent and children</td>
<td>Challenging conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>Children’s intrinsic motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic Value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeing Others Happy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hopes for the future</td>
<td>Parent hopes for child’s future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early Emphasis helps foster life long values</td>
<td>Parent hopes for society’s future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early Development Normalizing Service Healthy</td>
<td>Parent Reflections on Academic Privilege</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldview and Sense of Citizenship</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ reflections on academic privilege</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family service work</td>
<td>Parents’ intrinsic motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s hopes for the future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

164
APPENDIX N

PRELIMINARY THEMATIC STRUCTURE
Appendix N

Preliminary Thematic Structure

Following data analysis, it seems that parents perceived their children’s involvement in service work as having an influence on their children, on themselves as parents, and on relational aspects between them and their children.

**Influences Child (Child Factors):**

**Self-Esteem:**

This work, this service, it helps children see themselves as capable. You know my kids at 3, 4, and 5 they can help other people and make a difference, and now it’s not just me that thinks that but they think it about themselves. They see themselves as capable of making a difference in someone else’s life or in the environment.

And I see that doing something for their self-esteem, pride, and sense of confidence. - Dana

I think she feels like her work is important, and well really that she’s important. But I want her to feel like she is important because you know it makes her feel like she has a purpose and is part of something larger, and kids need that . . . I think it helps ‘em to become successful people.

- Abby

When she was able to help others, I saw it in her face, she feels good about herself when she can do something like that, helping. I can only imagine what that does for her self-esteem. – Tammy

**Child’s Empathy:**

Empathy is built within the classrooms but also in this kind of service work. The service work I think impacts the empathy they have for one another in the classroom but also empathy they have for just people in general . . . like my son can think about how he would feel if he didn’t have books to read, and he says, you know, “I’d be sad.” - Lindsey

You know you can see, she is actually seems more conscious of what other people are feeling and thinking and I would imagine that these are the things that are helping her realize that there’s you know other people have feelings. - Rich

I think there’s so much this service work with children is fostering, it’s like these learning opportunities that focus on empathy and understanding and awareness of that broader definition of community and their part in the community. Even at 3, or 4, or 5 years old this work enforces that. - Caitlyn
Child’s worldview and sense of community:
So it’s, it’s just trying to um let her know that she needs to share and she can now think about how, that people come, I mean they’re in different places . . . so and that you know no place is better than another they’re just different. - Abby

You know this work instills values and ideas that not all children are exposed to at this age. It helps him think about helping others and having an awareness that not all children have the same level of access or privilege and it’s important for him to be aware of others in the world. - Ryan

From this work she understands that not everyone has the same things that she does at home or access to those things, and she’s not ok with that, that inequity piece, she thinks it’s unfair. I think before some of these experiences she [daughter] was very much all about herself but I think after some of these experiences now she knows the importance of helping others. – Jade

Cognitive Complexity:
It makes her think about other people and that’s hard for people her age you know that complex thinking. And it’s good for people in the community so it benefits all really - Abby

And it wasn’t just making the clay pots, I mean she did like that part a lot and I think that is one of the main reasons that she liked that service activity. But she knew why she was making them, and that they were being sold and the money was to buy blankets for kids that didn’t have blankets . . . She’s complex, you know, she thinks and speaks more complexly about things and with an awareness of others. – Laine

You know she actually had, I don’t know how her brain works at five years old but she can explain to you if you ask why are you doing this, she can actually explain to you, why it is important for her to be doing this [service] work. - Jade

Enjoying work acts as intrinsic motivation:
But there’s some intrinsic value going on there. You know they don’t get an, “oh I’m so proud of you” or “great job for helping someone else.” But they still feel good and are smiley and energetic and excited afterwards because they know they did something to help someone else. And that helps them feel good. - Dana

She will make those kinds of statements you know after helping others or doing this service work that she feels good helping people and it’s important to her to help other people feel better. That part of, “I like helping people feel better” and” It makes me happy” those are common statements at our house – Michelle
Well her face, I mean she smiles and talks about it and is jumping around and seems excited. You know she talks about helping people and things like that so I think it is meaningful to her cause it sticks. I mean she thinks about it after the fact. - Abby

**Influences Parent(s) (Parent Factors):**

**Parents see children as capable:**

I feel like young children are capable of more, um, understanding of the world around them. More authentic understanding of the world around them if they feel like they can do something to help and I know, I’ve seen it, they can do something to help. - Lindsey

I tried to unload the boxes and what not myself, but she told me to stop and reminded me you know she said, “Stop mom! Kids can help people too, I can do it!” And she’s right you know we don’t give them enough credit. She amazes me sometimes. - Jade

Children can do service in lots of different ways, and I think this work encourages them to think about different ways they can help others and challenges adults to think about how children are able to help and contribute to and care for society. – Dana

**Parents experience pride**

You know my son, he amazes me sometimes how someone his age can be so aware of the people around them, and care about what they need. And this service work helps develop that in him – Ryan

So this work is valuable for her, and valuable for people who see children helping, because I would hope it encourages other people to think about how they can make a difference and be caring as well . . . I think for me it’s just an element of pride that my kids are all so involved with this – Angie

