UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES
TOWARD BARRIERS TO FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
the College of Education of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Michelle McAnuff-Gumbs
March 2006
This dissertation entitled

UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD BARRIERS TO
FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

by

Michelle McAnuff-Gumbs

has been approved for

the Department of Teacher Education

and the College of Education by

William E. Smith

Associate Professor of Teacher Education

Thomas E. Davis

Interim Dean, College of Education
The study investigates the attitudes of teachers toward barriers to family school partnerships. It describes the nature of the attitudes and examines whether attitudes vary based on teachers’ qualification and their attribution of blame for barriers. The role of teachers’ perception of their social status as well as their qualification level on their level of optimism is also investigated.

A questionnaire comprising four sections was used to collect the data. Section A collected demographic data. Section B sought information on teacher’s perception of their social status; Section C, on teachers’ attribution of blame for barriers; and Section D, on teachers’ attitudes to barriers. The responses of 135 teachers, selected using cluster sampling at the school level, were used in the study. Descriptive statistics and two 3 x 3 ANOVAs were used to analyze the data.

Results of analysis reveal that teachers, having already received training in fostering partnerships, exhibit a borderline average positive attitude to barriers, tend to attribute blame for barriers primarily to external sources, and assumed an educentric stance in terms of the barriers they preferred to address.
While there are no significant main effect for attitudes as a function of teachers’ qualification and attribution, optimism does differ based on teachers’ perception of their social status and based on their qualification level. Teachers who rate themselves highly on social status are highest on optimism, but teachers in the moderate group have lower levels of optimism than teachers in the low group. Post hoc analysis on qualification hints at teachers at the lower level having higher levels of optimism.

Findings from the various analyses converge to indicate the primacy of psychosocial and contextual forces over academic variables in determining reactions to barriers, and suggest the need for sensitization training (especially in family welfare and concepts of care) in teacher education and in practitioner upgrading.

Approved:

William E. Smith

Associate Professor of Teacher Education
Dedications

This, my first major challenge, is dedicated to my daughter, Chayanne Gumbs.
Acknowledgements

Several individuals and organizations have contributed to the success of this research. First, I would like to acknowledge the immense contribution made by the College of Education’s Graduate Research Grant in facilitating my travel for data collection and in financing other aspects of the research. I would also like to thank the principals, teachers and students of the schools that participated in the research. Your contribution and sacrifice made the research possible.

I would also like to thank the members of my doctoral committee who contributed their time, expertise and much-appreciated attention in fine-tuning the research and in ensuring that it is of scholarly quality. Special thanks are extended to Dr. William Smith, who is the best mentor, advisor and chairperson a student could ask for; to Dr. Beverly Flanigan who has supervised me over two degrees and who has ensured that I remain focused on the language problem facing my country; to Dr. George Johanson for the inspiration and for ensuring the methodological soundness of the research; and to Dr. Margaret King for ensuring that I remain true to the philosophy undergirding my research.

Immense gratitude is also extended my family and friends who recognized the value of my studies and who understood my drive to complete the project. Finally, I congratulate myself and thank God for giving me the strength I needed to go the course.

Thank you all.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedications</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
  Background to the Problem                                           | 21   |
|  
  Statement of the Problem                                            | 33   |
|  
  Research Questions                                                   | 34   |
|  
  Research Hypotheses                                                 | 34   |
|  
  Significance                                                         | 35   |
| Limitations and Delimitations                                         | 41   |
| Definition of Terms                                                   | 43   |
| Assumptions of the Study                                              | 46   |
| Summary of the Chapters                                               | 47   |
| Chapter Two: Review of Literature                                    | 49   |
|  
  Introduction to the Literature                                      | 49   |
|  
  Critical Review of the Literature                                   | 51   |
|  
  Summary                                                             | 92   |
Chapter Three: Methodology ............................................................................................. 93
  Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 93
  Research Design .......................................................................................................... 94
  Operational Definition of the Variables ....................................................................... 94
  The Population .............................................................................................................. 96
  Sampling Plan ............................................................................................................... 98
  Instrumentation ........................................................................................................... 100
  Pilot Study ................................................................................................................... 103
  Data Collection Procedure ......................................................................................... 110
  Data Analysis Procedures ........................................................................................... 112
  Summary ..................................................................................................................... 113

Chapter Four: Results ...................................................................................................... 114
  Research Questions ..................................................................................................... 114
  Instrumentation ........................................................................................................... 115
  Validity of the Questionnaire ...................................................................................... 116
  Reliability of the Scale ................................................................................................. 116
  Demographic Information on the Sample ................................................................... 120
  Descriptive Statistics ................................................................................................... 126
  The Univariate Results ................................................................................................. 132
  Correlation Results ..................................................................................................... 139
  Additional Findings .................................................................................................... 140
  Summary ..................................................................................................................... 147
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1: Percentage of Teachers According to Gender</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2: Percentage of Teachers According to Qualification Level</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3: Percentage of Teachers According to Training in Literacy</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4: Percentage of Teachers According to Attribution of Blame</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5: Percentage of Teachers According to Social Status</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6: Interpretation Scale for Teachers’ Attitudes Scores</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7: Distribution of Attitudes to Barriers Scores</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8: Two-Way ANOVA Results: Attribution and Qualification by Attitudes</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9: Means of Teachers’ Attitudes to Barriers According to Qualification</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10: Means of Teachers’ Attitudes to Barriers According to Attribution</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11: Correlation between Attitudes and Attribution</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12: Means of Teacher Optimism According to Qualification</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13: Means of Teacher Optimism According to Social Status</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14: Two-Way ANOVA Results: Qualification and Social Status by Optimism</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Attribution and Qualification in Regard to Attitudes</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One: Introduction

This exploratory study examines teachers’ attitudes toward barriers encountered in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with the families of low-income students. It examines the nature of teachers’ attitudes and explores whether attitudes differ as a function of teachers’ qualification and according to the kinds of attribution teachers make regarding the causes of barriers.

A secondary area of consideration concerns the role of teachers’ perception of their social status in the school community in determining their attitude to barriers. Focus is on the attitudes of teachers in the 48 remote rural schools that participated in Jamaica’s first formal, family-school literacy partnership scheme. The Jamaica All-Age School Project (JAASP), a joint effort of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture in Jamaica (MOEYC) and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DfID), aimed at enhancing the literacy and numeracy achievement of the rural poor primarily through stakeholder empowerment and participation (Ministry of Education Youth and Culture, 2003).

Jamaica is not the first country to have turned to stakeholder partnership schemes as a means of combating rural underachievement in literacy. Family-school partnerships have a long-standing history mainly in developed countries and have been shown to hold myriads of benefits for rural low-income students and for students at risk for literacy failure (Epstein, 1991, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Lazar & Slostad, 1999; Maynard & Howley, 1997; Thorkildsen & Scott-Stein, 1999). Benefits have also been cited for students who experience language/cultural dissonance between home and school.
and who must acquire literacy competence in a second/foreign language, as well as for
the families of such students. Epstein (2001) states, for example, that family-school
partnerships are especially vital for children from families with cultural and language
backgrounds that differ from that of the school (p. 315).

Partnerships between home and school have been cited as especially crucial for
schools and professional educators serving students on the margins of the school system
(Bevans, Furnish, Ramsey, & Talsma, 2001; International Reading Association, 2002;
Leslie & Allen, 1999; Morrow & Young, 1997; Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999;
networks for creating “bridges and buffers” as well as for supplying academic, attitudinal
and social benefits for students, professional educators and schools is continually
emphasized by researchers and practitioners who also caution against assumptions,
negative stereotypes, and oversights that can result in partnerships being more harmful
than productive for students and their families (de Carvalho, 2001; Epstein, 2001;
Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Pugh, 1985; Thorkildsen
& Scott-Stein, 1999).

Literacy Partnerships: Promises and Problems

Weaknesses in the conceptualization and execution of partnerships as well as
misunderstandings regarding the role, responsibilities and capabilities/inclinations of
specific stakeholders has led to the failure of many partnership schemes (de Carvalho,
2001; Lareau, 1987; Pugh, 1985). Recent attempts at clarifying the meaning and function
of partnerships have focused, therefore, on presenting partnership schemes as on-going, evolving processes (rather than as set products) in which parents, school and other stakeholders toil at establishing the kind of relationship that can adequately and positively scaffold children’s literacy learning.

Epstein (2001), for example, defines a partnership as the “continuous planning, support and participation of school personnel, families and community organizations in coordinated activities at home, in the school and in the community that directly and positively affect the success of all children’s learning” (p. 317). A family-school partnership is not a one-shot event but a process of learning to work together, continually refining relationships so that students’ learning can be effectively supported.

Pugh (1989, as cited in OECD, 1997) also states that for a family-school partnership to be truly effective and productive it has to be conceptualized as “a working relationship that is characterized by a sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate” (p. 53). It is a give-and-take process in which the parties try to understand, accommodate, and learn from each other, keeping the child at the center of all consideration at all times.

Like Epstein (2001) and Pugh (1985), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) characterizes a partnership as a process of “learning to work together and valuing what each partner can bring to the relationship” (p. 52). In partnerships, families are not compelled to participate in one-sided relationships and are not seen as deficient or in need of treatment (Pugh, 1985; OECD, 1997). No one adopts a
dictatorial role. Roles are continually being negotiated and each party respects and honors the expertise of the other. Partnership relationships, when properly executed, are characterized by an open-minded sharing of information, expertise and resources (joint investment); by joint responsibility; and by the adoption of equal levels of accountability (OECD, 1997).

Pugh (1985) distinguishes family-school partnerships from relationships labeled collaboration and cooperation. While in collaboration and cooperation, “ultimate decisions and responsibilities remain with the professional” and only simple compliance is requested of parents, in a partnership there is joint acting in planning and in the formulation of goals and objectives. There is also equal access to information and resources, equal participation in management and decision making, and joint participation in the execution of projects. Equitable literacy partnerships, for example, are characterized by, among other things, the provision of both home-based and school-based support services and interventions with each stakeholder being given the opportunity to feel as though he/she can effect change. As Pugh (1985) states professionals “work with rather than do things to” families (p. 220).

Epstein (2001) thought it crucial to distinguish partnerships from other activities labeled parental involvement. Epstein presents partnership (a broader concept) as the more sensitive and informed means of involving parents. While in parental involvement schemes the onus is placed on parents to connect with schools and to engage in their children’s education at home, in partnerships schemes responsibilities as well as ideas, activities, opportunities and services are evenly distributed and teachers strive to involve
all parents (p. 89). There is a greater connection between the school and the family spheres and students are viewed as the hub of the family and the center of all activities.

Surveys of recent trends in partnership formation reveal, however, that formulators are not always faithful to the conceptualization of partnerships as outlined in the literature (Epstein, 2001; de Carvalho, 2001; Hanafin & Lynch 2001; Lareau, 1987; Pugh, 1985). This has led to family-school partnerships schemes, particularly the philosophies and dispositions of professional educators who execute such schemes, being exposed to intense scrutiny (de Carvalho 2001; Dauber & Epstein, 2001; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Lareau, 1987; Lazar and Slostad, 1999; Pugh, 1985; Ramirez, 1999, 2000, 2002).

Researchers have criticized the philosophies that drive partnership ventures, the lack of consideration of the differences in the distribution of cultural capital among families, and the potential of particular partnership arrangements for precipitating social inequities. Researchers have also questioned the lack of reciprocity and failure to create consensual relationships in most schemes, the intrusion of incompatible values and norms on the private sphere of the home, the lack of joint planning and execution of initiatives, and the lack of consideration by school professionals of the effects of these oversights in their evaluation of parent participation levels. High parent attrition and unequal participation levels have been blamed on such failings.

The general leaning of educators toward culture of poverty explanations for parent non-participation has also attracted much scrutiny (de Carvalho, 2001; Lareau, 1987). Also in question is the lack of consideration of the curricular, linguistic,
pedagogical and assessment issues that also contributed to the literacy differentials that partnerships seek to eliminate, and the leaning toward blaming parents for the failure of schooling (de Carvalho, 2001; Lareau, 1987).

De Carvalho (2001) asserts, additionally, that the desirability and viability of family-school partnership models used as the basis of projects executed is often taken for granted without reference to the middle-class notions upon which they are based or to the high price tag and overwhelming burden these schemes place on the poor. De Carvalho also mentions the cultural/class imposition such schemes foster; the sanctioning of a shirking of responsibility by school; the absence of prerequisite school restructuring to facilitate equitable relations; the totalitarian nature of mandated schemes; the harmful perceptions school personnel often hold of specific types of families; and the continued conflicts that have characterized such relations.

Highlighting school-family as well as family-family dissonance affecting participation in partnerships, de Carvalho (2001) states, “families have different life conditions and arrangements and varying views and feelings about life, educability and educational responsibility” and will likely respond differently to expectations and policy mandates regarding participation “depending on material and cultural circumstances, social class, and individual behaviors and values” (p. 993). Additionally, the writer states that since school and families are “singly differentiated” in terms of conditions of operation, workings, and commitments, it might be unreasonable to expect parents to willingly comply with schemes in which their input in major decision making was not initially sought and whose operation conflicts with their life workings(p. 22).
Such precautions are not new. Pugh (1985) had cautioned schools against partnership schemes taking the form of impositions on the family sphere and had encouraged schools to aim for the building of bridges through consideration of the philosophies driving the partnership schemes and their compatibility with the culture of the home and community as well as with the capabilities, circumstances and wishes of families (pp. 229-234). Importantly, schools should consider the attitudes of professional educators, their willingness to consider issues related to partnership planning and execution, their perception of their roles, and their level of preparedness to work toward the success of partnership schemes given possible conflict in spheres as well as the possibility that they might be required to navigate spheres in a bid to ensure success. Pugh highlights the difficulty involved in fostering democratic partnerships. According to the writer, even the most lauded schemes highlight, more than anything else, “how very difficult it is to achieve a real partnership” (p. 234).

Researchers who recognize problems for partnership success generated by discontinuities between the school and family spheres and who understand the intervening role of professionals’ attitudes and quality of leadership in determining partnership success have long demanded a greater attention to process and a closer examination of the philosophies, social habitus, and dispositions upon which school-generated partnership schemes are predicated and executed (de Carvalho, 2001; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Lareau, 1987; Lazar and Slostad, 1997; Pugh, 1985; Tichenor, 1998). Epstein (2001) asserts that the quality of teacher leadership is crucial in conditioning the success of partnerships and in determining the extent of parents’ engagement in their
children’s education and thus highlights the need to examine the quality of teacher leadership in identifying reasons behind the success or failure of partnership ventures.

Epstein (2001) makes a crucial distinction between teachers who are leaders in partnership efforts and those who are not. Teachers who are leaders in forming networks tend to emphasize a greater overlap of the key spheres that influence students’ education, are more inclined to believe that parents with little education could and would support their children’s learning at home, make a greater effort to reach all parents, and have different interpretations of parent non-participation than teachers who are not (p. 162).

Epstein concluded, based on research revealing such distinctions, that the quality of leadership makes a difference in determining whether parents are included in or excluded from educational processes. Quality of leadership also determines whether parents make the decision to increase their knowledge of schooling and their own capabilities to help their children and whether parents decide to help their children increase their reading scores (p. 307).

Epstein (2001) states in addition that unique characteristics of language arts, reading, and primary-level educators position them well to be partnership leaders especially in literacy. Such educators, the writer states, tend to persist longer with peripheral parents, are inclined to expect more from low-income families, reported a greater level of success with partnership initiatives, and tend to have more family-friendly interpretations of non-participation.

This paper focuses on the attitudes of teacher more likely to adopt roles as partnership leaders toward barriers they encounter in establishing literacy partnerships
with poor families in rural areas of Jamaica. It explores teachers’ affective reaction toward barriers and looks at the implications of such attitudes for the success and sustainability of literacy partnership ventures. If JAASP teachers display positive attitudes then there is much hope that they can act as partnership leaders instilling in other educators the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make partnership initiatives a success.

**Background to the Problem**

The study examines the attitudes of teachers who participated in the Jamaica All-Age School Project (JAASP) toward barriers encountered in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with low-income families. It examines the nature of teachers’ attitudes and seeks to determine whether attitudes differ according to teachers’ qualifications and according to their attribution of blame for barriers. Participants are drawn from the group of teachers who participated in the JAASP literacy partnership initiative intended to alleviate problems relating to persistent literacy underachievement by rural low-income students. The section below provides background on rural literacy problems in Jamaica and the role envisioned for parents in alleviating such problems.

*Impetus for the JAASP Initiative: The Jamaica Adult Literacy Survey of 1999*

The Jamaica Adult Literacy Survey (JALS), conducted in 1999 and made public in 2001, highlighted several shocking trends in rural literacy, and may have been the impetus for JAASP. The survey found that literacy levels were lower in rural areas (73%) than in Kingston Metropolitan areas (88.1%) and in other towns (84%). The reports also maintained that “the person prone to being illiterate is an older, rural male who dropped
out of school early and received little parental assistance in the schooling process” (p. 47). Emphasizing the need to target literacy interventions to rural areas, the report encouraged policy makers to promote parental support as a viable means of fostering meaningful educational change. The report stimulated calls for greater parent participation in educational processes, but calls were also prompted by government need to drum up support for its cost-sharing program.

Claims regarding low levels of literacy in rural areas are not new. Miller (1992) had brought rural-urban differentials in literacy achievement to light in the late 1980s and early 1990s. After analyzing the performance of Grade 6 students across the island on five National Assessment Program (NAP) tests in 1989, Miller discovered that residency was a “powerful correlate of performance especially in reading” and that, in reading, urban students performed significantly better than did those from rural areas (p. 178). Miller at that time suggested that socioeconomic and cultural factors among other variables should be investigated, stating that “reading levels must be improved in rural schools” (p. 178).

Situations have not improved since Miller (1992) brought the problem to light. Burchell Whiteman, former Minister of Education, in speaking at the launching of the JAASP initiative in 2000, highlighted the gravity of the problem facing remote rural students, especially those enrolled in all-age schools. According to the Minister, concerned individuals and groups across the nation have persistently raised issues pertaining to “the plight of the students who attend these schools, either to make
suggestions for improving quality or to become involved personally in bringing about quality improvement” (p. 1).

Recent trends in literacy achievement have also precipitated fears about illiteracy and underachievement especially for rural students. A report by the 14-member task force commissioned in February 2004 to assess the impact of recently concluded educational initiatives on academic achievement asserts that, in 2004, only 13.6% of grade 3 students were able to demonstrate mastery on tests of phonics, mechanics, vocabulary, and study skills; and only 35.8% could demonstrate mastery in reading and listening comprehension. Highlighting the fact that the government had missed its target of 80% mastery, the report revealed that only 62% of grade 6 students were able to show mastery on the language arts tests used as one criterion for determining students’ capacity for handling secondary-level materials (Davis, 2004).

Importantly, the task force report revealed that the majority of students labeled as being at risk based on recent performance outcomes hailed from rural communities (Davis, 2004). McAnuff-Gumbs (2002) had found a significant difference in students’ reading performance according to whether they were rural or urban residents. Additionally, Roberts (2000, cited in MOEYC Language Policy, 2001) had found, in a study of rural students, that “over half the students in the study made little progress” in their journey through the all-age school years and that “some even retrogressed” (p. 13).

Examples closer to the JAASP project are available. According to JAASP statistics collected in 2000 and reported in the impact assessment in 2003, in one undisclosed remote rural school in Clarendon, only 5% of boys and 25% of girls were
labeled as Not At Risk based on their performance on the Grade Four Literacy Test. Eighty-four percent (84%) of students in that school were labeled at risk or questionable.

These statistics are not surprising given what the Rose Social Assessment of 2003 states about the literacy performance of the rural poor. According to the social assessment, reading ability represents the greatest challenge for rural residents in terms of access to upper-secondary level education. Low reading levels, the report asserts, prevent students from learning the content of various subjects and from demonstrating an ability to master secondary-level materials. Like Miller (1992), The Rose Social Assessment sets such academic difficulties within a wider social context and calls attention to the major socioeconomic divide between rural and urban areas as well as to the high level of stratification of the educational structure in Jamaica.

According to the RSA, the 44% of Jamaica’s population that resides in rural areas account for 80% of Jamaica’s poor and rural farmers are the poorest workers on the island. The children of such workers attend school less regularly due to high transportation cost, use facilities less, and seldom have the supplies necessary to participate fully in learning processes (Rose Social Assessment, 2003). Poverty in rural homes coupled with poor educational provisions worsens the fate of rural students. The RSA claims, “Children of poor families in rural areas and the inner city receive a low quality of education” and are typically sent to schools notorious for “poor teaching quality, poor infrastructure, and poor attendance” (p. 2). Christie (2003) states that situations are so discouraging for these students that, given the barriers, they often survive schooling not due to excellent pedagogy but as a result of “natural intelligence,
parent and other support, strength of character and/or other variables” (p. 40-41). The majority, the Christie admits, are frustrated.

Problems in attaining literacy proficiency due to poverty are compounded by language issues that are particularly crucial in rural contexts. Rural students, especially those in remote settings, experience a greater dissonance between home and school language because they tend to be speakers of a deep or basilectal Jamaican Creole (JC).

McAnuff-Gumbs (2002) had found a significant interaction between residency and language in influencing the reading performance primary school students in Jamaica. Christie (2003) acknowledges this fact, stating that residency, language, class, and educational opportunities are interwoven in the rural Jamaican setting. According to Christie, while Standard Jamaican English (SJE) serves as the language of the elite, is the official language of Jamaica, and is the code expected in all context in which written language is required, Jamaican Creole is the code typically associated with “the poorest members of the society, who are mostly black, and with rural as contrasted with urban dwellers” (p. 2). Christie claims additionally that since academic competence is often judged based on JSE proficiency, “Creole is associated with illiteracy” and with limited opportunities for achievement (p. 39).

The majority of students in remote rural schools hail from families in which JC is the predominant, if not the only language, spoken (Christie, 2003). Many are children of small farmers and day laborers. Christie acknowledges that while many of these students are successful in school, the greater majority are not so lucky. A large proportion of all-age school students do not make it to the end of elementary school and, as Christie
acknowledges, this fact has been traditionally viewed as a natural occurrence since students were thought to be destined to adopt roles as laborers anyway (p. 39).

Winford (1994) also acknowledges the intricate link among socioeconomic, linguistic, pedagogical and geographical factors that militate against rural students but states that by far the most disadvantaging force rests with the pedagogical use of language (p. 57). Devonish (1983) had addressed issues related to literacy underachievement of Creole speakers in terms of a violation of linguistic human rights and a subsequent denial of access to crucial cultural capital. According to Devonish, by requiring students to “develop functional and creative literacy in a language they do not speak” policy makers inadvertently guarantee exclusion from educational processes and set students up for failure (p. 308). Devonish had claimed unequivocally that language is “the crux of the educational problem” (p. 207). Examination of caveats arising from proposed solutions to the problem of rural underachievement through family-school partnerships has proven Devonish correct.

Jennings-Craig (2004), for example, highlights the crucial role of parental support in reversing depressing rural literacy trends, stating that “Those children whose parents encourage them to read, assist them with homework and whom the children observe reading were more literate than those who did not have such support” (p. 2). However, as Christie (2003) shows the link between socioeconomic and linguistic marginalization is such that relying on low-income parents to provide academic support might itself pose problems. This is so since some “parents who are poor speak only or mainly Creole and have difficulty accessing documents written in English” (p. 61).
Thus, they may not have sufficient language knowledge to scaffold literacy learning at home. This creates several challenges for casting parental support as a solution to the problem of rural illiteracy and for mandating parental partnerships in the absence of support mechanisms (Davis, 2004; Epstein, 2001). As Epstein (2001) acknowledges, “Parents with low reading ability (and with limited knowledge of the power code) need differently designed communications and materials, so they can get the information they need to understand the schools and encourage their children” (p. 311). It seems therefore that attempts at improving literacy achievement in students through family-school partnership schemes must also address linguistic and other contextual issues.

Thus, reports dating back to the early 1990s build on each other to emphasize a need to tackle literacy and numeracy problems faced rural students and an equal need to address the contextual forces that contribute to the potency of such problems.

*The Jamaica All Age School Project Partnership Plan*

The JAASP literacy project, which ran for three years and represented the latest in a series of internationally-funded literacy initiatives, was intended to benefit “children and communities in the most disadvantaged remote rural areas of Jamaica” by tackling issues of access, quality, retention and equity (Jamaica All Age School Project Report, 2004). One of the principles underlying the project, which had as its theme “learning for all”, was the building of partnerships between schools and all important stakeholders (including families) in a bid to “develop improved lifetime opportunities for rural children” (p. 1).
The project ran from April 2000 to June 2003 and was the result of a joint effort between the Government of Jamaica’s Ministry of Education, Youth, and Culture (MOEYC) and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID). According to MOEYC reports, the project was closely aligned with UK targets for poverty alleviation, and involved the promotion of better education for children in poor, rural communities in a bid to improve their life chances. As such, the project emphasized literacy education and literacy learning support, and involved 48 schools plagued by low student achievement, high rate of absenteeism, and poor relations between parents/communities and the school. (See Appendix A for a list of participating schools.)

Schools selected for participation in the project were found to produce students who qualified neither for the world of work nor for upper secondary education. In fact, the Rose Social Assessment (2003) found that students in these schools, 73% of whom belong to the low-income bracket, seldom survived the process of schooling and seldom gained access to upper-secondary level education. In 2002, for example, over one-third of all-age school students did not have places in high school (Davis, 2004).

This exclusion is further precipitated by the fact that all-age school, according to recent allegations, offer students only the illusion of lower-secondary education given the persistence of primary-level pedagogies in these grades and the failure of graduates to attain competencies that would allow them to progress to higher levels of the system (Rose Social Assessment, 2003). At the end of all-age schools, students are seldom found capable of coping with academic demands at the upper-secondary level and often exit the
system at age 15 (Rose Social Assessment, 2003). This had previously raised little concern since the government would still claim to have offered students “secondary education”.

No doubt trends in attrition would affect the relations between parents and school and would impact the kind of faith parents have in these schools. Baseline studies conducted by the project team in the targeted communities indicated that, indeed, relations between the school and parents in these communities were strained and that parents had negative perceptions of teachers and school management. Researchers also highlighted the apparent sense of hopelessness and frustration and the high level of pessimism among rural low-income parents that any change to their quality of life and the quality of education afforded their children was possible. The JAASP project seemed geared at alleviating such problems and concerns.

Although the JAASP project revolved around seven main components, the stakeholder participation and school improvement component was granted the highest level of priority. Principal focus was placed on stakeholder involvement; stakeholder ownership, autonomy and accountability; parent participation in school development and in their children’s education; and recognition of diversity as a means of effective educational change. Additionally, the literacy focus was paramount in the project.

Policy makers conceived of family-school partnership as a contractual arrangement between the parent, child and the school, with parents contributing a predetermined amount of time, money (cost sharing) and perhaps personal labor to ensure school advancement and improvement in achievement (Davis, 2004). One requirement of
the contract was that parents would become “conversant with school vision, expectations, rules, and regulations” (Davis, 2004, p. 31). This suggests that the school, not the child, was the hub of the model and the role of the family was to support school functioning. Focus, therefore, seemed to be on cooperation rather than on democratic, reciprocal relations. Thus, while focus was appropriately placed on literacy improvement through stakeholder participation, the conceptualization of partnership underlying the project may not have been appropriate for fostering the kind of ownership, autonomy and shared contribution that have been shown to yield success.

While the JAASP initiative enjoyed generous funding and incorporated many best practices, shortcomings in the conceptualization of the kind of partnership to be fostered might have undermined the project. According to reports in the Jamaica: Country strategy paper (2001) published by the DFID, program resources for the project was expected to be in the tune of 5 million pounds per year with additional sums coming from amounts budgeted for the rest of the Caribbean, and from which Jamaica was also expected to benefit. Funded activities included initial community surveys to garner public opinion stakeholder roles; the recruitment of a community participation facilitator from each school community; the training of community relations education officers in participatory approaches; the instituting of training for administrators and teachers; and the provision of family literacy training for principals and literacy coordinators. Despite these efforts, evidence existed in the action research reports to suggest that the project did not generate ownership on the part of parents and that the project as implemented did not conform to parents’ views of a truly meaningful initiative.
Despite family outreach programs, school-community programs with special focus on family literacy, and the formation of School Partnership in Children’s Education (SPICE) groups aimed at encouraging parents and teachers to work together to support students’ literacy learning, parent participation was still minimal if reports by teacher-researchers are to be believed. Still, at the end of the project, key achievements cited include increased involvement of parents in their children’s education and in the life of the school, as well as greater parent motivation and increased ability to provide support for their children’s literacy and general academic learning.

There was also said to be a greater level of commitment on the part of parents to develop their own literacy and to maintain informal contact with teachers, and strengthened community spirit. Unexpected benefits for participants cited include “increased level of confidence, self-esteem, and satisfaction” and “higher expectations of themselves and each other” (p. 5). Certainly, such positive outcomes should auger well for future partnership efforts by educators trained in the program.

However, an examination of documents detailing plans for regional strengthening as well as a scrutiny of the reports on 17 action research projects done under the umbrella of JAASP, revealed several barriers to the development of the types of partnerships envisioned by educators, and a concomitant series of self-serving attribution regarding the sources of problems (Kennedy, 2003). Also apparent was a mismatch between the claims of the impact assessment and reports of the outcomes of the 17 projects conducted by literacy professionals in the program.
In expressing frustration with perceived attitudinal barriers to partnership formation, educators referred to what they perceived as parents’ lack of ambition and negative attitudes toward the project, as well as parents’ gendered notions regarding which parent should be involved in partnership activities. Some barriers hinging on socioeconomic forces included parents’ demand for compensation for participation, parent appeals to familial hardships in explaining patterns of non-participation, lack of a sufficiently educated and motivated parent cohort, and logistical challenges such as transportation cost. Principals who sometimes led projects referred to teachers’ and parents’ lack of self-efficacy and demands for compensation. Principals also cited resistance to change by their administrative peers as factors affecting partnership success.

While project reporters tended to lean toward character weaknesses in explaining barriers and parent non-participation in project activities, references were also made to general socioeconomic hardships facing families. Also evident in the reports was a focus on product and not process in pinpointing problems. School personnel showed little signs of self or process evaluation, looking to parents and socioeconomic constraints as the primary culprits.

The aim of the UK funded JAASP literacy project was the elimination of poverty through the alleviation of factors that prevent the poor from participating effectively in the society and through the elimination of disadvantaging structures that perpetuate inequities in society. It is essential to ascertain the extent to which this initiative, originally aimed at achieving equity of access by fostering productive literacy-based family-school partnerships, actually succeeded in fortifying teachers at least attitudinally
for partnership challenges they will face. Vital also is the need to pinpoint the affective reaction of teachers to partnership problems, to determine their ideas regarding the source of barriers, and reveal their notions regarding responsibility and accountability when confronted with a failing partnerships.

*Statement of the Problem*

This paper aims at examining the attitudes of a specific group of professional educators toward the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with the families of low-income students. It seeks to ascertain the nature of such attitudes and to determine whether attitudes differ according to teachers’ level of qualification and according to teachers’ attribution of blame for barriers. If the data allows, the paper will also examine the role teachers’ perception of their own social status in determining teachers’ professional disposition. The paper’s focus is narrowed to an examination of the attitudes of teachers in the 48 schools in remote rural Jamaica that took part in the JAASP initiative.

A cluster sample of male and female primary-level teachers and literacy professionals serving in 28 of the 48 JAASP schools have responded to the survey used as the main instrument of data collection. Indications are that these teachers are the one most appropriately positioned to be partnership trendsetters given their training and experience in the project, their experience and training as language/literacy educators, and their greater inclination toward conferring with parents given the nature of their work (Epstein, 2001). These teachers are the most likely to express positive attitudes to partnership challenges, and to achieve greater success in partnership ventures.
Research Questions

The study aims at addressing the following questions:

1. What is the nature of teachers’ attitudes to the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with low-income families?

2. Do teachers from the different qualification levels - pre-trained, diploma trained or graduate trained - differ in overall attitude to barriers?

3. Is there a difference in attitude according to teachers’ attribution of the blame for barriers to teacher and school factors, to parent and family factors, or to wider societal factors?

4. Is there a significant interaction between qualification and attribution in regard to teacher attitude to barriers?

Research Hypotheses

No hypothesis is presented for the first question that seeks merely to describe the kinds of attitudes teachers display without any reference to whether attitudes differ according to any predetermined teacher characteristic. The following null hypotheses are proposed for questions two to four.

1. Null Hypothesis (Question 2):

Teachers from the different qualification levels - pre-trained, diploma trained or graduate trained– do not differ in overall attitudes to barriers.
2. Null Hypothesis (Question 3):
There is no difference in overall attitudes among teachers who attribute the blame for barriers to teacher and school factors, to parent and family factors, or to wider societal factors?

3. Null Hypothesis (Question 4):
There is no significant interaction between teacher qualification and teacher attribution in regard to teachers’ attitudes to barriers.

**Significance**

Motivation for conducting this research into teachers’ affective reaction to partnership-related problems comes from an awareness of global demands for stakeholder participation in educational processes around the world as well as from an intimate knowledge of the myriad of factors that militate against partnership efforts in third-world contexts. Motivation also comes from an awareness of allegations regarding the limitations of teacher training and professional disposition in fostering such partnerships and from claims pertaining to the classed nature of partnership models which critics claim are mostly predicated on the values and capabilities of the middle-class (de Carvalho, 2001; Epstein, 2001; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002).

The Jamaican education system is a new arrivant on the partnership landscape, especially in terms of fostering family-school partnerships at the primary level. Educational personnel who have become involved in recent partnership ventures are still in the process of conceptualizing their roles and are still struggling to assume new and perhaps foreign responsibilities placed on them. Since there is no long-standing history of
facilitating or expecting parent-teacher partnerships at the primary level, and since partnership efforts have never specifically centered on literacy, the JAASP literacy project represents the earliest and perhaps only attempt at forging such liaisons.

Given the groundbreaking nature of the intervention, given its generous funding and noble purpose, and given the high expectations placed on the project, it becomes important to ascertain the level to which this project has really improved the education landscape in term of providing teachers with the necessary professional fortitude for the role they have to play in fostering partnerships. Pugh (1985) highlights the mammoth task that partnership formation represents even for countries with a long-standing history of fostering such schemes. Epstein (2001) shows, however, that teachers at the primary level as well as those engaged in language and literacy education are highly likely to surmount challenges and to achieve partnership success, largely because they have been trained to expect and respect parent participation in educational processes.

This research attempts to assess these teachers’ affective readiness to confront barriers they have or might encounter in executing partnership mandates. These barriers, explicitly referenced in the next chapter, have been cited repeatedly in numerous surveys of living conditions, in various ministerial speeches, and in the Rose Social Assessment (2003). Evidence of these barriers also emerge through analysis of the content of numerous JAASP action research reports. In fact, barriers seem to loom large in discussions of JAASP partnership activities.

Barriers that arise in partnership activities are often attributed to parent apathy, negative attitudes, or lack of concern for their children’s educational well being. Low-
income and single parent families as well as teenage mothers are frequent targets for criticism since they are perceived to be the notorious non-participants who falter at visibly adopting their role as partners in their children’s education (Epstein, 2001; Filp, 1998; Lazar & Slostad, 1999). However, recent researchers have questioned educators’ limited understanding of the spectrum of reasons behind parent non-participation; have brought up for scrutiny the philosophical assumptions behind partnership projects; and have been highly critical of the demand educators placed on parents without regard to their specific circumstances.

Researchers have also expressed concern regarding the potentially negative impact of teacher interpretation of non-participation on the sustainability of educational partnerships (de Carvalho, 2001; Lareau, 1987). The particular framework of explanation for non-participation (culture of poverty thesis, cultural capital perspective; or institutional differentiation) to which teachers ascribe based on training and experience can affect their interpretation of non-participation and thus their attitude to emerging barriers to partnerships (Lareau, 1987, p.73). Epstein (2001) highlights behavioral implications stating, “educators’ philosophies about involvement affect the action they take” (p. 89). Since partnerships have been posited as one means of revitalizing both teacher and parent enthusiasm and motivation to improve the academic lives of low-income students, it is essential to ascertain whether partnership initiatives geared at helping the poor can actually succeed in doing so or whether they in fact accentuate inequities and fortify stereotypes.
Research suggests that teachers who interpret parent participations based on the common culture of poverty thesis (the most common explanation) have tended to mirror what they perceive as parent apathy or lack of care (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Kasama & Tett, 2001; Lareau, 1987; Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Conversely, teachers who are eager to assume their roles as agents of empowerment; who are aware of their own limitations as forgers of literacy partnerships; who are aware of the valuable resources that families have to contribute to partnership processes; who acknowledge system failings; who are empathetic to challenges facing the poor in accessing educational services; who are cognizant of parents’ views and desires; and who are sufficiently motivated to forge partnerships despite barriers, express faith in the capabilities of the poor and persist in efforts to involve all parents. Epstein (2001) suggests that the kind of teachers targeted in this study are more likely to exhibit such positive characteristics and it is crucial to identify whether this is actually so.

O’Loughlin’s demand for “socially aware teachers” goes to the heart of the purpose of this study (p. 36). Socially aware teachers, Lazar and Slostad claim, are able to make a difference because they understand parents, are aware of the possibilities partnerships bring, and are in a position to agitate for systematic change in the means by which schools forge partnerships with parents (p. 207). The study aims at facilitating the identification and training of a cadre of professional educators who are able to question popular explanations and to traverse traditional borders in their eagerness to include low-income families (see also Epstein, 2001).
One research motive for pursuing this topic rests with the fact that despite the recognition of the importance of partnerships in altering the fate of the rural poor, the literature highlights the absence of adequate training for teachers and the paucity of research focusing on the quality of partnerships (Cairney, 1995; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). No known study has had as its central focus teachers’ attitude toward barriers and there is a paucity of research in literacy education focusing on teachers’ attitudes toward partnership-related difficulties and the implications of such attitudes for the quality of partnership leadership.

A second research motive rests with the fact there is a need in Jamaica to channel educational research efforts into remote rural communities that are seldom the beneficiaries of such efforts. Research done as part of the JAASP project revealed that although remote rural schools are plagued by serious educational issues, they are seldom the target of educational research conducted either by the University of the West Indies (the Caribbean’s and Jamaica’s premier university), or by any of the nine colleges offering teacher training in Jamaica. According to Kennedy (2003), educational research by these institutions is “restricted in the field to those schools which were easily accessible” (p. 6). By choosing schools previously thought inaccessible, the researcher hopes to extend the research landscape.

Additionally, while the OECD have conducted a few studies on partnerships on an international level, most research examining literacy partnership processes have been done in developed countries and have tended to focus on teachers’ attitudes to parents, not on their attitudes to barriers. Action research studies conducted in Jamaica as part of
the JAASP Project have inadvertently mentioned barriers faced by teachers who attempt to forge partnerships. Content analysis done using these studies reveals a potpourri of attitudes to barriers, none of which are overtly explored by empirical research. The topic involves more than teacher attitude to parents. It involves teachers’ ideas about the sources of problem, about their own role in partnership ventures, about the roles and responsibilities of others (parents, students, administration), as well as about how the social system operates for the enhancement or detriment of partnerships efforts.

The current writer believes that exploring teachers’ attitudes to parents cannot in itself yield data rich enough to clarify teacher affective reaction to partnerships failure or to a revelation of teacher explanations for non-participation and ultimately to an exposure of the philosophies to which they ascribe, nor can a focus on attitude to parents fully explain teacher motivation to make partnerships a sustained reality in Jamaica. It has been shown that teachers may hold negative attitudes about parents and yet remain highly motivated to help children of low-income families succeed (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). This is especially true if teachers have themselves risen out of poverty and are aware of the societal barriers facing the poor. Given this possibility, research focus on teacher partnership readiness must adopt a broader perspective that is not provided by focusing on relations with one particular stakeholder.

Importantly, allegations regarding the failure of recent educational initiatives have flooded the Jamaica media in recent times. Critics cite missed targets and persistent rural underachievement as evidence of the failure of educational initiatives (Jamaica Gleaner Online, April 22, 2005). A task force commissioned by the Prime Minister in
February 2004 to assess such claims concluded that the government had indeed missed literacy targets by a wide margin and that equity of access was still an issue for rural children (Davis, 2004). Given such evidence of failure, it becomes crucial to revisit partnership processes and to examine teachers’ affective responses to specific types of failures. Lessons from such a scrutiny can be used to inform teacher training and professional development, to gauge the quality of dispositions in the rest of the teaching population, as well as to derive future literacy initiatives with a greater likelihood for success.

To reiterate, there are greater global, regional and national rationales for pursuing such a topic. Global, regional, and national development goal statements highlight repeatedly the importance of equitable stakeholder participation in the realization of partnership visions and, consequently of national human resource development targets. Teacher readiness and inclination toward fostering change have been mentioned (Jamaica White Paper, 2000). Until exploration is done of teacher interpretation of and professional readiness to confront setbacks that may arise from the context in which they are attempting to establish networks, crucial variables in determining gauging teacher quality and the quality of partnership leadership will be left unexplored.

Some limitations of the study are highlighted below.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations.** Several sampling and conceptualization issues limit the generalizability of the study.
1. Only a cluster sample of teachers from 28 of 48 project schools is targeted in this study. While all six educational regions are represented, the uniformed nature of the sample might limit the generalizability of results beyond the 48 schools.

2. For reasons of feasibility, only teachers’ attitudes are surveyed.

1. The researcher did not identify the remote rural schools that are the focus of the study. It has to be assumed that the Ministry’s characterization of these schools is accurate.

2. Not all segments of the instrument were subjected to piloting. Subscales B and C were replications of older, validated instruments and did not require piloting.

3. Some antecedents of teachers’ attitudes, such as self-esteem, are not addressed in the paper. These are considered outside the ambit of the present study.

4. Behavioral implications of attitudes are not empirically explored in the study. No implications for teacher agency and performance are explored statistically. For the present, a discussion of possible implications has been deemed sufficient.

The limitations highlighted above are closely related to delimitations discussed below.

**Delimitations.** The research has several parameter restrictions that should be established from the outset.

1. Only literacy teachers, intervention specialists, and literacy coordinators in JAASP project schools are surveyed. No other category of educators in the project is surveyed.

2. Only teachers in rural, low-income schools are surveyed. A short time has elapsed since the end of the project and no follow-up project to spread the initiative has
3. been implemented. It is not expected that the effects of the program would have sufficiently multiplied to warrant a surveying of non-JAASP teachers.

4. Although the literature suggests that poor, urban schools face a similar plight to that of small, remote-rural schools, for reasons of practicality the former is not the subject of this research.

Again, the study represents only a modest attempt to explore a rather crucial issue while attempting at the same time to stir interest in the area. It merely lays the groundwork for future, in-depth confirmatory research.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are crucial to the research and warrant precise definitions. Definitions are based on the literature and, where appropriate, authoritative sources are referenced.

All-age schools. The term refers to schools that serve students between ages 6 and 15 years old. The typical all-age school has an elementary section (grades 1 to 6) and a junior high school division (grades 7 to 9).

Attitude. The term refers to a psychological tendency expressed through a party’s favorable or unfavorable evaluation of a particular entity or situation, as well as that party’s predisposition to categorize entities and events and to react to them with some degree of evaluative consistency (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001).

Attribution. This refers to teachers’ evaluation of the causes of barriers to partnership (Weiner & Allred, 1998).
**Barriers.** These refer to forces, both tangible and intangible, which prevent partnerships from becoming a sustained reality.

**Basilectal Creole.** This refers to the form of Jamaican Creole that is most distant from English.

**Child shifting.** This is a Caribbean cultural tradition of informal adoption (also referred to as child-sharing) in which young children are moved from parents’ homes to those of relatives whether for economic reasons such as to distribute the costs of child rearing, or for social reasons such as occurs when a woman with no children of her own takes in the child of a sibling or relative (UNICEF, 1991).

**Dependency ratio.** This refers to the proportion of people who are not of working age compared to those of working age (15 to 65 years).

**Equity.** Equity is defined as a state of school operation in which all students are able to participate in and benefit to the same degree from educational services despite the environment from which they hail or the parents that they have (Hernes, 2003; Imber, 2001).

**Family.** Epstein (2001) defines the family as the group of individuals with whom a child resides, who are responsible for the welfare of the child, and who hold “the major responsibility for teaching children about their cultural background, family values, beliefs, manners, and other important social qualities” (p 87).

**Gender.** Gender is defined as the biological sex of literacy teachers and includes two groups, males and females.
Habitus. These are socially acquired tendencies manifested in a group or sub-culture’s outlook on life and living, the opinions of its members, and their inclinations toward particular ways of dressing and acting (Bourdieu, 1986; Scahill, 1993).

Literacy partnerships. This refers to the mutual efforts of families and schools to work toward the shared goal of fostering students’ literacy achievement both at home and at school. Lazar and Slostad (1999) refer to partnerships as “web(s) of support” aimed at providing students with the best opportunity to thrive in school (p. 206).

Low-income students. This refers to students whose parents hold jobs that pay at or below the minimum wage, or whose parents do not have a job/livelihood that provides a steady income. Seventy-three percent (73%) of all-age schools students fall into this category and a greater percentage of remote rural students may be classified accordingly (Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions, 2000-2002; Rose Social Assessment, 2003).

Parent. This refers to any adult directly responsible for the welfare of the child at home.

Peripheral parents. Peripheral parents refer to those parents whose family culture/norms, habits and operations are most distant from that of the school (Bourdieu, 1986; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Lareau, 1987).

Proximal parents. Proximal parents refer to those parents whose family culture/norms, habits and operations are or most similar to those reinforced in schools (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002).
**Qualification.** This is defined as the highest level of certification held by the teacher. (*Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions, 2000-2002; Rose Social Assessment, 2003*).

**Teacher.** This term refers to any person or group of people directly responsible for the literacy education of the child in school.

**Assumptions of the Study**

1. Education is a social service the equitable distribution of which can benefit the poor. If schools are to achieve equity, comparable opportunities to participate in and benefit from educational service must be afforded all families. Educational initiatives must be so designed that they reach all families (Bartoli, 1995; Imber, 2001).

2. A state of equity has not yet been achieved in the Jamaican education system since academic benefits, use of school resource, access to quality schools, and participation in key educational services are still determined by social origin (*Caribbean Education Strategy, 2000; Issues in Educational Finance in the Commonwealth Caribbean, 1996 as cited in Caribbean Education Strategy, 2000; Rose Social Assessment, 2003*).

3. Both teachers and parents are crucial variables in determining the quality and extent of educational benefits students reap from educational processes. (Epstein, 2001; Pugh, 1985).

4. Low-income students can accrue greater benefit from educational services if services are mediated by the family (Epstein, 2001; Riehl, 2000).
5. Children are the center of the family that acts as buffer, liaison, and advocate for the children, “protecting and advancing their children’s right to participate in school programs” (Epstein, 2001, 87).

6. The aim of literacy partnerships should be to neutralize the effect of home advantage by proffering compensatory services and opportunities to the economically and socially disadvantaged (de Carvalho, 2001).

7. Parents as well as school personnel must be empowered if productive, sustainable partnerships are to be realized. Socially aware teachers, empowered through training, understand the life experiences of low-income families as well as the difficulties they face in fulfilling partnership mandates and can thus agitate for system change (Tortello, 2004).

8. Teachers’ attitudes and leadership in partnership efforts are crucial in determining partnership success.

Summary of the Chapters

The first chapter has sought to present the rich milieu surrounding efforts to establish literacy partnerships in Jamaica and has sought to establish the relevance of a research project such as this. This initial effort to clarify the context, purpose and research question driving the research is extended in the review of literature to follow.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature including references to regional and national goal statements that seek to expose concerns regarding the fate of the poor in literacy education and which target family-school partnerships as a possible solution. Also reviewed in the upcoming chapter are the literature on family-school
partnerships models and their relative strengths and weaknesses; the research on the value and shortcoming of family-school partnerships; research on language and other barriers to access in Jamaica; data on the literacy performance of rural students enrolled in all age schools; and an outline of insights garnered from an analysis of JAASP action research reports discussed in connection with research on teachers’ attitudes toward poor families and toward career-related problems involving the poor. Through this discussion, the researcher hopes to create an adequate base from which to derive the research hypotheses presented in this paper.

Chapter Three presents the study’s design and methodology of the study including the operationalization of key variables; a description of the process by which the population was identified and selected; a delineation of the process by which the primary instrument was developed and refined; and a description of the final instrument. Proposed data analysis techniques are outlined and are linked with research questions and hypotheses.

Finally, chapters four and five present the study’s findings and a discussion of those findings, linked to appropriate conclusions and recommendations. Implications of the findings for relevant stakeholders and for future researchers are also presented in these chapters.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction to the Literature

This paper examines teachers’ attitudes toward the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with the families of low-income students. It examines the nature of teachers’ attitudes and seeks to determine whether attitudes differ according to teachers’ level of qualification and according to the kinds of attribution teachers make regarding the causes of barriers. It is posited that teachers’ inclination toward particular attitudes and attributional patterns can influence their motivation to persist in attempts to involve poor families in home-school partnership schemes. Implications of attitudes for the sustainability of partnership initiatives, for teacher education and teacher educators, and for policy makers and curriculum developers are explored in the study.

This chapter seeks to present the literature bearing on issues surrounding the creation of literacy partnerships networks with low-income families. It begins with a discussion of the importance of family-school partnerships of specific types for increasing the literacy and overall academic achievement of low-income students. Problems surrounding partnership schemes aimed at reducing class and residency differentials in achievement will then be addressed with specific reference being made to the differential participation of parents from the different social strata.

This discussion will be followed by an examination of the various frameworks of explanation for low-income parent non-participation offered in the literature and their connection with types of attitudes teachers display when confronted with relational
difficulties. Special attention will be focused on Lareau’s (1987) framework of explanation for non-participation as well as on Lareau’s and Hanafin and Lynch’s (2002) notions regarding the potential use of institutionalized forms of school-family relations as avenues for perpetuating class inequities. Also referenced are Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, and Ochoa’s (2002) hierarchical model used to explain patterns of non-participation; Epstein’s (1991) ecological explanation; and Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) notion of cultural capital. All these are discussed in close connection with categories provided by Hanafin and Lynch (2002) and Lareau (1987).

A discussion of the implications of professional educators’ orientation toward particular frameworks of explanation segues into a scrutiny of Weiner’s (1981) attributional theory of social justice. This is counterbalanced with information from the literature on teacher attitudes toward poverty and toward the poor, and on teacher attribution for career-related failure, mainly as a means of providing a balanced view of possible implications of teacher evaluations of parent non-participation for teachers’ subsequent actions.

Since the research adopts Jamaica as the main context of study, the researcher then looks at partnership efforts that have been executed in Jamaica as part of the JAASP literacy project and the issues that spurred on and arose out of the project. The researcher conducts a scrutiny of the content of the various action research studies that act as testament to the problems that can arise and to the myriad of explanations and reactions toward which educators tend to gravitate.
Critical Review of the Literature

The Value of Literacy Partnerships for Low-Income Families

A plethora of research since the 1980s has demonstrated clearly that students’ academic achievement is enhanced when parents are meaningfully involved in their education, yet many parents are precluded from such involvement by virtue of their socioeconomic circumstances and level of social awareness (Epstein, 1991; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Maynard & Howley, 1997; Niedrich, 2003; Thorkildsen & Scott-Stein, 1999).

While the benefits for all students have been well established, researchers maintain that there are greater benefits for low-income students. Various meta-analyses of the research on the value of family-school partnerships for minoritized students conducted since the 1980s indicate larger advantages for such students not only in terms of standardized test scores but also in overall academic performance as well as in attitudes and behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003). Epstein (2001) states, for instance, that “Children from low-income and culturally and racially diverse families have the most to gain when schools involve parents” (p. 315).

Benefits have also been established for programs and schools and even for teachers in terms of the reduction of stress associated with accomplishing the teaching task (Epstein, 2003; Pugh, 1985). This is especially true for literacy educators who understand the need to enlist the support of parents in creating literate environment to support children’s literacy learning.
In terms of tangible results, Henderson (1988, as cited in Lazar & Slostad, 1999) cite “higher grades and test scores, long-term academic improvement, positive attitudes, more successful programs and more effective schools” (p. 206). Other benefits include lower dropout rates, increased attendance, greater student motivation and higher self-esteem, as well as greater willingness on the part of parents and communities to support schools.

Jones (2001) qualifies assertions regarding the benefits of partnerships for low-income students, however, stating that only specific kinds of partnerships between home and school can lead to increased academic performance, and that effects of such partnerships tend to be indirect rather than direct. These notions are substantiated by research which shows that the strongest effects or association with high achievement are indicated by parents’ affective support for students’ work and by their conveyance of high expectations and aspirations for their academic achievement (Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1996; Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Mau, 1997; Singh, Trivette, Keith, Keith, & Anderson, 1995; Trivette & Anderson, 1995). Thus, active involvement in school functions and school development projects, while inherently useful, may be less useful than effective home support.

Jones (2001) further qualifies assertions regarding the effects of aspirations, stating that what is important for low-income and minority students is not so much what parents autonomously expect but “what parents and their schools have learned, through their own experiences, to come to expect” (p. 22). The writer traces the root of influence on achievement back to past interactions between family members and the school, and
makes specific reference to parent immunity or hopelessness resulting from repeated
cycles of failure in families. Another intervening factor mentioned is parents’ level of
awareness of their own role in realizing their dreams for their children. The writer asks,
“what if a mother doesn’t know to check on homework or isn’t fazed by an F on a report
card?” (p. 22). According to Jones, this is when socioeconomic status sets in and
becomes a contributory factor to performance.

Lareau and Weininger (2003) show, however, that socioeconomic forces can
mediate the effect of family-school partnerships in others ways not related to weaknesses
in parenting. Through ethnographic studies of parent-teacher conferences the researchers
demonstrate that even “the most institutionalized manifestation of home-school relation”
aimed at abating the effects of social class on achievement can become “suffused with its
(class) influence” (p. 375). The writers point to the close alignment of interactional
patterns, authority structures, linguistic orientations, and quality of information exchange
in parent-teacher conferences with parents’ social origin. The writers concluded that “far
from ameliorating disparities attributable to social origin” family-school partnerships and
related policies could in fact “provide new avenues for their influence” (p. 400).

Given the various caveats regarding benefits and evidence of the intervening role
of stakeholder awareness, expectations and aspirations, it becomes crucial for researchers
discussing the effects of family-school partnerships to understand the potential influence
of psychosocial and historical factors on partnership effectiveness. It is also important
that researchers understand models regarding paths of influence and how, in many ways,
the root of influences can be traced back to the actions, attitudes and perceptions of professional educators even though this is not the only source to which problems can be attributed.