I just want to like squeeze her that um it’s almost like one of those things where like you feel like, what have we done to support that and that would make me feel so proud that I was able to embody that in her. But um it also makes me feel good about the choices in terms of what we uh, expose her to - Emma

**Hopes for the future (child’s future and society’s future) Citizenship:**

The values that this instills in terms of what does it mean to be part of a community and care, and our responsibility to one another, it’s so important to learn at an early age. – Caitlyn
So I guess the bigger goal I see is because which is like so cliché but this is like the next generation. So we need them to be prepared when they come out into the world on their own to address some major social injustices and inequalities throughout the world that are probably going to look a little different than they do today, but they’re going to be kind of similar. I’m sure we’re still going to have problems with poverty, and food insecurity, and race, and gender and like the list goes on. So positioning them to be, I mean I think when you start young they are in a positions to actually address those issues later in life - Laine

I want them [children] to be good people so that they’re good people, but I also feel a great sense of social responsibility. And that social responsibility is shared by many people here, feeling that they’re not going to be super smart and giving and wonderful people for their own benefit. I mean it is for them but it’s so that they impact the world. So I feel like we’re kind of nurturing social change here, in a way. - Lindsey

**Influences Parent/Child Relational Experiences (Parent/Child Relational Factors):**

**Starts challenging discussions**

“She thinks that we’re being kind an that um and that some people don’t, don’t have as much as other people. She doesn’t really understand why some people have harder lives than others. And that’s hard to explain.” - Tammy

And I know those conversations stem from her interactions here and the experiences she has had with service and helping others here along with what we try to do at home. So you know I’d say those are the conversations we usually have are with things or based around a service event at the school or what we do as a family . . . And we talked a lot about ok, well there are people and children who don’t have enough clothes so we’re going to donate them to a shelter where kids can where them” - Michelle

“My son will ask questions about well, why don’t they have any books. Um and those start difficult but important conversations in our home” - Lindsey

**Encouraging service work outside of school**

This clean up the Meadow day is still everyday in our lives. Whenever we have any trash too she’ll tell me, don’t put that on the ground, we have to find a garbage can we need to throw it away. It will make other people feel sad or the animals feel sad. So I’d say that’s the one that has stuck with us the most - Michelle

And then continuing to point out litter, and she does it to this day, but of course she calls it glitter . . . and so she understands that it shouldn’t be there – Kirsten
I was out mowing the grass one Sunday or Saturday, I was mowing and planting and stuff and she [daughter] had this big contraption that you push the leaves and the stuff comes out. She kept saying, “I’m helping” with a smile on her face. She was proud of herself and doing a fabulous job. - Tammy

Authentic moments
She had some gummies, and you know she wants those gummies and that’s like not necessarily something that she would want to share with somebody, but she took some of the gummies in her hand and offered them to the other girl. It warms your heard, so she thought outside of herself.
- Emma

When he’s [son] going to bed, he asks me about my day, like, “how was your day mom?”... And I know it’s not exactly this, but it’s that idea that he asks... it really made me realize how intentional he is about listening. Like asking me questions and drawing me out that helps me realize that he is really in tune with me... he wants to know how my day was and he really cares how my day was. But it makes me think about this work, the service work that you’re doing at the school. And this is a way that he’s connected it to something. You know it’s not that we go and we serve and we do this, but he’s finding space within himself that he’s asking and he’s interested in how someone else’s day is going... and that’s powerful for me. - Caitlyn

She sat by him and helped to feel better and I asked her why she did that and she said, “because mom he needed me because I’m his best friend and I made him feel better, I can help people I’m good at that.” - Michelle
APPENDIX O

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
Appendix O

Focus Group Protocol

Thank you all so much for joining me today. I want to remind you all that this focus group will be video and audio-recorded. Our conversation today will remain confidential and I am only recording this group for transcription and data analysis purposes. I am distributing a handout that includes emerging themes that have developed from my analysis of all of your individual interviews. In this handout I also included direct quotations or anecdotes from our conversations. All identifying information has been removed, so you will not be able to be directly linked to your statements, unless you would like to refer to them during this focus group as being your own.

All right, I am going to start the recording devices now.

I would like to take a couple of minutes with you all to review this handout and reflect on some of your initial impressions (Provide 3-5 minutes for them to review the handout, or longer if needed. Talk through the handout with the parents).

Generally, I am interested in your reactions to the emerging themes that I have provided you.

How do these themes reflect your experience?

Do any of the themes surprise you?

What other thoughts have you had about your child’s service experiences?

**These questions are only examples of the kind of conversation that will be encouraged during the focus group. More specific questions will likely result after individual interviews are analyzed. Also, through facilitating the focus group, further conversation and questions will emerge as individuals talk with one another.
APPENDIX P

PRELIMINARY THEMATIC STRUCTURE REORGANIZATION TO FINAL THEMATIC STRUCTURE
Appendix P

Preliminary Thematic Structure Reorganization to Final Thematic Structure
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


(Original work published 1972)


(Original work published 1964).