*The Power of Parent Aspirations and Expectations: A Choice of Models*

Two models seeking to explain the effects of parent aspirations and expectations of academic achievement have evolved in recent times: an expectation-driven model and a performance-driven model. Generally, writers who highlight the connection between parental support and student academic performance pursue an expectation-driven model. This type of model indicates that where parents express high expectations, students’ academic performance tends to be high. This kind of inquiry represents only one framework of explanation that, if interpreted literally, would indicate that students who do not do well hail from homes in which such expectations are absent and would tend to fuel deficit views of parents.

Powell and Peet (1996) provide a second framework of explanation – a performance-driven model. The writers propose that families with high initial expectations often modified these based on experiences with school and based on current school feedback on their children. Parents of children who were not doing well in school often abandoned “their ideal dreams for the child” and communicated this abandonment to their children in numerous ways. See Cheng and Starks (2002) for descriptions of such processes. Powell and Peet found evidence for such adaptive aspirational patterns among low-income mothers in a study of maternal aspiration involving 141 low-income mothers from a cross-section of ethnic groups.
The writers found too that the children of mothers who had a large aspirational differential (the difference between ideal aspiration of parents and modified expectations based on known reality) got lower grades and lower standardized test scores. The writers assert additionally that one-third of mothers in their study had already surrendered their ideal aspirations even though the children were still in the early years of schooling, and that 42% of parents did not believe that the child would achieve their ideal expectations (p. 4). The writers concluded that feedback on children or on their older siblings’ academic performance often dilute parent expectations and aspirations, as does parental perception of inequities in the school system and in their immediate living environment. The study made no distinction between aspirations and expectations.

Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001), in their study of Latino minority parents did examine aspirations and expectations as separate constructs. In this study, the researchers did find evidence for the type of performance-driven model proposed by Powell and Peet (1996). The researchers found that low-income parents in their study tended to have high expectations and aspirations for their children. As the children progressed through the elementary grades, aspirations remained “stable, high, and certain”, while expectations for success were significantly “lower, less stable and subject to considerable uncertainty”, especially as students entered grades three and four, which are traditionally high-stakes grades (p. 560).

However, the writers found that while feedback based on their children’s performance in school did result in downward modification of expectation, exposure to wider societal forces such as racial discrimination did not (p. 564). The writers concluded
that past performances rather than parental aspirations predicted the performance of minority students since it engendered low expectations (although not low aspirations) in families (p. 575).

A well-noted factor contributing to downward modification of expectations is negative contact with educators who seek to convince parents of their children’s low ability and potential for success (Li, 2003; Rose, 1989; Ramirez, 2000). Li (2003), in her counter-narrative re-examining the notion of the model minority, asserts that even families that initially had high expectations for their children sometimes have their expectations dashed or diminished by the repeated cycles of school failure that plague their families or by negative contact with school clinicians.

Despite the various qualifications Jones (2001) impose on claims regarding the benefits of parental influence, Jones still expresses high optimism that both parent active participation as well as their affective support can contribute to enhanced academic performance. The writer points to the positive results reaped by Comer schools with low-income families. Schools that adopt the Comer model subscribe to James Comer’s belief that “the relationship between school and family is at the heart of a poor child’s success or lack of it” (Ramirez-Smith, 1995, p. 15). Jones maintains that “every school needs to make contact with every family” as well as give every family the opportunity to participate in purposeful, non-frivolous ways (p. 21).

*Partnerships at School: The Importance of Advocacy*

Parents' role as advocates for their children has been cited as one means of bridging the gap between parent expectations and aspirations, and academic outcomes.
Feldman (2003) highlights the need for low-income parents not only to speak to their children (communicate their aspirations and expectations) but to also “speak up for them” (p. 5). Jones concurs, stating that parents of low-income students need to be encouraged to become more assertive and to adopt the role of advocate, ensuring that their own aspirations for their children are heard and realized in schools.

Highlighting the instrumental role that parents have played in ensuring that students historically excluded from the education system in the U.S. gain access to free appropriate educational services, Yell, Rogers, and Rogers (1998) emphasize the importance of parent advocacy repeatedly in their work. Vail (2001) also states that as long as parents remain silent and are not involved, they have no way of ensuring that their hopes and dreams for their children are realized in schools.

However, the reality has been that low-income parents are most often peripheral participants or non-participants in school-related activities with parents from the upper echelons of society assuming proximal roles (de Carvalho, 2003; Hanafin & Lynch, 2001; Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

**Patterns of Parent Non-Participation in Family-School Partnership Efforts**

Several writers have sought to characterize patterns of low-income parent non-participation in school processes as well as to outline the various factors affecting parent participation. Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, and Ochoa (2002) in their study of patterns of non-participation show that, while marital, ethnicity, and employment status were important contextual factors affecting parent participation in partnership activities, socioeconomic status remained by far the most powerful influence. To clarify this
assertion, the writers state that while low-income parents are by no means less interested in their children’s education than parents from the other social strata, their social standing and educators’ knowledge of their living situations do “affect the way the educational system perceives and accepts” their involvement (p. 521).

Shannon (1996, as cited in Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, and Ochoa, 2002) highlight the “no-win” situation that low-income families sometimes face in partnership activities. The writer show that not only is parent non-participation (precipitated by potent socio-economic forces) viewed negatively, but their attempts to participate, to act like high-status parents, and to challenge the status quo are often viewed negatively by educators who are aware of their socio-economic standing and who hold behavior expectation for persons from that stratum of society.

Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, and Ochoa (2002) maintain therefore that a hierarchy of factors (individual, contextual and institutional) hinging on socioeconomics operate together to affect participation. On the institutional level, Lareau and Weininger (2003) show that even when low-income parents do get involved, the types of interactions they have with the systems are largely conditioned by their social standing. Such negative interactions, the writers state, can lead to high level of attrition. Epstein (1997) acknowledges the inevitability of relational barriers. However, the writer states unequivocally that these “must be resolved in order to reach and engage families in the best ways” (p. 11).
Factors Contributing to Non-Participation in Jamaica

World research delineating socioeconomic factors affecting low-income parent participation in family-school partnership efforts and in educational efforts in general, abound (EDSTAR, 2003; Lazar & Slostad, 1999; Morris, Knight, & Wasson, 1996; Ramirez, 2000; Vail, 2001). An extensive outline of these barriers garnered from the international literature is presented in discussion of construct validity presented in Chapter 3.

Many of barriers mentioned in literature are mirrored in the Jamaican context. The Rose Social Assessment conducted in Jamaica in 2002 and published in 2003 highlights a multiplicity of barriers to the participation of low-income families in educational activities, especially where rural families are concerned. The social assessment states, however, that if educators are to succeed in improving the cognitive skills of rural low-income students, then forces blocking children (and their families) from taking full advantage of educational opportunities must be identified and eliminated or at least circumvented in the short run (p. 4).

Socioeconomic Forces Affecting Parent Participation in Rural Jamaica: Individual Factors

One disadvantaging force highlighted by the Jamaica Survey of Living conditions 2002 (SLC) is the high dependency ratio in rural communities. The Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions (2002) asserts that “the working age population in rural areas is bearing a higher burden of caring for children and the elderly than their peers in the Kingston Metropolitan Area and Other Towns” (p. 2). This is so, the study maintains,
because they have the highest average number of children and the highest absolute household size that make them more vulnerable than their counterparts in towns. Thus, burden of childcare and related familial and financial hardships, especially in one-parent households, may prevent both parent and child from accessing educational services to the same degree as other educational clients not burdened by these forces. Such contextual burdens affect not only parents’ level of engagement in literacy support activities at school but also their ability to engage literacy support activities at home.

A related force pertains to what the social assessment refers to as a “destabilizing pattern of single-parent female-headed families” in Jamaica (p. 2). In 2002, the national average female-headed, single parent household stood at 45.5 percent, showing a trending upwards of 3.5 % since the last survey in 2000 (Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions, 2002). The social assessment refers also to the “very high number of children living with only one parent”, stating that this parent is usually the mother (p. 2). The prevalence of single-parent households as well as high reproduction rates have serious implications for the level of parent-coordinated literacy support a rural child is likely to receive both at home and at school.

This does not mean that children in all single parent households are disadvantaged. Hamilton (1997) in a study focusing on the struggles of female headship states that at the time of the study, women headed over one-third of household in Jamaica in the permanent absence of male partners. Hamilton did discover, however, based on expenditure analysis conducted, that female-headed households “devote a larger share of their budget to children’s basic needs items such as education, food, and clothing” and
that “a woman’s headship decision is not only influenced by her own consumption and leisure, but also the welfare of her children” (p. 6). This may suggest that living in a female-headed household in the absence of a male figure may not necessarily affect students’ education negatively since the education of the child is considered a priority in these homes. Still, *The Rose Social Assessment* (2003) asserts that current trends in family compositional structure in Jamaica pose a problem for students who need parental support and supervision as they seek to become literate.

To complicate matters, the social assessment claims, students sometimes live with neither parent. The report states that “many children have one or both of their parents working permanently abroad providing financial but no nurturing or educational support” (p. 2). Referring to what it perceives as the “incomplete family environment” to which most children are subjected, the report states that children are often left in the care of less mobile grandparents, less mature brothers and sisters, or in the care of relative or other parties who may not make the child’s education a priority. It is assumed that the more distance the kinship ties, the less likely will be the urge of these new guardians to provide the kind of literacy support known to produce good readers.

*The Rose Social Assessment* (2003) cites additional factors related to individual lifestyles that aggravate the problem of familial instability. According to the social assessment, Jamaica experiences grave problems with unplanned teenage fertility and child shifting (informal adoption) in rural areas, and these contribute to unstable and inadequate family settings for children. According to the social assessment, the child-shifting rate in Jamaica now stands at 20%. Patterns of informal adoption in Jamaica
result in children being sent to live in other households while their sole, supporting parent seeks to fend for a living. Additionally, parents must sometimes “eliminate” children from previous relationships from the household when they adopt a new and promising partner. Such children are usually sent to live with a grandparent or relative, or even on the streets. Contextual stress may also limit the level to which parents can focus on matters not related to fulfilling the most basic of needs.

**Barriers to Participation: Financial Hardships in Rural Contexts**

The literature cites numerous barriers that frustrate partnership efforts, not all of which originate with the families of low-income students. *The Rose Social Assessment* (2003) points to the myriad of disadvantaging structures that affect poor students and their families in access to educational resources. The report highlights the fact that economic hardship, high transportation cost precipitated by school zoning problems, as well as other externally-imposed challenges present huge problems for students and their families in accessing educational services and in establishing in the home the kinds of environment known to foster literacy development. JAASP reports to be scrutinized later highlight frequent problems in engaging parents discounted the relevance of unpaid partnership engagement because it competed for time with other activities in which parents could “hustle a living”.

In a country in which unemployment stands at 33%, in which the majority of those who are poor and unemployed live in rural areas, and in which the agricultural basis upon which rural communities subsist is being eroded, financial hardships are an everyday reality. No doubt parents who can least afford to send their children to school
on a regular basis due to high transportation cost, who are overburdened with dependents, and who may be the sole, minimum-wage-earning breadwinner in a less than viable agricultural industry, might experience grave problems in meeting family-school partnership expectations and engagements. The tendency might even be to view such activities as frivolous and non-crucial. As one teacher cited in Epstein (2001) states, “Parents are so involved with staying alive and being able to keep up economically, there is little or no energy left to devote to children – much less spend time teaching, disciplining, etc.” (p. 130).

*Mandating Partnerships: Partnerships as a Political Concern*

A look at the recent spate of speeches and sectoral presentations by the current Minister of Education, The Right Honorable Maxine Henry Wilson, as well as by other policy makers reveals an emerging concern regarding the extent to which Jamaican parents are providing the kind of support that positively affects students’ learning. The speeches highlight concern about support, but also reveal the presence of numerous misconceptions regarding the nature of productive partnerships and a refusal on the part of politicians to address pertinent disadvantaging social structures.

In referring to the results of the 2002 Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT), the Minister of Education encouraged parents to honor their obligation to foster the academic growth and development of their children. In this particular speech, the Minister also unveiled plans to coerce participation from parents through “mandatory parent education” administered through each school’s PTA as well as to foster parent education and awareness through public programming. As discussed in the first chapter, it is dubious
whether partnerships based on coercion and negative impetus is feasible or even sustainable (de Carvalho, 2001; Pugh, 1985).

The Minister’s speech comes in the wake of the government’s 2000 Green Paper which maintains that “parents are under obligation to make such provisions as may be necessary to support the education of their children at least to the point where they have completed 11 years of formal education or up to the age of 17, whichever comes first” (p. 1). The Green Paper also identifies “the parent constituency” as one group with which the government must operate in tandem in overseeing the education and training of its citizens.

The use of the term under obligation betrays a leaning toward coercion and suggests an imposition of policy makers’ framework of understanding on parents. Aronson, Mutchler, & Pan (2000) emphasize the importance of shared understandings and theories of change as well as continued negotiation in fostering ownership and compliance in the proffering of human and educational services to families.

The 2000 Green Paper is not an isolate document. It evokes many of the commitments formalized in the Dakar Framework for Action, Senegal, 2000 and represents a national commitment to promote related educational policies. The document states that, at the institutional level, there should be a tripartite contract between the school, the parent and the student and that in the case of the primary and infant/basic schools, the parent will make the commitment to the school on the child’s behalf. It is doubtful, however, whether policy makers had evaluated the socioeconomic and social
backdrop against which such tripartite relationships are to occur. Failure to address contextual difficulties will no doubt limit partnership success.

In a later speech dated July 1, 2004 and reported by The Jamaica Information Service (JIS), the Minister of Education again encouraged low-income parents to support their children’s education, at this point demonstrating some awareness of economic hardships at work but again refusing to give such forces the weighting they deserve. According to the Minister, research reveals that the “students who excelled (in GSAT) were not those living in the best ‘material environment’, but those who were supported by their parents” (p.1). The misguided assumption behind such a statement is that students who do not do well lack this kind of support and that the deciding forces affecting school success or failure rests with parents. A closer analysis of the Minister’s speech also reveals a limited perception of partnerships as involving mainly support of cost sharing and participation in school social functions, fundraising initiatives and in infrastructural improvement. The Minister did highlight in a later speech the role of parents in supporting students’ learning at home.

Thus, the value of partnerships as well as the ability and willingness of parents to engage in activities that support their children’s literacy growth has become a topical debate and a major focal point for politicians in Jamaica. In a speech dated June 27, 2004 another member of the Minister’s political camp stated that three problems forming the root of the crisis in the Jamaican education system and particularly the crisis in rural education were the growing failure of family life, lack of parental guidance, and high travel cost for children and teachers. Two factors cited cast serious indictments on parents
in terms of their commitment to their children’s educational development. The other factor hints at pertinent societal constraints. No mention is made of the role of principals and teachers, or of the pedagogical and language policy problems that form the root of underachievement in literacy.

Despite allegations regarding the failure of parenting, *The Rose Social Assessment* (2003) claims that there is “a very positive attitude to schooling by households/families” and maintains that in Jamaica “education is seen as a public good to be sought and supported to the greatest extent possible” (p. 1). The Jamaica Social Assessment (2000), in justifying its emphasis on disadvantaging structures, asserted that parents do value education but that prevailing social circumstances often prevent parents and students from performing optimally and in keeping with the value they place on education. See also Epstein (2001).

Lazar and Slostad (1999) believe that the tendency to blame parents for the failure of schooling is part of a long-standing socio-historical tradition dated back to colonial times when deficit views of families prevailed. The writers assert that educators’ tendency to blame parents for failing to provide the “intellectual and motivational prerequisite for learning” reflects also the failure of schools of education to adequately prepare teachers to understand and network with parents (p. 206). Thus, the writers make the link between inadequate teacher preparation and an inclination toward victim blaming.
Richgels and Wold (1998), speaking from the educators’ perspective, state that one challenge facing literacy educators who want to create effective partnerships with low-income parents is deciding how to involve families in meaningful and enjoyable literacy support activities at home (p. 18). A scrutiny of a collection of seventeen action research project reports compiled by Kennedy (2003) as part of the JAASP literacy project does reveal that parent non-participation represent a real problem even for well-intended educators seeking to establish family-school literacy partnerships with low-income parents in perhaps the most accessible setting, the home. Teachers who participated in the projects cite non-participation as a serious problem irrespective of whether activities were home-based or school-based, or a combination of both.

Fostering partnerships in the home sphere. One particular project, undertaken by educators at the Tranquility All Age School, focused on fostering family-school partnership through a homework initiative. The intervention used was a structured homework program aimed at fostering more active parent participation in their children’s education. The main problems highlighted by the teacher-researchers involved “getting parents to uphold their end of the arrangement” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 3).

Despite the fact that the program was launched with “great expectations on the part of the teachers and a positive attitude on the part of students”, teacher researchers acknowledged experiencing tremendous problems in getting “most of the parents to supervise the homework part of the project” (p. 3). The project reporter cites other related barriers to the success of the project and suggests that these should be the target of
future research efforts. Other action research studies conducted as part of the project highlight similar challenges in terms of fostering partnerships even in the home but did not mention any remediation strategy.

**Fostering partnerships in the school sphere.** Challenges related to parent participation were also evident when educators tried to foster meaningful engagement outside the home and targeted parents less burdened by stressful contextual problems such as lack of childcare and immediate family commitments. Report on a fathers’ club initiative at the Mount Providence All-Age School highlights concerns regarding participation and attitudes. Motivation for the project was said to have come from a realization that “there is an ongoing problem of fathers of the children of Mount Providence All-Age School showing no interest to be involved any at all (sic) in their children’s educational development” (p. 4). Among challenges highlighted was fathers’ overt assertions that “the welfare of the children is the solely (sic) responsibility of the mothers” (p. 4). Other fathers, the writer claims, believe that “teachers prefer having dialogue with the mother, as mothers are better listeners” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 4). Underlying such comments is an apparent perception of partnership activities as frivolous engagements.

Thus, fathers refrained from partnership activities, viewing these as frivolous, gendered engagements somewhat akin to gossip in which only women engage. The project reporter stated that the implementation process was rather challenging since fathers did not consider such activities a priority, “did not see any relevance in having a Fathers (sic) Club”, felt they were already “too busy being breadwinners to ever consider
coming to meetings”, and because some “expected some form of remuneration” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 4). The interest of the small number of fathers that participated vanished rather rapidly. It seem true, therefore, that socioeconomic hardships experienced by parents often overshadow partnership activities, making them appear non-crucial since they do not hinge on satisfying the most primal of needs. Also in question is whether the project really incorporated fathers’ perspectives on realistic strategies for effecting change in their community.

The reporter ended on an optimistic note, however, stating that although the school “is cognizant of the fact that there are fathers who do not consider that their involvement in their children’s education is a priority (sic)”, it still harbors hopes that this view will change (Kennedy, 2003, p. 4). No mention was made of how this would be done. Thus, optimism is high even in the absence of viable, well thought out solutions and in the absence understanding and reflection on the partnership conceptualization process.

Fusing the home and school spheres. Some projects sought to bring school personnel to the home in a bid to bridge the home-school divide. These projects were vague regarding outcomes. One project at Bybrook Primary tried to fuse the school and home spheres using home visits and an adult literacy project as the main means of forming liaisons. School personnel and the literacy coordinator visited parents’ homes “to get parents motivated to see the importance of education to their children’s development as well as themselves” and to encourage parents to send children to school regularly (Kennedy, 2003, p. 1). No impact of the intervention was reported in the study.
However, another project implemented at Waltham All Age and which instituted a similar system of home visits, this time preceded by community member interviews to identify the best ways of forming liaisons with parents, did report satisfactory outcomes. The project was said to be “appropriate for students from a low-income and poor socioeconomic environment” and “particularly suitable for deep rural schools where parents and guardians are unemployed, have large families and find it difficult to feed and educate their children” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 1). The final report compiled by the principal expressed satisfaction with outcomes, stating that even parents who were initially dubious about the program were “showing more interest in their children’s work” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 1).

It seems that knowledge of and expression of concern for socio-situational forces affecting partnerships does help educators in their efforts to achieve partnership success. Conversely, reports of parent doubtfulness and demeaning of projects raise concern regarding whether there input was sought at both the project and sub-project level.

A community approach: Partnership through correspondence and invitation to engage. It seems that partnership efforts which honored parent input and which seemed sensitive to parent predicament had a greater likelihood of success. One study at the Fruitful Vale All Age School investigated whether direct communication with parents would encourage them to send their children to school on a regular basis. Through letters sent to homes, the school highlighted the fact that students were not attending regularly. A survey sent to parents, seeking to identify problems parents faced in sending students to school, revealed that financial hardship, need for the child’s assistance at home and in
the fields, and babysitting needs were serious problems for families who wanted to send students to school and for parents who wanted to participate in school activities.

Home visits were also a part of this program, and parents were encouraged to visit schools whenever convenient to discuss concerns they had. At the end of the project, the principal claimed satisfactory outcomes, stating that “constant communication with parents can and does serve to encourage pupil’s attendance” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 1). The insight highlighted is crucial since research suggests that partnerships have a greater likelihood of success when efforts are continuous and when two-way communication and inter-institutional interaction is emphasized (Epstein, 2001; Pugh, 1987). Epstein (1997) also suggests that the key to partnership success rests with good communication and emphasis on reciprocity and shared understandings.

The study at Fruitful Vale All Age proved valuable since it sought after and made mention of the barriers to participation seen as crucial by parents themselves. The study also demonstrated awareness of the processes involved in sensitive partnership development (such as getting to know the families with whom one will work), and conveyed a high level of optimism that, if that process is followed, positive results can be achieved.

While a few projects did highlight positive outcomes not empirically measured, the majority highlighted concerns regarding parents’ lack of eagerness to engage in activities aimed at supporting their children’s education. In case study after case study, the same concerns regarding perceived parent reluctance and berating of project efforts are raised. In discussing problems faced, teachers inadvertently provided clues to their
attitudes to barriers and to their perceptions of families, to their understanding of their roles, and regarding the particular framework for explanation of non-participation to which they subscribe.

The JAASP project reports therefore constitute effective lenses for initially exploring the myriad of problems surrounding rural partnership efforts and serve as an effective launching point for examining teachers’ explanation of and attitudes toward non-participation.

Frameworks of Explanations for Low-Income Parent Non-Participation

Various researchers have posited theoretical frameworks for explaining low-income parent non-participation in educational processes. Explanations have traditionally appealed to personal and cultural deficit. Recently, researchers have tended to focus on ecological perspectives regarding discontinuities between home and school spheres (de Carvalho, 2004; Epstein, 2003; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002); on differences in material conditions and political status (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979; Lareau & Weininger, 2003); or on a combination of the three perspectives (Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002).

The three predominant perspectives adopted by researchers and educators are aptly summarized by Lareau (1987). Lareau maintains that teachers and researchers generally view non-participation through one of three lenses (a culture of poverty thesis, institutional explanations, or a cultural capital thesis). Culture of poverty explanations, with their focus on the home sphere, suggest that low-income parents do not value education, are intellectually and linguistically deficient, and are more inclined to act in ways that set their children up for failure. Institutional explanations focus on the school
and assert that schools do not welcome low-income parents and that the quality of educational leadership is the primary force affecting participation (Epstein, 2003). Cultural capital explanations examine the harmony or lack thereof between the two spheres and suggest that the operations of schools are at variance with the lifestyles and dispositions (habitus) of low-income families and that school operations, in fact, privilege the already privileged (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979; Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

Laurea (1987) and Hanafin and Lynch (2002) suggest that a leaning toward a culture of poverty thesis with its emphasis on families’ personal and cultural deficits will generally lead to tunnel vision by educators. This is so since educators will be inclined to target initiatives at “fixing” the family and will tend to adopt faulty assumptions regarding parent dispositions, needs, wishes and desires. Such an inclination may also result in failure to examine schools and societal structures that can also lead to educational failure and to a greater likelihood that initiatives will fail. Since family-school partnerships are really an aspect of curricular and instructional reform, failure to consider these issues can potentially reduce the initiative from being a program aimed at enhancing children’s literacy learning and development to little more than a public relations gimmick with little likelihood of success (Epstein, 1997, p. 18).

Grolnick, Benjet, Cronan, and Apostoleris (1997, as cited in Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002) demonstrate that, in reality, an interaction of factors rather than a single factor affects parents’ level of participation. The researchers found that individual characteristics (parent’s and child’s), contextual forces (demographics and resources availability), and institutional factors (school characteristics, school
representatives’ attitudes and perceptions, and schools’ behaviors toward parents) all affect participation. As an illustration, Ritblatt et al. show that parents’ income and educational attainment compounded by a stressful socioeconomic context, disadvantaging family structures, and lack of resource support can cumulatively hinder parents from participating in school-organized activities.

*The Merits of Focusing on Disadvantaging Structures*

Hernes (2003), in his article on educating the poor around the world, highlights the need to focus on disadvantaging structures rather than on disadvantaged groups. According to the writer, such a perspective allows one to focus more on the “conditions that manifestly hamper the ability of a person to function” rather than on the stereotypical traits of an individual or group in the society (p. 2). There is some merit to such a perspective since the focus would then be on how to eliminate barriers in a bid to foster inclusion, rather than on treating educational clientele as diseased and in need of cure.

Bearing the above in mind, this researcher draws heavily on the wealth model of partnership development for its conceptualization of the role and value of parents in partnership networks. This model maintains that parents are valuable resources for teachers and should be considered equal players in partnership efforts (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Cairney (2000, referring to Moll, Arnanti, Neff, and Gonzalez’s, 1992 notion of “funds of knowledge”), states that “Teachers are more likely to forge partnerships with parents if they see families as important resources of support and when they welcome and
involve caregivers as equal partners” (p. 206). The writer argues therefore for a uniform conception of parents from different strata of society as this can foster uniform partnership benefits on the part of families.

Suggestions are that specific aspects of the training of literacy, language and primary-level teachers make them more eager to surmount partnership challenges to establish relations with families (Epstein, 2001). If these teachers demonstrate unwillingness, this does not auger well for the affective reaction of less keen educators in other subject areas.

The Wealth Model: Low-Income Families as Crucial Untapped Resources

Nistler and Maiers (2000) state that the days when the family was a silent partner in the reading development of children is essentially over. Referring to the vast resource that families represent, the writers maintain that “parents are a powerful, underused source of knowledge – a great untapped resource in many schools” (p. 670). The writers state additionally that research examining early readers as well as investigations of emergent literacy reveals consistently and uniformly that “parental beliefs, aspirations, and actions critically affect children’s literacy growth” (p. 670).

Therefore, the focus of educators and policy makers should be on helping parents to appreciate the crucial abilities they possess as well as to empower them with additional skills that can help them contribute to their children’s literacy development. Nistler and Maiers (2000) maintain that educators can also help by supporting parents’ efforts through the proffering of materials/resources and guidance in a participatory setting, as
well as through instilling in families a sense of confidence that they can make a difference.

The aim of partnerships should be to foster parent understanding that despite their economic circumstances, they can play a crucial role in their children’s literacy development. Ventures should aim at raising parent awareness that literacy development can and should be fortified at home, as well as at instilling in parents the belief that school personnel do strive to make the school a hospitable environment where parents can freely air their views and advocate for their children and that teachers make every effort to involve them because they care. Efforts should also aim at fostering a sense of shared responsibility between home and school. Achieving such ends requires a specific kind of teacher, a variety not always readily available in the school system.

*Teachers’ Attitudes as Barriers to Participation*

Ramirez (2000) states that barriers to access by low-income students and their families sometimes stem from teachers who harbor stereotypes concerning low-income families, single parents, and at-risk populations. O’Loughlin (1997) in a study of the attitudes of teachers-in-training found that “many college students view low-income families as inferior, and considered them as welfare cheats and assume that they neglect their children” (p. 30). The writer concluded unequivocally that “teachers generally are prejudiced against working-class families” (p. 29). See also Weiner, Perry, and Magnusson (1988) on attributional reaction to stigma.
The Need for Socially Aware Teachers

Advocates for social justice in education alert teachers therefore to examine ways in which the attitudes they hold can compound barriers to access even when they do not intend this to be so. Edwards, McMillon, and Laier (2001), in their examination of achievement in schools labeled at risk, found that the folk theories that teachers held about students and their parents, their expectations regarding effects that interventions such as partnership initiatives will have on students’ literacy achievement, and the manner in which they reacted to difficulties faced in forming instructional networks around students and their families were more powerful factors in determining whether these schools and the students who attend them remained at risk. Teacher attitudes were found by these researchers to be more powerful determinants of low-income student success than was the infusion of “rich resources” (p. 149). See Hauser-Cram, Sirin, and Stipek, 2003, as well as Okpala, Okpala, and Smith, 2001 regarding the particular vulnerabilities of children who already experience low expectations. See also Epstein (2003) regarding the crucial nature of educational leadership in achieving equitable partnership outcomes from the schooling process.

In a society like Jamaica where debilitating social situations are rife, caution must be exercised so that teacher stereotypes do not bar students from key educational opportunities or alter the potential effectiveness of educational initiatives. According to O’Loughlin (1997), although school personnel are not omnipotent beings, the onus does rest with professional educators to create the kind of environment in which all students will thrive and, in this regard, to ensure that schools are presented as “hospitable and
inclusive environment for working-class families” (p. 33). The writers maintain also that although teachers by themselves do not have the power to change school structures that oppress low income students, “socially aware teachers can help create an affirming school climate” (p. 30).

The onus rests with school personnel to assume roles as agents of change demonstrating sensitivity to diversity and an awareness of societal structures that prevent students and their families from meeting school expectations. However, Ramirez (1999; 2000; 2002) points to a general reluctance on the part of teachers to bridge the communication divide between schools and the families of the students they serve. The writer also highlights a general unease with discussing or dealing with low-income parents on the part of teachers, and some degree of reluctance on the part of parents to risk having their children suffer negative repercussions from their attempts to influence curriculum options and school policies. Consequences are particularly real for the families who may lack the sociopolitical power necessary to agitate for real change. The result is an inevitable impasse between low-income parents and school personnel, often resulting in suspicion and resentment by both parties.

*Teachers’ Attitudes toward Barriers*

In terms of teachers’ attitudes toward barriers, Orellanna et al. (2002) assert that teachers tend to lack agency and a willingness to act when faced with difficulties arising from students’ socio-cultural and economic circumstances. The writers claim that teachers’ tendency to compare poor students with their middle-class peers leads them to emphasize the barriers facing the poor, which they believe interfere with literacy goals
rather than to attempt to eliminate them. Researchers who have cursorily mentioned teacher attitudes to career-related problems maintain also that teachers tend to look to students’ families to alleviate problems identified, rather than attempt to devise solutions. This is especially so when teachers believe that parents possess some level of control over whether or not such barriers exist (Morris, Taylor, Knight & Wasson, 1996; Molnar, 1998; Niedrich 2003; Ramirez, 2000; Weiner, 2000).

**Attitude, Attribution and Help-Giving Behaviors**

Although there is no one to one correspondence between behavior and attitudes, psychologists maintain that behavior is a function of attitude and that a group of attitudes may work together to influence behavior (Mueller, 1986). Evidence does exist, for instance, to link teachers’ attribution to their subsequent help-giving behaviors. Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson (1988, 2000) detail the process involved in the transformation of teachers’ attitudes into particular behaviors that can either be beneficial or detrimental to the welfare of attitudinal objects.

**Weiner’s Attributional Theory of Social Justice**

According to Weiner, Perry, and Magnusson (1988), teachers as naïve scientists seek to identify explanations for negative outcomes reaped from career-related efforts, in this case, parent non-participation in partnership activities. Once teachers have ascribed blame to a particular cause, social emotions such as anger or pity for the attitudinal object often follow. Weiner claims that these emotions result in particular behaviors. If the individual/object is perceived to have control over results, then anger is evoked. If however, the individual/object is thought to have little control over results then pity is
evoked. The level of pity or anger experience will determine the extent to which the evaluating party persists in trying to attain particular goals, offers help, or levels praise. (See also Clark & Artiles, 2000; Lareau, 1987.)

Weiner proposes also that where failure or need is deemed by a teacher to be the result of someone’s failure to expend effort rather than to low ability or to external uncontrollable barriers, anger is normally evoked and help is withheld. On the other hand, if the cause of failure is deemed to be outside the influence of the individual and not due to lack of personal effort or will, then pity and positive social reactions are generated (Weiner, 2000).

A teacher’s evaluation of the reasons behind parents’ non-participation as well as his/her ideas about the level of control that the perceived erring party has over his/her level of involvement will influence that teacher’s desire or drive to assist the party overcome barriers faced and to get involved. Weiner suggests also that teachers’ ideas about the stability or permanence of barriers will also affect their motivation to help. Thus, a parent’s failure to support a child’s education through participation in partnership efforts, viewed as an aberrant behavior by a teacher, may elicit either a decision to help or withhold help depending on the teacher’s cognitive evaluation of situations surrounding the parent’s failure to engage.

Attribution and stigmatized behavior: A look at ideas regarding permanence. Weiner’s attribution theory of social justice has been examined in situations involving stigmatized or untoward behaviors. To the extent that many teachers have been shown to hold negative folk theories about low-income students and the families from which they
come, failure by a parent from the low-income stratum to perform acts that support a child’s literacy/academic growth may serve to support or confirm an already existing negative evaluation. Cemented ideas regarding stigmatized behaviors may condition teacher ideas regarding the permanence of such behaviors and thus the persistence of related barriers. Ideas about the permanence of barriers will no doubt influence persistence (Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988).

Based on the results of two experiments, Weiner, Perry and Magnusson (1988) determined that, in the case of behavioral stigmas, that is, in situations involving the display of undesirable behaviors viewed as typical of a group, little pity, much anger, and judgments to neglect tend to be the reactions evoked. Since stigmatized behaviors are thought to be onset controllable, individuals are perceived as morally weak and as not being capable of exercising sound judgment, effort, or will. When failure to perform is perceived as originating in a stigmatized behavior (perceived lower-class child neglect in this instance), the perceived negligent party is held responsible for the onset (the problem) and therefore for the offset (the solution), and help or sympathy is withheld (Weiner, 2000). A teacher’s attribution of blame for an event will determine the extent to which the teacher holds high or low expectation for future performance and for the extent to which a teacher persists in helping that parent/child overcome barriers.

The writers did not extend their exploration to include a discussion of whether the presence or absence of accountability measures may influence teachers’ final decision to help, withhold help or persist amidst barriers.
Attribution and Help Giving in Third-World Contexts

Partnership activities occur in a rich milieu involving many stakeholders. Although teachers may hold negative perceptions of families, they may still exhibit attribution patterns that favor families and may gravitate toward positive helping behaviors.

Evidence from the research on poverty attribution in third-world situations shows that teacher attribution of blame may not always work against low-income families especially where teachers are aware of disadvantaging structures in society and especially when they hail from similar social situations as the students whom they serve. It is crucial therefore to temper Weiner’s proposals with knowledge of real world contexts (Hanafin & Lynch, 2001).

Poverty Attitudes and Causal Attribution

Weiner’s ideas regarding the link between teacher attribution and subsequent help-giving behaviors must be qualified by research on third-world teachers’ socio-psychological evaluation of low-income families and of their propensity for non-participation. This is necessary in order to maintain a balanced perspective in determining what attributions teachers may make in evaluating the role of low-income parties in failed or failing partnership situations as well as to understand the extent to which attributions affect teacher motivation to help or persevere in challenging situations.

Residency and attribution. Hine and Monteil (1999) tie residency in third-world countries such as Jamaica to an inclination toward system blaming rather than toward victim blaming for the causes poverty and for evaluations of circumstances involving the
poor. The writers suggest that this may be related to the presence of economic and social crises in most of these countries and to the high degree of social inequities observed.

Orientation toward system blaming rather than toward victim blaming in third-world countries may auger well for how parents who falter at supporting students’ education are viewed by teachers who seek to forge partnerships with such parents. Teachers who are aware of and are sympathetic towards the socioeconomic challenges facing the poor may be inclined to persist despite barriers. However, O’Loughlin (1997) provides a plethora of research that demonstrates a progressive rejection of the working class by teachers who have themselves escaped the grips of poverty (p. 32).

Qualifications, Attitudes and Attribution

Research suggests that the more a teacher gains access to higher education, the more likely might be his/her tendency to orient toward blaming the victim for the causes and consequences of poverty. As O’Loughlin (1997) states, teachers in the third world who use teaching as a stepping stone into the middle class often try to combat ambivalent feelings they have toward those left behind by “distancing themselves emotionally from working-class children and their families” (p. 31). The writer maintains, however, that many teachers still “aspire to raise the aspirations and life chances of working class students” and to “help them move up to the middle class” (p. 31). An analysis of the content underlying action research project undertaken later in this chapter provides some evidence in this regard and gives some hints as to possible direction of teachers’ attitudes and attributional patterns.
It may be the case that because teachers in deep-rural settings in Jamaica tend to have emerged from working-class situations and operate in a milieu involving social and economic difficulties, that these teachers may tend to orient more toward blaming society rather than toward blaming the victim. This would suggest that they would tend toward citing societal forces as the source of barriers and would tend to be more sympathetic toward the poor. Teachers may also be more inclined to help parents eliminate or circumvent problems that deter them from engaging meaningfully in their children’s education. This might be so because there might be less of a gap between the social and economic experiences of teachers and those of the students/families they serve. Thus, teachers may be better able to identify with the struggles that students face.

*Residency, qualification, social status, and attitudes.* Still, research suggests that, at an individual level, poverty attitudes and attribution vary largely by academic training or qualification, by class or position on the social hierarchy, by ethnicity, and by prior experience with the poor and situations involving the poor (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2002; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Furnham & Gunter 1984; Stephenson, 2000). Researchers claim that people with high educational attainment as well as persons who are of middle-class background are more likely to cite character weakness as the cause of poverty and the actions of the poor and will tend to blame the poor. People who are moderately educated or belonged to disadvantaged groups tend to blame system forces for the fate and actions of the poor (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2002; Guimond and Palmer,
The extent to which teachers’ attitudes differ based on their qualifications and their attribution of blame for barriers is a primary focus of this paper.

Attribution and gender. Evidence from spin-off studies bearing heavily on Weiner’s attribution theory provides a basis for claims that attribution (especially regarding explanations for performance, allocation of responsibility and resolve to assist) tend to vary by gender (Campbell & Henry, 1999; MacGeorge, 2003; Rosenthal & Guest, 1996; Struthers, Weiner, & Allred, 1998; Trentham & Larwood, 2001). Although there is some inconsistency in findings, research suggests that females tend to attribute blame to the self while males tend to lean toward attributing blame to others in situations involving failure (Beyer, 1999).

Green and Holeman (2004), drawing on the ego-serving theory of attribution, examined male and female attributional patterns for group performance outcomes. The researchers found that females were less ego enhancing than males in situations involving collective failure. Females, the writers claim, tend to adopt a neutral lens or to blame the self, hoping to study and learn from performance outcomes. Males, on the other hand, try to protect the ego of the team by placing blame elsewhere. Thus, women tend to orient toward internal attribution or to shy away from ascribing blame, while men tend to be more ego serving and to orient more toward external attribution of blame.

A proposition offered by Green and Holeman (2004) in terms of implications for behavior is worthy of note. The writers state that tendency toward self-blame may have negative rather than positive consequences for aspiration and persistence on difficult
tasks. This is so, state the writers, because “people who internalize failure become slower and perform worse following failure” (p. 5). Does this mean that low-income families may actually benefit from being blamed for partnership failures? Given the large proportion of females in the reading teaching population, do families actually stand to benefit from being blamed? This suggestion seems counterintuitive, but Green and Holeman suggest that if teachers blame themselves they may not persist amidst barriers. The writers do state, however, that females tend to see failure as a learning opportunity and this may auger well for poor families.

Even though gender is a key interest to the researcher, given the small proportion of males expected to be in the sample, gender will not be examined statistically but will be referenced in several discussions in this paper.

*The connection between attitude and attribution.* Empirical research into attitudes and attribution as psychological constructs suggests that negative attributions will tend to foster negative attitudes and may consequently lead to decisions to neglect. Positive attribution will more likely lead to positive attitudes to the object and may engender decisions to help. Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler’s (2001) research also indicates that positive attitudes are related to positive attribution (stereotypes) and negative attitude to negative stereotypes (p. 222). People who express positive attitudes towards an object tend to attribute the blame for failure to forces external to that object (positive attribution) rather than factors internal to the object (negative attribution). Indications in the research are that attitude and attribution will correlate positively, though only moderately.
Studies on poverty attribution conducted worldwide link negative poverty attitudes and individualistic attribution (victim blaming) for poverty to tendencies to neglect or marginalize the poor. Stronger intentions to help the poor, on the other hand, are tied to a tendency toward system blaming rather than victim blaming (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Thus, where a high degree of system blaming exists spurred on mostly by widespread economic hardships, poor families are more likely to be viewed in a sympathetic light and are more likely to receive greater assistance in gaining access to social services (Hine & Monteil, 1999; Stephenson, 2000; Weiner, 2000; Weiner, Perry & Magnusson, 1988). The economic standing of a country has therefore been known to influence the types of attribution for poverty and for the consequences of poverty exhibited in such contexts.

*Attitude, Attribution and Behavior in the Real World: An Analysis of JAASP Reports*

*Attitude of JAASP teachers.* An analysis of the content of the 17 JAASP action research reports (Kennedy, 2003) revealed an overall positive attitude toward barriers and an almost exclusive attribution of barriers to parents by teachers. When principals wrote the report, blame was usually allocated to both parents and teachers; when teachers wrote the report, blame for barriers was attributed solely to parents. Thus, some level of self-serving attribution seems to be at work in the reports.

However, one principal did blame principals who were described as not proactive and receptive to change, and there was some reference to disadvantaging familial and
societal structures in the reports. It should be noted, however, that attitude toward barriers tended to be positive whether the blame for barriers was attributed to parents, to the society, or teachers.

Clues regarding teachers’ attitudes toward barriers could also be found in teachers’ outline of the implementation process; in their description of parents, students, and the school community; and in their outline of project follow-up plans. Examples of statements made are given below. There was only one example of the display of negative attitude in the collection of study, but there were many instances of deficit views of parents.

*Views of parents, the community, and the child.* In describing parents, phrases such as “reluctant parents”, “negligent” and “uncaring” were used, reflecting a deficit view of parents as well as an allocation of blame to them for non-participation in schooling, and for the less than desirable emotional, academic and physical state of their children. In fact, one principal compared parents to the old woman who lived in a shoe, conjuring up images of irresponsible breeding, overcrowding and abuse.

Community members were described as “unskilled, underachievers (who)...lack the zeal and determination to better their capabilities” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 1). In fact, one researcher described community members as “either semiliterate or grossly deficient” stating that “these deficiencies often limit parent participation” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 1). Descriptions suggest a negative view of community members, a pervasive belief that barriers originated from their character weaknesses, a fatalistic view of potential for
community improvement, and a distancing of teachers from the communities from which they originated.

Descriptions of parents and the wider community are in stark contrast to descriptions of students, who are often viewed with sympathy and hope. Students were described as “starved for love, acceptance and belonging”, “battered and bruised emotionally”, “hurting and bleeding inside”, and as “needing to discover themselves”, suggesting some level of sympathy for students and a belief that better was possible. Descriptions may also reflect the fact that teacher researchers were beginning to view students through the eyes of project leaders who hail from developed countries. However, it could be that even though teachers held negative views of parents, they still held positive attitudes toward students and wanted them to succeed. Teachers may see themselves as more able parties endowed with the responsibility of rescuing students from a hopeless situation and may therefore exhibit positive attitudes to barriers.

Outlines of the implementation process involved the use of telling expressions. One researcher states, “There were many challenges in implementing the programme but the end product was most rewarding.” Other project reports used variants of the same expression (Morgan Pass, Gurney’s Mount, Mount Providence, Nightingale Grove, Waltham, and Alderton All Age schools). While many research reports were vague regarding barriers encountered, several explicitly named barriers. These included parent reluctance and lack of interest; parent notions regarding family-school partnership as frivolous, gendered activities; economic hardships in the community; and demand for compensation prior to participation.
Some statements also cast teachers in a negative light. One principal explicitly stated that the “main challenges faced were the doubts and fears both of from the point-of-view of teachers and from other community members” (Gurney’s Mount All Age, p. 1). In every instance but one, researchers expressed determination to overcome barriers in future extensions of the project.

High optimism was evident across the board, despite evidence of negative perceptions and pessimism regarding change. Some quotations, taken from Kennedy (2003), highlight this fact.

Mount Providence All Age:

The school is cognizant of the fact that there are fathers who do not consider that their involvement in their children’s education is a priority, but with ongoing strategies it is hoped that view will change.” (p. 1).

…principals and teachers see themselves as researchers in trying to find a solution to this problem.” (p. 1).

Tranquility All Age:

A few problems are to be overcome including getting parents to uphold their end of the arrangement…The confidence is there that we will succeed” (p. 1).
Clapham All Age:

The school is relentless in using the most effective resources at its disposal to eliminate illiteracy among its population. (p. 1).

Fruitful Vale All Age:

If an organization is willing to invest time and labor in trying to solve issues, positive results can be achieved. (p. 1).

Focused thought and willingness to act can make a difference. (p. 1).

These statements show more than just a positive attitude toward overcoming barriers. They also show an allocation of responsibility to school personnel for overcoming barriers encountered. These trends seem negate claims in the literature regarding school personnel’s tendency to shift responsibility to parents. However, conclusions must be counterbalanced with negative perceptions and pessimism regarding changes to the life conditions of people in these communities. It may also be necessary to examine layers underlying such optimism.

The action research studies are a rich source of insight generated form real-world contexts in which educators have tried to established partnerships and have at times encountered seemingly impassible barriers. They constitute rich evidence of teachers’ viewpoints and mindsets. The quotations indicate that teachers are aware that partnership formation is a process involving problem solving and negotiation, and thus demands a high level of initiative. All evidence indicates that teachers will display a positive attitude
to barriers, will tend to blame parents or the wider society for barriers but will, nonetheless, allocate responsibility for offset of barriers to those most able (educators).

The third chapter to follow presents the design of the present study, including research questions driving the research and hypotheses projected. Given the different directions suggested by a review of the literature, null hypotheses are projected for the main research questions.

**Summary**

The chapter presented a survey and critique of previous writings related to the topic of the study. Literature from both the international arena and the Jamaican setting were reviewed, analyzed and critiqued in a bid to lay the foundation for the questions explored and the hypotheses projected. Also presented were a series of theoretical lenses through which the literature could be filtered and through which the purpose of the study understood. The chapter to follow presents the methodology to be used in the study and the particular procedure to be followed in collecting and analyzing the data. Reference is also made to a pilot study done in pursuit of the topic.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The present study examines teachers’ attitudes toward the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with the families of low-income students in 48 schools in remote rural Jamaica. It seeks to ascertain the nature of teachers’ attitudes and to determine whether attitudes differ as a function of teacher qualification and according to their attribution of blame for barriers. Secondary lines of inquiry include whether attitudes differ according to teachers’ perception of their own social status and according to gender. A cluster sample of male and female literacy educators (literacy teachers, intervention specialists, and literacy specialists) serving in 28 of the 48 JAASP schools have responded to the questionnaire used in this study.

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. The population, sample, instrument, pilot study, reliability and validity of the instrument, and data collection and analysis procedures proposed, are also discussed in the chapter.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of teachers’ attitudes to the barriers they face in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with low-income families?
2. Do teachers from the different qualification levels - pre-trained, diploma trained, or graduate trained - differ in overall attitude to barriers?
3. Is there a difference in attitude according to teachers’ attribution of the blame for barriers to teacher/school factors, to parent/family factors, or to wider societal factors?
4. Is there a significant interaction between qualification and attribution in regard to teacher attitude to barriers?

*Research Design*

The study adopts a factorial design. Two main factors, each with three levels, are explored in this study. Factor A, teachers’ qualification, comprises three levels: pre-trained, diploma trained, and graduate trained. Factor B, teachers’ attribution of blame for barriers, also comprises three levels: attribution to teacher and school factors; attribution to parent and family factors; and attribution to wider societal factors. Teachers’ attitude scores constitute the primary dependent measure in this study, with some secondary consideration being given to teacher’s level of optimism as a dependent variable.

Data have been analyzed using SPSS, version 13.0. Main analyses include descriptive statistics and two 2-way Analyses of Variance.

*Operational Definition of the Variables*

The dependent variable in all primary analyses is teachers’ attitudes toward barriers reported as an individual aggregate score with a value of between one and five for each respondent on the 22 Likert-type items in Subscale D. A teacher’s aggregate score on these items are considered a reflection of the teacher’s general attitude to barriers. A score nearer the higher end of the band (5) indicates a positive attitude, whereas a score nearer the lower band (1) indicates a negative attitude to barriers.

Teachers’ attribution refers to teachers’ indication of the party or entity to whom they attribute blame and whom they feel is most responsible for barriers that hinder
partnership success. In the study, three entities are presented and teachers are required to indicate the party to which they lay blame for a hypothetical partnership problem.

Teachers’ qualification refers to one of the three categories of qualifications recognized by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture (MOEYC) in Jamaica. Although the MOEYC recognizes six categories of qualification, these have been collapsed into three primary categories: pre-trained teacher, diploma-trained teacher, and graduate trained teacher (*Education Digest 2002/2003*). The term *pre-trained teachers* refer to those teachers who do not hold a diploma or degree in education. *Diploma teachers* are those holding a diploma in teaching having undergone a three-year program offered by one of the nine teacher training colleges. The term, *trained graduates*, refers to teachers trained in education and who hold a degree from a tertiary institution.

Gender refers to a teacher’s biological sex, and includes two categories: male, coded as one, and female coded as two.

Teachers’ perception of their social status, a secondary independent variable, refers to teachers’ ratings of their level of importance, competence, powerfulness and level of regard in the school community. An aggregate score on these four items (ranging from zero to five) was derived for each teacher and used to categorize the teacher into one of three groups - high, moderate and low social status. SPSS Visual Bander was used to derive categories.

Teachers’ level of optimism refers to a teachers’ rating of the likelihood that barriers to partnership efforts can be overcome.
The Population

The population targeted was teachers in the 48 low-performing schools that participated in the JAASP initiative. This translates into 528 educators (nine grade teachers, one literacy coordinator, and one intervention specialist), serving students in grades one to nine of each school. These educators represent a small segment of the total population of teachers employed at the primary level, cited by the Ministry as 10,300 strong (Jamaica Educational Digest 2002/2003).

The schools targeted had all been all involved in the JAASP initiative. Teachers in these schools have had experiences and training in trying to involve low-income families in partnership ventures. Additionally, they are all employed at the primary level and had received some training in literacy and language arts. These factors combined indicate that they would perhaps be the educators most likely to exhibit positive dispositions toward partnerships and would be more prepared to tackle the barriers they encounter in fostering partnerships with low-income families. See Epstein, 2001 in regard to the advantages that language arts, reading and primary level teachers have over teachers in other subject areas. Because of the training and experiential advantage that these teachers possess, the type of attitudes they display would give an indication of the level of concern that might be held regarding affective reaction of teachers in the general teaching population toward problems that emerge in forming partnership relationships with low-income clients.

A list of all 48 JAASP schools is available from the Ministry of Education’s website http://www.moe yc.gov.jm/projects/jaasp/changingthefuture.pdf) and has been
included in Appendix A. Schools are divided into six regions, with eight schools listed under each region. It was necessary to survey teachers in all regions. A random sample of schools was taken from this list.

**Male-female ratio and the variables explored.** The number of female teachers in the population is much higher than the number of male teachers. JASPEV (2004) reports the ratio of male to female teachers in the education system as 8.4 females to 1 male. Additionally, Ministry statistics report that that at the primary level, 89% of teachers are females (Educational Digest, 2002/2003). Additionally, literacy education tends to be female dominated. It is expected that the number of male teachers in the overall population and therefore in the sample will be quite small. This disproportionality in male-female ratio has implications for the factors explored in the study. For instance, gender cannot be used as a primary category in this study despite the fact that research establishes its crucial nature in exploring attitudes and attribution.

**Training status and qualification.** It is expected that many teachers surveyed will not have a training or teaching focus solely in literacy. Until recently, teachers of literacy at the primary level in Jamaica did not receive specific training in literacy education. Normally, teachers receive training in primary education and do two courses in literacy (fundamentals of teaching reading, now called foundations of literacy development, and children’s literature) as part of their training. Additionally, teacher trainees specializing in primary education pursue one course in child development and one in language arts methodology.
Teachers who actually specialized in language education during teacher training are often employed as teachers at the primary level. For these teachers training in reading that accompanies their program is usually done in two courses: fundamentals of reading (now called foundations of literacy development) and reading in the content area. These teachers also take courses in adolescent psychology – the parallel of child development. Literature/language teachers have the added advantage of being literature teachers and thus get training in literature methods, language arts methodology, and adolescent literature.

Educators who act as literacy coordinators and intervention specialists usually have a masters or bachelors degree in literacy studies or in special education. Given the remote rural setting, it is expected that the majority of the teachers will be diploma trained but that some individuals will have bachelors and master’s degrees. A minority of teachers will be pre-trained teachers or pre-trained graduates. A description of the sampling strategy used is given below.

**Sampling Plan**

Sampling took place at the school level. A two-step cluster sampling strategy was used to select the 28 schools needed. However, data was only collected from 22 school since the onset of a hurricane terminated data collection. The researcher strove to select at least four schools from each region to ensure that the sample was representative of the six educational regions. In the first step, the names of the 48 schools were sorted into six groups according to the region in which each school fell. Thus, there were six groups of eight schools each. The names of schools in each group were placed in a box and four
schools randomly selected from each of the six boxes. Thus, 24 schools were selected initially. In the second step, the names of schools not selected in the initial drawing were all placed into a single box and four more schools drawn randomly. Thus, 28 schools in total were selected.

Only educators serving students in grades 2 to 6, the intervention, and the literacy specialist in each school selected were used in the study (seven educators per school). This amounts to a targeted sample of 196 literacy educators. The sample is adequate based on power requirements established by Borenstein (2000). Borenstein’s power computation procedure establishes the importance of various factors including desired power, level of significance, effect size, and the number of factors in determining sample size. Given the presence of two factors (three levels each) in the proposed analysis, to attain a power level of .82 with moderate effect size of .25 and alpha level of .05 (two-tailed), the required sample size for each of the nine cells would be 19. There should also be a minimum of 57 subjects per factor and 171 subjects overall. While the 196 initially targeted should have sufficed, those actually surveyed fell below this number. Data collection had to be terminated due to an impending hurricane and only 136 teachers were actually surveyed.

*Rationale for grade band.* Several factors influenced the grade band selected (grades two to six). The lower grade band was selected to provide some time allowance for teachers to identify students with learning support needs and to attempt to involve the parents of these students. Grade 6 represents the traditional high-stakes grade at which various tests are administered to determine competency and to make decisions regarding
readiness for secondary education. An additional motive for selecting these grades rests with the fact that training in JAASP and the Primary School Improvement Plan targeted teachers in these grades.

Finally, partnership ventures represent a relatively new phenomenon on the Jamaican educational landscape. The researcher can have some degree of certainty that these teachers have at least attempted to engage low-income parents in partnership ventures if these schools are used. Evidence exists in the 15 JAASP action research studies to support such attempts at engagement as well as for the myriad of barriers encountered during such efforts. Since the current study rests on assumptions regarding the existence of barriers, teachers surveyed must have at least attempted to engage parents. JAASP schools, therefore, represent the most appropriate sample for this study.

Questionnaires were delivered personally to the schools selected. A return rate of 80% of questionnaires distributed was required (Tuckman 1999, p. 267). Although Jones and Lang (1980, as cited in Walonick, 2005) suggest that a high response rate does not necessarily guarantee representativeness, a high return rate is important for proper analysis. The researcher therefore included safeguards such as incentive schemes, reminders, follow-up phone calls and visits as well as other measures to boost return rate and to eliminate non-response bias.

**Instrumentation**

The research aims at surveying the attitudes of teachers toward the barriers they face in instituting partnership schemes. Research suggests that a questionnaire is the most appropriate data-gathering tool for this purpose (Henderson, Morris & Fitz-Gibbon,
Walonick (2005) cite many advantages of using questionnaires to measure attitudes. These include ease of analysis, malleability to available statistical procedures and software, cost effectiveness where large geographical areas and large samples are targeted, reduced levels of intrusion, a lesser likelihood of interaction bias, and, importantly, familiarity.

The questionnaire developed for use in this study comprised four subscales. Subscale A gathered demographic information the most important being teacher qualifications. Subscale B, six-point scale, measured teachers’ perception of their social status. Subscale C measured attribution for partnership-related problems using a single item. Subscale D used a 5-point Likert scale comprising 22 items - 12 negative and 10 positive - to measure teacher attitude to barriers. The four subscales are described in detail below.

*Subscale A: demographic variables.* Teachers are required to give information on their qualification status, gender, training status, and years of service. At least one of these variables is crucial for the study, namely qualifications. Teachers are provided with three categories of qualifications - pre-trained, diploma trained, and graduate trained – and asked to tick the one that best describes their current level of education.

*Subscale B: Perception of social status.* The scale used in this section requires teachers to rate themselves on each of four dimensions namely level of importance, competence, powerfulness and level of regard in the school community. The scale for all items ranges from zero, representing “Not at All”, to five representing “Very much”. This scale was composed based on sociometric variables used for over six decades beginning
with Max Weber in 1946. Research on valid measures of perception of social status indicates that respondents ratings of whether they considered themselves “highly regarded”, “competent”, “important”, and “powerful” were plausible markers of perception of social status (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996; Feinman, 1981; and Sirin, McCreary & Mahalik, 2004; Weber, 1946).

Subscale C: Teacher attribution. Teachers are required in this scale to indicate whether they believe, based on experience and a scenario provided, that the primary blame for partnership problems rests with “teacher and school factors”, “parent and family factors” or wider “societal factors”.

Following in the tradition of Guttman (1982, 2001), in constructing this scale, the researcher sought to design a subscale based on elements taken from the conceptual worlds of the individuals in the population to be studied. Since the population itself was situated in a remote location at the time of piloting, the researcher relied on the 15 JAASP case study reports compiled by educators who would form the population to be studied. Specific phrases in the case reports, which betrayed teacher notions regarding the sources of barriers, were extracted verbatim and initially sorted into four categories. The categories used initially were “teacher factors”, “family environment”, “administrative factors,” and “external support”. Next, the researcher composed a vignette detailing a hypothetical situation in which a partnership effort failed. Although the situation used is hypothetical, descriptions are based on real situations drawn from the case studies examined.
To establish face validity, the scale was reviewed by four college professors and the researcher. Review revealed that teacher and administrative factors should be fused and that “external factors” could more appropriately be labeled “societal factors”. Thus, on the final sub-scale, teachers are required to read the vignette and then indicate whether they think “school and teacher problems”, “parent and family problems”, or wider “societal problems” is the main cause of the problem described. Teachers are required to select only one of the three options.

Subscale D: The teacher attitude scale. This subscale comprises 22, 5-point Likert-type items. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the 12 negatively worded and 10 positively worded items by selecting one of the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. A-priori weights of one integer differences have been assigned in descending order (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) for positively-worded items (items 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22) and in ascending order (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) for negatively-phrased items (items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). The process of refining the subscale is outlined below. The instrument is provided in Appendix B.

Pilot Study

The attitude scale was the first subscale developed in this study. The initial 5-point Likert scale comprised 32 items (19 positive and 13 negative) with 13 geared toward the parent component, 6 items toward the teacher component, 6 toward school administration, 5 toward the student component, and 2 toward school personnel as a
group (teachers and administration together). A total of 18 items addressed attitude to barriers emanating from factors in the home and 14 addressed school forces.

Content validity. Content validity was established through a review of the literature on partnership-related barriers and well as through procedures geared at establishing face validity as outlined by Light, Singer and Willet (1990).

An extensive review of the literature, a scrutiny of relevant articles in the news media, and an examination of open teacher forums dealing with educational issues, provided insights into possible domains of the construct attitudes and yielded additional insights into the nature of the narrower construct, teacher attitudes to barriers.

Anderson and Kristiansen (1990), drawing on the work of Katz (1960) and Smith, Bruner, and White (1956), determined that an adequate examination of attitude must include a scrutiny of all three psychological functions: object appraisal/social adjustive function, ego-defensive function, and value expressive functions. All these dimensions are covered in Molnar’s delineation of barriers to partnership ventures. Thus, Molnar’s (1998) work provided a comprehensive initial framework for looking at barriers to partnership ventures.

According to Molnar (1998), barriers to family-school relations may be grouped into three main categories. Human barriers refer to barriers that arise when a party envisions “threats to one’s self esteem, such as fear of criticism, fear of failure or of each other’s differences” (p.3). This would be similar to what Smith, Bruner, and White (1956) refer to as the ego-defensive function. Communication barriers encompass cultural dissonance as well as conflicts in values emanating from language and cultural
differences between families and schools (See also Lazar and Slostad, 1999). This is similar to the object appraisal/social adjutive function. *External forces*, like the value expressive function, refer to lifestyles problems, employment conflicts, personal problems, childcare issues, lack of time, administrative policies, unclear roles, and inadequate teacher training or support” (Molnar, 1998: 3).

Further review of the literature revealed that these components could be explored along four dimensions closely aligned with stakeholders involved in partnership development – teachers, parents, administrators, and students. Students and parents were later fused to form a category labeled “families” given the focus on primary education.

An outline of the basis of item construction is given below.

A. Parent/Societal Constraints:

1. Time, resources, and social support networks available to parents.
2. Parents’ level of education and attitude to school/schooling.
3. Relational constraints including parents’ sense of security and adequacy in school settings.
4. Parenting skills/ideas regarding their role in the literacy lives of their children as well as their knowledge of scope for involvement both at home and school.
5. Community issues including linguistic and cultural barriers, values, lifestyle, attitude to school, views of success and barriers to success, and general ideas about literacy that permeate the community.
B. Teacher Constraints:
1. Level of teacher preparation to deal with family literacy matters.
2. Teacher folk theories about low-income parents (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).
3. Occupational demands and constraints.
4. Psychological constraints including teachers’ fear of losing power, their sense of security/insecurity, ego, willingness, and possible propensity for turf “wars”.

C. Administrative Constraints:
1. Principals’ attitudes to parents and community as well as their level of sensitivity to diversity issues.
2. School rules, regulations, and policies.
3. Limited conception of parents’ roles.
4. Level of encouragement/ support (financial and otherwise) offered.
5. Fear of losing control or power.
6. Level of knowledge regarding effective literacy or educational practices.
7. Failure to reward teachers’ efforts (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).

D. Student Constraints:
1. Commitment to liaison role.
2. Level of parent-child communication related to school.
3. Perception of parents’ involvement in their school life

Student constraints were found during piloting to be less crucial at the primary level.

Administration of the Instrument. The initial survey was administered via an online mode. The URL was e-mailed to various mailing lists comprising literacy teachers
and teachers in training. This group constituted a convenience sample of 38 respondents. Data was returned via an Excel spreadsheet, which made it impossible to link responses to particular participants. Thus, participant confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

**Scoring.** The 38 participants in the study were asked to indicate their level of agreements with the 32 Likert-type items. Since there were positively and negatively phrased items, a-priori weights of one integer differences were assigned in descending order (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) for positively-worded items and in ascending order (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) for negatively phrased items.

**Analyses.** The data was subjected to a series of analyses, and follow-up survey of the literature. Analyses included SPSS 13.0 reliability analysis and non-parametric procedures to isolate crucial independent variables. Analyses led to a refinement of the instrument from a 32 items scale to one comprising 22 items.

**Reliability issues.** The 38 sets of responses were subjected to item analysis and measurement of internal consistency using Cronbach’s Alpha available in SPSS. The final scale had a moderate reliability of .60 unmodified and a high reliability of .80 when faulty items were deleted. The scale, after modification, comprised 22 items.

**Nonparametric statistical analyses.** Non-parametric procedures were used primarily to eliminate unimportant variables from consideration. The unmodified scale was used for this purpose. Various questions regarding teacher attitude were explored. In terms of overall attitude to barriers, it was found that attitude scores on the survey ranged from a low of 2.75 on a 5-point scale to a high of 3.66, reflecting a moderately positive attitude to barriers on the part of respondents. When asked on one item whether they felt it
was possible to establish effective literacy partnerships with low-income parents despite the many barriers, the majority of teachers (90%) said they felt this was possible. Only 3.3% of teachers said that establishing effective partnerships was not possible given the barriers. Thus, attitude and optimism showed positive trends.

Other analyses indicated that teacher optimism regarding the possibility of eliminating barriers may not be related to years of teaching reading and that optimism may not be related to educational level. The researcher also sought to identify whether attitudes differed as a function of teacher gender. The specific question asked was whether overall attitudes of male and female reading teachers differed in the population. Tests conducted revealed a significant difference in attitude between male and female teachers, with female teachers showing a tendency toward more positive attitudes to barriers. Gender was kept as an important independent variable but disproportionality of male and female teachers in the population has led to it being relegated to the position of secondary consideration.

An additional question asked of the preliminary data was whether there was a relationship between marital status and attitudes. Analysis revealed that teachers from the different marital categories did not exhibit differing attitudes to barriers. This variable was eliminated from consideration since it did not appear crucial.

The preliminary non-parametric analyses revealed many useful insights regarding teacher attitude to barriers to parent-teacher literacy partnerships. Teachers in general tend to have a positive attitude towards barriers and felt that it is possible to establish literacy partnerships with parents despite barriers they experienced or might experience. The study also showed that attitudes tended to differ based on gender, and that female
teachers are more likely to exhibit more positive attitudes than are male teachers. Analysis also revealed that the majority of reading teachers tend to be female, which seems to fit well with common sense and data from the current *Jamaican Educational Digest (2002/2003)*.

Importantly, the study revealed that years of teaching, marital status, and educational level were not statistically related to teacher attitude to barriers. In terms of teacher responses to individual items, it was found that teachers felt that effective teachers assume the bulk of the responsibility for establishing partnerships (86.7%). Teachers seldom blamed administration for the ineffectiveness of partnerships efforts. Additionally, teachers seldom blamed school policies but did see scheduling and teacher time as a major problem in undertaking partnership efforts. Teachers tended to support the need for training and accountability in facilitating partnerships, although the level of agreement was a bit low (60%).

Finally, the pilot study revealed that teachers tended to have a positive attitude towards partnerships in general since 73% of teachers disagreed that the cost of involving parents outweighed the benefits. Overall, teachers tend to exhibit a positive attitude toward tackling barriers. They tended to assume some responsibility for the success or lack of success of partnerships and did not attribute blame solely to others. The pilot study not only led to a refinement of subscale but also helped with eliminating non-crucial/non-feasible factors and in suggesting possible hypotheses.
Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected between June 13 and July 12, 2005 since the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has already approved the study. See Appendix C for approval letter and related documents. Consent was sought from the MOEYC in Jamaica upon the researcher’s arrival in Jamaica, and prior to the commencing of data collection.

Upon arrival in Jamaica, the researcher prepared the 28 packets to be delivered to the schools. Each packet mailed to a participating school contained the following documents:

1. Seven copies of the consent form (See Appendix D)
2. A cover letter describing the study’s purpose, protection afforded respondents, information about the researcher/institution under whose auspices the study is being conducted, as well as safeguards and opportunities for debriefing. See Appendix D.
3. An information sheet for administering the questionnaire.
4. Seven copies of the questionnaire. See Appendix B.
5. Seven special envelopes into which completed questionnaires and signed consent forms were placed by individual teachers.
6. Two trade books as incentive for schools/teacher to complete and return questionnaires.
7. A stamped and addressed return envelope.
In terms of general procedure, the researcher had proposed the following method:

1. Principals would distribute and collect questionnaires, then mail the packet back to researcher. Since principals would act as liaisons between the researcher and teachers and since they represented one party scrutinized on the questionnaire, it was crucial that teachers were made aware of procedures for protecting responses.

2. Teachers were required to complete the questionnaire after reading the cover letter and after reading and signing the consent form that provide instructions to seal responses.

3. Teachers would seal the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided prior to returning the surveys (as instructed in the introductory statement on the questionnaire).

4. Schools that do not return surveys within two weeks would be contacted by telephone or by a personal visit form the researcher. The researcher would bring extra copies of the documents along in case those sent previously could be located.

Due to time pressure and the possibility that questionnaires might be ignored because data collection coincided with end-of-year examinations in the schools, however, the researcher chose to administered questionnaires personally. Additionally, only one principal agreed to administer the questionnaire. Others flatly refused. The researcher was given consent, however, to approach teachers personally. Teachers were given a
3-hour period to respond after which the researcher returned to collect the secured responses.

Data was possessed and coded at the end of each day in preparation for the final analyses. The research questions and procedures used in the main analyses are briefly below.

_Data Analysis Procedures_

1. What is the nature of teachers’ attitudes to the barriers they face in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with low-income families?

Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, and standard deviation was used to address this question. Reliability and factors analyses were also done on the scale.

2. Do teachers from the different qualification levels - pre-trained, diploma trained or graduate trained - differ in overall attitude to barriers?

3. Is there a difference in attitude according to teacher attribution of the blame for barriers to teacher/school factors, to parent/family factors, or to wider societal factors?

4. Is there a significant interaction between qualification and attribution in regard to teacher attitude to barriers?

A Two-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to explore main and interaction effects related to these research questions. The rationale for choosing this method rests with the fact that there are two independent variables (teacher qualification and teacher attribution) and one dependent variable (teacher attitude). Where appropriate, a post hoc procedure such as the Tukey test was be conducted.
Summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology employed in the study. A description of the population and means of selecting the sample were detailed in the chapter. The chapter also explored instrumentation including a description of the final questionnaire and the process of developing and refining the respective scales. The pilot study as well as efforts to establish content validity and assessment of instrument reliability was described. Information on proposed data collection plans and follow-up data analysis procedures closed out the chapter.
Chapter Four: Results

The paper sought to examine teachers’ attitudes toward the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with the families of low-income students. The research focused on teachers in the select group of remote schools that participated in the JAASP literacy initiative. It sought to determine the nature of teachers’ attitudes and to ascertain whether teachers’ professional disposition differed according to teachers’ qualifications and according to the kinds of attribution they make regarding the causes of barriers.

Secondary lines of inquiry center on whether attitudes to barriers vary according to teachers’ perception of their own social status in the school community. Implications for teacher success in partnership ventures and for the equitable participation of the rural poor in partnership schemes are explored in the study.

Results are presented in this chapter. The chapter is organized into six main sections: (a) research questions, (b) instrumentation, (c) sample demographics, (d) descriptive statistics, (e) univariate results, (f) correlation results, and (g) crucial additional findings. All analyses were conducted using SPSS (Version 13).

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of teachers’ attitudes to the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with low-income families?

2. Do teachers from the different qualification levels - pre-trained, diploma trained or graduate trained - differ in overall attitude to barriers?
3. Is there a difference in attitudes according to whether teachers’ attribute blame for barriers to teacher/school factors, to parent/family factors, or to wider societal factors?

4. Is there a significant interaction between qualification and attribution in regard to teachers’ attitudes to barriers?

*Instrumentation*

A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The instrument comprised four sections. Section A requested demographic information including teachers’ level of qualification, training status, and gender. Section B asked for teachers’ ratings of their own social status in the community in which they teach. Section C asked teachers to indicate, based on a scenario and their own experiences, which of three factors they consider most responsible for partnership problems: parent and family problems, teacher and school factors, or wider societal factors. Section D presented a 22-item Likert-type scale aimed at determining teachers’ attitudes toward parent non-participation and the causes of this.

For Section D which measures teacher attitudes to barriers, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the 12 negatively-worded and 10 positively-worded items by selecting one of the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. A-priori weights of one integer differences were assigned in descending order (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) for positively-worded items (items 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22) and in ascending order (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) for negatively-phrased
items (items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). These weights were used as the basis of coding the data collected from the subscale.

Validity of the Questionnaire

Face validity bolstered by an extensive review of the literature on components of the attitude construct and on descriptions of barriers to family-school partnerships was used to attain content validity. Items were framed based on domains of the attitude identified in the literature (please see Chapter 3). The scale was then reviewed by four university professors (one with a specialization in early childhood education and literacy, one with specialization in family-school partnerships, one with expertise in non-parametric procedures and scale development, and one with specialization in the social uses of language), and by the researcher. DeVellis (2003) established clearly the crucial role of experts in establishing the relevance of items on a scale to the latent variable, in evaluating item clarity and conciseness, and in suggesting ways of more effectively tapping the latent variable (pp. 85-86). Comments from reviewers were crucial in revising and improving the instrument.

Reliability of the Scale

SPSS reliability analysis was conducted on data gathered from the attitude scale in Section D. Cronbach’s Alpha, used to determine internal consistency, yielded an initial reliability coefficient of .63. It should be noted that reliability in the pilot survey had stood at .80 after faulty items were deleted. Such a dramatic drop in reliability from the pilot to the real study may have been due to major revisions that took place after piloting and/or to the method and atmosphere surrounding questionnaire administration. While
the pilot survey was done online and at participant’s own leisure, the final survey was
done through individual face-to-face interaction and under less relaxed conditions.

A look at the corrected item-total correlation for individual items on the current
scale revealed that the scale would benefit from the deletion of items 1, 8, 13 and 21.
These items either had a negative correlation with the mean score (items 1 and 21) or had
coefficients below .1 (items 8 and 13). When faulty items were deleted, the reliability
coefficient rose slightly to .68. However, since items had similar coefficients suggesting
some uniformity in quality, all items were kept and used in analyses done in this paper.

DeVellis (2003) categorizes scale in which only 68% of the variance in responses
can be attributed to true difference on the latent variable as “minimally acceptable” (p.
95). Frary (2000) also considers .68 in the low to moderate region and states that such a
scale, if used should be considered with other evidence such as the content analysis.
While providing benchmarks, both writers caution against using a priori numerical
criteria to judge the reliability of multidimensional scales. According to DeVellis, terms
such as attitudes and barriers, both of which are examined in this study, often refer to a
common category rather than to a unified underlying latent variable and may not provide
the uni-dimensional scale necessary for high internal consistency coefficients (p. 64).
This is so, DeVellis states, because items will not tend to “co-vary the way items do when
they are the manifestations of a common latent variable” (p.64).

The possibility that an emergent variable such as the one studied may not reflect
one underlying unified construct. Since Cronbach’s Alpha used to judge reliability
requires a uni-dimensional scale in which items hinge on one underlying construct, a
factor analysis could potentially yield some insights into the nature of the scale and the construct/s it actually measures. DeVellis (2003) states that factor analysis is an essential tool in scale development, not only because it can help determine the number of factors underlying a latent variable in the absence of strong guidance from theory, but also because it can provide greater insights into the latent variable than reliability analysis can.

Determining the number of factors is also crucial for conducting a proper reliability analysis. Brunner and Sub (2005) highlight the link between the reliability level of a scale and the factor loading of items on the scale. According to the writers, where items on a scale show non-zero loadings on more than one factor, the result is often low reliability. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation done on the scale used in this study revealed that all but one item (item one) had non-zero loadings on more than one component. PCA also indicated that nine (9) factors accounted for 66% of the variance in item response on the scale. This result was derived using the default factor extraction method (Eigenvalues over 1), and after coefficients under .40 were suppressed. Thus, the scale does appear to be multi-dimensional and the reliability coefficient must be interpreted with caution.

Brown (1997) states that the question that really needs to be asked in terms of reliability is whether .68 (68%) is sufficient for the purposes of the study. Since the study is exploratory in nature and is intended to be used for garnering insights rather than to make decisions, it may not be necessary to dwell on a priori reliability levels. Mason (1996) suggests that researchers distinguish between scales functioning as the basis of formative evaluation (being used for suggesting ways of improving teaching) and those
being used as the basis for summative purposes or for making final judgments, in determining whether reliability levels are adequate. Brunner and Sub (2005) also highlight the need to distinguish diagnostic purposes from research application when judging whether multidimensional scales are reliable since reliability measures often fail to take into consideration the multi-dimensional nature of empirical data. In terms of decisions that can be made based on the scale, Frary (2000) asserts that while such a scale may not be appropriate for making high-stakes decisions about an individual, it can be used to gather preliminary insights about a group.

However, since results are only as good as the scale upon which they are based, one must still decide whether a value of .68 provides an adequate foundation upon which garner insights into the professional disposition of the group of teachers in question can be based. Some statistical characteristics of the scale render it useful for garnering such insights. Mean score were derived for all item of the scale. Results show that scores range from 1.19 to 4.36 with a wide variety of scores in between. Total mean score was 3.21 and the mean standard deviation was .35 (See Appendix E). Coefficient of variance stood at 11%. Brown (1997) states that if such a scale produces systematic variance with a wide spread of scores with different values in between, and if results are systematic enough to produce significant results then the scale may be used, preferably backed by other evidence such as content analysis. Thus, on the surface, the attitude sub-scale seems adequate for the exploratory purpose for which it is being used.

As a follow up to the principal component analysis mentioned above, items were subsequently scrutinized for commonality and components labeled as follows:
persistence and flexibility of school personnel; convictions about the value and abilities of stakeholders; faith in democratic relations as solution to barriers; ideas about parents’ potential and possible contribution; the power of support mechanism to change perceived parent disposition; ideas about accountability; self-efficacy; stakeholder responsiveness; and ideas about the role of responsibility-taking in determining effectiveness.

Demographic Information on the Sample

Data was collected from 22 of the 28 schools initially selected using the cluster sampling technique detailed in Chapter 3. The approach of Hurricane Dennis and the subsequent early closing of all public schools by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica rendered further data collection impossible, at least for several months. Of the 150 questionnaires distributed up to that point, only 136 were returned. This represents a return rate of 91%. Return rate was enhanced by the fact that, due to limited time and impending school closure for summer holidays, the researcher had opted to administer questionnaires personally rather than mail them as initially intended.

Several problems, in addition to those listed above, resulted in the researcher missing the targeted number of questionnaires. One questionnaire had to be eliminated because the respondent had only completed the first page. Additionally, the presence of multi-grade schools in areas with low population density meant that some schools had only two teachers between grades two and six. The number of questionnaires collected from schools was also affected by the fact that, despite Ministry proclamations, most schools had no literacy specialist or intervention specialist on staff while others had more than their fair share.
In terms of the administration process, only one set of questionnaires was administered through the principal. This process was discontinued for feasibility reasons - low return rates and costly multiple visits often required to collect questionnaires – and because of teachers’ expressed discomfort with this procedure.

There was also a problem with multiple missed items on questionnaires collected from one particular school, which precipitated difficulties with missing data.

The distribution of teacher respondents according to gender, qualification, and years of teaching reading as provided by the 135 usable questionnaires, are provided below.

Table 4.1

*Percentage of Teachers According to Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Female teachers far outnumbered male teachers in the sample. As Table 4.1 indicates, a little over ninety percent of teachers in the sample are females. This is in keeping with MOEYC statistics that indicate that females account for 89 percent of the overall teaching population. While the composition of the sample matches the composition of the population, the low number of males in the sample discounts the merit of a statistical exploration of gender as a determinant of teachers’ attitudes.

Information regarding the qualification level and training status of teacher respondents was also collected. This information is provided in Table 4.2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-trained</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Less than one-tenth (7.5%) of teachers in the sample were pre-trained. The national percentage of pre-trained teachers stood at 11.5% in 2004 (Education Digest, 2003-2004). The majority of teachers in the sample (61%) had qualified through the three-year diploma program. This figure fell below the national average of 72.9%. Finally, less than one-third of teachers in the sample (31%) held degrees. The national figures for trained graduates stands at 15.5%.

Table 4.3  
Percentage of Teachers According to Training in Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Training</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of teachers (65%) indicated that they had received some training in literacy although not all of these had a specialization in the area. Some teachers (35%) had no training in literacy. These figures are interesting since, if Epstein (2001) is correct, such training would condition teachers to display more positive attitudes to barriers. Epstein claims that in general, teachers who are engage in literacy and language
instruction have higher expectations regarding parental participation, respect such participation and persist in involving hard-to-reach parents. The majority of teachers should therefore display positive attitudes.

Presented below are the data gathered from Subscales B and C, which sought to determine the sources to which teachers attributed blame for barriers and to reveal teacher perception of their own social status, respectively. Both, along with select demographic characteristics gathered in Section A, are used as factors in various analyses in this paper.

Table 4.4

Percentage of Teachers According to Attribution of Blame for Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent and Family</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider Society</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen by figures in Table 4.4, the percentages of teachers who attributed the blame for problems to parent and family problems (48.5%) and those who attributed
blame to wider societal problems (50%) were approximately equal, with only a few teachers attributing blame to teacher and school problems. The majority of teachers seem reluctant to shoulder the blame for relationship failings in partnership efforts.

Table 4.5

Percentage of Teachers According to Social Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 suggests that the majority of teachers rated their social status as being low (49%). Approximately one-third (31%) of teachers rated themselves as being of high social status. These figures are important since the majority of teachers position themselves in the moderate region. The literature suggests that people of moderate or low social standing will blame the system and will have more positive attitudes toward challenges facing the poor.
Descriptive Statistics

The main purpose of the research was to examine the nature of teacher’s attitudes toward barriers to family-school partnerships and to determine whether attitudes varied according to teachers’ qualification and teachers’ attribution of blame for barriers. Descriptive statistics including percentages, means, and standard deviations are reported in this section in order to answer research question number one and to lay the foundation for addressing other research questions.

Research question one was stated as follows: What is the nature of teachers’ attitudes to the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with low-income families? Results gathered from the attitude scale, including the means and standard deviation for individual items on the scale, are displayed in Appendix E. Research question one is addressed below.

What is the Nature of Teachers’ Attitudes toward Barriers?

An interpretation guide was derived from the results of Section D in order to interpret attitude scores and item means. Five categories were derived (low/poor, below average, average, above average, and high) based on the distribution of individual attitude scores. In deriving categories, SPSS Visual Bander was used to specify five cutoff points derived based on equal percentiles for scanned cases (16.67 bandwidth). The total mean score of 3.21 (see Appendix E), when compared with the guide derived and displayed in Table 4.6, suggests that teachers in the survey had a positive, but only borderline (just .02 points above the average category) attitude, toward barriers.
Table 4.6

*Interpretation Scale for Teachers’ Attitudes Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Attitude Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.33 or Higher</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.20 - 3.32</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 –3.19</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.91 - 3.09</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.90 or Lower</td>
<td>Low/Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the distribution of teachers’ attitude scores, descriptive statistics conducted after reverse coding of negative items revealed that the majority of scores fell in the 3.00 to 3.99 band as shown in Table 4.7. Only about 1% of teacher had high positive attitudes.
Table 4.7

*Distribution of Attitudes to Barriers Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.99 and lower</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 – 3.99</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>98.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00-5.00</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of teachers displayed attitudes falling closer to the neutral band, suggesting that attitudes were only marginally positive.

Based on results gathered from the questionnaires and means derived for each item, the researcher was able to select five items with the highest mean score concerning teacher attitudes to barriers, and the five items with the lowest mean score. Items were selected after negative items were recoded. Given the marginal nature of the scale reliability and requirements in the methodological literature for supportive content analysis, scrutiny of the content of these items can help bolster claims made based on the total score derived from the scale. Tables showing the items with highest and lowest means scores are displayed in Appendix E. Items are labeled according to the level of attitude displayed. Labels are also based on the five categories derived interpretation of teachers’ overall attitude score. As can be seen from the tables, all high scoring items
indicated high attitudes, and all low scoring items indicated low (poor) attitudes. It was deemed necessary by the researcher to determine which items received such extreme responses.

Items with the highest mean scores as can be see from tables provided were: item 3, “Teachers should not be required to build partnerships with unresponsive parents” (M = 4.06); item 5, “Despite teachers’ busy schedules, it is possible to find time to work through partnership problems with parents” (M = 4.01); item 9, “Family literacy training for teachers and principals can help remove barriers to partnership efforts” (M = 4.05); item 17, “Parents should concentrate on helping their children at home; participation in school affairs is unnecessary” (M = 4.09); item 22, “Despite the many barriers involved, it is still possible to establish strong parent-teacher literacy partnerships with low-income parents” (M = 4.36).

Items with the lowest mean scores were: item 7, “When parents are committed to their children's education, they find time to get involved” (M = 1.19); item 11, “The Ministry of Education should hold teachers and principals more accountable for outcomes” (M = 1.98); item 12, “Parents should be the ones held accountable for their own involvement” (M = 1.09); item 18, “Schools strapped for funds cannot afford to provide transportation for parents to attend meetings” (M = 2.13); item 21, “Schools should be more aggressive in ensuring that parents meet with teachers at times determined by the school” (M = 2.05).

Items selected reveal useful insights into the nature of teachers’ attitudes and into their views regarding the kind of barriers they should tackle. Analysis of these items was
also useful for identifying which best practices in fostering parent-teacher partnerships teachers supported.

Items selected revealed a preference on the part of teachers to tackle teacher and school-related problems and a reluctance to tackle problems originating outside the school. Items are discussed below. An N indicates that the item that revealed a particular item was negatively worded and a P that the item was positively worded.

Problems related to teacher and school functioning that teachers were willing to tackle included principal apathy if present (N), teachers’ scheduling conflicts (P), training needs probably because rural teachers tend to crave degree-earning opportunities so far removed from their contexts (P), assuming responsibility for partnership activities (P) although not for guaranteeing success (P/ N) and continued efforts to make parents feel more welcomed when they choose to participate (P).

However, teachers did not agree that conference scheduling should be at parents’ convenience (N); expressed disagreement with suggestions that they meet with parents’ one on one although they did see the merits of meeting on such a level (N); and were strongly opposed to suggestions that they be held accountable for partnership outcomes (N/P), supporting instead the idea that parents should be held accountable for outcomes (N). This view coincides with the Jamaican notion that “He who has dried beans should seek fire”, that is, he who has the problem should actively seek the solution.

Additionally, teachers agree that schools should not expend much-needed funds on helping parents with transportation problems (N); did not feel that providing support mechanisms such as childcare would improve participation patterns (N); and agreed that
parents, if sufficiently committed, would get involved and would meet at times determined by the school (N). It could be that teachers are picking their battles and would prefer not to challenge socio-economic forces operating to affect partnership efforts as would be suggested by trends in the main analysis.

Teachers therefore appeared to view the school rather than the family as the hub of partnership activities, and to believe that parents are obligated to gravitate toward this hub. In teachers’ views, it is not the obligation of school personnel to move beyond traditional borders in order to involve “hard-to-reach” or peripheral parents. Dunlap and Alva (1999) had stated that teachers are generally unwilling to extend their efforts beyond educentric borders in order to ensure partnership success.

Spady (1995), who conceives of educentrism and reformism as opposing forces, defines educentrism as an “inward-looking, closed-system perspective” on education that refuses to consider “the nature of the challenges that today’s students are likely to encounter” and which views the roles and responsibilities of the education system and those employed in it in terms of the traditional categories (p. 82). This seems largely the case if patterns in responses are to be given credence. If teachers blame external forces but are unwilling to move beyond school borders and express an unwillingness to provide resource support to help parents move toward what teachers view as the hub of activities, then it is dubious whether teachers will succeed in including peripheral families facing economic challenges. Teachers’ attitudes may merge as barriers to the establishment of democratic partnerships.
Worthy of note is the fact that findings seem to suggest that teachers were basing their reaction to different barriers on what they knew or thought they knew about parents in deep rural communities. Research conducted by de Carvalho, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Achoa, 2002; and Lareau and Weininger, 2003 support such trends in reactions to on-participation. If parents are self-employed or unemployed then they should have no problems in meeting conference or other obligations. In addition, since communities are small, if parents were eager to get involved, they would walk the mile or so to school. Conclusions regarding lack of care are easy to reach in these contexts (Weiner, Perry & Magnusson, 1988).

Reactions seem also to have been influenced by teachers’ beliefs regarding their roles and responsibilities in partnership activities. As one teacher participant said, since teachers are not social workers, problems arising from parents’ stressful familial contexts were not within their realm of responsibility. Educating their children is enough. Dunlap and Alva (1999) establish the prevalence of such views.

Thus, analysis of selected items from the survey proved quite useful.

The Univariate Results

This section tests the null hypotheses connected with the last three research questions. The hypotheses were as follows:

1. Teachers from the different qualification levels (pre-trained, diploma trained, and graduate trained) do not differ in their overall attitudes to barriers.
2. There is no difference in teachers’ attitudes according to whether teachers attribute the blame for barriers to parent and family factors, teacher and school factors, and wider societal factors.

3. There is no significant interaction between teacher qualification and teacher attribution in regard to teachers’ attitudes to barriers.

Examination of interaction effects is a prerequisite for discussing main effects. If there is a significant interaction between the factors then there are no grounds on which to explore main effects (Norusis, 2000). While interaction effect (hypothesis 3) was examined prior to the exploration of main effects, for purposes of clarity the main effects are presented first.

Attitude scores were subjected to a 2-way Analysis of Variance having three levels of qualifications (pre-trained, diploma trained and graduate trained), and three levels of attribution (parent and family problems, school and teacher problems, and wider problems). During analysis of the data, tests of independence, normality and homogeneity of variances were conducted. Levine’s test of homogeneity of variances indicated that variances are likely to be homogeneous among groups, $F(124) = .703, p = .647$.

Results of the analysis are provided below.

*Do Teachers from the Different Qualification Levels Differ in Attitudes?*

The main effect of qualifications yielded a ratio of $F(2, 131) = .135, p = .927$, indicating that the attitudes of teachers who took part in the study did not differ according to whether they were pre-trained ($M = 3.13$), diploma trained ($M = 3.18$) and graduate
trained teachers (M = 3.17). Thus, the null hypothesis that teachers do not differ in attitude according to their qualification level was retained.

*Do Teacher’s Attitudes Differ According to Their Attribution of Blame for Barriers?*

The main effect of attribution yielded a ratio of $F(2, 131) = .214, p = .662$, indicating that teachers who took part in the study did not differ in attitudes based on whether they attributed the blame for barriers to parent and family problems (M = 3.23), to school and teacher problems (M = 3.05) and to wider societal problems (M=3.19). Thus, the null hypothesis that teachers do not differ in attitude according to their attribution of blame for barriers was retained, especially since a 2 x 3 analysis with only two levels of attribution (negligible attribution to teacher and school being eliminated), revealed no significant differences among the groups.

*Is There a Significant Interaction between Qualification and Attribution in Regard to Teachers’ Attitudes to Barriers?*

To test the null hypothesis that there was no significant interaction between attribution and qualification in regard to teachers’ attitude toward barriers, a 2-way ANOVA was used. ANOVA results, displayed in Table 4.8 below, indicate that the interaction effect was non-significant, $F(2, 131) = .179, p = .836$. Thus, it was found that attribution and qualification did not interact to affect teacher’s attitudes toward barriers to partnership formation. The null hypothesis regarding no significant interaction was retained.

Table 4.8 provides the relevant information regarding all analyses pertaining to research questions 2, 3 and 4.
Table 4.8

*Two-Way ANOVA Results: Attribution and Qualification by Attitudes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-Way Interactions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification x Attribution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.836</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.927</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.210</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated by the data presented in Table 4.8, pre-trained, diploma trained, and graduate trained teachers, whether they attributed the blame for barriers to parent and family problems, to teacher and school problems, and to wider societal problems, displayed similar attitudes toward barriers to partnership formation.
As Table 4.9 show, slight differences did exist between teachers in the pre-trained group and teachers at the other qualification levels. However, the differences were not found to be statistically significant.

Table 4.9

Means of Teachers’ Attitudes to Barriers According to Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-trained</td>
<td>64.90</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>69.39</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>68.97</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67.75</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10 indicates slight differences between teachers who attributed blame to teacher and school factors and the other groups. However, differences were also not statistically significant.
Table 4.10

Means of Teachers’ Attitudes to Barriers According to Attribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent and Family</td>
<td>68.84</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and School</td>
<td>65.86</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider Society</td>
<td>68.56</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>67.75</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table indicates, attribution to the school system was negligible and attribution to parents and family quite close suggesting an almost equal level of blame.

Figure 1 below should further elucidate trends.
As the figure indicates, only diploma-trained teachers cited teacher and school factors as crucial and those who did tended to have the lowest levels of attitudes. Teachers who blamed parents and family had the highest level of attitude and attitudes appear to be similar across qualification groups. While the qualification groups tended to have similar levels of attribution to parent and family factors, they varied in their views of the role of wider societal factors in creating barriers. Pre-trained teachers who cited societal factors had the lowest level of attitude with diploma teachers who cited societal factors having the highest level of attitudes.

While differences did not emerge as significant, the trends observed are crucial
since they hint at some support for Green and Holeman’s (2004) claim that when teachers blame the self, they will exhibit more negative attitudes toward challenges because efficacy is at stake. In addition, teachers may feel powerless in the face of societal factors and might express less of a willingness to tackle these. Hinted at also is the fact that when teachers blame parents and families, they might view factors originating from these forces as less formidable that those hinted at by internal and societal attribution. These possibilities will be explored further.

Correlation Results

In this section, the relationship between teachers’ attitudes and teacher attribution is tested. Cramer’s V was used to test the relationship between teachers’ attitudes and teachers’ attribution of blame for barriers as measured on the questionnaire. SPSS Visual Bander was used to convert teachers’ attitudes to an ordinal variable with three levels (low, average and high) so that it could be compared with attribution, which was treated as a nominal variable in the study. Conversion was done using a similar process to than used in deriving attitude bands for interpretation of teachers’ attitude scores.

Results of correlation analysis indicated that no significant relationships existed between teachers’ attitudes and teachers’ attribution of blame for barriers, $V (131) = .149, p = .683)$. Thus, no relationship was found between teachers’ attitudes and teachers' attribution of blame for barriers.
Table 4.11

*Correlation between Attitudes (Banded) and Teacher Attribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Attribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cramer’s V</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attribution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cramer’s V</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Additional Findings*

Exploratory research, with its focus on the development of insights into a problem, provides scope for the employment of flexible means of observation. After having conducted main analyses, the researcher then turned attention to item 22 – the last item on the scale, which also functioned as a global/summative indicator of teachers’ attitudes to barriers. Cashin, Downey, and Sixbury (1994) argue that since the final global item is usually the most powerful on the scale, often surpassing the final score in powerfulness, it can be validly used as the basis of gathering insights about a specifically
defined trait, in this case teacher optimism. Best and Addison (2000) provide precedence for use of such methods. Thus, a second analysis was conducted using scores on this item as a dependent variable.

The second 2-way Analysis of Variance was conducted to determine whether scores on item 22 (labeled teacher optimism) differed according to teachers’ qualification and according to their perception of their own social status (their level of importance, competence, powerfulness and level of regard) in the community. The global item states, “Despite the many barriers, it is still possible to establish literacy partnerships with the families of low income students”. Teachers’ perception of their own social status is measured by Subscale B and asks teachers to rate themselves in terms of their level of competence, powerfulness, importance and regard in the school community.

The following research questions and hypotheses guided this second analysis:

*Secondary Research Questions*

1. How optimistic are teachers that barriers to partnership formation can be overcome?
2. Does teacher optimism differ according teacher qualification?
3. Does teacher optimism differ according teachers’ perception of their social status in the school community?
4. Is there a significant interaction between teacher qualification and teacher perception of their social status in regard to teacher optimism?

Null hypotheses were projected for these questions.
The Findings

How optimistic are teachers regarding possibility of overcoming barriers? As the item summary table provided in Appendix E reveals, mean score on teacher optimism (Item 22), stood at 4.36 with a standard deviation of .53. When compared to the levels provided in the interpretation guide used earlier, the mean score on the item indicated that teachers expressed a high level of optimism that barriers could be overcome. The question remained as to whether all teachers expressed such high optimism.

Do teachers’ level of optimism differ according to their qualification level? During analysis of the data, tests of independence, normality and homogeneity of variances were conducted. Levine’s test of homogeneity of variances indicated that variances are likely to be homogeneous among groups, \( F(124) = 1.287, p = .256 \).

In the second 3 x 3 Analysis of Variance, the main effect of qualifications yielded a ratio of \( F(2, 133) = 3.109, p = .048, \eta^2 = .046 \), indicating that teachers’ level of optimism differed according to whether they were pre-trained (M = 4.62), diploma trained (M = 4.39) or graduate trained (M = 4.18). Thus, the null hypothesis that teachers do not differ in optimism according to their level of qualification was rejected at the .05 level. Teachers in the study were found to differ in optimism based on their qualification level (effect size of .046 and a power of .590). Pre-trained teachers expressed the highest level of optimism, followed by diploma-trained teachers. Graduate trained teachers had the lowest level of optimism. Cell means for this analysis are displayed in Table 4.12 below.
Do teachers’ level of optimism differ according to their perception of their own social status in the school community? The main effect of teachers’ perception of their own social status yielded a ratio of $F(2, 133) = 6.079$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .087$, indicating that teachers’ level of optimism differed significantly according to whether they perceived themselves to be of high, moderate or low social status. Teachers who perceived themselves to be of high social status had the highest mean attitudes ($M = 4.66$), followed by those who perceived themselves to be of low social status ($M = 4.38$). Teachers who rated themselves as being of moderate social status had the lowest level of optimism that barriers could be overcome ($M = 4.16$).

### Table 4.12

*Means of Teacher Optimism According to Qualification*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-trained Trained</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13

Means of Teacher Optimism According to Social Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the null hypothesis that teachers do not differ in optimism according to their perception of their own social status was rejected at the .05 level. Teachers in the study were found to differ in optimism based on their perception of their social status in the school community (effect size of .087 and a power of .88).

Interaction between teacher qualification and teacher perception of their own social status in regard to teacher attitudes to barriers. No significant interactions were found between teacher qualification and teachers’ perception of their own social status in regard to teacher attitude to barriers, $F (2, 133) = 1.253, p = .292$. Thus, the two factors did not interact to affect teachers’ attitudes to barriers and it is reasonable to discuss main effects.

The ANOVA summary table is presented below.
Table 4.14

Two-Way ANOVA Results: Qualification and Social Status by Optimism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>η²</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-Way Interactions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification x Social Status</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.253</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.109</td>
<td>.048*</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Status</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.079</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.824</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean differences are significant at the .05 level.

As the table indicates, significant results were found for both variable sin the initial analysis. Since significant main effects were found for both qualification and perception of social status in regard to teacher optimism, it was necessary to determine the groups between which significant differences exist. Two 2-way ANOVA post hoc tests (Tukey HSD) were conducted on qualification and perception of social status.
Tukey HSD results on qualification revealed no significant differences among the qualification groups, $p = .123$. Thus, the test indicated that groups formed one homogenous subset. However, results of pairwise comparison (Fisher’s LSD) revealed that while pre-trained and diploma trained teachers did not differ significantly in optimism ($p = .229$) and while differences between graduate and diploma trained teachers only approached significance ($p = .059$), differences did exist between pre-trained and graduate trained teachers ($p = .03$). While bearing in mind the fact that the latter test does not control for familywise errors, one can reasonably say that the possibility exists that pre-trained teacher might display a high level of optimism than do graduate trained teachers. See Appendix G for tables showing post hoc results.

For exploratory research such as this, pairwise comparisons offer Type I error control while also supplying needed power and ease of application. Benjamini & Holberg (1995) states that, for exploratory studies and studies that center on variables not previously studied and which seek merely to define a problem, the less stringent false discovery control methods can yield greater power as seen in this instance and can reveal useful insights.

Results of multiple comparisons used to ascertain whether teacher optimism differed as a function of their perception of their social status in the school community, revealed that while teachers who rated themselves as being of low social status ($M = 4.32$) did not differ from those who rated themselves as being of moderate social status ($M = 4.15$), $p = .376$. Additionally, no significant differences were found to exist between teachers who rated themselves as being of low social status ($M = 4.32$) and those
who rated themselves highly (4.56), \( p = .096 \). However, those who rated themselves as being of moderate social status did differ from those who rate themselves highly, \( p = .012 \). Two homogenous subsets were found to exist in terms of social status with the “low” group straddling both subsets.

It can be seen from Table 1 in Appendix G that significant differences did exist between at least two groups of teacher according to their perception of their social status. Teachers who rated themselves highly on social status (competence, powerfulness, importance and level of regard) had the highest mean score on optimism (4.655), followed by teachers who rated themselves as being of low social status (4.375). Teachers who rated themselves as being of moderate social status had the lowest mean score on the item (4.16).

Thus, while qualification and attribution were not found to be significant determinants of teacher attitude to barriers in general, qualification and teacher perception of their social status did emerge as crucial factors in determining teachers’ level of optimism that barriers could be overcome.

**Summary**

Demographic data collected conformed with Ministry of Education statistics regarding the proportion of male to female teachers and regarding the distribution of qualification levels among teachers. There were almost ten times as many female teachers as there were male teachers. The majority of teachers were diploma trained. Only a small minority of teachers were pre-trained.
Teachers were found to have a below average positive attitude to barriers to family-school partnerships. Qualification and attribution of blame for barriers were not found to be significant determinants of teachers’ attitudes. Additionally, attribution of blame and attitudes did not correlate significantly. However, analysis done on the final global item revealed differences in optimism among specific groups of teachers based on their level of qualification and according to their perception of their own social status in the school community.

As stated earlier, non-significant results for the main analysis may have been due to weaknesses in the scale as well as to low sample size and the resultant failure of the analysis to attain adequate power (DeVellis, 2003, 38). Power for the main effect analysis hovered around .06 and .12 with a model power of .10, far below the preset power levels. With such low power, it is dubious whether significant results could be found. Conversely, power levels for analyses done on the summative item were as high as .88, thus increasing the possibility of finding significant results.

Problems with the scale could be attributed to the large number of subcomponents of attitudes to barriers targeted by the single 22-item scale. Reliability tends to be high when items measure a single item consistently. Where a large number of sub-components are targeted by a scale as short as this, reliability problems are likely to emerge especially when reliability measures used assume uni-dimensionality (Brunner & Sub, 2005; DeVellis, 2003). The summative item on the scale emerged as quite powerful, however,
having the second highest correlation coefficient of the lot (Abrami, 1989; Cashin, Downey, & Sixbury, 1994). Analysis using this item produced significant results that conform to ideas in the literature.
Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

In this chapter, a discussion of the major findings of the study is presented. The chapter begins with a restating of the purpose, design, main research questions and hypotheses undergirding the study. This will be followed by a presentation and discussion of the results of the main analysis. Important additional insights garnered from the data will also be presented and discussed. Conclusions reached and their implications for the future of literacy partnerships for policy makers at the Ministry of Education, for teacher educator and teacher education programs, for teachers and administrators in schools, and for the families with whom schools work are then explored. The chapter will be rounded out by an outline of recommendations for future partnership processes, for teacher training and professional development, and for further research.

Purpose and Design

The major purpose of the study was to investigate the attitudes of teachers in a select group of remote rural all-age schools toward barriers that arise during attempts to establish literacy partnerships with the families of low-income students. It sought to establish the nature of teachers’ attitudes and to discover whether attitudes differed according to teachers’ qualification level (whether they were pre-trained, diploma trained, or graduate trained), and according to their attribution of blame for barriers (to parent and family problems, to teacher and school problems, or to wider societal problems). The study also aimed at examining the role of teachers’ perception of their social status in determining their affective reaction to barriers.
The questionnaire used to collect the data in this study was specifically designed and refined by the researcher for the purposes of the study. It comprised four sections. Subscale A requested demographic data, Subscale B collected information on teachers’ perception of their social status, Subscale C gathered information on teachers’ attribution of blame for barriers, and Subscale D, the main subscale, targeted teachers’ attitudes toward a multiplicity of situations known to operate as barriers to partnership formation.

The scale was subjected to considerable refinement during construction. A substantial review of the literature and critique of the scale by a team of experts served as the main means of establishing content validity. Scale revisions were made based on the judgment of the team and at the discretion of the researcher (DeVellis, 2003).

Questionnaire respondents were drawn from 28 of 48 JAASP schools using a modified cluster sampling strategy. The study targeted 196 teachers but, due to an impending hurricane and the subsequent closing of schools by the Government of Jamaica, only 150 questionnaires were distributed and only 136 collected up to the time of the termination of data collection. This reflects a 91% return rate on those distributed, but represents only 69% of expected respondents. Only 135 questionnaires were deemed usable.

After data collection, stability of items on Subscale D was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha. The internal consistency reliability of the 22-item scale was shown to be in the low to moderate region, perhaps due to the multidimensional nature of the construct. Decisions regarding multidimensionality of the scale were made because nine factors were found to account for 66% of the variance in items responses. Items had
similar coefficients suggesting some uniformity in quality. Computed reliability after the deletion of faulty items stood at .68. Initial reliability stood at .63.

Several different analyses were conducted on the scale. These included:

1. Cronbach’s Alpha was used to estimate the stability of items as indicated above.
2. Principal component analysis (PCA) was used to determine the number of factors measured by the scale as well as to determine the proportion of variance in responses accounted for by the items on the scale. PCA also led to a naming of factors.
3. Descriptive statistics were generated for important variables namely qualification, attribution, perception of social status, and gender.
4. Inferential statistics were used to analyze the data in relation to research questions 2, 3 and 4. Two 3 x 3 ANOVAs were deemed necessary in this study.
5. Correlation using Cramer’s V was conducted to examine the relationship between attitude (transformed into an ordinal variable) and attribution, using Cramer’s V.

*Research Questions and Hypotheses*

The study aimed at addressing the following questions:

1. What is the nature of teachers’ attitudes to the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with low-income families? *Teachers exhibited a marginally positive attitude, with an almost exclusive attribution of blame to external forces.*
2. Do teachers from the different qualification levels - pre-trained, diploma trained or graduate trained - differ in overall attitudes to barriers? *No.*
3. Is there a difference in attitudes according to teachers’ attribution of the blame for barriers to teacher/school factors, to parent/family factors, or to wider societal factors? *No.*

4. Is there a significant interaction between qualification and attribution in regard to teachers’ attitudes to barriers? *No.*

Hypotheses pertaining to the main analysis were as follows:

1. Teachers from the different qualification levels - pre-trained, diploma trained or graduate trained– do not differ in overall attitudes to barriers.

2. There is no difference in overall attitudes among teachers who attribute blame for barriers to teacher/school factors, to parent/family factors, or to wider societal factors?

3. There is no significant interaction between teachers’ qualification level and teachers’ attribution in regard to teachers’ attitudes to barriers.

Additional questions of interest include the following:

1. How optimistic are teachers that barriers to partnership formation can be overcome? *Teachers were very optimistic.*

2. Do teachers’ level of optimism differ according to their qualification level? *Yes, but only marginally so.*

3. Do teachers’ level of optimism differ according to teachers’ perception of their social status in the school community? *Yes.*
4. Is there a significant interaction between teachers’ qualification and teachers’ perception of their own social status in regard to teachers’ attitudes to barriers? No.

For the second analysis, hypotheses were as follows:

1. There is no difference in teachers’ level of optimism according to teacher qualification.

2. There is no difference in teacher optimism according to teachers’ perception of their social status in the school community.

3. There is no significant interaction between teacher qualification and teachers’ perception of their own social status in regard to optimism.

**Summary of Findings**

As demographic statistics reveal, data from the responses of 135 teachers from 22 remote rural schools were used in the analyses. Only thirteen (9.6) of respondents were male teachers while 122 (90.4%) were female. Ten (7.5%) had received no training in education and classified themselves as pre-trained, while eighty-two (61.2%) of teachers held basic teaching qualifications (a diploma in education). Forty-two (31.3%) held degrees along with training in education. Statistics also reveal that eighty-six (64.7%) teachers in the sample had received training in literacy while forty-seven (35.3%) had received no such training.

Also evident from the data was the fact that forty-one teachers (30.6%) perceived themselves to be of high social status, twenty-eight teachers (20.9%) perceived themselves as being of as moderate, and sixty-five teachers (48.5%) as being of low
social status. Some variety existed in the way in which teachers perceived their status as professional educators in the school community. The measure of teachers’ perception of their social status provided information far beyond their ideas regarding their position in the community. Ideas regarding teachers’ sense of efficacy (Lazard & Slostad, 1998) also emerged due to the particular indices such as competence, importance, powerfulness and regard used. This information proved useful in later analysis.

It could be observed from the data that teachers attributed the blame for barriers almost equally to parents and family problems (48.5%) and to the wider society (50%). Attribution to self (teacher and school problems) was negligible and stood at 1.5% (2 teachers). This suggests that teachers generally believed that schools and teachers were not to be blamed barriers and were, therefore, not willing to shoulder blame for the barriers that emerged during partnerships. Instead, teachers seem to believe that barriers emerged because of problems related to societal forces as well as by factors originating in students’ homes. While attitude did not differ significantly according to teachers’ attribution or qualification, trends in the data are that teachers demonstrated lower levels of attitudes when blame was attributed to society or to self. When attribution was made to parents and families, attitudes were highest.

The data appear to indicate some failure on the part of teachers to self-evaluate and to re-examine the role of schools and teachers in creating and precipitating partnership difficulties. This absence of reflective action suggests also a reluctance on the part of the majority of teachers to re-evaluate the process of partnership formation and to scrutinize in a positive manner the perceptions and action of those who placed themselves
in charge of that process. Although current definitions of partnerships emphasize the importance of shared contribution, participation and accountability, in general, teachers showed a reluctance to shoulder the blame for relationship failings in partnership efforts. For the two teachers who attributed blame to self, attitudes tended to be low. Perhaps teachers are afraid to indulge in self-reflection and, thus, to contend with concomitant suggestions of fallibility.

In terms of teachers’ attitude to barriers, descriptive statistics garnered from Subscale D indicate that teachers’ attitude scores ranged from a mean of 1.19 (out of 5) to a mean of 4.36 after negative items were recoded. Overall mean attitude stood at 3.21, hovering precariously close to the higher end of the average category (3.19) in the interpretation guide. Total mean score stood at a mere 69.9 out of a possible score of 110. These figures indicate that, while attitude was positive, this was only marginally so, and teachers in general may only express a guarded belief that they could handled barriers positively. To prove this point, it can be observed that 22.2% of teachers had attitude scores below the neutral point, that is, of 2.99 and below (out of 5). The majority of teachers (76%) had scores that hovered between 3.00 and 3.99. Only 1.3% of teachers had scores above 4.00. Thus, merely stating that teachers had a positive attitude would not be an adequate description based on these trends. Borderline positive is a more appropriate term.

Scrutiny of scores on the five items with the highest scores and the five with the lowest scores provide additional insights into teachers’ attitudes. As means scores on these items show, there were some barriers toward which teachers expressed strongly
positive attitudes, but other barriers did not receive that level of gusto. Items with the lowest scores all reflected negative attitudes at the lowest level (that is, had scores below 2.90). The highest score in this category was 2.13, with the category means being only 1.69. All high scoring items had high attitude scores (above the 4-point mark).

Overall, teachers indicated that they felt it was possible to overcome problems with their busy schedules and agreed that effective teachers assumed the bulk of the responsibility for fostering partnerships. However, teachers showed low support for accountability. This suggests a divide between knowledge and practice and creates doubts regarding to whether teachers are ready to foster democratic partnerships as defined in the literature.

While teachers felt strongly that effective teachers strive to reach unresponsive parents and that school personnel needed additional training in order to do so effectively, they still showed low support for support mechanisms needed to clear barriers to participation. This is interesting given the fact that the Rose Social Assessment (2003) cites high transportation costs and problems with school zoning as crucial factors affecting participation in educational services by the rural poor, and since the Ministry of Education had recently thought it necessary to provide teachers with car loans to enable them to get to school on time. Is it then that teachers are aware of what needs to be done and of what effective teacher leaders do, but are unwilling to do those things themselves? Patterns of responses again reveal divide between knowledge and intended practice.

Noteworthy in this regard is the fact that teachers indicated agreement with calls for parent participation both at home and school, yet they also agreed with negative
statements promoting scheduling inflexibility by the school and felt that parents who do not get involved in the school sphere lack the necessary commitment to get involved. Such conflicts in support may suggest that teachers are aware of appropriate strategies but are reluctant to implement them in their own practice.

Trends in support or lack thereof may therefore betray a disconnect between knowledge and practice, but such trends may also reflect teachers’ knowledge of parents’ lifestyles such as the fact that the majority of adults in these communities do not have job that would result in scheduling conflict and that taking time off from the farm may not involve threats of termination.

Thus, while teachers supported several suggestions for surmounting barriers, there were other suggestions for overcoming difficulties that they did not support. Additionally, while teachers indicated agreement with proven strategies, they showed an unwillingness to consider these in their own practice. This mixed response undoubtedly affected attitude scores. This is evident since a counterbalancing of the mean of the five items with high mean scores (4.11) and the means of those with low mean scores (1.69), yielded an average score of 2.9, a negative score just 0.1 shy of neutral. As stated early, near neutral overall score for teachers’ attitudes may reflect a trend of mixed responses regarding suggestions for overcoming barriers. Despite trends toward non-support, curiously, teachers still felt that barriers could be overcome and felt that they could establish effective partnerships.

The inferential statistics generated in the study revealed the following outcomes in reaction to the hypotheses tested:
There was no significant interaction between teachers’ qualification and teachers’ attribution in regard to teachers’ attitudes to barriers. Additionally, teachers’ qualification and teachers’ perception of their social status in the school community were not found to interact significantly to affect teachers’ level of optimism that barriers could be overcome.

1. Main effects of the independent variables qualification and attribution regarding teachers’ attitudes to barriers revealed no significant difference in attitudes according to whether teachers attributed blame for barriers to parent and family problems, to school or teacher problems, or to wider societal problems. Neither was any difference in attitudes observed according to whether teachers were pre-trained, diploma trained, or graduate trained. Still, patterns in the data suggest that attitudes were lowest when blame was attributed to self and society and highest when blame was attributed to parents and families.

2. An additional analysis did reveal significant main effects for qualification and perception of social status in regard to teachers’ level of optimism. Power for this analysis stood at .59 for qualification and .88 for perception of social status. Optimism was found to differ according to whether teachers were pre-trained, diploma trained, or graduate trained and according to whether they rated themselves as being of high, moderate or low social status.

3. Post hoc multiple comparison (Tukey HSD) on the groups in qualification and the three groups derived for perception of social status in regard to teachers’ optimism revealed no significant difference among the qualification groups.
4. perhaps due to family wise error control built into the procedure (adjustment of observed significance level in multiple comparisons to prevent chance identification of significant differences where there is none) and because differences had only been marginally significant \((p = .048)\) for this factor (Keselman, Cribbie, & Holland, 2004). However, for perception of social status, significant differences were found between teachers who rated themselves as being of moderate social status and those who rated themselves highly. Teachers in the low group did not differ from teachers in the moderate or high group. Numerically, those in the moderate group had the lowest level of optimism. This may reflect the fact that these teachers are more modest or guarded than teachers in the low group. Other interesting interpretations of such results are presented later.

5. Results of the Cramer’s V correlation test indicated that teachers’ attitudes to barriers and their attribution of blame for barriers were not significantly correlated, \((r = .169)\).

**Discussion of Findings**

In this section of the study, the findings of the study are held up for scrutiny. Where appropriate, support for findings is presented. The section discusses teachers’ attitudes to barriers as well as the narrower teachers’ level of optimism that barriers can be overcome. The influence of main factors used in the study (attribution and qualification) on teachers’ attitudes to barriers forms a substantial part of the discussion,
but some attention is given to the influence of perception of social status on teachers’ level of optimism. Correlation results will also be discussed.

**Teachers’ attitudes toward barriers.** The overall attitude of teachers toward partnership-related barriers was deemed borderline average positive. Generally, an attitude score above average is deemed positive, however, given the borderline nature of the mean attitude score, caution is taken in interpreting this classification. Even though trends in teacher training and rating of social status would suggest that attitudes would be positive, this was only marginally so.

By and large, teachers expressed a limited level of willingness to tackle partnership problems. Teachers preferred to deal with challenges that emanate from teacher and school problems, that is, barriers that are generally perceived to be under the control of the school or teacher. Conversely, teachers seem to prefer to leave challenges that emanate from the family and wider society to parents or outside personnel, and expected some level of parent agency in this regard. These trends were evident when a sorting and analysis of items with which teachers agreed or disagreed strongly was conducted (five highest and five lowest scoring items). An individual analysis of each item on the Subscale D confirms this interpretation.

Revelations regarding teachers’ expressed preference to tackle only particular kinds of problems provide some support for Ramirez’s (1999, 2000, 2002) claim that teachers are unwilling to tackle communication problems with parents, and overwhelming confirmation of Orellana, Monkman, and MacGillivray’s (2002) claims that teachers tend to display attitudes that reflect an absence of agency and willingness to
act when confronted with barriers that arise from students’ socioeconomic circumstances. This kind of detachment from socioeconomic constraints on partnership success seems largely the case in the study. This seems rather ironic given the fact that the JAASP project aimed specifically at increasing literacy opportunities by removing some of the barriers that prevent the poor from engaging in educational services. How does one evade the economic origins of problems when engaging in a project aimed at dealing with such forces? Such attitudes seem counterproductive.

Findings also support Lareau and Weininger’s (2003) claims that interactions between low-income parents and the school are largely mediated by the kind of knowledge school personnel have or believe they have about parents’ living conditions and lifestyles. While teachers acknowledged the existence of barriers emanating from both families and the wider societal, allocating almost equal attribution to both, their ideas regarding the scope of their influence and their reaction to barriers does have the potential to compound problems mainly through their unwillingness to tackle problems exterior to the school.

To complicate matters, teachers did not display the kind of attributional pattern that would allow them to re-examine the self and its role in making partnerships work although they did agree that some areas such as hospitality and training could be strengthened or improved. This is so since only two teachers allocated blame to school and teacher factors, and for these attitudes tended to be low. Teachers did not display the kind of attitude reflected in the axiom blazing on the interior wall of one school complex that “If we (educators) desire to change something in the child, we must first seek to
change something in our selves”. Attitudes did not reflect the kind of teacher leadership which Epstein (2001) believed would result in greater participation of low-income families in partnership processes.

Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, and Ochoa (2002) show how factors (individual, contextual, and institutional) build on each other to create barriers to participation. This appears to be the case in this instance. Teachers believed that barriers emanated largely from families and the wider society but showed an unwillingness to tackle barriers originating from these sources. This does not auger well for teacher leadership in eliminating barriers to partnership success.

This conclusion is rendered valid by one literacy specialist and senior teacher’s notation on the questionnaire, which she was determined to bring to the attention of the researcher. According to this teacher, “Teachers are not social workers”, and should not therefore be expected to tackle parents’ non-educational problems. The attitude expressed in this statement conforms with researchers’ claims that in the face of career-related problems emanating from socioeconomic circumstances teachers often look to parents or other parties to alleviate such problems, believing that these forces are external to their responsibility as professional educators (Molnar, 1998; Morris, Taylor, Knight & Wasson, 1996; Niedrich 2003; Ramirez, 2000; Weiner, 2000). Dunlap and Alva (1999) show, however, that if partnerships are to be successful, teachers must be helped in “becoming open to working with parents and to fostering parental involvement beyond educentric borders” (p. 6.).
Findings on the nature of teachers’ attitudes have serious implications for what Marshall and Brown (2004) refer to as teacher vigor and persistence on difficult tasks such as dealing with problems with parent non-participation that originate in realms that extend beyond traditional school borders.

Epstein (2001) emphasize the fact that parents rate teachers more highly on teaching ability and interpersonal skills when they employ more partnership practices, and maintains that “a teacher’s ability to master and use home and school connection are just as crucial to their success as their ability to teach reading” (p. 310). The latter is especially true, the writer states, because literacy educators “must work every day with children, their families, family conditions, and the connections between school and home” (p. 310). Epstein reveals, however, that despite the crucial nature of teacher leadership in determining partnership success and despite emphasis on the fostering of such networks, lack of training, lack of demand for specialist credentials, absence of incentives for action and consequences for inaction, and absence of adequate resource support surrounding projects often result in partnerships not being viewed as “the essential ingredient of school improvement” which they in fact are (p. 301). Interestingly, although Epstein (2001) cites these variables as crucial, of the lot only training needs and need for incentives, which are both suspiciously self-serving, received support from teachers.

*The influence of qualification and attribution on teachers’ attitudes to barriers.* Findings from the main analysis are that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of respondents toward barriers to family-school partnerships as a function of their level of
qualification or their attribution of blame for barriers. There is some conflict in the
literature regarding the true role of qualification. On the other hand, predictions regarding
the role of attribution are quite clear.

In terms of qualifications, suggestions from one school of researchers are that the
attitudes of teachers in partnership schemes will be conditioned largely by the type of
academic training to which teachers have been subjected and by their particular area of
specialty (Dunlap & Alva, 1999; Epstein 2001). The role of general qualification level is
less clear although researchers suggest that the higher the educational attainment the
greater the likelihood that teachers will tend to blame character weakness in when
confronted with problems arising from parents’ stressful contexts. Researchers believe
that attribution of problem to character weakness will escalate with qualification level
(Abouchedid & Nasser, 2002; Guimond & Palmer, 1989; Hine & Monteil, 1999;
O’Loughlin, 1997). Given the connection that researchers make regarding the positive
correlation between attitudes and attribution, it is expected that the higher teachers’ level
of educational attainment the greater will be the likelihood that they would blame parents
for problems, thus precipitating the likelihood that they would display negative attitudes
to barriers extending beyond traditional school borders.

Epstein (2001) disagrees with this conclusion. According to Epstein, subject
specialty is far more important than general qualification. Teachers with specialization in
the language arts and reading will have a more positive attitude to barriers and will tend
to stress the importance of involving and conferencing with parents more than will
teachers of mathematics, science and social studies (p. 144). The writer says that
language arts teachers also report greater success with hard-to-reach parents. Epstein’s claim for the role of subject specialty conforms to suggestions by Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler, 2001; Furnham and Gunter 1984; and Stephenson, 2000, who suggest that teachers’ attitude will differ by academic training.

In developed countries, training in literacy is often accompanied by some coursework with embedded components of family literacy and which emphasizes the crucial role of parents in literacy development. While a national survey of teacher education programs in the U.S. did find an absence of coursework centering on family literacy in most colleges and universities, it was found that some courses do involve elements of it (The Harvard Family Research Project, 1994). For instance, specific aspects of pre-service training in reading in these countries emphasize educational activities such as parent read-alouds, parent-child shared readings, family-centered book clubs and reading hour, and book-in-a-bag home readings, which convey messages about the value of parents and ways of circumventing barriers emanating from the home.

Thus, built-in messages in some programs may condition teachers to expect, respect and accept parent participation as well as to persist in enlisting parents’ assistance. This had not generally been the case in Jamaica prior to JAASP and prior to the establishment of literacy studies as an area of specialty in some teachers’ colleges and at the University of the West Indies at Mona. Few teachers in the sample had specialist qualification in literacy. In the absence of sensitization training in any program prior to JAASP, it is dubious whether qualification can truly be considered a crucial variable in
regard to teacher attitude to partnership-related barriers, as the pilot study that preceded this research rightly indicated.

Failure of the analysis on qualification in regard to teachers’ attitude to barriers to attain statistical significance in this study may, thus, be due to the fact that family literacy training is not predicated on qualification level per se and the qualification level of teachers has little bearing on their receipt of sensitization training in family literacy, diversity and social equity. Additionally, in the Jamaican context prior to 2000, there was no coursework in family literacy.

While no clear guidance exists in the literature regarding the role of general qualification level in determining attitudes, suggestions are clear regarding the influence of teacher attribution on attitudes toward the poor and situations involving the poor. O’Loughlin (1997) claims that a teachers’ attitudes to situations involving the poor will vary according to the kinds of attribution they make about the poor. Additionally, Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler’s (2001) clearly establish the link between attitude and attribution, stating that the two will co-vary and will indicate a moderate positive correlation (See Chapter 2).

O’Loughlin goes a stage further making a connection not only between attribution and attitude but also suggesting that qualification and attribution will interact to affect attitude. The writer states that the more qualified teachers get the more likely they are to orient toward victim blaming (attribution of problems to parents and families), the more likely they are to cite character weaknesses as the reasons for the condition of the poor, and the more likely will be their tendencies to reject the poor. The writer suggests that
victim blaming will lead to negative attitudes toward the psychological object and toward the difficulties they face. Thus, suggestions are that qualification may affect attribution, which in turn may engender congruent attitudes.

Still, Hine and Monteil (1999) predict that third world teachers will blame the society and may express sympathy for parents. Residency may serve as an intervening variable and may produce different reactions. Additionally, because the majority of teachers are only moderately educated and are aware of social crises in this developing country, they may orient toward system blame, which may upset paths of influence.

Despite predictions that attitude would vary according to attribution, no such trends were observed in the study. Attribution to teacher and school factors was negligible and attribution to the two other forces, almost equal. Teachers’ attitudes did not vary according to whether they attribute blame for barriers to parents and family, teachers and school, or to the wider society. No interaction between teacher qualification and attribution in regard to teachers’ attitudes to barriers was observed in this study. Additionally, no statistically significant relationship was found between attitude and attribution (r = .149).

Non-significant results may have been due to low scale internal consistency reliability resulting from the diverse foci of the items on the questionnaire (DeVellis, 2003). Low internal consistency generally results in failure of a scale to produce consistent results. This coupled with less than the required sample size may have resulted in a failure of the scale to attain adequate power and thus to produce statistically significant results. There may also have been problems with the manner in which
attribution was measured in Subscale B. The measure may not have been an adequate reflection of attribution as reference in the literature (see Weiner, 2000).

**Teachers’ level of optimism that barriers can be overcome.** Descriptive statistics on optimism revealed that teachers had a high level of optimism that barriers could be overcome. This conforms to findings from the content analysis performed on JAASP action report studies in which summative statements made by researchers suggest a high level of optimism despite the presence of barriers and despite pessimism about parent and community potential for change. Since content analysis of the reports also revealed some negative undercurrents mostly hinging on negative perceptions of parents and communities as well as some level of pessimism regarding possibilities for change for these communities, a deeper exploration of optimism was necessary.

The need to explore more deeply teacher optimism was also prompted by references in the partnership literacy to the role of teacher self-efficacy in determining attitudes to challenges. Epstein and Dauber (1991), for instance, maintain that schools with more confident teachers used more involvement strategies and reported more support from parents (p. 301). The writers cite teacher efficacy repeatedly as a crucial variable in determining teachers’ partnership practices and programs and suggest a further researching of these variables.

The scale measured teachers’ perception of their status in the school community. Luszczynska, Guittierrez-Dona, and Schwarzer (2005) define perceived self-efficacy as “belief in one’s competence to tackle difficult or novel tasks and to cope with adversity in specific demanding situations” (p. 81). Since perception of social status as measured on
Subscale B was based on indices connected with perceived self-efficacy, the writer anticipated that optimism (as measured by Item 22, “Despite the many barriers involved, it is still possible to establish strong parent-teacher literacy partnerships with low-income parents”) would vary according to the degree to which teachers rated themselves as having competence, powerfulness, importance and of high regard (their perception of their social status) in the school community.

The influence of teachers’ qualification and perception of social status on optimism. Analysis done based on informed projections regarding the importance of teachers’ level of optimism revealed that optimism did vary based on whether teachers rated themselves as being of low, moderate or high social status (measured using four indices: competence, importance, powerfulness and high regard), and based on whether teachers were pre-trained, diploma trained or graduate trained.

In terms of the influence of teacher’s perception of their social status on optimism, it was found that teachers who rated themselves highly on social status displayed the highest level of optimism. However, teachers in the low group expressed higher levels of optimism than those in the moderate group. Interesting reasons behind these findings are discussed later in connection with efficacy theory and in the context of problems arising in the measurement of psychological constructs, namely socially desirable response sets and impression management.

Luszczynska, Guitierrez-Dona, and Schwarzer (2005), who refer to optimism as “a generalized expectancy regarding future outcomes” (p. 82), provide evidentiary support for findings that teachers who perceived themselves highly on competence and
regard had higher levels of optimism. In a cross-cultural study involving 8,796 subjects, the writers found clear positive associations between optimism and, (a) an individual’s belief in his/her “competence to tackle novel tasks and to cope with adversity in a broad range of stressful or challenging encounters”, (b) his/her stressful appraisals, that is, the belief that one can overcome barriers and focus on opportunities, and (c) his/her orientation toward the future. Marshall and Brown (2004) also make a link between expectancies and self-efficacy. The writers state that “efficacy beliefs are one determinant of expectancies” and that expectancies influence how hard people try and how long they persist (p. 348).

People who rated themselves highly on social status (competence, etc.) should demonstrate a high level of optimism, as is the case in this study. It should be noted that the item on optimism, although it mentions barriers, does implicitly require teachers to base their expectancies on their view of their own potentialities. It differs from attitudes to barriers because the latter asks for faith in others as well. The score on optimism was higher than for other items, suggesting that the majority teachers had faith in themselves and their potential, or alternatively that they were providing socially desirable responses.

Analysis revealed that there were no differences in optimism between the low social status group and the high group in the study. Statistically significant differences were only found between the moderate and high group. Interesting psychological processes may underlie the fact that teachers in the low group had the second highest level of optimism, expressing higher levels of expectancies than people in the moderate group. First, people who are of low social status, who perceived themselves to occupy
low positions in society and in the perception of important others or those who feel threatened by stereotypes are known to exhibit socially desirable response sets on questionnaires. That is, such persons tend to give overly positive responses on questionnaires due to some motivation or distraction (Paulhus, 2002).

Von Hippel, von Hippel, Conway, Preacher, Schooler, and Radvansky (1985) provide an example of one motivation that may lead to such a response. According to the researchers, teachers in the low group may be high on impression management, wherein respondents deny “unpleasant possibilities” as a means of coping with stereotype threats (p. 23). Teachers in the low group may perceive themselves to be closer in status to the families under scrutiny and may therefore express higher levels of optimism because they identify with families and know that, like them, families can overcome barriers to grasp opportunities.

Alternatively, the low group may have provided more optimistic responses than the moderate group because they fail to recognize the challenges that problems really present. This connects with self-efficacy theory. Luszczynska, Guitierrez-Dona, and Schwarzer (2005) show that although high self-efficacy is related to high levels of optimism and although highly self-efficacious people may recognize that they are able to overcome barriers, such persons may display lower optimism than normal because they recognize the challenges that stressful situations really represent even though they still have their eyes on the opportunities (p. 82).

Thus, teachers in the moderate group may have been more modest or guarded in their expression of optimism than teachers in the low group. Rating themselves to be of
moderate social status may have itself reflected characteristic guardedness and a leaning
toward more modest projections. In some ways, the findings also reflect the weaknesses
of requesting self-rating of one’s own importance.

In terms of qualification, post hoc test (Tukey HSD) results for qualifications
yielded one homogenous subset for the three groups, indicating that no significant
differences existed between the groups. Pairwise comparison (which does not include
family wise error correction) did reveal differences between pre-trained and graduate
trained teachers, with less qualified pre-trained teachers exhibiting higher levels of
optimism. Results of pairwise comparisons are of interest in an exploratory research such
as this because they may indicate that under more rigorous research scrutiny qualification
may prove to be an important factor. Findings are important because higher optimism by
the less qualified make some interesting connections with efficacy theory and ideas
regarding the role of impression management in explaining socially desirable response
sets by traditional “underdogs”.

Teachers’ attitude to barriers, their level of optimism that barriers can be
overcome, and their expectancies regarding future performance are important because
self-efficacy theory suggests that pursuit of tasks at hand will last as long as teachers hold
positive attitudes and entertain optimistic beliefs regarding success. Highly self-
efficacious people choose to perform tasks that are more challenging, set goals and stick
to them, invest more time and persist longer, and will tend to recover more quickly when
setbacks occur, remaining committed to the task. Teachers with such levels of efficacy
are needed to lead partnership ventures involving parents who show trends toward non-participation, especially since partnerships require sustained efforts and ongoing re-examination and revamping.

Moreso, Haney, Czerniak, and Lumpe (1996, as cited in Gibbons, Kimmell, & O’Shea, 1997) maintain that levels of perceived efficacy will affect not only the partnership activities that teachers opt for but also how much effort they expend, the coping strategies they develop for problems identified, and how they persist in the face of such obstacles. If a teacher is optimistic that barriers can be overcome then s/he will react more positively to challenges faced in establishing partnerships and will persist longer to overcome them.

Conclusions derived from the discussion of findings are presented below.

Conclusions and Implications

This section of the chapter presents the conclusions derived based on findings presented and from their discussion in the context of the literature. Recommendations, closely tied to these conclusions, as well as implications are presented according to their relevance for policy makers, for teacher educators and teacher-training institutions, for teachers and administrators, for researchers interested in describing the educational and psychological climate surrounding partnerships for educational change and improvement, and for families served by all-age schools.
Conclusions

1. Teachers were deemed to have a borderline average positive attitude to barriers, and to hold an educentric stance toward barriers expressing a willingness to deal only with barriers originating in the school sphere.

2. Teachers were not willing to accept blame for failing in partnership efforts. As such, teachers demonstrated a somewhat self-serving attributional pattern, allocating blame to external forces (parent and family problems and to the wider society) with only negligible attribution to the self. This suggests an external locus of control and self-serving attribution, and perhaps an absence of reflective practice.

3. Since the majority of teachers stated that they had had some training in literacy and since the majority also rated themselves in the low to moderate region in terms of social status, it was expected, based on suggestions in the literature, that the majority would express positive attitudes toward barriers. Instead, the majority of scores fell between 3.00 and 3.99, suggesting only a moderately positive attitude.

4. Teachers’ intimate knowledge of parent circumstances and lifestyles in these small rural communities may have influenced their educentric stance toward barriers.
5. Attribution and qualification are not significant influencing factors on the attitudes of teachers in JAASP schools. Discussion in connection with the literature shows that content area specialty and sensitization training may be more crucial than higher levels of tertiary education.

6. One trend observed was that only two teachers (diploma trained) attributed blame to self and their attitude scores tended to be low. Teachers who blamed parents and families showed trends toward higher levels of attitude with teachers who blamed societal forces falling in the middle in terms of attitude. While differences were not significant, such trends suggest that where attribution is made to self or to society, low levels of attitude (and perhaps efficacy) may ensue while high levels of attitudes may accompany attribution to parents and families.

7. Perception of social status and qualification were significant influencing factors on teachers’ level of optimism. However, main effect of qualification was only marginal although suggestions are that pre-trained teachers may express a higher level of optimism than graduate trained teachers.

8. Socio-psychological forces may be more crucial in determining teacher optimism than mere access to higher education. Levels of optimism displayed by teachers in the study differed based on their rating of their own social status. Teachers who perceived themselves to be of high social status had the highest levels of optimism, but teachers who rated themselves as being of low status (the majority of teachers) were more optimistic about overcoming barriers than were those who rated themselves as being of moderate social standing.
9. Ideas regarding the connection between attitude and attribution were not supported statistically in the study. This may be due to uniformity of attribution in a third world context or alternatively to weaknesses in the attribution subscale, compounded by a small sample.

10. The construct *attitudes to barriers* was found to be multidimensional. DeVellis (2003) believes that anything labeled *attitudes* or *barriers* might potentially be a common category of construct rather than a unified construct. This possibility should be further explored.

Thus, teachers in the study tended to display a borderline average positive attitude toward barriers and tended to adopt an educentric stance toward barriers, showing a willingness to tackle only those barriers that originated in the school despite the fact that they attributed the origin of barriers to factors external to the school. Qualification and attribution did not appear to influence the attitude of teachers. However, perception of social status and qualification did prove to be important factors conditioning teachers’ level of optimism. One conclusion reached by the research based on these trends in main effects is that psychosocial forces were quite potent determinants of teachers’ beliefs that barriers could be overcome.

*Implications*

The study has implications for various stakeholders. The most crucial are outlined below.

*Implications for teachers and administrators.* The following conclusions and implications for professionals are foreseen.
1. The study revealed that teachers exhibited only a borderline average positive attitude toward barriers, showed a reluctance to engage in self-evaluation, and tended to assume an educentric stance, preferring to tackle those problems originating in the school sphere. While positive attitudes are important, attitudes cannot be lukewarm if patterns of non-participation are to be eroded. When compounded by external attribution and educentrism, lukewarm attitudes do not auger well for the removal of barriers to participation.

Lazard and Slostad (1999) state that for barriers to be removed, teachers and administrators must receive staff development experiences that will enable them to assume roles as reformers who are willing to move beyond traditional school borders where necessary, to critically examine their perceptions of families, and to work together in designing, implementing and evaluating partnership schemes. Gibbons, Kimmell, and O’Shea (1997) support the need for staff development in changing teachers’ attitudes and behaviors, stating that teachers are unlikely to change unless they are given the skills, knowledge and confidence to do so through the instilling of a reformist perspective, a spirit of professional collaboration, and a desire for self-reflection.

2. Epstein suggests that literacy and language arts teachers as well as primary educators have more positive attitudes toward partnership barriers and exhibit higher levels of efficacy in establishing relationship with parents. If this is true then these teachers are potential partnership leaders and cadre trainers for teachers in other content areas. If these teachers, who are expected to be attitude leaders,
display low levels of attitudes, self-serving attributions and educentric leanings, then it is discouraging to think what level of attitudes and dispositions may be held by teachers in other content areas. Professionalism may need to be fortified in this population.

**Implications for teacher training institutions.** The following conclusions and implications for teacher trainers and training institutions are foreseen.

1. Qualification and attribution were not found to be significant determinants of the attitudes of teachers in the study. Perception of social status and qualification were found, however, to be determinants of optimism. Trends in differences among groups in terms of their level of optimism examined in the context of the literature seem to imply that psychological forces are more crucial in determining teachers’ level of optimism and that sensitization training embedded in all teacher-training programs may be to teachers’ advantage.

2. Teachers appeared to view partnership problems originating in societal problems as being beyond their realm of responsibility and competence. Epstein and Saunders (1998) state that teachers’ reluctance to deal with specific problems stems from the “absence of adequate preparation that would help educators define partnerships as part of their professional work” (p. 392). Thus, there exists not only the need to erode the concept of partnership as extra chore, but also to impress upon teacher trainees and practitioners the crucial role of partnerships in effecting educational change. Teacher educators and policy makers are well positioned to implement such suggestions. Teacher educators can target pre-
service teachers by incorporating into teacher the preparation process, field experience in school-family partnerships, followed by reflective analysis or action research. Policy makers can ensure that policies solidly establish the crucial nature of partnership programs, making clear accountability measures to be implemented.

3. Subject area specialty may be more crucial than qualification because of sensitization training built into some programs (Epstein, 2001). While literacy/language arts teachers, primary-level teachers, and teachers of moderate to low social standing are expected to be attitude leaders in partnerships, such positive dispositions were not observed in the data. This suggests that key sensitization elements may be lacking in teacher training in Jamaica and that sensitization experiences unique to literacy teachers may not be a part of these teachers’ practice. Thus, teachers were quite apprehensive to tackle barriers outside the school and attitudes diminished when teachers blamed the self. Lazar and Slostad (1999) claim that “teachers’ fears and apprehensions in partnership situations often stem from fundamental flaws in teacher education” (p. 207). The writers claim that teachers enter the profession knowing little about the family and socio-situational factors affecting students they teach and understanding little about concepts of caring or about partnership frameworks (p. 207). The Harvard Family Research Project (1994) provides a comprehensive framework for devising a teacher education program that provides scope for sensitization training
for literacy teachers. Sensitization training is required in all content areas, however.

Implications for the ministry of education. Implications for the MOEYC are outlined below.

1. Teachers’ reluctance to tackle out-of-school problems affecting partnerships may reflect flaws in the particular partnerships policies implemented in the JAASP Project, the absence of incentives efforts to tackle external factors, as well as limitations in pre-project professional development. Epstein (2001) highlights the crucial role of incentive schemes, accountability measures and training opportunities in ensuring that sustainable partnerships are developed. The writer states too that when policies do not clearly define partnerships as part of school improvement and change, teachers and administrators do not truly view partnering with parents as a crucial responsibility. Policy makers should revisit the formulation phase of the project and make modification necessary.

2. The fact that stakeholder input was sought at the project level but perhaps not at the sub-project level meant that many parents did not identify with and, in fact, berated the action research literacy projects, meant that key steps in derived shared visions of change were omitted in JAASP. Policy makers need to revisit the conceptualization process to see whether the process drew on the visions of all stakeholders as to how to best effect changes in students’ literacy achievement.
Implications for researchers. Implications for researchers are as follows:

1. The study, through the yielding of statistically significant results for teacher optimism in regard to their perception of their level of competence, importance, powerfulness and regard in the school community, reveals that socio-psychological forces are pertinent in the Jamaican context. Lazar and Slostad (1999) highlight the importance of a continued scrutiny of the “educational climate surrounding partnerships” in a bid to help teachers navigate past difficulties that have hindered collaboration. This study establishes the pertinence of contextual forces in conditioning, not only teachers’ attitudes but also the attitude of the researcher toward the research object.

Recommendations

As a consequence of the findings of the study, the discussion that followed the presentation of findings, and the insights drawn from such discussions, the following recommendations are proffered by the researcher and are aimed at key stakeholders.

Recommendations for teacher training institutions and curriculum leaders. Because of findings regarding the non-crucial role of qualification in determining attitudes as well as its marginal role in determining optimism level, the researcher sought to scrutinize preparation programs for reading teachers. Survey of the six courses offered in the master’s level literacy studies teacher preparation course offered by the Department of Educational Studies at University of the West Indies (U.W.I.), at Mona showed no signs of any provisions for preparing teachers to foster sensitive partnerships with families. The same is no doubt true for courses in teachers’ colleges that also operate
under the umbrella of the Joint Board of Teacher Education at the U.W.I. No doubt, some consciousness-raising experiences are needed in programs to ensure that teachers are prepared to foster sensitive family-school-community partnerships. The absence is glaring, however.

The researcher proffers the following suggestions for improvement in teacher education, all of which are based on the development of sensitive partnerships grounded in an emic understanding of families and the teaching community. Lett (2005, citing Pike, 1954), defines an emic understandings as “accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories that are regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the members of the culture under study” (¶ 4). Such understandings are necessary for sensitive interaction and cannot be developed without the input and validation of the community members. The researcher recommends the following:

1. Consciousness-raining experiences should be built into course requirements. Such experiences should be built into courses that could be labeled Family-School Partnerships for School Improvement and Educational Change. The course should emphasize the role of teachers as reformers and should emphasize the important role of the family in education.

2. Other courses should be made malleable to the infusions of values, attitudes and dispositions that would facilitate appropriate teacher and administrator orientation toward families, toward fostering partnerships, and toward dealing with set backs that originate from sources lying beyond traditional educational borders.
3. Some attention should also be given to communication and human relation skills in reading/primary-level teacher training and in in-service professional development. Teachers should be taught how to deal with people from different economic or linguistic backgrounds.

4. Field experience geared at inducting teachers into methods of developing an insider (emic) understanding of families should be built into teacher-education programs. Such field experience should help student teachers learn ways of collecting insider-validated understandings of the language orientation, perceptions of education, and worldviews of particular families. Negative stereotype could be eroded in this way.

Recommendations for practitioners. The following recommendations are directed at practitioners.

1. Professional development should target areas of sensitization suggested for teacher trainees.

2. Any professional development offered should involve practical experiences in how to design and implement partnership schemes based on shared theories of change, as well as how to evaluate such projects for faulty conceptualization and vision.

3. The importance of reflective practices and professional collaboration should be built into professional development activities.

4. To deal effectively with teachers’ educentric stance toward barriers and their reluctance to engage in reflective behaviors, professional development
providers should inculcate in educators the need to indulge in reflection on the perceptions, dispositions and behaviors that characterize the teaching community. Developing an emic understanding of attitudes, dispositions and behaviors within the teaching community is a prerequisite for effecting change. Bandura (1994, as cited in Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002) states that since teachers operate collectively within an interactive social system, they cannot be considered as isolates (p. 522). The belief structures that schools’ systems of staff create can be debilitating or vitalizing for the particular institution. If teachers operate in communities and if teachers’ beliefs, attitudes and behaviors relating to partnerships affect institutional efficacy as Epstein (2001) and Bandura state, then, professional development geared at ensuring partnership effectiveness should facilitate a greater understanding of the teaching community - its actions and perceptions, as well as the perceptions of its member regarding their roles and responsibilities as educators within a wider social context.

Recommendations for policy makers. The following recommendations are directed at policy makers.

1. Policy makers as well as teachers and researchers should familiarize themselves with change theory and its connection with the devising of social and educational services geared at children and their families (see Oronson, Mutchler, & Pan, 2002). When this perspective is adopted, devisers ensure a greater likelihood of ownership of the project by all stakeholders because continued planning and
negotiation by all stakeholders ensure that the perspectives of all are considered and that the experiential knowledge of none is overlooked.

2. Policies makers should design task-specific job descriptions in the form of contracts that would explicitly reference the roles and responsibilities that teachers are expected to play and the activities in which they should engage where partnerships are concerned. Task-specific job descriptions should require explicit agreement from teachers.

3. Proper incentives and accountability measures should be thought out by policy makers and the project conceptualization stage and made clear to teachers from the outset. Following through is also important.

4. Families should be a part of the conceptualization and design stage of not only the umbrella project but also the sub-projects that operate under that umbrella. Plans of action must be viewed fluid and open to revision to match the needs and unique characteristics of the families served. Suggestions from families as well as their feedback can be used to reformulate or adjust projects as needed to guarantee participation and success.

5. Family-centre rather than school-centered ones may be more appropriate for effecting changes in literacy achievement. Students and families should be viewed as the hub of partnership activates. This will ensure greater appropriacy, relevance and ownership once the project is implemented.

Recommendations for researcher training programs. The following recommendations are directed at those who train educational researchers.
Educational researchers examining the success or failure of partnerships initiatives should be first strive to develop an accurate picture of the attitudes, lifestyles and dispositions of families. For this to happen, researchers should also be exposed to sensitization training and should strive to gather insider-validated knowledge of the families they seek to scrutinize.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. This study should be repeated with an improved scale with higher reliability levels and a more appropriate attribution subscale.

2. Future research should attempt to ascertain whether sensitization training in diversity, equity and social justice or specialist training in parental involvement would lead to greater participation of the poor.

3. Follow-up research could also empirically explore the implication of teachers’ educentric stance on partnership effectiveness.

Summary

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the attitudes of teachers in JAASP schools toward barriers encountered in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with low-income families. It describes the nature of teachers’ attitudes and examines whether attitudes vary based on teachers’ qualification and based on the kinds of attribution they make regarding the cause of barriers. The role of teachers’ perception of their social status and their qualification level on their level of optimism for overcoming barriers is also investigated. The study was fueled by concerns arising out of
a scrutiny of JAASP documents, which indicated the difficulties that can arise when attempts are made to foster partnerships in developing countries.

A questionnaire comprising four sections was used to collect the data. Section A collected demographic data; Section B, information on teacher’s perception of their social status; Section C, teachers’ attribution of blame for barriers; and Section D, teachers’ attitudes to barriers. The responses of 135 teachers, selected using cluster sampling at the school level, was used in the study.

Descriptive statistics and two 3 x 3 ANOVAs were used to analyze the data. Teachers were found to exhibit a borderline average positive attitude to barriers, assuming an educentric stance in terms of the barriers they opted to address. Blame for barriers was attributed primarily to external forces, and teachers showed an unwillingness to tackle these.

While no significant main effects were found for attitudes to barriers as a function of teachers’ qualification and attribution, teachers’ level of optimism was found to differ based on their ratings of their social status and based on their qualification level. Teachers who rated themselves highly on social status had the highest levels of optimism, but teachers in the moderate group were lowest in optimism. Post hoc analysis of qualification also hints at teachers at the lower level having higher levels of optimism.

The findings from descriptive statistics and inferential analyses converge to indicate the primacy of psychosocial and contextual forces over academic variables in determining reactions to barriers, and suggests the need for sensitization training (in social equity, diversity, family welfare and concepts of care) in teacher education and in
professional development. Interesting and worthy of note is the fact that content analysis done on the JAASP reports reveals insights that converge with those garnered from descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

A negative undercurrent appears to accompany the findings in the study. Researchers indicate that literacy/language arts teachers and primary educators are the most likely candidates to be attitude leaders in partnerships yet these teachers showed only marginally positive attitudes, demonstrated a high level of educentrism in their stance toward obstacles, seemed unable indulge in self-assessment and reflection while maintaining positive attitudes, and were inclined to relied on ill-founded stereotypes in deciding whether to help families. If these teachers are the best of what the system has to offer then there seems to be little scope for hope. This is especially so since these teachers have had training and experience in fostering partnership under the umbrella of a major government project. If those thought to be best able to bring about change fail to demonstrate disposition necessary for such change to occur, then some failing must be present in the system.

Underline patterns in teachers’ behaviors lies low levels of professionalism and efficacy. While sensitization training may lead to more professional attitudes on the part of teachers, it seems that changes are necessary in the way teachers and schools operate, in the ways in which educational change is conceived, and in the way the system holds educators accountable for the outcomes of educational activities.
References


### Appendix A: Complete List of JAASP Schools

#### JAASP Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region 1 St Andrew and St Thomas</th>
<th>Region 4 Hanover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clifton AA</td>
<td>Askenish AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westphalia AA</td>
<td>Hillsbrook AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halls Delight Primary &amp; Junior High</td>
<td>Chambers Pen AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creighton AA</td>
<td>Gurney's Mount AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodford AA</td>
<td>Maryland AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minio AA</td>
<td>Mount Hannah AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woburn Lawn AA</td>
<td>Brownsville AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penlyne Castle AA</td>
<td>Pondside AA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region 2 Portland</th>
<th>Region 5 St Elizabeth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bybrook Primary</td>
<td>Giddy Hall AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Hall AA</td>
<td>Happy Grove AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frutiful Vale AA</td>
<td>Kilmarnock AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloomfield AA</td>
<td>Clapham AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claverty Cottage AA</td>
<td>Nightingale AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquility AA</td>
<td>Bearsheba AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort Castle Primary &amp; Junior High</td>
<td>Pisgah AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moore Town Primary &amp; Junior High</td>
<td>Ginger Hill AA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region 3 St Ann</th>
<th>Region 6 Clarendon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alderton AA</td>
<td>Mount Providence AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irons Mountain AA</td>
<td>Pinders Valley AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village AA</td>
<td>Mount Liberty AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapham AA</td>
<td>Morgan's Pass AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prickly Poie AA</td>
<td>Prospect AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camperdown AA</td>
<td>Red Hills AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Waddy AA</td>
<td>Simons AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltham AA</td>
<td>Mitchell's Hill AA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Instrument

*Barriers to Literacy Partnerships*

We are interested in understanding the problems teachers face in attempting to engage low-income parents in the development of the literacy competencies of their children both at home and at school. Our intention is to arrive at solutions to problems teachers face rather than to make judgments about any of the parties involved. Should you choose to participate in the study, your responses will be kept in the strictest of confidence. The survey takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. Please provide thoughtful responses.

Be sure to place the completed questionnaire into the envelope and seal prior to submission. Do not supply your names or any other identifier. Thanks for your assistance.

**SECTION A**

Please select the option that best applies in each of the items below.

a) I am:

- [ ] Male  
- [ ] Female

b) For how many years have you been teaching reading?

- [ ] 5 years and under  
- [ ] 6 - 10 years  
- [ ] 11 - 15 years  
- [ ] 16 - 20 years  
- [ ] 21 years and over
c) Are you trained in literacy education?
   □ No  □ Yes

d) What is your level of education?
   □ Pre-trained  □ Diploma Trained  □ Trained Graduate

SECTION B
1) Rate yourself on each of the following items according to how you think you are viewed in the local community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarded</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION C

Please read carefully and base all your answers in this section on the following scenario.

Any Town All-Age, a small school located in a rural farming community in Jamaica, has been plagued for at least a decade by persistent underachievement in literacy, a high level of absenteeism, truancy, and behavioral problems. In a bid to raise literacy levels in this school and to address attendance and behavior problems, the school undertook various literacy partnership projects. Projects included direct communication with parents, a structured homework program, home visits, a father’s club, and learning centers/adult literacy classes geared at helping parents help themselves as well as their children in gaining adequate literacy competencies. All attempts to involve parents meet with little success.

**Bearing in mind the problem described in the scenario and your own experiences with attempting to engage low-income parents in home-based and school-based literacy support projects indicate which of the following you believe to be THE MAIN CAUSE of family non-participation.**

*Tick (✓) the one item that best represents your view.*

- [ ] Parent and Family Problems
- [ ] Teacher and School Problems
- [ ] Wider Societal Problems
SECTION D

Read the following statements then select the response that best reflects your own view.
Please think carefully before you respond.

1. The effective teacher assumes the bulk of the responsibility for fostering parent-teacher partnerships.  Positive
   - Strongly Agree  - Agree  - Neutral  - Disagree  - Strongly Disagree

2. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to meet at parents' convenience.  Negative
   - Strongly Agree  - Agree  - Neutral  - Disagree  - Strongly Disagree

3. Teachers should not be required to build partnerships with unresponsive parents.  Negative
   - Strongly Agree  - Agree  - Neutral  - Disagree  - Strongly Disagree

4. When principals place no value on fostering partnerships, there is little a teacher can do.  Negative
   - Strongly Agree  - Agree  - Neutral  - Disagree  - Strongly Disagree

5. Despite teachers’ busy schedules, it is possible to find time to work through partnership problems with parents.  Positive
   - Strongly Agree  - Agree  - Neutral  - Disagree  - Strongly Disagree
6. The cost of partnering with low-income parents far outweighs the benefits. **Negative**

   - Strongly Agree  □  Agree  □  Neutral  □  Disagree  □  Strongly Disagree

7. When parents are committed to their children's education, they find time to get involved. **Negative**

   - Strongly Agree  □  Agree  □  Neutral  □  Disagree  □  Strongly Disagree

8. One-on-one communication with parents is time consuming. **Negative**

   - Strongly Agree  □  Agree  □  Neutral  □  Disagree  □  Strongly Disagree

9. Family literacy training for teachers and principals can help remove barriers to partnership efforts. **Positive**

   - Strongly Agree  □  Agree  □  Neutral  □  Disagree  □  Strongly Disagree

10. Low-income parents want to be involved in their children's education. **Positive**

    - Strongly Agree  □  Agree  □  Neutral  □  Disagree  □  Strongly Disagree

11. The Ministry of Education should hold teachers and principals more accountable for outcomes. **Positive**

    - Strongly Agree  □  Agree  □  Neutral  □  Disagree  □  Strongly Disagree
12. Parents should be the ones held accountable for their own involvement. **Negative**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

13. Schools can be made into more welcoming places for low-income parents. **Positive**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

14. Reading teachers need additional training in how to foster democratic partnerships with low-income families. **Positive**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

15. Parents are more involved in schools that persist in efforts to involve them. **Positive**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

16. Schools should value the input of low-income parents in school decisions. **Positive**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

17. Parents should concentrate on helping their children at home; participation in school affairs is unnecessary. **Negative**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

18. Schools strapped for funds cannot afford to provide transportation for parents to attend meetings. **Negative**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
19. Even when child watch is provided, low-income parents will still refuse to come to parent-teacher conferences. **Negative**

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

20. Teachers would be ill advised to send materials to students' homes. **Negative**

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

21. Schools should be more aggressive in ensuring that parents meet with teachers at times determined by the school. **Negative**

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

22. Despite the many barriers involved, it is still possible to establish strong parent-teacher literacy partnerships with low-income parents. **Positive**

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

**Negative = 12**

**Positive = 10**
Appendix C: IRB Approval Documents

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2 - research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: Literacy for Social Justice: Understanding teacher attitude and attribution for obstacles encountered in attempting to establish literacy partnerships with parents of children of poverty in 48 schools in remote and rural Jamaica

Project Director: Michelle McAnuff-Gumbs

Department: Teacher Education

Advisor: William Smith

Rebecca Cale, Associate Director, Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

Date 04/08/05

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
The amendment, detailed below, and submitted for the following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University. Approval date of this amendment does not affect the expiration date of the original approval.

Amendment: Title Change; Revised Questionnaire; Misc. Revisions to Study Design

Project: Literacy for Social Justice: Understanding teachers' attitudes toward barriers to family-school partnerships

Project Director: Michelle McAnuff-Gurms

Advisor: William Smith

Department: Teacher Education

Rebecca G. Cale
Institutional Review Board

05/19/05
Date
Appendix D: Consent Form and Cover Letter

Title of Research: Literacy for social justice: Understanding teachers’ attitudes toward barriers to family-school partnerships

Investigator: Michelle McAnuff-Gumbs

Department: Teacher Education

Federal and university regulations require signed consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent by signing this form.

I. Explanation of Study

Purpose of the research

The study aims at identifying the sources and nature of barriers teachers encounter in attempting to establish family-school literacy partnerships with parents of students enrolled in remote rural schools. The aim is to survey teachers’ to pinpoint their ideas regarding the sources of problems as well as to identify whether teachers differ in overall attitude.
Procedures to be followed

First read the introductory statement to the survey and then decide whether you would like to participate in the research. If you choose to participate, you are required to read each item and select the response that best describes your own view on the topic addressed by the question. Please provide thoughtful responses.

Duration of subject's participation

The survey takes approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Identification of specific procedures that are experimental

This is a low-stake research initiative. No part of this research requires experimentation and no risk to participants are foreseen.

A. Risks and Discomforts

To help the researcher protect your privacy, you are asked to place the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided then seal it.

Benefits

Your participation in this research is vital for furthering rural educational research, for providing pathways to effective teacher training and re-training, and for ensuring effective educational services to the rural poor. Apart from the benefit of knowing you
are helping to further crucially needed rural education research, you also stand to benefit in the following ways:

1. The post-research report that will be provided to the school will detail the findings of the research. This should prove quite enlightening for teachers who can gain a clearer understanding of processes at work during partnership development. Such insights can help foster self-reflection that may potentially lead to improved practice, more empathy for low-income families, and greater teacher eagerness in serving the rural poor.

2. Given the paucity of trade books in most rural classrooms, trade books can help improve classroom collections of reading materials.

3. The study’s finding can provide insights for teacher training/re-training and for the improvement of literacy practices/initiatives.

4. Allegations regarding failed initiative can be laid to rest or confirmed based on finding of the study.

**Alternative Treatments** (if applicable)

No treatment regimes are required in this research.

**B. Confidentiality and Records**

No one other than the researcher will have access to completed questionnaires and these will be destroyed once the research is completed. No identifiers (names, school names, TRNs etc.) are required and these should not be provided on questionnaires. Please place responses in sealed envelopes prior to submission.
While no compensation is attached to this research, the researcher foresees that the school will benefit in the following ways: 1) trade books provided as incentive to participation can help enrich classroom libraries, 2) the handbook based on findings can be valuable for enriching partnership efforts, 3) insights from the research can help improve rural literacy education and rural research.

C. Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Dr. William Smith, Associate Professor, College of Education, Ohio University, (740) 593-4483/smithw@ohiou.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue
participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.

Signature_________________________________________ Date_______

Printed Name:_________________________________________
Dear Principal:

I am requesting your assistance in gathering data relevant to my doctoral research. I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Ohio University in the U.S. and a lecturer at Bethlehem Moravian College in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. My research deals with the challenges teachers face in establishing literacy partnerships with low-income parents in Jamaica.

I would be grateful if you would have teachers in your school who are currently involved in literacy teaching complete a 4-page survey. The survey takes no more than 5 minutes to complete. Results of the survey will only be used for the purposes of this research and no attempts will be made to identify individual respondents. No one but the researcher will have access to the data.

The results can go a long way toward promoting rural research and in helping low-income students and their families who struggle in gaining access to literacy opportunities.

I deeply appreciate your cooperation and support. Without you and the cooperation of literacy teachers I would not be able to conduct this research, which will hopefully foster
greater participation of low-income parents in the education of their children. When the study is completed, I will provide your school with a description of the results.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call my advisor, Dr. William Smith, at 740-593-4483.

Sincerely,

Michelle McAnuff-Gumbs
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Teacher Education
College of Education
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701
mm320100@ohiou.edu
740-589-4718/876-451-2489
### Table 1

**Means and Standard Deviations for All Statements included in Section D of the Questionnaire used to Measure Teacher Attitudes to Barriers to Partnership Formation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The effective teacher assumes the bulk of the responsibility for fostering family-school partnerships. P*</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to meet at parents' convenience N*</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teachers should not be required to build partnerships with unresponsive parents. N</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. When principals place no value on fostering partnerships, there is little a teacher can do. N</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 1: Continued**

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Despite teachers’ busy schedules, it is possible to find time to work through partnership problems with parents.</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The cost of partnering with low-income parents far outweighs the benefits.</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>When parents are committed to their children's education, they find time to get involved.</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>One-on-one communication with parents is time consuming.</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Family literacy training for teachers and principals can help remove barriers to partnership efforts.</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Low-income parents want to be involved in their children's education.</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The Ministry of Education should hold teachers and principals more accountable for outcomes.</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Parents should be the ones held accountable for their own involvement.</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Schools can be made into more welcoming places for low-income parents.</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Reading teachers need additional training in how to foster democratic partnerships with low-income families.</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Continued

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Parents are more involved in schools that persist in efforts to involve them. P</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Schools should value the input of low-income parents in school decisions. P</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Parents should concentrate on helping their children at home; participation in school affairs is unnecessary. N</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Schools strapped for funds cannot afford to provide transportation for parents to attend meetings. N</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Even when child watch is provided, low-income parents will still refuse to come to parent-teacher conferences. N</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Teachers would be ill-advised to send materials to students' homes. N</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Schools should be more aggressive in ensuring that parents meet teachers at times determined by the school. N</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Despite the many barriers involved, it is still possible to establish strong parent-teacher literacy partnerships with low-income parents. P</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Average | 3.21 | .35 |
Total Score | 69.90 | 8.00 |

*N indicates a negative item; P indicates a positive item.
Table 1

Two-Way ANOVA Test Results for the Interaction between Teachers’ Qualification and Teachers’ Perception of Social Status in Regard to Teacher Optimism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-Way Interactions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification x Social Status</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.253</td>
<td>.292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.383</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.109</td>
<td>.048*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Status</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.079</td>
<td>.003*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.824</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean differences are significant at the .05 level.
Appendix G: Post Hoc Results (Second ANOVA)

Table 1

*Tukey Multiple Comparison Test of Differences in Attitudes to Barriers According to Teachers’ Perception of Their Social Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) Social Status</th>
<th>(J) Social Status</th>
<th>Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.012*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>.012*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean differences are significant at the .05 level.*
Table 2

Tukey Multiple Comparison Test of Differences in Attitudes to Barriers According to Teacher Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) Qualification</th>
<th>(J) Qualification</th>
<th>Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-trained</td>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>Pre-trained</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>Pre-trained</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.505</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Pairwise Comparison Test of Differences in Attitudes to Barriers According to Teacher Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) Qualification</th>
<th>(J) Qualification</th>
<th>Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-trained</td>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>.030*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>Pre-trained</td>
<td>-.234</td>
<td>.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Trained</td>
<td>Pre-trained</td>
<td>-.448</td>
<td>.030*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma Trained</td>
<td>-.214</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean differences are significant at the .05 level.